





Introduction

Unless you've been living under a rock, you probably know about the importance of having a social media presence as a business. The same way people will have told you how important it is to have a website in the 90s - it's now almost inexcusable to not have at least a grasp of social media for your business. There's one simple reason why: it's where your customers are. There are millions of eyeballs waiting to see your brand across the main social networks, and they're just a few clicks away. In this e-book, we'll talk through how to get your brand kickstarted on social media.

There are more than 200 well-known social media platforms currently in operation, and even when you trim the list to only the most widely used, you're still looking at 20+ platforms. So it is easy for small business owners to feel overwhelmed, and to give up on social media before even getting started.



While specific social media platforms may come and go, the basic concept of social media is not going anywhere, and it will remain an important part of any business strategy: from brand awareness, through to marketing, sales and

customer service. Our brief guide to getting started with social media will take you through the important first steps, helping you overcome any paralyzing fear you have of social media, and making it easier for you to take the next steps almost unaided.

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You can never go wrong by investing in communities and the human beings within them.

-Pam Moore (@pammktgnut)

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Choose the Right Platforms

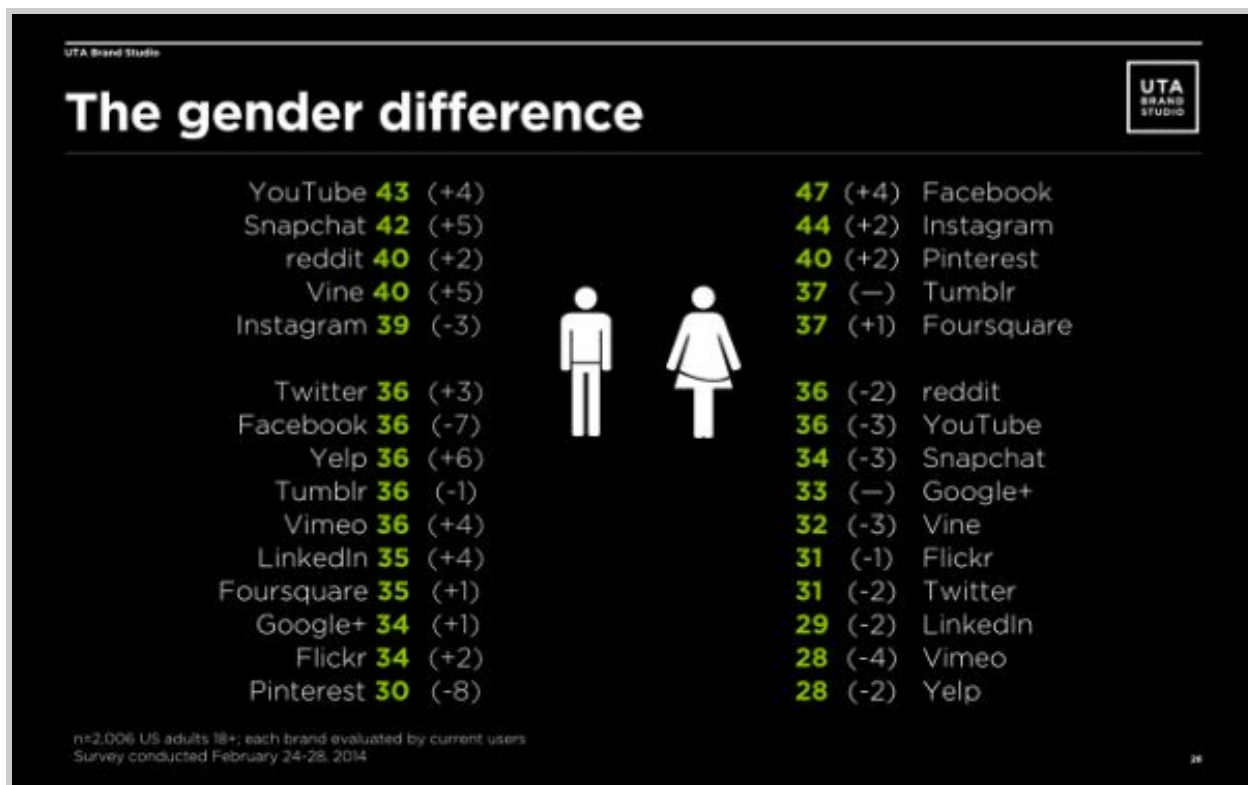


Image Source: [UTA Brand Studio](#)

If you're starting with a clean slate, then the first step is deciding which platforms you are going to be active on. If you're already active on multiple platforms, then it might be a good idea to consider if you're using the right platforms for your audience. This isn't as simple as looking at which are the top 5-10 platforms, but rather investigating which are the most popular with your audience.

