

SIMPLY SOCIAL



Outsourcing Your Social
Media Marketing

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Introduction

If you own a business and have an online presence, you've probably realized at this point that you need to take advantage of social media in order to stay competitive. There's just one problem: managing, posting and participating in discussions on social network is a time-consuming task. It's also not as trivial as it may first seem - there are many little things you need to learn if you want to see the best possible results from your efforts.

Fortunately, there is a way to get all the advantages of social media without having to do all the heavy lifting yourself. All you need to do is outsource it to a competent social media manager, who specializes in managing pages and accounts for businesses like yours. It doesn't have to be very expensive, and the upsides are many.

In this guide we'll go over everything you need to know about outsourcing social media, including:

- What social media management is, and the advantages (and disadvantages) compared to handling everything yourself
- What you should expect after hiring a social media manager
- The questions you need to ask yourself in order to determine whether you should outsource these tasks or not
- The various traits and skills you should look for in your social media manager
- The situations where running things yourself could actually cause harm to your business
- Whether you should go with an agency, a freelancer or hire an employee
- Where to find the perfect candidate, and what to consider during the recruiting process

- How "outsourcing" in-house works and why it can sometimes be a good idea
- ...and much more!

What is Social Media Management?

The concept of social media management and outsourcing your social media needs is simple enough. You simply bring in a specialist whose expertise is building and managing social media properties, and keeping an audience of fans and followers engaged and interested. This allows you to focus your efforts elsewhere, knowing that your social media pages are properly taken care of, regularly updated and constantly tweaked and optimized.

Why outsource social media?

The advantages of outsourcing social media management are many. It frees up your time, allowing you to work on building your business without worrying about social media. It also ensures you get the best possible results from your social media efforts (assuming you find a talented and professional manager, of course).

Many social media managers have enough experience to know what works and what doesn't. They know what an audience responds to, and they have the ability to give them what they want. Were you to do it all yourself you could find yourself in a long period of trial-and-error before finding the routines and techniques that produce the best results.

Competition for eyeballs on the popular social networks is ever increasing too, and you need to bring your best game in order to keep the attention of users. A skilled social media manager helps you do that, and together you can map out a plan that will ensure that your business becomes the dominating force in your niche on social networks.

Any disadvantages?

As with all kinds of outsourcing, you have to be prepared to give up some control over the process and let your new manager do his/her thing. If you try to micromanage the whole process it will only cause trouble for both of you, and the project will be much less likely to succeed. You have to let them do the

job they were hired to do. Of course you should still give your input and make sure their process aligns with your business goals.

There are a few other disadvantages too. One is that your social media manager will never know your business and your industry as well as you do. Even if they've got some previous experience in the niche there are still many things that vary from company to company. The easiest way to resolve this problem is telling them to always ask you if they're the least bit uncertain about something, instead of just acting on their own and hoping for the best. This is especially important when communicating with customers through social media.

Another potential problem to watch out for is unprofessional managers who take shortcuts and cut corners (like copying posts or media from others), and generally don't have your company's best interests in mind. This risk can be minimized by carefully researching the person before deciding to hire them, and making sure their other clients are all happy with their performance. You are leaving a big part of your business up to this person so you better be certain that they can be trusted. Poor handling of your social media properties will not only make you look bad in the short term, but can also harm your business in the long term and reduce customer confidence in your company.

How much does it cost?

Good social media managers aren't cheap, but it doesn't have to be super expensive either unless you're looking for the "best of the best". A native English-speaking manager should start at around \$20/hour, but the very best might cost \$100/hour or even more. You can get a cheaper manager by hiring someone from a developing country, but that might cause more problems than it's worth if you're not careful (more about that in the "What to look for" chapter).

You have to decide for yourself whether you think the money is worth it. Keep in mind though that it is likely not a full-time position you're hiring for, but rather an hour or two per day in most cases (unless your social media pages are extremely active and you have a huge following).

Getting started

We'll go over in detail how to hire a social media manager in later chapters, but at this point you may be interested in knowing how the process works once you've hired someone.

