

# How to Ace Social Media

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BrandChise's own, Amy Plaisted, was featured in this issue. She talks about the benefits of social media with franchises!

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# Going Social

## How Franchises are Mastering Social Media

by Mark Henricks

Using Facebook status updates to tell consumers about a new location, Twittering to announce a special promotion, looking for franchisee candidates on LinkedIn -- franchisers and franchisees -- today are actively employing social networks to communicate. It's a rare franchiser that isn't delving into marketing with social networks, and the nascent trend is only going to accelerate.

"I think it's still emerging," says Amy Plaisted, vice president and co-founder of Lakeland, Fla., franchise consulting company BrandChise. "There are some brands out there that have done a very good job of social media. There are others who aren't using it and haven't realized this is the tool to either get to potential franchisees or promote their brand."

For those franchisees who are either just getting into social media or want to improve their techniques,

Plaisted suggests basic ground rules. First, understand that this is a two-way channel. "Social media is a conversation between customers and businesses," she says. "If they're doing it correctly, they're listening to the chatter and responding to it as much as they are talking about their business."

Franchises also should make an effort to provide useful information, rather than just marketing pitches, to people with which they interact. "Not only do you talk about how great your business is or what your daily special might be, you also educate them based on what the industry is," Plaisted says. "If you're involved with health, it might be giving them health tips."

At School of Rock, involvement with social media is central to the marketing strategy, says Alyson Shapero, senior vice president of marketing. The Teaneck, N.J.-based franchiser

of music schools appeals to would-be entrepreneurs who want to join a love of music with a viable venture. “Social media makes it easy to stay close to our customers, to be in touch with the parents, the students and the music teachers,” says Shapero. “Whether it’s on Facebook, Twitter or other online portals, there are new opportunities and new ways to integrate social media into what we’re doing that touch more people, especially since we have a very active community.”



School of Rock’s social marketing right now is focused on Facebook, where the company maintains a national page and encourages local schools to have their own Facebook pages. “They keep their communities abreast of social events and school events, and contributions from consumers keep it two-way,” Shapero says. “Our students, staff, and parents are always sharing the latest music videos, recordings, and other music news. It’s been a great way to build customer relationships and brand loyalty.”

There are 70 schools across the country, including 22 company-owned locations; by the end of next year, Shapero foresees a total of over 125 franchised and company-owned schools in the United States. “We’re very excited about our new openings this month, which include Las Vegas and Franklin, Tenn.,” she says.

The excitement at Intensity Security is about its breadth of product offerings, says David Hayes, chief executive officer (CEO) of the Montreal-based franchiser of security businesses. The company supplies franchisees with a wide range of quality security equipment ranging from dashboard-mounted, closed-circuit television systems to

climb- and cut-proof security fencing, and bullet-resistant film for inexpensively hardening automobile windows. The variety helps franchisees turn sales calls into purchase orders, he says.

“When you only have one or two products, you might have to see 50 people to find one who wants one of your products,” Hayes says. “We have such a breadth of products that when our franchisees go into a business their likelihood of coming out with an order is extremely high.”

Intensity Security puts up YouTube videos demonstrating its bullet-resistant films for potential customers. It also employs LinkedIn to communicate with members of the industry, including potential franchisees. “We find a lot of security professionals use LinkedIn for promoting their services but also as a way to communicate about new security risks,” Hayes says.

The combination of a broad product selection and active social media campaign have helped Intensity Security grow to a dozen open locations in the U.S., Canada, Europe, Africa, and Asia. “In a year, we’ll probably have over 200,” Hayes says. He is signing master franchisees now throughout the world. “Geographically, we’re going into markets that have a lot of security issues,” he says. “So that means the U.S., Mexico, South America, the Middle East, and parts of Europe.”

Environmental Waste Solutions is going into almost any market where businesses generate waste and recycling, says Diana Shapiro, chief operating officer of the Baton Rouge, La.-based company. “We have over 600 locations throughout North America,” Shapiro says. “They are generally anywhere there are fast-food restaurants, full-service restaurants, supermarkets, manufacturing, food processors, convenience stores, hospitals, apartment complexes, etc.”