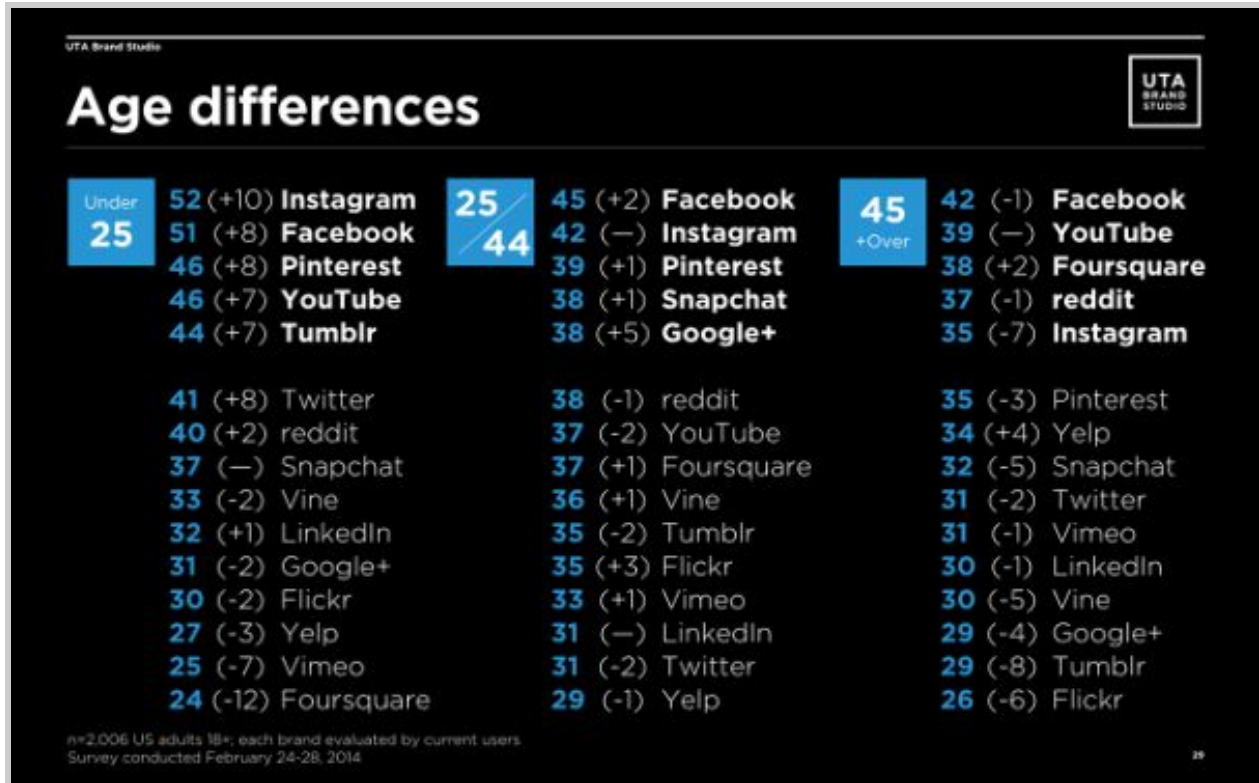


Image Source: [UTA Brand Studio](#)

Facebook might be the Big Daddy, but if your audience is more active on Pinterest and Instagram, then any effort you put into Facebook is possibly wasted. Begin by looking at your competitors: which platforms are they using, and what is the size of their audience on each? Then look at the demographics of your customers, both current and those you are trying to reach: what gender, age group, education and income bracket does the bulk of your audience fall under?

Pinterest and Instagram Usage Doubles Since 2012, Growth on Other Platforms Slower

% of online adults who say they use the following social media platform, by year

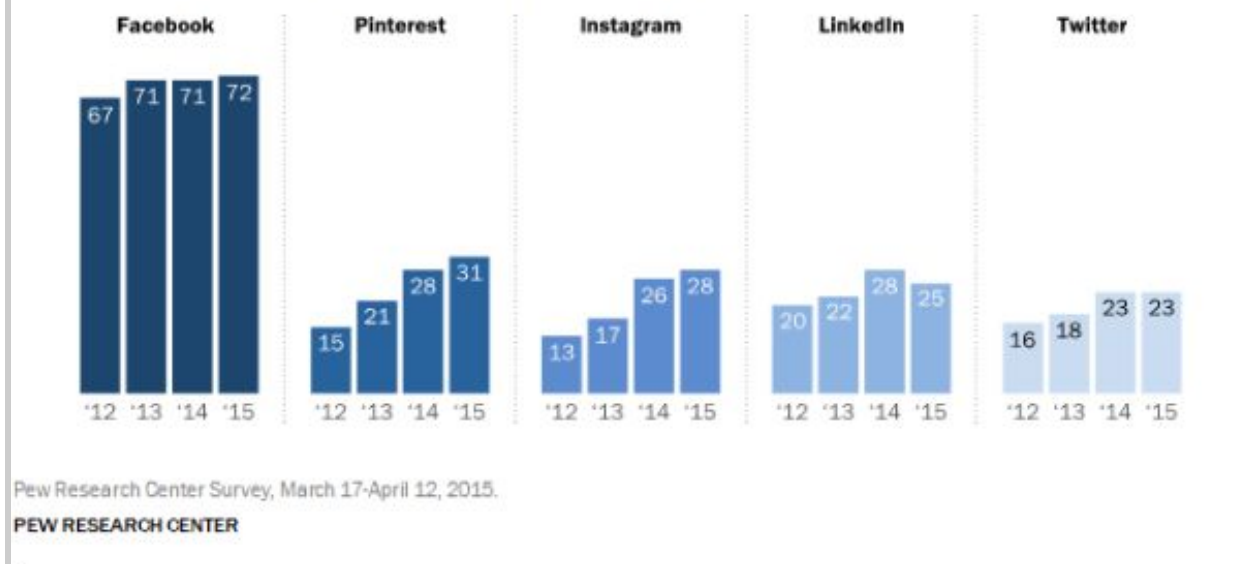
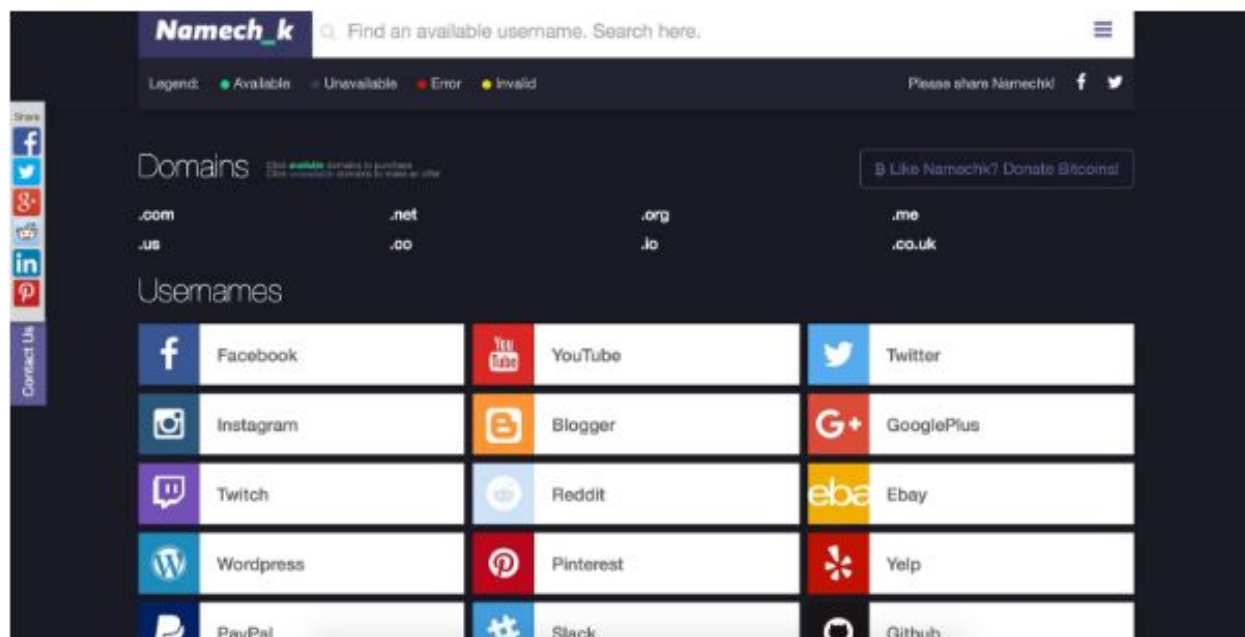