Once you're ready to get started with your new hire you should draw up a plan together, that combines your own goals with what they deem would be effective for your business. They'll be happy if you give them input, but as stated before don't try to micromanage them too much. The best way might be coming up with an overall strategy together but leaving the individual postings up to their best judgment.

You should also establish what your end goal is. Are you looking for more sales? Better customer service through social media? Perhaps you're mostly looking to build customer loyalty and send out great offers once in a while? Regardless of your goals, it's imperative that you discuss them with your social media manager and come up with a plan together on how to best reach them.

Don't expect immediate results

It will most likely take time before you start seeing some real results from the efforts put in by your social media manager, and at first it can feel like you're just throwing money away without a tangible upside. Don't be discouraged though - you should be prepared for at least a few months to let your manager lay the groundwork and figure out the optimal strategy. Unfortunately a lot of people aren't patient enough to allow for this, meaning they risk giving up just as they're getting close to reaching the critical point where their social presence starts snowballing and growing almost effortlessly.

Also keep in mind that it's not just up to your manager to grow and promote your social pages. You should also do your best to promote them wherever you can; on your website, in your e-mail correspondence and so on. That's how you get the best results.

Takeaways

- Hiring a skilled social media manager ensures you get the best results from your social media efforts
- As competition for eyeballs on social networks is steadily increasing, it's beneficial to start as soon as possible and do it right from the start
- Be prepared to not have complete control over everything your social media manager posts to your properties; trying to micromanage everything will only lead to less efficiency and a bad experience for everyone involved
- Let the person you hire know that it's always better to ask you if they're uncertain about something, rather than acting on their own and risking making mistakes
- Spending some extra time on researching and checking up on your new manager's background minimizes the risk of hiring someone who's unprofessional or unsuited for the job
- Expect to pay at least \$20/hour for a native English-speaking social media manager, more if you want someone with lots of experience
- While it may seem expensive, keep in mind that it's likely only going to be a couple of hours per day at the most, unless your online following is huge
- Once you've hired someone, make sure you plan out the entire strategy together so there will be no misunderstandings later
- Also establish what the goal of your social media efforts is - are you looking for more sales, increased customer loyalty or something else?
- Be prepared to wait for results - things will move slowly at first and then start to snowball

Do I Need Help?

Hiring a social media manager doesn't make sense for every business. Ask yourself the questions in this chapter to determine if you should handle it all yourself, or if you would be better off outsourcing your social media tasks.

Do you enjoy social media?

This is probably the most important question to ask yourself. The truth is a lot of people simply don't enjoy participating on social networks, and if you're one of them you may find it difficult to keep going in the long run. Remember that a strong social media presence isn't built in a week, but requires a steady effort for a long time for best results. If you don't enjoy updating your social media pages you will likely just give up long before reaching critical mass.

Another potential issue is that your lack of enthusiasm might lead to less interesting updates and ultimately less interested followers. Keep in mind that you're competing with many other businesses for user attention on social media, and a half-baked attempt is likely not going to cut it.

If you enjoy one platform more than the others, it can also be a good idea to hire a social media manager to handle those you like less. Say you're a fan of Twitter but don't like updating your Facebook page, then you could focus all your efforts on your Twitter account and outsource Facebook to someone who's better at it.

You could also choose to outsource the majority of updates but not all of them. Maybe you'd enjoy posting once or twice a week, and then letting someone else handle the others. All kinds of variations are possible, you just need to figure out the best strategy that suits you and your particular situation.

Do you have time for it?

Social media can be very time consuming, and as a business owner you may not be able to squeeze it into your daily schedule. An aggressive social media strategy requires you to update your properties at least daily, ideally even more

than that. Once you've gained a respectable following you'll find that questions and comments will be coming in at all hours of the day, and people don't like to sit around waiting for answers. If you handle it all yourself you may find yourself constantly interrupted and it may very well interfere with your regular tasks.

