

## Engage your Market with the Use of Social Media Marketing

Right now your customers are flocking to social media sites like Twitter, Facebook, MySpace and YouTube. Your competitors are also flocking there in droves to participate in the online “conversation” that is happening amongst the members of your target market although most companies have a very limited understanding of how to effectively engage their target market through these social media sites. They rush to quickly sign up with as many accounts as possible, maybe upload a picture or two and wait for the magic to happen – they wait for the people to come to them. What most companies don’t know is that there is no magic – the people won’t just show up. “Social Engagement” is the activity of initiating or participating in the online social activities that are important to your target market. This is not to be confused with a selling or promotional activity. Although social media marketing helps attract loyal customers and keep past ones, it is done through influence and relationship building, not through the use of propaganda.

### 1. What is the best social media site for my company?

It is important for a company to identify which social outlet is going to give them the best return on both their time and investment. Mainstream sites offer a vast audience but sometimes it’s better to target niche social outlets and be a big fish in a small pond. Posting content in topically relevant niche social sites will also help you produce thematically related back links which will help your site build authority with search engines like Google, Yahoo and Bing.

I’m a firm believer that you should have a presence on the main stream social sites like YouTube and Facebook, but niche social sites allow you to target those people who are really passionate members of your target market - your industry influences. Truly enthusiastic members of your target market are going beyond mainstream social sites and searching out a niche online community where they can find others just like them and share related content. A nurse, for example may be more likely to go to a social networking website, such as [www.nursetogether.com](http://www.nursetogether.com), where they can discuss relevant industry happenings with people who can relate to them.

These niche sites are the prime locations to identify and engage the true influences within your target market. Those members of your target market who have enough passion in their industry to seek out a nursing social site are clearly going to be a great conduit for reaching other passionate members through viral marketing.

## 2. How Do I Effectively Participate in the Conversation?

Once you have identified your social outlets (both mainstream and niche) you're need to put on your creative hat and start thinking on how you're going to effectively take part and contribute (not control) in the existing conversations. This will require time, research and creativity. If you find an existing conversation regarding a specific topic, write a response to that topic or research a great article and point the readers to it. Post videos that will entertain enlighten or amaze. This content is your brand's vehicle and if done well and will be forwarded to the inboxes of many future brand evangelists and loyal customers. Besides content (both original and shared), consider adding a handy tool or resource like a "widget" or an "app". Not only does this offer useful contribution to the online community, it also is a great way to get back links and quickly build exposure. It doesn't have to be a big expensive widget - simply get creative and think of something simple and useful that members of your target market can share.

## 3. How Can I Keep My Presence Fresh and New?

Once you've identified your social sites, listened to the conversation taking place and offered something useful to it, you need to keep up the momentum. It's important to keep yourself in front of these members and find ways to engage new ones. Your engagement activities will attract a lot of visitors to your online conversation - both those who have found you through a search engine and those that have been referred. And just like in sales, you'll need to keep adding new members to your online conversation to replace the members that are leaving. Keep inviting others to join your conversation and use other forms of advertising to market your social endeavors. Promote your social groups on your company's website, at industry events and tradeshow, in email newsletters and through other forms of advertising.

It's important for you to post often and to continue posting at a somewhat regular pace, but not to monopolize the conversation. This means that you're going to have to make a time commitment for a member of your staff or a social media agency to continue your social media strategy on an ongoing basis.

Utilizing these simple steps will help you engage your target market on both a personal and professional level and create life long relationships with your current and future customers.

Oliver Feakins is the President of WebTalent SEO, A [social media agency](#) and [internet marketing company](#) in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Oliver works with companies from around the country on their online marketing strategies and specializes in social media marketing. Oliver's work has appeared in Promotion World, Marketing Profs, Tech-Links, IT World and Social Media Today. For more information on his social media agency visit [www.webtalentseo.com](http://www.webtalentseo.com) .