Image Source: [Pew Research Centre](#)

The Pew Research Center publishes data annually which looks at the demographic makeup of popular social media platforms, and although the data is generally based on American adults, it is still a good reference point. Finally, consider whether the platform makes sense to you (do some extra research before deciding that you “don’t get it”) and whether it is appropriate for your content.

Your Brand Name

Once you have decided which platforms to be active on, your next step is to claim your brand name on those platforms.



Namechk is a nifty tool which helps you see whether your brand name is available on a large number of platforms, and you can then begin registering on all the platforms you intend using. Some points to remember:

#1 - Have the same username across all platforms

Consistency is important when your audience searches for you.

#2 - Limit your username to no more than 15 characters

Although other platforms accept longer usernames, Twitter is capped at 15 characters.

#3 - Register your username on all the major platforms

Even if you aren't going to be using them. This keeps the username associated with your brand safe, and means it is available should you ever decide to start using any other platforms.

Do you have a long brand name longer than 15 characters?

Shorten some – or all – of your brand name, or abbreviate it. American Airlines, First Great Western and Standard Chartered had to resort to both of these methods. Alternatively use the name your customers use, as Starbucks Coffee did.



What if the username you would like associated with your brand name is not available?

- If your brand name consists of two or more words, separate them using an underscore.
- Add “The” to the front of your brand username, or “Official” at the start or end.
- Add “HQ” or your location, though this only makes sense for businesses with multiple offices.

The ideal scenario is for your social media usernames to match your brand exactly, but since this is not always possible, make sure they are at least easy to remember, and type in.

Build a Complete Profile

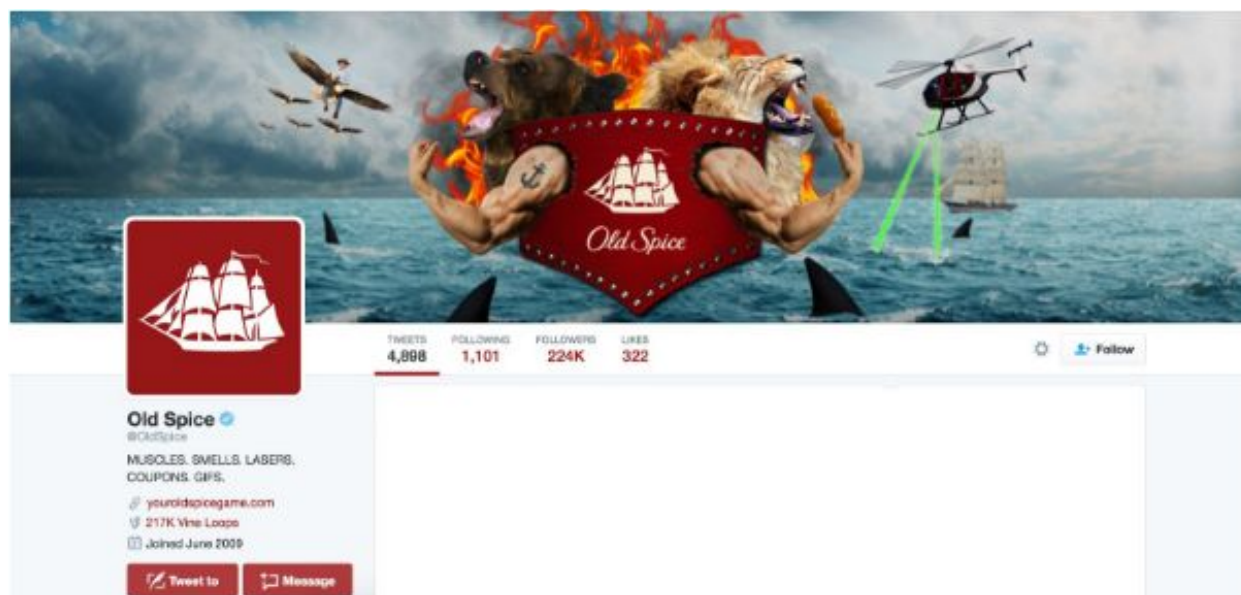
Now you're ready to build your profile on your chosen social media platforms, and like your username, your profile should help identify you to existing customers, while letting new customers know what you do.



Your Profile Image:

Most social media platforms allow you to upload a cover - or header - and a profile image. Most businesses use their logo for the profile image, but it is important to remember that although the minimum size (depending on platform) is between 110px and 400px, your audience will mostly see it as a 32px X 32px image, and if your logo does not look good at that size, nobody is going to be able to identify you.

If your logo includes an easily identifiable logomark that customers already associate with your brand, use that instead of your full logo. As with your username, be consistent and use the same profile image across all platforms, just make sure it is properly resized as per each platform's requirements.



