

## Growing your social media channels



Let's say that you've got a great little routine going. You've set aside time to create content. You report regularly. You manage your community. But often, part of the social media manager's role is to help grow the social media channels.

When I talk about growth, I'm not talking about "getting new followers". I'm talking about "finding more people in your target market".

There are a couple of myths around "follower numbers" online, which I've touched on before.

Some people believe that by having more followers, your customers will see you as more professional, or a more trustworthy brand. [There isn't a lot of evidence to support that.](#)

While there is some validity in seeing that others have purchased from your business (known as 'social proof'), it can become a slippery slope of 'never having enough' if you're always after more followers.

Additionally, people are now very cynical about massive follower numbers since it's now so easy to purchase 'Likes' from a third-party. Today, high follower numbers don't mean you're a more established or popular business.

Having *some* followers is healthy for a brand, but Likes should never be your key driver unless your business has a really, really good reason for it.

Keep in mind that followers aren't the same as customers or having new people find out about your brand. In those cases, sometimes advertising is the best way to reach that objective.

Many social platforms have also changed in recent years, so that follower numbers do not reflect the number of people who will see your content in their newsfeed.

It's easy to *think* that if you have 1000 Facebook fans, then 1000 people are seeing updates about your business every day. But the reality is that most social platforms are driven by algorithms that serve your content to only *some* of your followers.

Additionally, many digital marketers would tell you that it's better to have a social media following of 100 true fans who *love* your work rather than 1000 "followers" who can't tell you from a bar of soap. You're wanting to connect with those *real* adoring audiences.

## Building a solid foundation

Before jumping into platform-specific tactics for growth, it's worth highlighting a couple of foundational tactics that can help build for follower numbers. For example, if you've never told your newsletter subscribers that you've got social channels, they might not even know they exist. Cover your bases by ensuring your existing website visitors know about your social channels.

Here are some ways to ensure your existing audience is well aware of the social channels you're on. Add links to your social media channels to:

- Your website header or footer
- Website contact page
- Your About Us on each social channel, link to the others
- Your newsletter
- Your email signature
- Any ebooks or white papers you release
- Any printed materials, such as flyers or menus
- Your storefront window or front counter

There are some organisations where they collaborate with others, so can spread the word even further:

- Are you working with bloggers or have media appearances? Make sure you mention your social channels there.
- Are there industry directories or industry bodies that might mention you on their website or newsletter?
- Do you have organisations you can partner with who will help spread the word of your social channels?
- Is someone from your company speaking at a conference? Can they add your social media channels?

## Channel-specific tips for growth

The reality is that growth on social media channels happens in two ways: with time or money. In the first case, you spend no money, and your social channels grow slowly over years, shaped by the many small actions you take every single day, like a bonsai.

Or, if you want results quickly, you need to spend money. This might be by buying targeted ads, running an amazing campaign, or running a competition (see the next lesson for this).

Most of these tactics aren't 'one-off' activities but things that should be done regularly over time to help your channels grow. I suggest popping it into your weekly—or even daily—calendar to work through these activities for the primary channel your audience is on. It's kind of like mowing the lawn, right? You could do it once a year, but it makes things easier to do a little bit more often.

For now, these are the “bootstrapping it” tactics for each social channel which are helpful to keep in mind for when you've got time but a limited budget.

### **Facebook Pages**

Organic Facebook growth is a lot slower than it used to be, with Facebook's limited reach for brand pages. Once upon a time, creating content for people to share or engage with was enough, but now very few people see these posts, so growth is limited.

Many people look at activities like posting content favoured by the algorithm, such as posting video, or live videos. Facebook is also shifting so that “Stories” are one of the more popular features, so creating content as a story is looking to be one of the more effective ways to gain reach.

For this reason, some businesses are turning to Facebook Groups as an alternative. More of a community than a newsfeed, it requires a lot more upkeep; however content distribution is not restricted in the same way as Pages.

### **Instagram**

Instagram also has an algorithm, but the reach is not so limited as Facebook. Because it's primarily based around hashtags, tactics that work on Twitter will work here too—and of course, competitions.

When looking to grow Instagram, tactics include:

- Actively using a mix of large and small industry hashtags for reach, with a maximum of 30 hashtags
- Following people who use Industry hashtags and comment on their posts
- Go through the list of tactics used for Twitter—most will apply here, too.
- Posting a mix of mediums such as Stories means you're serving a wider audience.

*TIP: There are plenty of hashtag recommendation websites to help you research Instagram tags for your industry, such as [Leetags](#) and [Tagify](#). However, the best starting point is searching for others in your industry and documenting which hashtags they use, then delving into finding similar hashtags.*

### **Twitter**

Twitter growth is a slow process that can take years, so being realistic about your growth rate is important, especially in Australia where Twitter is one of the lesser-used social networks (despite the big reputation!).