It's just not the time it takes to update pages and respond to followers either. You also need to stay current on the trends in social media, and learn new techniques as they are invented. Many platforms, like Facebook and Twitter, are also constantly evolving, meaning what works today may not be the best approach tomorrow. Keeping up with all this will require much of your time and attention, and ultimately you may find that it's just not possible to combine with your other responsibilities.

Also keep in mind that even if you technically *could* find the time to handle all the social media needs in your business, it may not be the best use of your time to do so. As a business owner you will often be better off delegating tasks to others and focusing mainly on big picture stuff, like devising strategies and growing your company.

Are you a decent writer?

No, you don't have to be the next Hemingway to update your social media properties, but you definitely do need decent grammar and spelling if you want your audience to take you seriously. Even small mistakes can be enough to make your followers see you as unprofessional, and you have to be prepared that some people greatly enjoy pointing out mistakes made by others. Being good at writing will also help you construct better posts that receive more likes, shares and comments.

This will also depend on your platform(s) of choice. On Twitter, for example, you're limited to 140 characters meaning you can't exactly write a novel in your updates. It's even fine to use poor grammar and spelling in some cases in order to reduce the number of characters and save space.

Are you a "people person"?

Let's face it: social media is all about people. If you're easily frustrated by dealing with difficult people, and simply don't have the patience for it, handling your own social media presence may not be the best choice.

All you need to do to determine whether you could handle it or not is hitting up one of the fan pages or Twitter accounts of a major brand and looking at their interactions with their followers. This could be a real eye-opener, showing the less fun parts of social media. For example, how would you respond to a follower that repeatedly bashes your brand in public? Could you defuse the situation without becoming angry and agitated, or would you take it personally and try to "strike back"?

This is just one of the things a professional social media manager is experienced with, and a big reason why you should consider hiring one. A single incident handled poorly can have a large impact on the reputation of your business and cause long-term damage, so it's very important to handle these situations well.

How important is social media to your business?

Some businesses rely heavily on social media, both for marketing and supporting customers. Others see it more as a bonus that may bring in some extra sales and increase customer loyalty over time. What's important to remember is that if you don't see social media as an integral part of your business, you may not be able to justify hiring a manager to handle it for you.

While outsourcing social media doesn't have to cost much in most cases, it's still another expense that you have to be able to justify in your business. If social media isn't important enough to you, that may be hard to do.

What about the future?

Even if social media isn't that important to you at the moment, where do you see it going in the future? Maybe it's a step your company simply has to take to keep up with the competition.

If you think it's just going to be more and more important in the coming years to have a strong social media presence, maybe it would make sense to start

working on the best possible strategy as soon as possible? Starting today by hiring a skilled social media manager may be the best way to ensure longevity for your business, giving you a head start versus your competitors who haven't gotten started yet.

Of course the opposite could be true as well; maybe you don't see social media becoming that important in your niche/industry. In that case it might be enough to start with a low-effort strategy, perhaps handling it yourself and sticking to updating just a couple of times per week. Just because "everyone else" is focusing heavily on social media it doesn't mean that it's right for your business.

Takeaways

- If you don't enjoy participating on social media in general, you'll most likely find it difficult to handle your properties yourself
- Lack of enthusiasm may lead to lower quality postings, and ultimately poor results from your social media efforts
- You don't have to hire a manager for all social networks, it's fine to hire a manager for just the networks you don't enjoy participating on yourself
- Consider the time required if you were to do it all yourself - not just for the postings and discussions, but also the time you need to put in to keep up with current trends and best practices (which are ever changing and evolving)
- If you know you're not good at writing it is probably a bad idea to try to handle it all yourself, as every update requires at least some bit of writing, and the better writer you are the easier it will be to engage the audience
- Social media is all about interacting with all kinds of people, and if you're not a patient "people person" you may find it taxing and even annoying at times
- If you don't deem social media to be that important to your business it may not be a good idea to spend the money on a social media manager

- Don't forget to plan for the future too - how will your social media strategy look in a year or two?

