

# Harnessing Social Media to Drive Sales

**S**ocial media platforms enable people to share information and network with others online. This guide explores strategies to move beyond basic social media posting and help your small business create content that drives results from your target audience. With the proper strategy, small businesses can leverage their established social media presence to capture leads, promote products, generate sales and encourage repeat business.

There are four steps to consider as your business harnesses social media:

1. Set goals and strategies for business results.
2. Develop a content calendar.
3. Create impactful content.
4. Evaluate content performance.

If your business is new to social media, see MU Extension publication G6225, [Post, Engage, Grow: A Social Media Primer](#) ([extension.missouri.edu/publications/g6225](http://extension.missouri.edu/publications/g6225)) to determine what platforms might fit your business, identify your target audience and build an online following.

## 1. Set goals and strategies for business results

When your business first established a social media presence, you likely focused on building a following and fostering engagement. After establishing an audience base, you can use your social media to drive business results by setting specific goals and identifying appropriate strategies and tactics. These goals may directly impact sales or indirectly support them. For example, lead generation — such as collecting email addresses for future marketing — doesn't result in immediate sales but helps build relationships that lead to sales over time. To visualize this process, consider the act of cooking a meal, outlined in Figure 1.

The first step is to identify the goals you want to achieve using social media. Your goals are the finished dishes in your meal and end products of your efforts; they should be measurable, achievable and time bound. Example goals include:



**Goals**  
Goals are the finished dishes and end products of your efforts.

**Strategies**  
Strategies are the recipes for your meal and provide guidance to efforts.



**Tactics**  
Tactics are the ingredients of your meal and are specific actions and activities.

**Figure 1.** Meal analogy to visualize goals, strategies and tactics.

- Increasing online or in-store sales
- Generating email leads
- Driving website traffic to specific products or pages
- Boosting customer retention and repeat purchases

Next, decide what social media-based strategies will help you to achieve your goals. Strategies are the recipes used to prepare your meal and provide guidance to your content and engagement efforts. Strategies might include:

- Content marketing to educate potential customers
- Promotional efforts to incentivize immediate sales
- Community engagement to build trust and buy-in
- Influencer or partnership efforts to grow your business exposure and followers
- Efforts to draw visitors to your website, collect their contact information and turn them into customers

Finally, your goals and strategies will inform the tactics used on your social media platforms. Consider tactics as the ingredients and cooking techniques of your meal, since these are the specific actions and activities that will drive your social media content.

By aligning your goals (finished dishes) with strategies (recipes) and tactics (ingredients and cooking methods), you maximize the return on your time and effort using

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social media to drive results for your business. It might be helpful to write down your goals, strategies and tactics to prioritize your efforts and monitor your progress.

Figure 2 shows a sample social plan for a fictitious Frank’s Fruits & Vegetables business. Frank makes value-added agricultural products, which are sold at a farm stand and farmers market. Use this example to consider how you can develop goals, strategies and tactics to drive business results on your business’s social media platforms.

### Frank’s Fruits & Vegetables social media plan

<p><b>Goal: Increase online sales by 25% in the next year.</b></p> <p><b>Strategy:</b> Develop a promotion program to encourage website purchases.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; <b>Tactic:</b> Use Facebook and Instagram stories to create a 48-hour flash sale with exclusive discount codes to track sales.</li> <li>&gt; <b>Tactic:</b> Create “shoppable” posts on Instagram to encourage purchases.</li> <li>&gt; <b>Tactic:</b> Use Facebook to grow email list and website traffic.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Goal: Convert one-third of new customers into repeat customers in the next year.</b></p> <p><b>Strategy:</b> Listen and engage with customers to strengthen loyalty and trust.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; <b>Tactic:</b> Post teaser videos and images of upcoming products and ask customers for feedback.</li> <li>&gt; <b>Tactic:</b> Develop a series of posts that highlight ideas for new product offerings and let the community comment or vote on their favorites using reactions.</li> </ul> <p><b>Strategy:</b> Incentivize repeat customers and build brand advocates.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; <b>Tactic:</b> Invite top customers to a VIP Facebook group where have access to insider news and exclusive perks.</li> <li>&gt; <b>Tactic:</b> Offer perks and promotions for customer referrals.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Goal: Grow value-added fruit and vegetable products sales by 10% in the next year.</b></p> <p><b>Strategy:</b> Educate consumers about how to use value-added products.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; <b>Tactic:</b> Use Instagram reels and live to share weekly step-by-step recipes, pairings and tips for enjoying products.</li> <li>&gt; <b>Tactic:</b> Run a “Recipe of the Week” Facebook contest where followers can share creative ways they use Frank’s products for a chance to win a gift certificate or discount.</li> </ul>