You aren't as restricted when it comes to your cover or header image, and although each platform has different requirements when it comes to the size, they're a lot more generous than the profile image. Hubspot has a [great set of cheat sheets](#) giving image dimensions for all the major platforms, and you are encouraged to make good use of all the space provided for your cover image. Don't be afraid to change it regularly, and don't think that, like your profile image, you should only use your logo. Use the space to show off your products, your workspace, your employees: visit the profile page for your favourite brands to see how they are using the space, just don't let it be boring.

Your Bio:

Each platform has different requirements when it comes to your bio, from the simple 160 character bio on Twitter, through to the much more detailed profiles offered by Facebook Pages and LinkedIn. The recommendations for your bio are simple:

For short bio's such as Twitter, approach it as an elevator pitch to new customers; they need to be able to look at your bio and immediately know what your business is all about. Existing customers just need it to assure them that it is the official account of your business.



For longer bio's such as Facebook Pages, complete as many of the provided fields as possible: from start date, through to short and

long descriptions, address, and contact details.

Starbucks ✓
@Starbucks

Home
Posts
Videos
Photos
Locations
About
Likes
Pinterest
Open Jobs
International
Events
[Create a Page](#)

Like Share Suggest Edits ... [Send Message](#)

About [Suggest Edits](#)

BUSINESS INFO

Opened in 1971

CONTACT DETAILS

<http://starbucks.com/>

MORE INFO

About
Inspiring and nurturing the human spirit -- one person, one cup, and one neighborhood at a time
<http://www.youtube.com/starbucks>

Company Overview
Starbucks has an unusually human approach to business. We always figured that putting people before products just made good common sense. Our relationships with... [See more](#)

STORY

Come on in. This space is not so different from your neighborhood Starbucks. It's a place where people from all over come together for conversation and great coffee.

We welcome your ideas, feedback, and constructive criticism. That said, please understand that we will not be able to address store specific customer service issues here. We encourage you to discuss specific issues regarding individual store service with that store's manager. Or if you have a customer service issue, you can contact our Customer Care Center at 1-800-782-7282 or visit: <http://sbux.co/1aU7h1V>.

The comments, videos and pictures that are posted to the Starbucks Facebook page may or may not reflect the opinions of Starbucks, and we do not confirm the accuracy of any postings.

Always include a link to your company website, and if the platform allows it, include links to your other social media accounts.

“

48 Percent of Americans have interacted with companies or institutions on at least one social media network.

- Hootsuite

”

Ready to start using your social media?

Now let us talk about some of the best tips that we have to help you get the very most from your social media.

Define Your Goals

Like all other aspects of your business, your presence on social media networks needs to be linked to specific goals. Goals are often defined broadly, but linked to measurable marketing objectives, and they form the basis on which you establish your strategy, objectives and the tactics you intend using.

In terms of social success, you need to describe what you want to achieve through your marketing efforts on each social media network.

1. Do you want to raise awareness for your brand and reaching new demographics?
2. Maybe you want to improve customer service through social media, thus your goals would relate to response rates, engagement and even support tickets.
3. Or do you simply want to increase revenue and drive leads to your business.

Ask yourself the question of what you really want to see from social media for your business...

“

A colossal 50 million businesses use Facebook Pages.

– Facebook

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Outline Your Content Strategy

As with your company website, your efforts on social media should be controlled by a clearly outlined content strategy. As a minimum, your social content strategy should consist of the following:

1. A list of all the social media channels your company uses, and who is in charge of each.
2. The primary and secondary goals of your social presence, along with the KPIs you will be measuring.
3. Mini profiles of who your target audience is, and what you want/need from them, broken down per social media network. Your audience is likely to be different on each channel, but we'll explain that later.
4. Important dates for the full year ahead. These would include holidays, special occasions and any promotions and product launches you already have planned.

Later on you will link this to a detailed content calendar.

“

If you're looking for the next big thing, and you're looking where everyone else is, you're looking in the wrong place.

- Mark Cuban, owner of the Dallas Mavericks

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Set Marketing Objectives

You might have some goals in mind, based on the aforementioned examples. But your marketing objectives will be more precise, since they are the specific - and measurable - steps you will be taking to achieve your goals.

Your goals might state that your presence on social media is intended to generate more leads, and increase sales, but your marketing objectives will add numbers to those goals, specifying how many leads you hope to generate via social media, and what increase in sales you hope to achieve through your social strategy.

Your marketing objectives will also describe the tools and analytics you will use to measure your success. As mentioned previously, it is important that each of your objectives is linked to specific goals, and that timeframes are also attached to each objective - your goals are long-term, but your objectives are short and medium-term stepping stones towards achieving your goals.

“

There are no magic wands, no hidden tracks, and no secret handshakes that can bring you immediate success, but with time, energy and determination you can get there.

- Darren Rowse, Professional Blogger

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Know Your Audience

Buyer personas are an important component of any business, helping you ensure you are targeting the right people, in the right places, at the right times, and with the right message. And the more detailed and accurate your personas are, the easier it is to reach both existing, and new customers. This is especially true when it comes to social media, since your audience on each network is likely to be very



different, with some skewing to older generations, and others to much younger generations.

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Social marketing eliminates the middlemen, providing brands the unique opportunity to have a direct relationship with their customers.

- Bryan Weiner, CEO at Digital Agency 360i

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Be on the Same Channels as Your Audience

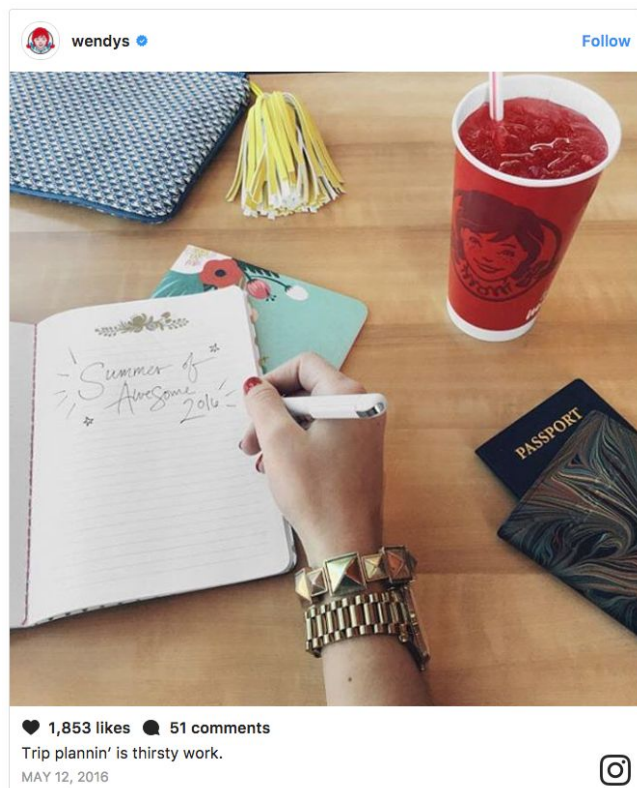
It is not necessary to have an active presence on every single social network, only those that appeal to your current (and target) audience, and where they themselves are most active. Remember: the right people, in the right places; everything else is just wasted time.

