



Pinning Down Another Social Network

by Deborah Sternberg
 Executive Vice President, AlwaysCare Benefits Inc.
 Baton Rouge, LA
 Deborah@AlwaysCareBenefits.com

Social media gives you the opportunity to engage and interact with your clients. This interaction includes listening to their concerns, providing solutions and sharing content that is helpful to them. It provides another approach to cultivate your relationships and build your reputation as an expert who understands their needs and meets them without being too annoying while discussing this type of information in an online social setting. While every social media channel may not be a good fit for your business, it is important that you at least evaluate the options before ruling them out.

Think about your current social media usage. LinkedIn helps you build a professional network that includes potential clients, clients, partners and employees. Facebook helps you interact with clients in a social setting by providing answers to their questions and sharing information. Twitter lets you connect in typically 140 characters or less to news, updates, questions and answers. Instagram enables you to apply filters to give your photos a new look and share them. Socialcam lets you share tips via a quick video. The most popular newest option, Pinterest, a visual social network, enables you to pin aesthetically pleasing content to a virtual pin board.

At this point, you are probably trying to figure out what a virtual pin board is and how it could benefit your business. Think of it as an online corkboard where you can “pin” images or videos that are of interest to you and that you think would be of interest to existing and potential customers.

Millions of people browse pinboards to discover new things and get inspiration from people who share their interests. They interact by commenting, “liking” or “repinning” items that are of interest to their own boards. Most Pinterest users think of it as a place to view visually stimulating images, including those of crafts, fashion, hairstyles and food but, with a variety of pinboard categories, you will be able to find your niche. If an image is stimulating enough, users will repin it and click it to go to the website of origin.

Still not sure if Pinterest is a good fit for your business? Consider the undeniable success of visual content on the Internet. According to the Alexa traffic ranking report, YouTube is the third most popular website in the world, behind Facebook and Google.¹ Also, take a look at the undeniable success of the aforementioned Instagram, which has more than 80 million registered users who have shared over 4 billion photos. Currently, Pinterest has over 20 million unique visitors monthly and 11.5 million registered users.² Seventy-nine percent of Pinterest users are females and 63% of users are over 35 years old.³ If these groups are important for your business, you should consider trying Pinterest to visually tell your agency’s story. Let’s take a look at a few ways that you can incorporate Pinterest into your business marketing mix.

First, take time to identify the areas in which you would like to communicate your expertise and create pinboards based on those topics, possibly using words that are currently a part of your search engine marketing strategy. Users have the option of choosing to follow a pinboard or a user’s account. Your individual pinboards will likely have more followers than your account because your individual pinboard followers receive updates when you have posted new content, but if they only follow your account page, they will not receive updates on your activity. You can use tried-and-true methods to increase your followers, such as promoting your pinboards via your Facebook and Twitter accounts, including them in a blog or newsletter article and interacting with other pinboards that feature content relevant to your chosen themes by following, liking and commenting on pins.

At this point, you are probably trying to figure out what kind of insurance or benefits content could be considered visually stimulating. You may have more gems than you think! Thoroughly review your existing content (webpages with photos, online digital brochures, infographics, etc.) and make sure you choose quality over quantity. With each item you pin, make sure you link it back to the specific webpage where the content is located. Adding a caption that is thought-provoking or humorous would be a good touch as well.

Photos

Share the culture of your agency. Pin photos from agency events and community events that your organization participated in or sponsored. Pin photos from award ceremonies, which will give more credibility to being an industry expert and an invaluable resource.

Blogs

More and more bloggers are using eye-catching images to accompany their posts. These images are used to intrigue the readers, because they are selected with that reaction in mind. It is likely they will create the same reaction on Pinterest. Pin eye-catching images from your blog posts.

Videos

Videos are extremely popular and are a great way to communicate key messages. By pinning your videos, you can highlight the importance of certain insurance or the value your agency delivers with those products along with other relevant topics. Sharing videos on Pinterest uses a pretty simple uploading process, so feel free to add videos from your website or YouTube.



If an image is stimulating enough, users will repin it and click it to go to the website of origin.

Infographics

Infographics provide a visual look at data and are a great way to communicate compelling information in an easy-to-follow pictorial narrative style. Pin infographics that help make complex subjects simpler. They are a great way to communicate key messages to your followers and to get repined, increasing the likelihood of being deemed as a trusted resource.

Keep in mind the content that you pin does not have to be produced by you. If you identify visually stimulating, informative content from another website that fits into one to the themes of your pinboards, pin it. Of course, you want to be discerning with other sites' content and should only pin content from sources you trust. The premise of Pinterest is pinning content that you find. But if you are not finding the content that you are looking for, create it yourself or hire someone to create it for you. As you create this content, make sure that it features your company's



name and as you pin it, make sure it links to your website and the specific webpage where the content is located. Social media is a great way to toot your own horn, but it is important not to come across as too self-promoting as you share your interests.

Lastly, incorporate a "Pin It" button on your website. While you may not feel as though you have an abundance of visually stimulating content on your site, you may be surprised at the items that users pin from your site. This may also give you insight into the type of information your audience is looking to receive. Content pinned using the "Pin It" button will include a link back to your website, enabling users to engage with your content and visit your website with just one click.

Although Pinterest does not have built-in analytics functionality, you can use a free tool like Google Analytics to measure the performance of your pinboards. You can use this data to determine the most popular content, identify future content to entice potential followers and maintain your existing followers' interest.

Social media gives you an opportunity to stand out as an industry leader by becoming a trusted resource who shares helpful information. Pinterest provides an opportunity to tell your story visually by allowing you and other users to bookmark, view and share things that are of interest in one place. Pinning visually stimulating content will require time to search for and/or develop the content. Pinning of dull images will not produce optimal results.

The content you pin does not have to only be about the services you sell; you can use this opportunity to provide visually stimulating images that show your users that you are in sync with their interests. Ultimately, your pins should increase traffic to your website. As you work to incorporate this tactic into your marketing mix, keep in mind that although insurance may not seem glamorous, the countless topics that are relevant to it, and to your existing and prospective clients, will allow your pinboards to fall under many of Pinterest's categories.

So what are you waiting for? Get pinning! **HIU**

1 <http://www.alex.com/siteinfo/youtube.com> (Accessed October 29, 2012)

2 <http://www.appdata.com/apps/facebook/274266067164-pinterest> (Accessed October 24, 2012)

3 <http://royal.pingdom.com/2012/08/21/report-social-network-demographics-in-2012> (Accessed October 24, 2012)

The content you pin does not have to only be about the services you sell; you can use this opportunity to provide visually stimulating images that show your users that you are in sync with their interests.