

# Using Social Media to Grow Your Practice

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## Introduction

Should accounting firms use social media?

Millions of people visit social media sites every day, and every day millions more are signing up to join them. Chances are, your clients, prospects, competitors, and referral partners are participating in online conversations via social media on a daily basis. The conversations are going to continue, the question is, will you be a relevant participant?

Social media is not just the latest fad or trend. Social media is here to stay and is having an impact on every aspect of marketing and growing your accounting practice.

For all of the promise that social media holds, many firms are still wrestling with questions like which tools to use, how to use them efficiently, how to grow business, and how not to waste time.

The purpose of this guide is to provide an overview of how accountants can use social media tools to participate in these conversations. We will discuss how you use these tools to **attract new clients** and continue to **build your relationships** with existing clients as well as your key business relationships.

## How marketing is changing

Recent studies have shown that the average American is bombarded with as many as 3,000<sup>(1)</sup> advertising messages per day. These messages interrupt our day in order to try to get our attention. Commercials interrupt our favorite television programs, telemarketers interrupt our dinner, and pop-up ads interrupt us when we are reading a Web site.

Because we don't like to be interrupted, we have become very good at tuning out these messages. Inventions like Tivo, do not call lists, email filters, caller id, voice mail and pop-up blockers fight off this onslaught.

But people still buy things. They still have wants. They still have problems they need help solving. The thing to remember is that they want to be able to find solutions when *they* want them. They want to hear what others have to say about it on their schedule. They don't want to be sold; they want to make informed purchasing decisions.

## Outbound vs. Inbound marketing

The interruption-based marketing described above is sometimes also referred to as outbound marketing, because it depends on the company sending messages out to the marketplace and then to go look for buyers. By contrast, inbound marketing focuses on "being found" or attracting people with a particular need or want at the time they are preparing to make a purchase.

The people at HubSpot.com are generally credited for popularizing the term "inbound marketing." HubSpot.com makes and sells marketing software.

HubSpot.com founders Brian Halligan and Dharmesh Shah co-

The table below shows some common traditional marketing tactics and the inbound techniques that are beginning to replace them.

<b>Outbound (Prospecting, Hunting, Interrupting)</b>	<b>Inbound (Attracting, Educating, "Getting Found")</b>
Print Ads	Blogs, eBooks, White Papers
Radio Ads	Podcasts
Television Ads	Videos
Tradeshows	Webinars
Cold Calling	Search Engine Optimization
E-mail Blasts	RSS, Feeds

As you can see, the new model of Inbound Marketing focuses on creating content that is valuable to your prospective clients and then making it widely available and easily discoverable so a prospective client will find it when searching for a solution to their problem. In other words, Inbound Marketing focuses on helping you be ***found by people ready to buy the solutions you offer.***

### **Will they find you?**

According to BIA/Kelsey's User View Wave VII, 97% of the consumers surveyed use online media when researching products or services in their local area <sup>(2)</sup>.

Last year, 1 & 1 Internet conducted a survey <sup>(2)</sup> of 1,800 small and medium sized businesses. That survey revealed that 2 out of 5 of those businesses did not have a Web site. By the way, of those SMBs that did have a Web site, 83 percent report that their Web site was essential to their company's success.

Let's summarize, and generalize a bit. Almost all of your potential customers search the internet for local goods and services before they buy. Only a little more than half of local businesses have a chance of showing up in that search. I say a chance because it is important to do the work to make sure your site is showing up in the search results for the *way your customers search*. It seems to me that those businesses that have a Web site optimized for local search enjoy a distinct competitive advantage.

When prospective clients are searching for solutions, will they find you?

### **How social media helps you "Get Found"**

Social media provides several ways to help you be found by people searching for your services.

The first way is by allowing you to create profile for that site. Your profile is where you get to describe yourself and\or your business. By completing your profile and optimizing it for your particular business, you can improve your chances for being found by people searching for your services.

There are two key points to remember when it comes to optimizing your profile. First, be specific about what you do. One way to be specific is to include the local area that you serve – “Denver tax accountant” vs. “CPA”.