Discovering what networks your audience is most active on can be a little tricky for smaller businesses, but actually asking your customers can help, along with studying what your competitors are doing on social media (see below).

Separate Strategies for Separate Channels

Leading on from the previous point, you will probably also find that audiences on different social networks respond to different types of content, so it is vital that you analyse the performance of each post

on all the networks you are active on to establish what content generates the best results. This will help you to refine your strategy, leading to better results on your objectives.



Wendy's feed on Instagram is completely different to what you will find on their Facebook Page - no memes, just high impact visuals and videos.

But Use the Same Language as Your Audience

Like the rest of your content marketing strategy, your social media strategy is an opportunity to present a more human aspect of your brand to customers. Avoid using industry buzzwords and formal language in your social media copy, using a relaxed, almost conversational tone instead – especially when responding to customers on social media. But if you’re going to occasionally incorporate trending topics and hashtags in your social content, make sure you fully understand the context, and that it relates to your brand in some way, otherwise you risk embarrassing yourself, and alienating your customers.

Like Wendy’s, Denny’s content differs across the various social networks, with the content shared on Instagram being kookier than what is shared on Facebook. It is obviously targeting a younger audience on Instagram, and the number of likes and comments show that this strategy definitely works for them.



Know Your Competition

Knowing your competition on social media is not that different from knowing your competition in the business world. Identify 3-5 of your primary competitors, and analyse their activity on social media:

Where are they?

Depending on the niche, some companies are going to be more successful on specific social channels. There is a high chance that most established brands will have a killer marketing team who've explored the possibilities of all social channels available, so learn from their mistakes.

However, investigating what channels they use can also identify gaps in the market for your company so never take things at face value.

Content & Tone?

Looking at what other companies have done is a fantastic way to get a feel for the tone that they use to convey with their (your) audience. Look through the content that does well, and the stuff that doesn't. This isn't to say you should copy your competitors, but there is time and money that can be saved learning from the failings of others.

Brand Awareness & Customer Loyalty?

Take a big step back now and look at how their customers engage with them. Because these are the people that you want to be your customers, right?

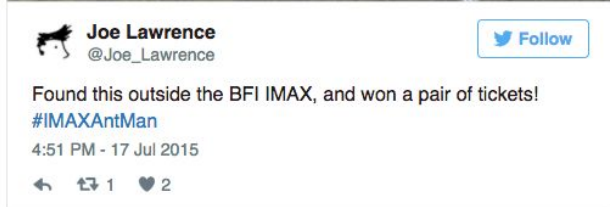
Knowing this can help you shape your own content strategy, allowing you to incorporate some of their more successful techniques, and even target some of their audience.

Most customers can be persuaded to join your team if the marketing strategy is honed enough around this.

Share Quality Content

In this context, quality is not simply about how polished your content is, it is about the value it adds to the lives of your customers: how it helps them. The greater the value to them, the more likely they are to engage with your content, and pay attention to your future posts. Quality content not only helps build trust, it can also help you grow your audience.

Wendy's makes excellent use of their social media presence, and recently they started doing live streams on Facebook, giving their audience an opportunity to ask questions about Wendy's, and anything else on their mind. But there is a variety of content that can be a play on marketing.



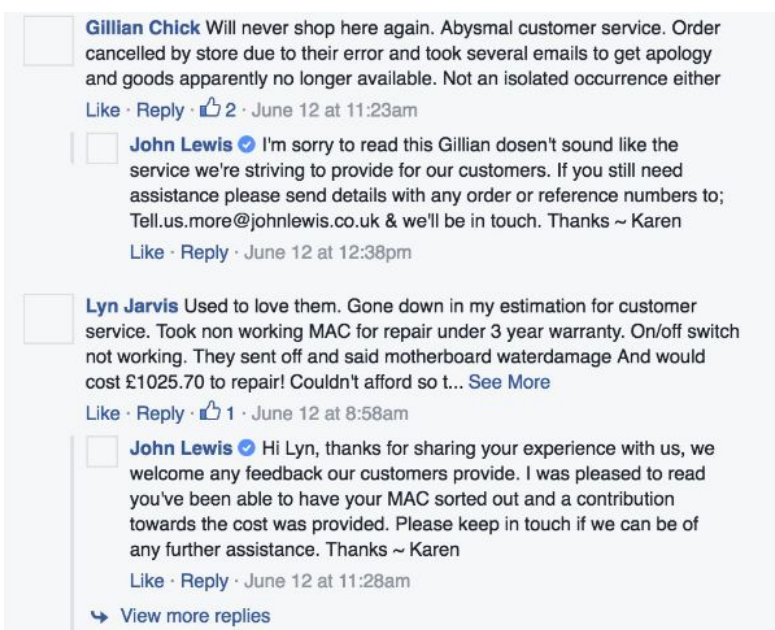
You can see a marketing stunt from Ant Man in the photo which we thought would have gone down well on social media with a few tweaks!


In London they actually also hid miniature tickets and stowed them away in hard to find places as part of their social media campaign. The point of this? Social media can be whatever you make of it.


Respond and Engage With Your Audience


Your website is a one-sided communication channel, where you share information with your audience, and try to convert new customers. This is also true for your presence on social media networks, except it should not be one-sided. Social media is an opportunity for you to properly engage with your audience by reacting – and responding – to their comments.