**Figure 2.** Sample social media plan for the fictitious Frank’s Fruits & Vegetables business.

## 2. Develop a content calendar

After outlining goals, strategies and tactics for your social media efforts, you must thoughtfully determine how to use your social media content to reach these milestones. Sharing creative content consistently is critical for your business to see results. To manage your posting strategy and ensure content alignment with your goals and strategies, Dhariana Lozano for Social Media Today recommends developing a content calendar.

You can make a basic content calendar in a spreadsheet with columns for the post date, related goals, message and media (e.g., photos, graphics, videos). Place the content for each individual post in one row. Based on your social media platform’s recommended posting frequency and your business capacity, you might have multiple posts in a day; make sure to notate this in the post date column. If you are managing more than one social media platform, develop a separate spreadsheet for each platform.

Plan ahead to more meaningfully engage potential customers, recommends Bennett Conlin with Business.com. You can use your content calendar to track important dates and events that your business can use as inspiration for posts; be mindful to choose days that you can connect to your products and your business identity. For example, on National Doughnut Day, Krispy Kreme and Dunkin’ have created Facebook posts to advertise free doughnuts in their U.S. stores. The following are some important dates to track:

- New product or service launches
- Holidays and observances that relate to your business (e.g., Fourth of July, National Farmers Market Week, National Dairy Month)
- Company milestones (e.g., anniversaries, farm expansion, seasonal successes)
- Upcoming events, workshops or collaborations with other businesses or individuals

As you develop your content calendar, aim to strike a balance. Generally, dedicate a majority of your social media posts to educate, inform or entertain your audience, and a small portion to explicitly sell your products or services. As Tanya Hall writes in Inc., some businesses use an 80/20 rule to dictate this split between content types; however, alternative ratios might be more effective for other businesses, so test what works best for yours. Continuing to grow and engage your audience is also important, and these efforts can be layered into your content.

Table 1 provides a sample content calendar for Frank’s Fruits & Vegetables. The calendar specifically plans the business’s Facebook content and connects each post to the goals, strategies and tactics outlined in Figure 1.