The second key is to describe what you do in similar ways to the way people search for you. If people are looking for “Tax for small businesses in Denver”, make sure your profiles include that phrase.

What if you don’t know how people search for what you do? Begin by asking your best clients how they would search for you on the internet.

Social media sites also help you “get found”, as you share your expertise with the community. This can be done by submitting articles to the site or by linking to articles you have written on your blog or other social sites.

You can also demonstrate your knowledge and expertise by participating in the conversations happening in these communities. Answering questions is a great way to give back to the community. It is also a way to start building trust, so people will feel comfortable in approaching you when they need to purchase your services.

### **The role of social media in your marketing mix**

From a strategic point of view, social media helps us create conversations that open up new access points. Think about this is as many streams feeding a river. Access points to what, you ask?

This is a great question and an important point that is often overlooked when talking about social media marketing.

Your social media marketing activities should provide access to your marketing system. While each firm’s marketing system will be different, it should include, at a minimum, an education component as well as a follow up or “keep in touch” system.

Marketing materials that try to directly sell professional services are generally ineffective. People don’t want to be sold; they want to make informed purchasing decisions. Therefore, it is vital that your marketing materials educate your prospects on the problems you solve, how you solve them, and what they can expect when working with you.



Clients often don't need your services right when you meet them. Often, they don't need your services on an everyday basis. However, the need for your services typically repeats itself over the lifetime of your relationship. Therefore, it is paramount that you have a system to keep in touch with them and remain in "top of mind" status, so when a need *does* arise, they will remember and buy from you.

The point of your social media activities should then be to move prospects closer to entering your education and/or stay in touch system. This assumes that you have a marketing system in place before you begin your social media marketing activities.

Being found won't be of much benefit if there isn't a clear next step for a potential client to take. What that next step is will depend on your particular marketing system – it may be to visit your Web site or blog, attend your upcoming seminar, or call for a free consultation.

Social media marketing should be a *part of your overall marketing system*, not a stand-alone activity.

The point to remember is that social media marketing should be a *part of your overall marketing system*, not a stand-alone activity.

### **Does social media marketing make sense for accountants?**

In order to answer that question, you must first answer these – who are the people I need to connect with in order to grow my practice (prospects and strategic partners), and can I connect with them using social media channels? If so, can I do so in a way that is more advantageous than my traditional marketing activities?

Looking at the first question, let's consider the following statistics. According to the online competitive intelligence service Compete.com, social media growth continues to skyrocket.

- ✓ The top three social networks—Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn—collectively received more than 2.5 billion visits in the month of September 2009 alone. Twitter grew by more than 600% in 2009, while Facebook grew by 210% and LinkedIn by 85%.
- ✓ As of this writing, Google and Yahoo! are the only Web sites that receive more daily traffic than Facebook.
- ✓ In fact, if Facebook were a country, it would be the world's fourth largest.
- ✓ The most recent count of blogs being indexed by Technorati currently stands at 133 million.
- ✓ The same report also revealed that, on average, 900,000 blog posts are created within a single 24-hour period.
- ✓ It's been reported that YouTube is likely to serve more than 75 billion video streams to around 375 million unique visitors during 2009.

Given these numbers, chances are the people you need to meet in order to grow your practice are either using social media tools, or people who know them (and can connect you with them) are.

But do social media tools make it any easier for you to connect with these people? Social media tools provide several advantages over traditional marketing methods including:

- ✓ **Asynchronous conversations** – social media tools give us the ability to have conversations without all of the parties having to be in the same place or having to be present at the same time.
- ✓ **Discoverability** – social media tools make it easier to discover connections in your network (see the section below on LinkedIn). They can also help discover expertise in your network. For example, you may have known Sue is a CPA, but you may not have known she specializes in restaurant consulting until you saw an online conversation in which she participated.
- ✓ **Geographic boundaries** – social media helps remove geographic boundaries that prevent you from connecting or seeking advice from industry experts.