Customers see social media not only as a means to learn more about brands and products, but also to initiate a dialogue regarding any



Gillian Chick Will never shop here again. Abysmal customer service. Order cancelled by store due to their error and took several emails to get apology and goods apparently no longer available. Not an isolated occurrence either
Like · Reply ·  2 · June 12 at 11:23am

John Lewis  I'm sorry to read this Gillian dosen't sound like the service we're striving to provide for our customers. If you still need assistance please send details with any order or reference numbers to; Tell.us.more@johnlewis.co.uk & we'll be in touch. Thanks ~ Karen
Like · Reply · June 12 at 12:38pm

Lyn Jarvis Used to love them. Gone down in my estimation for customer service. Took non working MAC for repair under 3 year warranty. On/off switch not working. They sent off and said motherboard waterdamage And would cost £1025.70 to repair! Couldn't afford so t... [See More](#)
Like · Reply ·  1 · June 12 at 8:58am

John Lewis  Hi Lyn, thanks for sharing your experience with us, we welcome any feedback our customers provide. I was pleased to read you've been able to have your MAC sorted out and a contribution towards the cost was provided. Please keep in touch if we can be of any further assistance. Thanks ~ Karen
Like · Reply · June 12 at 11:28am

[View more replies](#)

problems they are experiencing, and to pose questions. Some brands choose to steer these conversations towards private channels such as direct messaging, email or even telephonic communication, which is good for complex problems that may require personal information in order to resolve. But this should be the exception, and not the norm, especially when

your response could help other customers with similar problems.

The John Lewis social team responds to customer comments As mentioned previously, try to keep the tone light and conversational, and use plain language wherever possible. And don't forget that your audience's comments and questions can be used to further shape your social media strategy, and future posts.

Coordinate With all Internal Departments

A small business might not have large teams managing different departments, but they would still have individual employees responsible for separate business functions. It is vital that these departments, or individual employees, are involved in every step of your social strategy; not only will they be able to suggest ideas for actual content, but they will also have better knowledge of what goals and objectives they would be able to contribute to. Each department (or employee) will have intimate knowledge of what their internal pains are - what obstacles they face each day - and who their customers are, allowing you to create more detailed buyer personas.

Have a Content Calendar

In the first part of this article, we covered some steps involved in outlining your content strategy, and one of the documents linked to your content strategy is a content calendar. Aside from listing the days and dates in each month in chronological order, your content calendar should include the following:

Content description

A brief description of the content that will be posted. This is helpful for sharing plans with coworkers and managers!

Time

This only needs to state whether it will be posted in the morning, afternoon, or in the evening. Although on rare occasions your piece of content might be a pre planned reactive post which you can't account for, but that is another story.

Type

Are you posting a link, text, image and text, video, etc. We also think it is worth adding a few notes about whether the content is linked up with other marketing activities

KPI

How are you going to measure the success of each post? Clicks, views, shares, comments, etc. Think back to those marketing objectives that you set the company!

Result

The actual KPI result, updated after the content is posted. As always, reflection is the best way to refine and produce incredible results. Take the time to analyse the results, because it'll only pay off.

Populate your content calendar as far in advance as you can manage, but never less than a month in advance. This gives you sufficient time to create any media that is needed – graphics, videos, etc. – and by planning ahead, you also reduce any stress associated with coming up with content to post, and ensuring that it addresses specific objectives. It also assists with automating your social posting, as discussed later in this article.

“

Build it, and they will come” only works in the movies. Social Media is a “build it, nurture it, engage them, and they may come and stay.

– Seth Godin, sethgodin.com
















”

Analyse Performance

Analysing the performance of each post, on each channel, serves a dual purpose:

It allows you to track your progress towards achieving your objectives, and it allows you to see what types of posts perform best.

There are many paid solutions for analysing your performance, but before you start investigating them, get to know the free analytics tools that are included with each channel.

Your 5 Most Recent Posts							■ Reach: Organic / Paid ■ Post Clicks ■ Likes, Comments & Shares		
Published	Post	Type	Targeting	Reach	Engagement	Promote			
06/09/2015 8:18 am	 How to Start Selling Your Products Online Quickly and Easily			67 ■	3 3 ■ ■	Boost Post			
06/08/2015 8:18 am	 How to Use Google+ Collections for Business			273 ■	17 11 ■ ■	Boost Post			
06/05/2015 12:35 pm	 How to Gain Insights from Top Business Books in Half the Time			85 ■	0 4 ■ ■	Boost Post			
06/05/2015 8:18 am	 Check out the new design of Kikolani & apply to be a guest blogger! Submissions are open.			224 ■	24 7 ■ ■	Boost Post			
06/04/2015 12:35 pm	 Keywords to Concepts: The Lazy Web Marketer's Guide to Smart Keyword Research			874 ■	53 16 ■ ■	Boost Post			

[See All Posts](#)

Image source: [SproutSocial](#)

Some of the key performance indicators can be recorded on your content calendar, while others will need to be plotted separately.

Reach & Awareness

which is different to the number of followers you have. Each post will only reach a fraction of your audience, and even then, not all of them will actually see, or pay attention, to the post. Analyse reach in relation to the time each post is made to help determine the optimal day and time for sharing updates on different social channels.

Engagement & Interaction

Which is first measured in terms of the number of likes, shares and comments each post attracts, and then in terms of referrals and conversions - if any of the posts include a link back to your website, how many people follow the link.

If you are posting videos, then you would also need to measure how many times each video is viewed.

Post type performance: a comparative measure of how each post type performs in relation to other types.

Social Following

The most widely used number to define success. We have to disagree with basing success on the sheer amount of people following your Facebook page and define success as achieving your goals.

For example, you could have 1 million followers but the content that is created doesn't generate revenue equal to a company with half as many followers.

Have a Unified Look

We previously discussed having separate strategies for each social network you are on, but this needs to be managed carefully to ensure that your brand identity remains consistent. Even if the type of content you share is very different on each network – as is the case with Denny’s – your audience should never have any doubt that it is your official account.