**Table 1. Sample Facebook September content calendar for Frank's Fruits & Vegetables.**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Related goal</b>	<b>Message</b>	<b>Media</b>	<b>Notes</b>
9/1	Grow value-added product sales	We're going live at 6 p.m. today to teach you how to prepare a perfect summer squash succotash for your Labor Day party!  Be prepared to pepper us with all of your food questions as you're planning your weekend festivities. Tag a friend in the comments and invite them to join!	Image of squash succotash kit	Prepare for Facebook live segment
9/5	Convert first-time customers into repeat customers	We're savoring the last bit of summer and need YOUR help! Let us know in the comments which salsa flavor combo you'd like to see at the market next week.  • Tomato-peach • Tomato-watermelon • Tomato-apple  Comment your pick below! And if you've tried our salsas before, let us know your favorite — we love hearing from our customers!	Image of different salsas on outdoor table	Monitor comments and engage with followers  Tag the farmers market to expand reach to people who follow that account
9/9	Convert first-time customers into repeat customers and increase online sales	Are you a member of Frank's Fans VIP Facebook group? Make three online purchases in six months for exclusive access to an online community where members receive perks, special releases, event invites and the chance to help us choose new products! Head to our website to learn more and start shopping.	Image of Frank's Fans group at event	Ask permission to post club members' photo
9/15	Grow value-added product sales and increase online sales	Celebrate National Dessert Day with our blueberry jam! Perfect for cheesecakes, thumbprint cookies and more.  To help you enjoy the holiday, receive 20% off online purchases of blueberry jam using the code JAMSDESSERT at checkout. Code expires in 48 hours!	Image of blueberry jam jars	Include link to online store
9/22	Grow value-added product sales	We picked our first pumpkins today! These beauties will be used to make our delicious, all-natural pumpkin butter.  Want to know when our first batch is released? Sign up for our email newsletter and be the first to know about product releases and sales.	Image of team picking pumpkins	Share follow-up post when we shelve the pumpkin butter from this crop
9/28	Grow value-added product sales	Wonder where we get the strawberries that make our strawberry shortcake so special? We grow our own! Thank you to our team for preparing next year's strawberry beds.  Visit our website to learn more about our farm and find your favorite treats.	Video of team preparing strawberry plasticulture beds	Give field manager tips for shooting video
9/30	Increase online sales	Looking for seasonal treats to share with loved ones? Our apple spice cake will pair perfectly with a mug of mulled wine. Check out the video below for an easy recipe that is sure to be a hit.  Each purchase of apple spice cake over the next 48 hours will receive a FREE jar of mulling spices.	Image of apple spice cake and mulled wine	Ask kitchen manager to take photo

After developing a content calendar with important dates, events and information, you can focus your effort on filling in the rest of the calendar by developing impactful social media content that will evoke emotion and action from your audience, leading to results that align with your business's goals.

### 3. Create impactful content

As you craft social media content, focus on opportunities to convert your followers into customers for your business while aligning with your content calendar and overall goals and strategies. Each post should support one or more of your goals, and should be in alignment with the appropriate strategy, while your identified tactics will drive the focus and format of your social media content. By consistently tying your content back to your business's goals, you'll streamline efforts and create a more results-driven approach.

As you develop content, keep your target audience in mind. Consider information you've gathered on their behaviors, interests and values, and refer to these insights when crafting your content so it resonates with them and offers value. Furthermore, consider the platforms you intend to post on when preparing content, notes Mike O'Brien in an article for the ClickZ digital marketing community. You should be familiar with the posting frequency and best practices for your social media platforms of choice; refer to MU Extension publication G6225 for more information.

Depending on your goals and strategies, there are many ways to prepare your social media content for publishing. Content types can include photos, videos, polls, surveys, text posts, links, infographics and resharing user-generated content. Incorporating visual and interactive elements in your social media content can enhance engagement and inspire action, so consider ways that you can make your content easier to read and interact with. When writing posts, imagine yourself talking to a friend or in-person customer to avoid using industry-specific jargon or overly complicated language. Consider other tips for developing results-oriented social media content:

- Diversify your content and use a mix of content types to avoid repetition and maintain audience engagement.
- Create a sense of urgency by using time-sensitive language to encourage quick action.
- Leverage storytelling to explain how your products or services solve a problem or enhance your customer's life.
- Use relevant hashtags and keywords in your content to increase your content's exposure to your existing and untapped audiences.

- Incorporate a clear call-to-action in each post to prompt your audience to take meaningful action (e.g., click a link, leave a comment, make a purchase or visit an event) and use action-oriented language.
- Ensure your audience knows how to order products or request information by having updated contact information in your account's "bio" or "about" section.