While social media will never replace face to face meetings, it certainly provides advantages in terms of reach, convenience, and cost when it comes to connecting with prospective clients and business partners.

### **Getting started with social media marketing**

Whether you are beginner or seasoned social media user, your social media marketing efforts are more fruitful when you have a social media plan that follows these principles:

- ✓ Listening
- ✓ Getting Found
- ✓ Creating and sharing educational content
- ✓ Providing a clear next step for people who want to learn more

### **Listening**

A large part of what social media is engaging in online *conversations*. An essential component to having a meaningful conversation is listening. Social media tools give us so many new ways to get our message out to others that it can be easy to forget to use these same tools to listen.

When we are engaged in face to face conversations, how often do we really listen? It takes effort to really pay attention, to not think about what we want to say next, what profound point we want to make.

It is even easier to do this (not listen) with online media. It's easy to shout out to the masses. It isn't as easy to tell that two of us are talking at the same time.

### **Tools for listening**

Listening tools for social media usually combine 1) search, 2) the ability to save that search, 3) automatic notifications or alerts when new results are found for that search.

Popular tools for listening on the web that accountants will find useful include:

**For a list of additional listening tools, visit**

<http://johnbell.typepad.com/weblog/2008/06/links-for-liste.html>

- ✓ **Google Alerts** (<http://alerts.google.com>) – listening for updates on any search term or phrase for items that Google indexes.
- ✓ **Twitter Search** (<http://search.twitter.com>) – listening to Twitter conversations
- ✓ **Technorati** (<http://s.technorati.com>) – for listening to blogs
- ✓ **Board Tracker** (<http://www.boardtracker.com>) – for message boards and forums
- ✓ **Yahoo! Groups** (<http://groups.yahoo.com>)
- ✓ **LinkedIn Answers** (<http://www.linkedin.com/answers>)

## Blogging

Blogs began as online journals or logs. In fact the strange name originates from combining the word “web” and “log”.

Blogs have evolved into what is commonly called a content management system or CMS. This is just a fancy way of saying blogs provide the tools to create, organize, and manage your content as well as the content created by others.

One of the key tenets of successful social media marketing is that in order to attract your ideal clients, you need to provide quality content – content that is educational and relevant to your target audience.

For this reason, a blog should be the foundation for your social media marketing activities. It is the tool that is best suited for creating the meaningful, educational, keyword rich content that will help you be found by the search engines.

The quality and tone of this content will be a major factor influencing visitors’ decision about whether they want to learn more about your practice and the services you provide. Your visitors want to connect with and learn from a real person. Your blog is not the place for corporate marketing speak.

Most accountants believe that when they are marketing their services, they are really marketing themselves. They realize that having a personal connection is an important factor in a client’s decision making process. For this reason, a blog is a perfect marketing tool for accountants. **A blog let’s an accountant demonstrate their technical expertise, while at the same time, letting prospective clients feel like they are getting to know the accountant through the conversational tone of her blog posts.**

## Before you start

It is a good idea to visit other blogs and read what people are writing and commenting about before you begin writing your own blog. Use sites like Best of the Web Blog Directory (<http://blogs.botw.org>) and Google’s blog search (<http://blogsearch.google.com>) to find blogs related to your industry. One of the most comprehensive lists of Accountant’s Blogs can be found on Michelle Golden’s Web site – Golden Practices (<http://goldenmarketing.typepad.com/weblog/accountingbloglist.html>).

## Blogging Terms:

**Post** – the individual entry or article

**Themes** –the layout, color scheme, and overall appearance of your blog. Themes allow you to change the look and feel of your blog without having to worry about changing the content

**Blogroll** – a list of links to other blogs and web sites recommended by the blog owner

**Permalinks** – a *permanent link* to an individual blog post

**Trackbacks and Pings** – mechanisms to allow one blog to be notified when another blog links to it

## How often should you post?

How frequently to post is a common question asked when starting a blog. After all, writing blog posts takes time. When it comes to blogging for accounting firms, it is generally best to favor a strategy of being consistent rather than trying to be prolific. Consider this, by posting only once week, at the end of one year you will have added fifty new pages of quality, keyword rich content to your Web site.

