

Building Your Business through Social Media

A simple guide providing best practices to use social media in creating awareness, increasing engagement and driving sales

A lot of sales agents want to jump into marketing on social media -- and why not? It's a great place to engage people and make connections. However, it's important to consider how to do it right...not just how to do it fast. Below are my top ten best practices that you can use as you market your business using tools like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and others.

BEST PRACTICE #1: DON'T START WHAT YOU CAN'T MAINTAIN

A famous example of what NOT to do involves a trucking company who made the decision one summer to start a Facebook page. They rallied a bunch of people at the company, got everyone excited and launched the page that very day.

Their first post (June, 2011) was "Welcome to our new Facebook page!" Their second post (January, 2012) was "Happy New Year!" They didn't post again until October. Ouch.

The thing to remember is that you're starting a conversation, and the goal isn't merely to speak, but to be able to continue that conversation. Start by gathering content. Think about what you'd like to say, how frequently you'd like to say it, and what other content you'll need (photos, graphics, videos, etc.) before you launch.

BEST PRACTICE #2: A CALENDAR IS YOUR BEST FRIEND

First off, you don't need to post every day. Some of the best companies out there only post a few times each week. Sure, if you're Wendy's or IHOP, you've got a small army of social media experts, cranking out digital content 13 times a day. But that's not you (I don't think)...so keep things simple.

Find a calendar and poke around online for a list of holidays and key dates you want to include. You might want to wish all of your clients a happy Thanksgiving, for example. Or maybe you'd like let people know that Ben Franklin's birthday is January 1777-- that's only important because he founded the first insurance company in the US (The Philadelphia Contributionship) way back in 1752.

Whatever you choose to highlight, having a calendar will ensure you won't miss something critical. There was once a military charity that neglected to post on Memorial Day. Oops. Don't be those guys.

Once you've scheduled all the critical stuff, you can fill in the gaps with other content. Some of it, we can provide (more on that later), but much of it will be up to you. That's why organization is key.

BEST PRACTICE #3: KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Remember that you want to match your messages to your audience.

LinkedIn is generally for professionals interested in networking, job hunting, professional enrichment, etc. Facebook is more casual and is used by increasingly older people. Instagram, by comparison, is favored by younger people. Depending on who you want to talk to (and why you want to talk to them), you'll likely favor one social tool over others. This will also inform you as to the type of content you need. Have a long professional document to share? Go to LinkedIn. Got lots of photos and videos? Facebook and Instagram is the right place. Need a place to store all your videos? YouTube is the place for you.

The good news is that, because Facebook owns Instagram, many of your posts in Facebook will show up in Instagram. However, since the audiences are different, you should decide if a given post applies to both.

Don't forget Best Practice #1, however -- choose the tool or tools that (1) best fit the audience you're trying to reach, and (2) you are able to maintain. Spread yourself too thin, and you won't be able to keep up.

BEST PRACTICE #4: STARTING SMALL IS PERFECTLY ACCEPTABLE

This best practice is related to the previous one. All too often, companies think they have to launch everything at once in order to succeed. That's not the case. If you have limited time and resources, start with one social tool (Facebook is probably a good place to get your feet wet), and as you develop a rhythm of posting, bring on other tools as it makes sense for you and your business.

BEST PRACTICE #5: REMEMBER THE FOUR PILLARS

This is a big one, and is often ignored or forgotten. So pay attention.

Every good social media campaign needs to abide by four key pillars. They are:

1. Posts must be **conversational**. Don't try to sound like you're writing Shakespeare or building a polished legal defense. Your audience is made up of real people, so talk to them like they're people.
2. Offer **something of value** to your audience. This doesn't mean giving a box of girl scout cookies to everyone who like your page. Sometimes, the valuable thing you're providing is merely a forum for them to share their opinions. Using words -- nice, inexpensive words.
3. Be **transparent** in your posts. Social media users can root out false people very quickly, and they prefer (and appreciate) what's real. The irony is that those same people who value what's real also spend an insane amount of time posing for selfies and heavily editing them later. But that's how things are. The important thing is that you show the real you.
4. Hold yourself **accountable**. Things go wrong. Everyone has a bad day. Everyone makes mistakes. If that's you, own up to it. And don't use the tried-and-true "non-apology" apology favored by so many politicians these days. A simple, sincere "I'm sorry, please tell me how I can make things right," goes a long way.