The company’s affiliates advise businesses on how to reduce costs for disposing of waste and recycling; when savings are realized, affiliates split the savings with the business they work with. One of the appeals of Environmental Waste Solutions is that its affiliates pay no monthly royalties or marketing costs. “Low overhead, residual income, work from home, and no employees...it’s the type of business with very low risk, perfect as this economy slowly pulls out of recession,” Shapiro says.

Environmental Waste Solutions has a Facebook page and employs a third party to help with its social media and

online reputation management tasks. It particularly emphasizes blogging on its corporate website. "The blogs on our website are written by industry technical writers, identifying and relaying to potential new affiliates what our business is about, what our industry can do to be more green, and why someone would want to be involved in waste management consulting," Shapiro says. "Continuing to blog regularly and keep your information fresh and new is imperative these days to stay at the top of search engines."

Shapiro anticipates significant short-term growth for the concept. "We are interested in opening 120 new locations in the next 12 months and would love to target major metro areas throughout the U.S. and Canada," she says.

Love is a key part of the message and the appeal at Seniors Helping Seniors, a Reading, Pa., franchiser of non-medical home-care businesses. "We actually use the word 'Love' in our advertising," says Co-founder and CEO Philip Yocom. The company's specific services range from mundane tasks such as changing light bulbs to providing round-the-clock care. It's overriding objective, however, is to provide clients with critical intangibles. "We provide less-active seniors with all of the help they need to be able to continue to live independently in their own homes with both the dignity and the respect they deserve," Yocom says.

Seniors Helping Seniors' approach to social media is to leave it to its master franchisees. "We found our master license structure is our best way for our Seniors Helping Seniors franchise system to both maximize the opportunity and to minimize the challenges inherent to social media," Yocom says. Local franchisees are active in using social media including Facebook, LinkedIn, and YouTube to educate, inform, and interact with consumers and professional referral sources. Examples include a local franchisee posting a YouTube video of the company joining the local chamber of commerce, another delivering a videotaped explanation of the company's mission and offerings, and a master licensee posting weekly to LinkedIn to develop potential franchisee contacts

When Seniors Helping Seniors began in 2005, the company's goal was to double its size annually and, beginning 2011, add 100 new franchises a year for the next five years. The company is on track to do that and more, with approximately 175 franchise territories open across the country. And for Yocom franchisee's, emotional commitment to joining the Seniors Helping

Seniors continues to be as important -- or more so -- than the geographic market.

At Cousins Subs, family is fundamental to its attraction, says Justin McCoy, director of marketing for the Menomonee Falls, Wis.-based chain of sandwich shops. The company has been family-owned since its founding 40 years ago, and is in the middle of a major expansion effort, stressing its quality product, training, operations, technology, and competitive initial investment, McCoy says.

"We have been extremely active in social media with our primary focus on Facebook and Twitter," McCoy adds. Cousins Subs posts updates about store openings and services such as online ordering while also mining social networks for customer feedback. With 145 open locations in Arizona, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, and Wisconsin, McCoy expects to add 15 by the end of 2012 concentrated in the Midwest, Texas, and Arizona.

At Red Mango a big concentration is on flexibility with a real-estate platform that supports self-serve, full-serve, and non-traditional kiosk formats, says Daniel Kim, founder of the Dallas-based franchiser of frozen treat purveyors. Other attractions include products top rated for health and taste, and a diverse menu of frozen yogurt, smoothies, parfaits, and other beverages, Kim says.

Social media serves up a helping hand, as well. "Many of our franchisees are avid fans of our brand, so we get a lot of leads through these channels," Kim says. "Also, potential franchisees research the brand through our interactions on Facebook and Twitter." Red Mango has 141 locations, mostly on the East Coast and in the Midwest. "We will continue to grow on the East Coast, and in the Midwest and South, with a target of 200-plus stores over the next 12 months," Kim says.

Clearly, growth-oriented franchisers in a variety of fields are targeting social media as a vital tool for reaching out to customers, franchisees, and others. Consultant Plaisted says that franchisees that aren't active in social media should probably move fast to get started. But she adds that those who already have track records in tapping the networks also have to remain nimble.

"I think social media is probably here to stay," she says. "But what it's going to be might change. And you've got to go where your consumers are. So whatever's trending, the business should probably follow."