## What to write about

When considering the idea of starting a blog, many accountants wonder if they will have enough material to consistently post on their web. One way address this is to remember that what you are doing is engaging in conversation with clients and prospects – this conversation just happens to be taking place online. So, if you ran into a client or prospect, what would you talk about?

- ✓ **Frequently Asked Questions** – Most accountants have certain questions that clients and prospects typically ask. These can be great topics for a blog post.
- ✓ **Things to know before you...** How many times could you have saved a client money, time, and aggravation if they had spoken to you before completing a transaction? Write posts about common mistakes or questions people should ask before taking action.
- ✓ **News** – What new developments are happening in your world and how do they affect your client's business?
- ✓ **Lists \ Resources** – List of do's, don'ts, and helpful resources make for good blog content.
- ✓ **Industry News** – Changes to the tax law and updates on accounting rules make for good content. Show your expertise by explaining how these changes affect your particular niche.
- ✓ **How-To's** – Do you support a software package or service for your clients? Providing useful tips and tricks are a good way to demonstrate your expertise and attract people who are searching for solutions to their problems.
- ✓ **Interviews** – Interview your clients, strategic business partners, and key industry vendors.
- ✓ **Brainstorming** – Many accountants like to sit down and brainstorm to come up with a list of 20-25 topics to write about in the future. Having a list like this can certainly be helpful when you are trying to find topics to write about. Just don't let not having the list be an excuse for not getting started writing on your blog.

### Expertise with a Personal Touch

From accounts payable to complete AccountEdge support, Team Jenn tackles all accounting department responsibilities virtually for 50 clients disbursed across the US.

Team Jenn uses their blog to provide useful tips, tricks and topical discussions about taxes and other business related issues.

By using a blog, Team Jenn is able to demonstrate their technical expertise while also allowing prospects and customers to learn about them as people.

Visit Team Jenn's blog at - <http://teamjennnews.blogspot.com>

## Expanding your reach

You put a lot of work into creating quality blog posts. Make sure you get as much mileage out of them as possible. Most popular blogging software include tools help you share your posts with your other social

media communities. Deploy a “write once, share everywhere” strategy by using these tools to share your content on LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, and any other online communities that you participate in.

## LinkedIn

LinkedIn is known as the social site for professional networking. Of all the social media sites, LinkedIn is probably the one that professionals trust the most. Over 60 million professionals use LinkedIn to exchange information, ideas and opportunities.

Networking has always been a backbone tactic for growing an accounting practice. Because of this, LinkedIn is probably the most important and powerful social media marketing tool (second only to blogging) for accountants. Most accountants seem to start their social media participation on LinkedIn.

What makes LinkedIn so powerful is that it makes networks visible.

Using LinkedIn, I can start by searching for the help that I need, find the people who provide that service, and then see how I am connected to them.

For example, let’s pretend I am an accountant and I would like to meet the owner of a technology firm that installs and supports networks for businesses in my area. I believe a company like this would make a good strategic referral partner for my firm. I search LinkedIn and I find a technology provider named Mary. Mary and I both know Joe, so I can ask Joe about Mary. Based on his feedback, I then ask Joe to introduce me to Mary.

Contrast this with traditional networking where the network isn’t so visible. Mary may be the ideal person for me to partner with, but unless I talk to Joe and remember to ask him if he knows any technology providers, I may never find her even though she is only one connection away.

## Other ways to use LinkedIn

As your LinkedIn network grows, you will want to explore some of the other ways that LinkedIn provides for you to interact with and grow your network.