BEST PRACTICE #6: DON'T MAKE IT ALL ABOUT SALES

I know what you're thinking -- the whole point of doing this is to drive sales; why wouldn't I make this all about sales?

In a nutshell, the people you're reaching out to aren't exclusively interested in buying stuff (that's why Amazon exists), and social media is all about connections – on multiple levels. You're a complex person with ambitions, hobbies, relationships, and much more. The people you're speaking with on social media are the same. Strive to show a variety of content and messaging, and they'll respond.

Think back to the calendar you created (Best Practice #4) – flesh it out a bit beyond the holidays and key posting dates, and you might end up with something like this:

- **Monday Motivator:** share a motivational quote (or make up one of your own) to get the week off on the right foot
- **Testimonial Tuesdays:** share something one of your other clients said about you or your products (get their permission first, of course)
- **Wednesdays:** Take a break (if you want)
- **Talkback Thursdays:** post a short poll, asking people what they like most/least about their insurance plan (and use it to share how the plans you sell are better)
- **Fun Fridays:** post a funny experience you had during the week

These are just examples, but it will help showcase everything you do and provide avenues to start conversations. Remember, you don't have to post every day, nor are you limited to posting only once per day – start with a number of posts you can manage, and grow from there.

BEST PRACTICE #7: MAINTAIN THE CONVERSATION

Speaking of conversations, don't forget to respond. And almost every comment you receive deserves a response. Here are a few guidelines to follow in determining how to reply:

1. **Don't forget your manners.** If you get a positive response, say thank you (See? Your mom was right all along!).
2. **Acknowledge their feelings.** If someone gets angry about you or one of the plans you're selling, take the high road. Respond in a way that doesn't dismiss their experience. Try something like, "I'm so sorry you had such a bad experience! That's not what I want at all. If you can give me a little more info, perhaps I can find a way to make things right."
3. **Follow up.** It doesn't matter if the comment is positive or negative -- ask for more information. See if they'd be willing to talk more. Request they provide a testimonial. Every post is a chance for a discussion.
4. **Know when to take it offline.** If you see that a discussion is getting too complicated, or if it's veering into an overly negative tone, suggest that the person email you directly. This will add a personal touch, and may limit the amount of dirty laundry piling up for everyone to see.
5. **Be careful what you delete.** Sometimes, it's necessary to delete a comment -- perhaps it's obscene or filled with hate speech. That sort of thing is good to remove, but use your power sparingly. Only delete comments when the situation is dire (not to avoid accountability -- see Best Practice #5). And if you delete something, tell people. Write a post stating, "One of my followers posted a comment with objectionable content, and I made the decision to delete it, in order to maintain a positive, professional space." Most reasonable people will understand and appreciate the action.

BEST PRACTICE #8: USE VARIETY TO STOP THE SCROLL

Everywhere you look in social media, there are messages of one sort or another -- usually stacked on top of each other. At a certain point, social media users just start scrolling. They don't read anything until something catches their eye -- something unique and different. When this happens, they stop scrolling and start reading (for a second or two, anyway). This is your opportunity to get your message across.

This is easier said than done, but one trick is to vary your post content. Just as you read in Best Practice #6 (don't make it all about sales), having a good mix of content is important. However, the other thing you can do is switch up your imagery. Even if you are posting two similar (or even identical) posts, having a different image to go with it will sometimes be enough to catch a reader's eye and stop the scroll.

Included in the social media kit in the NCD Agent Launchpad is a library of social media posts as well as a collection of images to go with them. You'll see that many of these posts have the same image but with different colors. If you want to post the same post on different days (or, better yet, on different weeks), just use a different colored image.

It may seem like a trick, but it often works -- especially given the short attention span of most avid social media users.

BEST PRACTICE #9: USE A SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGEMENT TOOL

One of the biggest complaints I hear is how difficult it is to keep up a regular presence in social media, while working a full-time job. It's a valid problem. In fact, many companies (remember Wendy's and IHOP?) employ teams of people whose sole purpose is to manage corporate social media sites. But that's not likely to be the case here. The good news is, there's a solution: social media management tools.