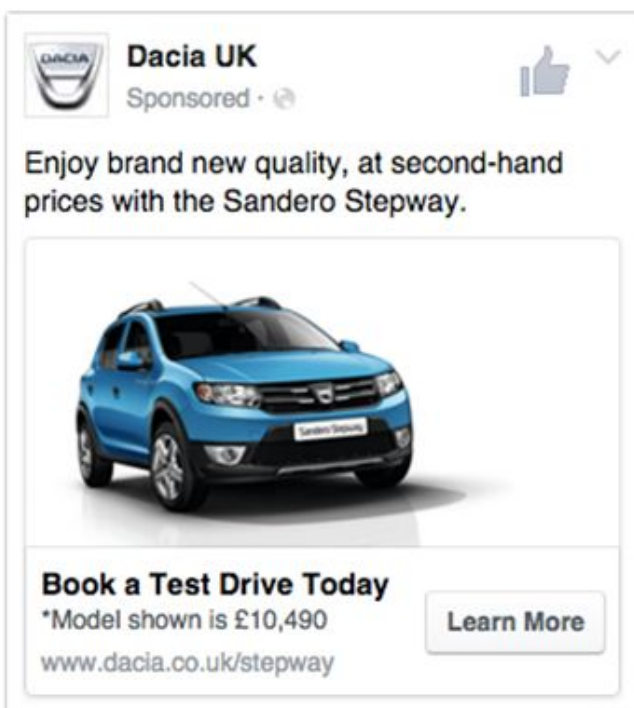
Denny’s Facebook & Twitter profiles are identical

From having the same handle/username on each network, to using the same profile photo, and largely similar bio’s, a consistent brand identity is important.

And while it isn’t essential that all images you post include branding, your videos should.

Know When to Spend Money

Creating a presence on social media doesn't need to cost you anything apart from some time and effort, but being willing to spend a bit of money – and knowing when to spend it – can only benefit you and your business. The growth in the freelance economy means you don't need to hire a full-time designer to get great looking content, and finding freelance photographers, videographers and designers is incredibly easy, and much more affordable than a full-time employee. Not every single post to your social networks has to be professionally designed, but it can make things easier for you, while also helping to ensure your brand identity does not suffer.



The image shows a Facebook advertisement for Dacia UK. At the top left is the Dacia logo and the text "Dacia UK Sponsored". To the right is a thumbs-up icon and a dropdown arrow. The main text reads "Enjoy brand new quality, at second-hand prices with the Sandero Stepway." Below this is a photograph of a blue Dacia Sandero Stepway car. At the bottom left, it says "Book a Test Drive Today" followed by "*Model shown is £10,490" and the website "www.dacia.co.uk/stepway". At the bottom right is a "Learn More" button.

Another part of your social presence that can benefit from a willingness to spend money is exposure and reach, in the form of advertising on the various networks. Instagram, Twitter and Facebook all offer advertising to a global audience, while Pinterest is currently only available in the US and the UK, and they all offer you an opportunity to not only be seen by more of your existing audience, but also to reach people who aren't

following you yet. Each campaign is highly customisable, right down to how much you are willing to spend.

Be Consistent

Consistency is not only about having a unified look, but also about posting regularly. Ideally you would be posting every day, but this is more challenging for small businesses, so ensure that you consistently post on the same days) each week, at roughly the same time. This can be extended further by also posting specific types of content on certain days, so Monday's see you posting helper videos, and Wednesday's posting image links that drive traffic to your website.



Automate to Simplify

The final step to social success is automating your posts, which is only possible if you have taken the time to compile and populate a content calendar.

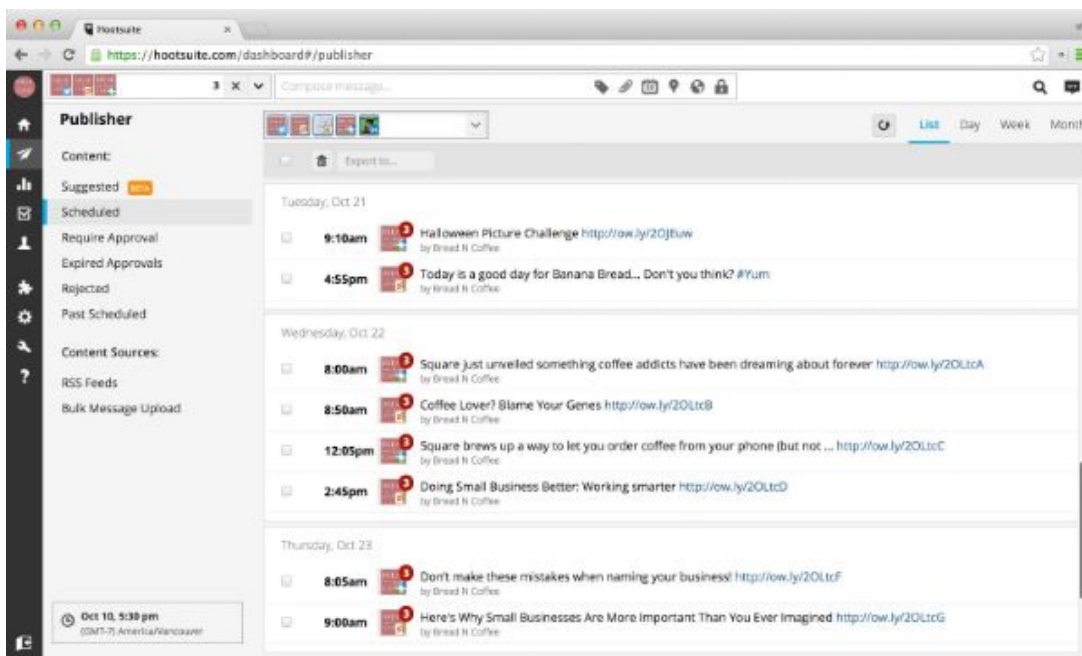


Image source: Hootsuite

Knowing what content you are going to post, and when you are going to post it, allows you to use tools such as Buffer or Hootsuite to schedule everything in advance, with the added benefit of enhanced analytics offered by both tools. However, automation is only meant to save you from having to remember to post, they do not take away the responsibility you have to actively monitor each of your social channels, and to respond to customer queries and comments.