**Groups** – Find and connect with people with similar interests. Start a new group and build your community.

**Answers** – Ask for help and advice. Give back to the community and demonstrate your expertise.

**Events** – Find events that interest you and promote your own events.

**Applications** – Collaborate and share information with your network.

For a video demonstrating this “visible network” view this video on YouTube

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lzT3JVUGUzM>

## Best practices for LinkedIn

- ✓ Complete your Profile – links, keywords, descriptions and profile picture
- ✓ Use the Status Update feature to let others know about your upcoming events, what you are looking for.
- ✓ Use the LinkedIn Applications such as the Slideshare or YouTube application to repurpose and share content you have created with your LinkedIn network.
- ✓ Use the Advanced Search function to find prospective clients and referral partners
- ✓ Recommend people in your network. Giving recommendations is one of the best ways to receive them.
- ✓ Demonstrate your expertise and willingness to help by answering the questions posted in the Answers section.

## Facebook

Facebook is a **social utility** that **connects you** with the people around you. Facebook started as a closed community for college students, but now is open to users around the world. Take a look at these statistics and you can see why there is increasing interest in marketing on Facebook, even for B2B firms.

You can find the latest Facebook statistics at <http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics#!/press/info.php?statistics>

- ✓ More than 400 million active users
- ✓ 50% of active users log on to Facebook in any given day
- ✓ More than 35 million users update their status each day
- ✓ More than 1.5 million local businesses have active Pages on Facebook
- ✓ Business pages have registered more than 5.3 billion fans or “likes”

## Average User Figures

- ✓ Average user has 130 friends on the site
- ✓ Average user sends 8 friend requests per month
- ✓ Average user spends more than 55 minutes per day on Facebook
- ✓ Average user clicks the “like” button on 9 pieces of content each month
- ✓ Average user becomes a fan of 4 Pages each month

## How Can Accountants Use Facebook?

Facebook can help your accounting firm:

- ✓ Get found by people who are searching for your services
- ✓ Connect and engage with current and potential clients
- ✓ Create a community around your practice
- ✓ Share content you create, including webinars, blog posts, articles, user guides, etc.

## Personal Profile vs. a Business Page

Facebook allows you to share information via personal profiles and business pages. While profiles and pages may look very similar, there is an important distinction. Profiles are for people while pages are for businesses. Do not create a profile page for your business – use a business page. As Facebook continues to add new features for businesses, these features will be added to pages.

Some other key differences between Business Pages and Personal Profiles include:

- ✓ Pages allow you to designate multiple administrators. This allows you to have more than one person help manage your page. This is helpful if one of your administrators leaves your firm, you can still have control over the Page.
- ✓ Pages are, by default, public and will start ranking in Facebook and public search results.
- ✓ Anyone can become a fan of your Page without first going through administrator approval. This is different from Personal profiles which require mutual acceptance to become friends.

## Creating your business page

You can create a Page for free (other than your time to build and maintain it). To get started, visit [www.facebook.com/pages/create.php](http://www.facebook.com/pages/create.php) (Note: you must be logged in to create a Page.) Facebook provides a wizard to walk you through the steps to create your Business Page.

You can designate more than one administrator to help with the maintenance of your Business Page

As the administrator, you are the behind the scenes manager. Your name and profile will not show up anywhere on your Business Page. When you post new information or respond to a discussion thread, it will appear to be posted by your firm rather than you personally. As mentioned before, you can designate more than one administrator to help with the maintenance of your Business Page.

Don't forget to become a fan of your page. Once you become a fan, you will be listed among all the other fans on your Page and all the Pages of which you are a fan will show up on your profile – giving your business more visibility to your network.

## Promote your page

Now that you've built your Page, you need to get some fans. Here are a few ideas to get you started.

- ✓ **Create an engaging Page.** Use applications like the discussion board and YouTube video box to add more interesting and engaging content to your Page. Give users a reason to become a fan of your Page and engage with you.
- ✓ **Give your fans something to talk about.** Every time fans engage with your page, that activity is published to their "news feed" which is seen by all of their Facebook friends. When a user logs in to Facebook, they see a feed of their friends' recent activity, so the more they interact with your page, the more that is shared with their network, leading to more visibility and potentially more fans for your business.
- ✓ **Invite your existing network.** Don't forget to invite your email subscribers, current clients, and blog readers to become a fan of your business on Facebook. Including a link to your page in your email signature, blogging about your Facebook page, and posting a link or badge to your page on your Web site and/or blog are other ways you can promote your page.