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#### Ideas for content generation

Developing social media content can be a challenge for business owners. Consider these ideas, paired with best practices for creating impactful content, for your next social media post:

- Highlight a customer testimonial or success story.
- Share a recipe or use case for your product.
- Encourage customers to try new products or new uses for products.
- Leverage user-generated content from your followers.
- Ask a question or offer a prompt for your audience.
- Share a tip or technique related to your product or service.
- Encourage repeat visits to your website or in-person store by reminding customers about product availability.
- Inform your customers of upcoming business events.
- Share educational content about your farm or products, or give a virtual tour.

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### 4. Evaluating content performance

Evaluating your social media content performance can happen in multiple ways. For example, you can measure sales conversions by tracking discount codes on websites and evaluating sales made during live events.

Additionally, social media analytics can be used to measure content performance, adjust tactics and generate learnings that can tailor future content development. According to Cision, a media-monitoring software, the following are three common social media metrics:

- Impressions: the total number of times anyone has viewed your content. An audience member can be counted more than once in this figure, which is a total sum of all views.
- Reach: the total number of unique viewers who have seen your content. Unlike impressions, a user is only counted once.
- Engagement: every interaction a viewer has with your content, including reactions, comments, shares, mentions, clicking on links, etc.

Impressions are used to measure the overall exposure of your social media content, whereas reach is used to measure the potential breadth of your audience. In some instances, impressions might be higher than reach for your social media content, possibly even higher than your account's follower count. These cases likely result from individual viewers seeing your content more than once or your content being exposed to audiences outside of your follower base. Impressions and reach can lend insight into your content's performance and visibility. By knowing how many people have been exposed to your content, you can start to understand potential impact and make informed decisions about content.

Engagement can help you understand how audiences interact with your content, more so than merely viewing it. High engagement shows that your content resonates with your audience and prompts them to act, according to Sprout Social. Engagement can help a brand's reputation and increase trust, and it offers valuable insight into your audience's interests and preferences. Engagement also helps your content navigate algorithms built into social media platforms, which tend to prioritize posts with more interaction. User engagement with social media content can lead to increased brand awareness, improved customer loyalty and higher conversion rates.

Evaluating your content's performance helps you determine when your business is ready to invest in social media advertising. Paid social campaigns let you target specific audiences with precision, ensuring your content reaches the right people. You can adjust your budget to expand your reach or extend the duration of your ads.

## Summary

With a strategic plan in place, small business owners can use social media to generate sales and other meaningful results from their online presence. This guide explored four steps to help businesses harness their social media presence to drive impact. Businesses should set defined goals, strategies and tactics for their business and develop a content calendar to ensure alignment. Next, businesses should create impactful social media content that encourages action. Finally, content performance should be evaluated to glean key learnings and measure success of business goals. This helps small businesses better understand how to better harness their social media presence and use a focused approach to develop social media content that aids in lead generation,

sales, customer loyalty and other key objectives for business growth and success.

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### Are you ready for paid advertising?

You can expand the reach of your social media efforts by running paid advertising campaigns. Here are some indicators that you might be ready to invest in a paid campaign:

- You can concretely define your target audience and their behaviors or interests.
  - You have a clear business goal (e.g., increase followers, grow an email list, generate sales, etc.) and past experiences that indicate that social media efforts can achieve the goal.
  - You are confident in your content creation abilities and can identify what content your audience best responds to.
  - You have enough time to monitor the campaign and its outcomes (e.g., fulfilling orders, engaging customers, etc.).
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## Resources

This guide draws upon the sources listed below to explain how small businesses can leverage social media to create impactful content that drives results in alignment with their goals and strategies.

- Conlin, B. (2018). [How to Properly Use National Days for Advertising](https://businessnewsdaily.com/11070-national-days-advertising.html). (businessnewsdaily.com/11070-national-days-advertising.html). Business News Daily.
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- O'Connell, A. (n.d.). [What Is Social Media Analytics? Definition and Examples](https://cision.com/resources/articles/what-is-social-media-analytics). (cision.com/resources/articles/what-is-social-media-analytics). Cision.

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