Remember Best Practice #2? Well, if a calendar is your best friend, a social media management tool is your best friend's best friend.

These applications enable you to create and schedule posts, read and respond to comments, and generally stay on top of everything that's happening on the social networks you manage, all in one place. Some of the more common ones are Hootsuite, Sprout Social, Loomly and Buffer (though there are many others). Some of these have free versions and others charge a subscription fee, but they all have the same basic purpose -- to make it easier for you to interact with others on social media.

Using one of these tools, you can write and schedule dozens of posts at one time, across multiple social networks. Sure, you'll still need to hop on now and then to respond to a comment or post a timely bit of info (say, telling people that your office is out of power due to a storm), but you'll be able to schedule the important posts on a monthly basis -- or even longer, if you like.

Staying on top of social media isn't easy. So don't make it harder than it is. Find a tool that you like (Hootsuite is my personal favorite) and put it to work for you.

BEST PRACTICE #10: HAVE FUN!

Don't be super serious! This is supposed to be at least a little fun, after all!

Post a photo of your new puppy! Share a favorite joke! Tell people about a recent vacation! Show off a favorite hobby! This sort of thing helps drive home the fact that you're a real person...and people respond well to stuff like that.

Those are a few key items to keep in mind as you move into the social media space. Just stay curious and commit to learning as you go...you'll find many more tips, tricks and best practices along the way.

And when you do find a good story, please send me an email and tell me all about it -- it may be something worth sharing with other agents!

Happy posting!



Dan Dykstra
NCD Director of Marketing, Adventurer and All-Purpose Geek
dan@ncd.com

Looking for content to help you sell NCD by MetLife? Look no further! Below are a set of social posts that are approved for use on any social network. The images are available, too (each is perfectly sized for Facebook and Instagram)!

Just select a post, copy the text into your social media site, upload an image from the folder, and you're done!

More posts and images will be added soon! Keep checking back!

SOCIAL POST 1: "DISCOUNTS"



The NCD by MetLife association dental plan goes above and beyond, providing members of the National Wellness and Fitness Association with great benefits and service. In addition, the NWFA provides all members with discounts on travel, wellness, and other business services!

All that, and an exceptional dental insurance plan! Contact me to learn more!

SOCIAL POST 2: "ONE IN FOUR"



If you're in this group, consider the NCD by MetLife association dental plan. It has a max annual benefit of up to \$10,000 (depending on the plan you choose), and great coverage on services like root canals, crowns, and extractions.

To learn more, give me a call!

SOCIAL POST 3: "CONFUSED"

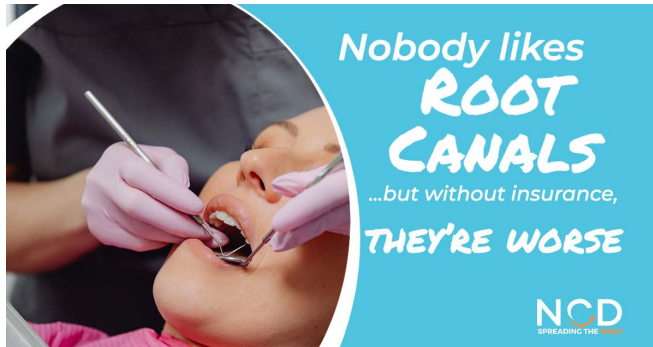


That's why I'm selling the NCD by MetLife association dental plan. It's easy to understand, quick to apply, gives you a choice of coverage levels and has the support of MetLife's outstanding claims process.

I could tell you a lot more, but I'd love to talk directly.

Contact me today.

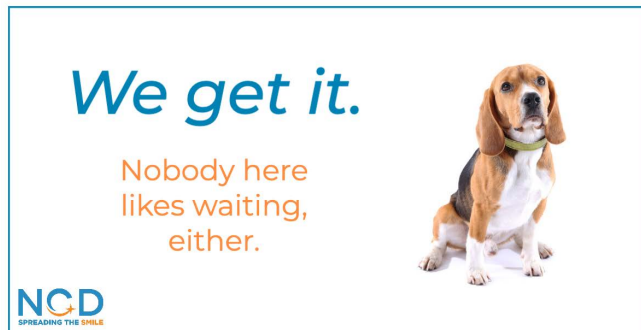
SOCIAL POST 4: "ROOT CANALS"



I'm sure we can all agree that nobody buys dental insurance hoping they'll need a root canal, right? (I'm guessing that's not your favorite way to spend an afternoon...)