One of the key tactics here is the use of hashtags. These are descriptive words combined with a hash symbol to make tags: clickable keywords where people self-

identify what their post is about so it can be searched and seen by people looking for content based on that tag. Examples include #smallbusiness, #craft, #sydney. People strategically choose hashtags based on how large they are (i.e. increased reach), or how specific they are to a certain industry, niche or group.

Twitter growth tactics include:

- When you follow people, they sometimes follow back. You can follow up to 1000 people per day. Create a Twitter List of all the people you know in your industry or target market. This can be done simply by Googling your industry, and for every business that comes up, Follow them on Twitter.
- Now, go through everyone you've been following in your industry and see who *they* follow. Add those people.
- You can do a search for keywords in your industry and 'Favourite' tweets from people discussing these topics so they will be notified, and perhaps engage with you.
- Get noticed by retweeting and/or adding commentary to discussions people in your industry are having.
- You can 'tag' or @mention people in your tweets who are relevant to your discussion. If it's a favourable comment, they may Like it or retweet it to their followers.
- There are automated tools (also known as bots) which can be programmed to Like or Follow people if they use specific keywords, for example, #dogs. These are often frowned upon as Twitter prefers real, human engagement, but some tools can be used to help you shortlist people, which you then manually review.
- Follow trending hashtags and participate in the discussions. For some, this might be cultural, like #happynewyear, but this can also be niche, such as industry or conference hashtags.
- Running Twitter competitions is another way to increase growth, but there's a lot of work involved. We go into more depth on this in the next chapter!

## TikTok

On top of creating great content, similar to Instagram and Twitter, leveraging hashtags and following people is a great way to build your following on TikTok.

## LinkedIn Business Pages

While LinkedIn Business Pages are growing in popularity, they have until recently been very small, mostly because people were not used to following pages on LinkedIn. They are often used for company and business updates, or for recruitment. However, if you're B2B, there's no reason that you can't focus your efforts on this channel.

One simple way to grow this channel without buying ads is to take advantage of the industry network your staff are likely to have already. Encourage all your staff to share posts from your Business Page to their personal newsfeeds each week, adding a personal note about how they contributed to the article, or why it's interesting for their industry or audience.

For a bit of added reach, you can also add hashtags to your Business Page posts, which are becoming more and more common on LinkedIn.

If your staff post to LinkedIn Pulse on behalf of your company, add a link at the end of the article to your business page which they can follow.

### **LinkedIn Personal Account**

Freelancers and sole traders who don't have a LinkedIn business page can instead use their personal profile for business. In some cases, these tips might be most useful for a CEO or business spokesperson to take on board.

Building LinkedIn connections (or "friends") means you will turn up in LinkedIn search. LinkedIn search, as a default, shows up to three levels of connections (people you know are first level connections, people who know the people you know are second level connections, people who know your second level connections are third level connections). Therefore, the more connections you have, the more visible you are in search. For this reason, growing your personal LinkedIn account might be seen as *more* important than growing your LinkedIn Business Page for some businesses.

Tactics to grow your personal LinkedIn profile include:

- Post content, and comment on other's posts regularly. Don't forget to @ mention or tag other people or companies where possible to grow your reach.
- When you request connections, add a personal note—why do you want to connect (ie. "Good to meet you last week while traveling to Melbourne. Let's keep in touch." or "I've seen your posts and noticed your work. I really appreciate your perspectives and would love to connect." )
- Post blog posts from your website to LinkedIn Pulse (LinkedIn's blogging platform). Don't forget to add hashtags to your Pulse blog posts and link back to your original blog.
- At events, add people on LinkedIn *then and there* when you're networking in person. Having the LinkedIn app on your phone will help with this.
- Engage in LinkedIn Groups for your industry (read the group rules, read for a few weeks to understand the culture and what is acceptable before engaging, and never post any direct sales posts)
- Add people via LinkedIn's "People You May Know" feature
- In LinkedIn Search, there is an "All Filters" option in the search. Search for "Connections Of... Joe Bloggs" to find connections of people you believe might have strong connections to your industry or target audience.
- Use the "Who's Viewed Your Profile" Tool to find people who have viewed your profile. It's possible you've come up in search, and they are looking for someone with your skills. Consider adding them to your network. On the free version of LinkedIn, you've got limited visibility of these people unless you upgrade to Premium.
- At the time of writing, LinkedIn's algorithm also favours when you livestream, so when you livestream, you'll be seen by more people.