What to look for

So you've decided to hire a social media manager? Congratulations! Now you just need to find the perfect candidate for your needs. This may be easier said than done, unfortunately, as there are many people out there claiming to be "experts" on social media, but not all of them live up to the label they've given themselves.

There are a number of traits you should look for in your ideal candidate. Keep in mind that every business and situation is unique so these are meant more as guidelines than hard rules that you must follow. Some of them might be common sense too, but they're still worth mentioning as that doesn't make them any less important.

Friendly and patient personality

This should almost go without saying, but a social media manager should have a friendly, service-minded demeanor and be a master of communication. It also helps if they have lots of patience as users/followers can sometimes be a handful to deal with, and they must remain calm and professional at all times. It also helps if they have a generally positive attitude and seem to enjoy what they do (if they don't it will surely affect their work and your social media pages will suffer as a result).

Relevant niche/industry knowledge and passion

Just because someone is good with "social media", it doesn't automatically mean they would be a good fit for you. Ideally you're looking for someone who has at least some prior experience with the niche/industry you're in. This is important because your fans and followers may use your social media pages to ask presales questions or for customer support, and if your social media manager is unable to answer even simple questions he/she will have to pass everything on to you. It's simply not an efficient workflow and you may actually end up doing most of the work yourself anyway.

If you can find a social media manager who's not just knowledgeable in your niche, but is even passionate about it, you'll be in excellent shape. That passion will fuel their postings and lead to better and more interesting content for your followers. Of course it's not always easy to find passionate workers, especially if your niche is one that few people are passionate about, but it's generally better to spend some extra time looking than settling for a social media manager that's really not that interested in your business or niche.

Master more than one platform

Most successful social media strategies utilize more than one platform (even if the main focus is on just one of them, usually Facebook or Twitter). For the majority of businesses it doesn't make sense to hire a separate manager for each of them, meaning the person you decide to hire should ideally be able to confidently manage all of these platforms. Some might use special software that easily lets them stay on top of their clients and their pages on multiple platforms; there's no harm in that but make sure you understand their workflow completely before hiring to reduce the risk of misunderstandings.

Available throughout the day

When your followers interact with your brand on social media you don't want to let them wait for hours (or days!) before getting a response. That's why the ideal social media manager is one that can check in several times per day, as needed, both to reply to comments and post new content. You don't need to hire them full time for that - you'll find many candidates who handle social media for a range of businesses, meaning they can easily fill their time even if your particular assignment only requires an hour or so per day in total. Some will even be prepared to update your pages on weekends when many of your followers will be at home browsing the web, and this should definitely be working in their favor when you're deciding on whom to hire.

No conflicts of interest

If you manage to find a candidate who seems to have both knowledge and passion for your niche, make sure you double-check so they're not already working for one of your competitors as that could lead to a conflict of interest. Who's to say they're not sharing some of your inside info with your competitor?

Even if they didn't, they might still feel more loyal towards one of you based on other factors (like the duration of the relationship), which may cause them to provide a slightly worse service to you.

They could also attempt to cut corners by posting similar content on both pages, which could lead to some confusion (and just seem plain weird to people who might be following both yourself and your competitor).

Ability to learn and update their methods

The social media world is constantly evolving, and the methods and best practices are always changing too. That's why you need your social media manager to be a fast learner with the ability to pick up new skills and techniques with minimal input from you.

Ideally the person you hire is passionate enough about social media to both keep up with current trends and be prepared for what's coming up around the corner. If he/she is the type of person that just keeps doing the same old thing over and over with little thought as to whether it works well or not, you will most likely run into issues sooner or later.

Flawless spelling and grammar

It should go without saying that your social media manager needs to be able to write like a native person. It can often be tempting to outsource tasks like these to countries where labor is cheap, but doing so can actually end up harming your brand unless you're extremely careful about who you hire. Make sure they can show you samples of other social media accounts they manage so you can see for yourself how their writing looks. It can also be a good idea to schedule a Skype chat if you need more proof of their writing abilities, as that would be very difficult to fake. If you want to be completely certain, however, you'll have to spend the money to get a native speaker. It doesn't always cost that much more, and you'll have peace of mind knowing the postings will be of high quality.