So, you are ready to build your brand using social communities

There are two kinds of people in this world, joiners and followers. It's one of those platitudes that we learn early on in life, but it meant something different back then. The basic message was that the joiner could never be a leader. In the Life 2.0 world of social media—where how much you put into the system determines how much you get out of it—being a joiner is the first step towards gaining followers.

This is one of the prime directives of any digital marketing strategy: Before you can lead the group, you need to join the group. It's social media, after all, and if you're off in the corner acting the virtual wallflower, no one's going to engage with you. At the same time, you can't just blast out a stream of one way communications, announcing deals or holiday hours. There are plenty of different tactics you can use, but this isn't one of them.



Think of Facebook as a big party. And let's say you're a coffee shop owner whose only intent is to network a little, spread the word about your cafe. You've just arrived, and the party has already splintered off into groups. Over there in one corner is group of 6 or 7 men and women, all lawyers and so have a lot in common, with hours of good conversation ahead of them.

Sitting on the couch, near the stereo, is a group of people listening to the music attentively, pausing only discuss similar music and recommend other bands. There's another batch of people standing over the table where all the snacks are, trading recipes for their favorite appetisers. The rest of the partygoers are all just yelling at each other about politics or analysing Jennifer Aniston's baby bump. It's a pretty big party. So what do you do? What's the most effective way to get as many new, loyal customers as you can? Here are three strategies you can use to get the most out of joining. To make them easier to remember, they all start with the letter P.

Pick your groups wisely. Personally engage. Participate consistently.

“

Marketing is telling the world you're a rock star. Content marketing is showing the world you are one.

- Robert Rose

”

Pick your groups wisely.

You can't meet everyone. Focus your efforts on select groups.

Realistically, not everyone here is going to like you—and you definitely don't want those vocal Trump supporters stopping by your coffee shop for a cup. It's best to narrow your efforts and focus on the people who you can really connect with, which automatically rules out the lawyers, too. Those music enthusiasts look pretty cool, and you do love programming the playlists for your shop. That's definitely a good place to start.



Now, outside of this party scenario I've created when you're actually on Facebook, it is a good idea to connect with people this way. If you share interests with them, it doesn't have to be related to your business. But

you'll also want to join some of the more obvious groups—like, if you own a coffee shop, definitely join that coffee enthusiasts group. Join discussions on free trade, and ethical sourcing, and roasting, any topic on which you're an expert. But remember that you can't meet everyone. Don't join them all. Focus your efforts where you can have the most impact.

Remember, too, that Facebook isn't the only game out there. I just used that as an example for a blog post. If your focus is B2B marketing, LinkedIn has tons of groups that you can peruse and join and use as a foundation for networking. Quora is another good platform to join for this purpose. Its Question/Answer format is a natural way to demonstrate your authority on a given topic. Your participation has to be pertinent to the group, and not just shameless plugs. Remember, you're selling yourself—not your product.

For B2C, Instagram and Twitter are also highly effective, even though neither has a group/discussion function. But on Instagram, a single, catchy hashtag is a great way to curate relevant pictures and create a community around your business. And Twitter offers keyword targeting, so that you can find users who've used specific words or phrases—like “coffee” and “espresso”—and target your tweets back to them.

Reddit has become a very popular place for business owners who are willing to put the time to become trusted, authoritative voices, building strong and loyal followings from their audience. There are quite literally thousands of user forums and discussion groups that aren't even part of any specific social media platform that afford you the same opportunities. A simple Google search of your topic plus the word “forum” (e.g. “coffee roaster forum”) will show you the way to these kinds of group discussions.

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Most people think “selling” is the same as “talking”. But the most effective salespeople know that listening is the most important part of their job.

- Roy Bartell

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Personally engage and be yourself, literally!

Yes, this sounds like really trite, unhelpful advice. Of course, you should be yourself, right? But I mean this literally: your online presence for discussion groups needs to be you, not your business. Be yourself. When you walk into a party, you don't say, "Hi, I'm Acme Manufacturing." Your profile can—and absolutely should—include your professional credentials, and if it's natural to bring them up in the course of conversation, then do that, too. Just don't hijack a discussion for the sake of plugging your business. If someone asks a question and you know the answer, answer it. You can explain the difference between an Americano and a Macchiato without mentioning that your coffee shop makes both with beans you roasted that day.

Participate constructively and have something to say

Likewise, don't just jump into the fray with new posts where you pretend to discuss problems your audience might be having and how your business can solve them. Again, it helps to visualize a social situation: you wouldn't walk right up to a group of people having a good time and start marketing to them, would you? Of course not. You'd join their conversation, and want to contribute positively to whatever the dialogue is. It's no different online. Have something to say. Don't plug your cafe every chance you get. Or, really, any chance you get. You're at a party. Have fun. Connect over the music. Comment on other people's threads, demonstrate your knowledge, get to know other people. It's not about you or your business. The most important thing about the group is the group.

Establish common ground: if you're chatting up a bunch of music lovers, add some of their recommendations to the Spotify playlist you use as the soundtrack at your shop, then share it with them. If any of those people like coffee, they'll come check you out on their own, and chances are they'll like your Facebook page before they ever try your coffee. You can do this same thing with a Facebook group for Foodies. You can talk food with them, share a recipe of something you make for your work.

You can talk about coffee brewing, and speak with authority on the differences between french press vs. drip brew. Tell them what your favorite is. Find out what desserts they like and make a note of it. If you're engaging with them here, it's like they'll engage with you on your business page, too. Over there, it's more appropriate to talk about your business—put their dessert suggestions up to a vote to be a featured special. The winning recipe gets named after the person who submitted it, and they'll be sure to share the vote around to their friends.

Joining these networking groups is a lot like making friends: it isn't rocket science, but it isn't easy, either. And in either case, nobody wants to help you move furniture. The point is, you can't fake a connection with an audience—it takes time and honest effort. Your audience is out there, somewhere.

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