Contact me, and I'll tell you all about the NCD by MetLife association dental plan. With 100% coverage for routine care exams and cleanings, it can help catch those little problems before they turn into bigger ones.

SOCIAL POST 5: "WAITING"



That's why the NCD by MetLife association dental plan is great – not only does it offer maximum annual benefits of up to \$10,000 (depending on the plan you select) and 100% coverage on routine exams and cleanings, but there's no waiting period! Coverage begins on Day 1.

Why wait? Contact me to learn more.

SOCIAL POST 6: "DO MORE"



The NCD by MetLife Association dental plan goes above and beyond, providing members of the National Wellness and Fitness Association with outstanding benefits, white-glove service, and excellent coverage, all backed by MetLife.

Contact me, and I'll tell you all about it.

SOCIAL POST 7: "SHOW OF HANDS"



No one? I'm not surprised.

That's what makes the NCD by MetLife association dental plan so awesome. It provides members of the National Wellness and Fitness Association (NWFA) with outstanding benefits, white-glove service, and excellent coverage, all backed by MetLife.

And our US-based support team is fully staffed with human beings, you'll be able to ask your questions and get answers quickly and easily.

Contact me to learn more.

SOCIAL POST 8: "TIRED"

Tired of
**Dental
Insurance
Plans**
that
*don't give you
what you need?*



Try the NCD by MetLife association dental plan.

It provides members of the National Wellness and Fitness Association with outstanding benefits! And as a member of the NWFA, you'll get great discounts on services that will help you stay physically and mentally healthy.

Contact me to learn more.

SOCIAL POST 9: "DID YOU KNOW"

Did you know...

many dental plans only offer annual benefits of \$1,000 or \$2,000?

That's not a lot!

...especially if you need more than just routine care.



The NCD by MetLife association dental plan carries a max annual benefit of up to \$10,000, depending on the plan you select! You heard me – up to \$10,000 every year.

Don't settle for a dental plan that may not provide the value you need. Contact me today to learn if NCD by MetLife is right for you.

SOCIAL POST 10: "HOW'S YOUR SMILE"



How's your smile?



The holidays are coming up, and a lot of people will be taking pictures. To keep your smile looking its best, make sure you have outstanding dental care.

Consider the NCD by MetLife association dental plan. It provides members of the National Wellness and Fitness Association with outstanding benefits! And that's not all – as an NWFA member, you'll also get great discounts on services that will help you stay physically and mentally healthy.

Contact me to learn more. Your smile will thank you.

Not sure which tools to use?

Don't worry -- we've got a list of good ones you can check out. Many of them have free trials available, so you can see if you like one of them before you pay for anything.

In addition, these tools are extremely well-known, so if you run into a snag or have questions, the answer is only a Google search away! :)

SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGEMENT TOOLS



www.hootsuite.com

The standard in social tools, strong functionality.

Pricing: \$99/month and up (30-day trial)

Basic subscription allows for 1 user and up to 10 social accounts



www.loomly.com

A good mid-range tool offering solid functions at a lower price

Pricing: \$26/month and up (15-day trial)

Basic subscription allows for 2 users and up to 10 social accounts



www.later.com

A budget-conscious tool offering basic functions

Pricing: \$18/month and up (also offers a more limited free version)

Basic subscription allows for 1 users and 1 social account (with a max of 30 posts scheduled at any time)

GRAPHICS TOOLS



www.canva.com

An easy-to-use graphics platform with thousands of pre-built templates, allow for quick creation of simple social images

Pricing: Free (believe it or not), though many of the better stock images are only available with a paid subscription



www.create.vista.com

A good alternative with 100,000+ templates and over 70 million photos, videos and design files

Pricing: Free (again, some of the more advanced features and better content are only available with a paid subscription)