Complementary skills

There are a few additional skills that can be very useful for a social media manager. For example, it's great if they have some ability to manipulate images

and photos as that can be very helpful when posting. You don't want them to get stuck on little things like that - the more work they can do on their own without help from you or anyone else, the better. Similarly, if they're reasonably good at design they can handle things like your Facebook fan page and Twitter account design. Otherwise you'll have to hire another person to do these things.

It's also useful if they're skilled researchers so they can easily find new content to post to your properties. This kind of research ability is actually not a given - some wannabe social media managers might expect you to go out and research their postings for them, delivering it to them in a ready-to-post format. Needless to say, these people wouldn't be of much use as you'd be doing most of the heavy lifting for them. As you would expect, it's often the most inexpensive providers that lack these basic research capabilities.

Another great skill to have is basic video editing and perhaps even recording and voiceovers. These skills would allow them to create and post unique videos to your social media properties, which can be a great addition that few other companies have the ability to match. It would also allow you to fully use Youtube as another social media outlet where you can build up a loyal following in your niche. Uploading useful videos is a great way to establish your business as an authority in your industry, and drive qualified traffic to your website.

Agency, freelancer or employee?

This is something you may want to think about before you start your search. There are pros and cons of each. In general an agency will be more expensive and the relationship will be quite different compared to hiring a freelancer or employee, as with an agency you'll be the client buying a service, and with the other options you're an employer hiring an individual. The dynamic is completely different, so put some thought into which option you think you'd prefer.

Takeaways

- Finding the ideal candidate can take some time as there are a number of traits and skills they should have

- It almost goes without saying, but a good social media manager should have a friendly personality with heaps of patience
- If your candidate has previous experience in the niche/industry your business operates in, that should be considered a huge advantage
- Social media managers should master all major platforms, and be willing to learn new techniques as they are invented
- Since response times and regular postings are important, the person you hire should be available to check in with your pages at least a few times per day (your fans and followers wouldn't appreciate having to wait hours/days for a response)
- Make sure the person you hire isn't working for one of your competitors, as that can lead to a conflict of interest
- Look for complementary skills like ability to create and edit videos and images, these can be very helpful and add more value to the postings
- Consider whether you'd like to work with an agency, a freelancer or hire an employee - they all have their pros and cons

Where

Once you've decided that you're going to outsource your social media tasks, it's time to start thinking about where to look. There are a few choices, each with their own pros and cons.

Freelancing sites

Websites like oDesk, Elance and Freelancer.com have hundreds of skilled social media experts ready to work with you, and this is probably the route that most people take when they're looking to outsource something. Generally it's as simple as putting up a job post detailing your requirements and then waiting for bids to come in.

One issue with these sites is the large number of applications from less qualified individuals - expect to get dozens of these bidding on your job. Many of them will be from developing countries, allowing them to bid just a few dollars per hour. This may seem like a tempting proposition in theory but do keep in mind that their English is generally not that good, making them less suited for social media manager positions.

Make sure you read all the applications carefully (at least the ones that look interesting) and ask plenty of follow-up questions before inviting your favorites to an interview. Also look at their feedback from previous clients on the site. If they aren't displaying any examples in their portfolio, ask them which pages/accounts they've managed previously and, if possible, if they could provide you with proof or references.

Search engines

Of course lots of potential candidates can be uncovered with a simple Google search using terms like 'outsource social media', 'social media management' and so on. Check out both the paid ads section (top and sidebar) as well as the organic results. Generally these will be larger agencies rather than individuals, but you may find a few of the latter too scattered among the results.

Once you've assembled a list of interesting candidates it's just a matter of contacting them and letting them tell you more about their services and give you a reason why you should pick them. Just as when hiring from freelancing sites you should request that they show other pages they've managed so you can see their style and assess their skills. If it's an agency they shouldn't have a problem disclosing some other clients they've worked with previously to establish some trust.

