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Module 3

Promoting your business online

The freedom of being connected 24/7 means that people are going to find and interact with your business differently. Through social media, forums and your website, customers will seek out your business, and often expect real-time answers to their queries at all hours of the day.

In this module, we'll go through the basics of engaging and growing your customer base. Having a website is one step of the equation, however a comprehensive social media strategy (see Module 4) will ultimately enhance your digital presence.



Part 1: Online communities

Treating your customers, both new and existing, as part of your community will help you develop a strong reputation, increase sales, and grow sustainably.

Customers literally have a world of choice online, so what's going to make your business find its niche in a global market?

Building your own online community is a good way for customers to gather information, comment on your product or service, and provide feedback. This can be done through having a blog with comments on your website, social media, and through ratings and feedback on products in your store.

Make sure to foster meaningful conversations by providing a welcoming space to share ideas. Listen to what people have to say and use that information effectively.

You may also want to research existing community forums, build up a reputation and interact with customers there. The benefit of finding existing forums means that you may find new customers who use similar products, and also glean more information about how your competitors operate.



Part 2: Product and service reviews

Every day, people write product reviews based on their own experience of products and services, for other potential consumers to read. The voice of experience gets shared via forums, websites and social networking sites. The influence of the consumer has grown and continues to.

Smart business owners can use these reviews to their advantage. Not only can the feedback provided by the reviews prove invaluable to improving or modifying their products and services, it can also be used for marketing purposes as testimonials (when permission is received).



Part 3: Customer Service

Whatever platform you use to build or join a community, it's important to manage it well. Check for comments regularly and address any questions, concerns or positive feedback as soon as you can. Consider including LiveChat on your website (see Module 2) so that customers can quickly ask questions and purchase.

Excellent customer service cannot be overstated. If a customer asks a question or raises an issue, seize the opportunity to showcase your service or product.

Not all queries should be addressed through social media sites or your website. In these cases, direct the customer to additional support – provide an email address and ask they email you directly, or a phone number where they can talk to someone offline.

The level of support provided could separate your business from other companies who might offer the same or similar services.

Tip:

Most customers buy from people they know, like and trust. Creating a 'community' and interacting with that community goes a long way to developing trust and building credibility.



Part 4: Attracting an Audience

To attract an audience, it's important to have many things in place:

- A brand and marketing strategy that includes online and content management.
- A website that uses your customers' terminology and language.
- Clear sales pages on your website for each product and service that engages and prompts them to purchase.
- A regular email newsletter, online advertising, and social media that creates an engaged audience.
- Excellent customer service, PR and outreach.
- Dedicated staff (if you have the resources) who are attuned to customers' needs and familiar with their online habits.

Outreach (sometimes referred to as Digital PR) is simply reaching out to people and organisations that influence your target customers, and creating partnerships or exchanging value. It could be as simple as researching your audience's favourite websites and contacting them to see if you can provide a guest blogpost, or reaching out to a podcast creator and offering one for you or one of your experts to do an interview. Podcasts can be a great way for long-term marketing as they are often available for years to come and with an increasing audience that is highly targeted.

In all of the contacts you make, lead with how to help them first and how to provide them value, give examples of credibility or other successful partnerships and options for them to choose from. It may take more than one email. Engaging an Outreach expert is helpful.

Building your business's audience and creating communities is time consuming, fascinating and rewarding. Be strategic, provide high value, put in place people who are great at engaging with your customers, review metrics (potentially both the reach you are gaining and conversion to sales), refine your strategy and celebrate the gains.

Further Resources:

If you want to promote your business online, but don't know where to start, these resources may help. All information was current at the time of writing. When you go to any of the links below, you will be leaving the DBK site.

Module 2 for creating a website and relevant tools.

[Hubspot.com/free-marketing-resources](https://www.hubspot.com/free-marketing-resources) - Marketing insight and tips to attract people to your website.

[Blog.bufferapp.com](https://blog.bufferapp.com) - Online Marketing tips.