Classified ads

Websites like Craigslist can be great for outsourcing, especially if you prefer someone local who you can meet in person. Of course if you live in a small town you may not find a whole lot of social media managers offering their services, but if you live in a major city you could find some skilled people this way.

Before you decide that you "need" to hire someone local to you though, consider the advantages of not restricting yourself to a geographic area. By expanding your search you will most likely be able to find a more skilled person for less money.

Of course Craigslist and similar sites aren't just for hiring locally either. It's definitely possible to hire remote workers too off classifieds sites, so even if that's what you're looking for you shouldn't rule these sites out.

Asking around

If you have friends with their own businesses, it doesn't hurt to ask around how they're handling their social media pages. Chances are some of them are already outsourcing it successfully, in which case you could ask them for recommendations. Unless you're directly competing with them in the same industry they'll more than likely be happy to refer you to their provider.

This method is great because most of the hard work has already been done for you (the looking around, interviewing, etc). Of course it isn't guaranteed that this person will be exactly right for your particular situation, but there's a very good chance.

"Outsourcing" in-house

If you already have employees working in your business you may actually find that the best solution is just "outsourcing" it to one of them. As social media tasks usually don't take that much time and is best tackled in smaller batches throughout the day, it may not be too much of a burden to let an existing employee add it to their daily routine. You could even train more than one so the whole thing doesn't come to a stop if one gets sick and is unable to work.

If you're going to do this, however, you need to understand that there will be days when the social media duties will leave less time for this employee's regular tasks. This means you probably shouldn't be assigning it to a person whose daily work is critical for your business. Of course there will also be some days when the social media duties are quickly and easily taken care of, so in the end it should even out.

While this route may be tempting as it will require a minimum of effort on your part (no time spent hiring a new person), it's important to keep in mind that you need to be positive that the person you choose actually stack up well against professional social media managers. It may seem like an easy gig on paper but not everyone is suited for it (as seen in the previous chapter where we went over the traits you should look for). In the long run you may actually end up shooting yourself in the foot if you go with a person who doesn't have the proper qualifications.

Takeaways

- Perhaps the most common way to recruit a social media manager is using one of the major online freelancing sites, like oDesk, Elance and Freelancer.com
- Keep in mind that even if applicants from developing countries are inexpensive and may look good on paper, they may not be completely fluent in English and there may be cultural differences as well
- Expect to have to go through a large number of unqualified applications on the freelancing sites

- Another option to find candidates is simply searching for them in Google/Bing - generally you'll find more agencies than individuals this way as they'll have more resources to ensure higher rankings
- Online classifieds can also work well, especially if you're looking to recruit someone local to you
- Don't rule out asking friends and colleagues for recommendations, as that can save you a lot of time and deliver the perfect candidate directly to you with no need for a lengthy recruiting process
- If you already have employees in your business, consider giving social media responsibilities to one of them ("outsourcing" in-house)
- Regardless of where you recruit from, make sure you spend plenty of time researching and background checking every candidate to avoid a nasty surprise later on

Conclusion

By now you should have a pretty good grasp about why you should outsource your social media management, as well as how to actually do it in practice.

Keep in mind that recommendations in this guide are exactly that: recommendations. Feel free to bend and break these "rules" as you see fit, as you probably know what's best for your company.

The important thing to remember is that hiring a social media manager is not a magic bullet that guarantees fast, effortless success. Building a sustainable social media presence will always take time and require dedication, both from yourself and those who work for you. The key is being patient and realizing that you may not see an immediate ROI (return on investment) you spend.

Also keep in mind that you can always start small. It's been stated previously in this guide that the most effective strategies require attention several times per day, but if you're just starting out you may not need to be 100% effective from the get-go. Maybe you could get a social manager to update your pages just a couple of times per week? That wouldn't cost much, but you'd still hopefully see some benefits, and you could always scale up later.

Well, whichever way you choose to go...

Good luck with your social media endeavors!