- ✓ **Make your Page publicly searchable.** Your Page is public by default, so that it can get indexed by search engines. If your page is not showing up in searches, go to Edit Page and then Settings and set your page to be “Published (publicly visible).”
- ✓ **Advertise.** Use Facebook advertising to promote you page to potential fans.

### Advertising on Facebook

Facebook provides an advertising program that allows you to display type in the right sidebar of Facebook pages and profiles. If you are familiar with Google AdWords, Facebook advertising will feel very familiar to you. Here is a general overview of how advertising on Facebook works:

- ✓ **Create your ad** – Facebook gives you 25 characters for you advertisement title. The content for the body of your ad can be up to 135 characters in length (including spaces).
- ✓ **Target your ad** – One of the strengths of advertising on Facebook is the ability to use the information in Facebook to create a highly targeted audience for your ad. You can target your audience using a combination of geographic location, age, likes and interests, education, as well as by their connections on Facebook.
- ✓ **Set your budget** – Indicate how much you pay for each click as well as the maximum you want to spend per day.
- ✓ **Monitoring** – Once you launch your campaign, you will want to monitor the results. If your ads point users to something inside of Facebook (i.e. your ad promotes your business page) you can use the Facebook Insights tool to monitor your campaign. If your ad points users to a site external to Facebook, you can use Google Analytics to monitor your campaign. You can learn more about Insights here - <http://www.facebook.com/help/?page=866>

For more information about Facebook Advertising, visit the Ads Manager section of Facebook’s help system - <http://www.facebook.com/help/?page=865>.

For more ideas on how you can use Twitter for business, read Chris Brogan’s blog post – [50 Ideas on Using Twitter for Business](#)

### Twitter

Twitter is similar to text messaging, the main difference being that, instead of you deciding who to send message to, you broadcast your messages and the *audience decides* if they want to listen or follow you.

Twitter also allows you to send direct messages, just like regular texting.

Because of all of the non-business chatter on Twitter, it can be difficult to see how Twitter can be used as a business tool. Here are a few ways you may use Twitter in your practice.

- ✓ Twitter can be a good way to connect, stay in touch with, and network with others in your industry or area?

- ✓ With Twitter you can listen, in real time, to what's being said, about your firm, people, products, or brand.
- ✓ Twitter can provide you with a steady stream of ideas, resources, and tips focused on your area of expertise or interest.
- ✓ You can monitor what's being said about your customers and their competitors with Twitter. Twitter can also help you stay up to date with what is new in your clients' industry.
- ✓ You can use Twitter to help spread awareness of your blog posts, upcoming events, and other news about your firm.

### Twitter Terminology

More than other social media tools, Twitter has its own vocabulary, which can make it a little confusing for new users. Here is a list of common Twitter terms and their meanings to help you get started.

**Tweet:** When you post or write your 140 characters or less on Twitter and hit send, it's called a tweet or tweeting.

**Handle:** That's your Twitter name, like @SurePayroll—balance short with descriptive and no matter what your business handle is get your personal name if you don't plan to use it right now. It's like your URL and will have value someday.

**Follow:** This is simply the act of adding someone to your list of people you are following— this makes their tweets show up on your home page.

**Replies:** This is what it is called when someone writes a tweet directly at your handle— @SurePayroll cool post today blah blah—this is often an invite to engage with a follower.

**RT or Retweet:** This is a tactic of republishing someone else's tweet—the original tweet along with the author stays intact, but you are basically showing someone's tweet to your followers— many people find this a great way to add content and acknowledge great posts from the folks they follow.

**DM:** This is a message that is sent directly to another user. They must be following you for you to DM them, but this is a very useful tool for private messages and generally a good choice when you start going back and forth with someone on something your entire base of followers might not find interesting.

**Hash tag:** This is a way people categorize tweets so that others might use the same tag and effectively create a way for people to view related tweets. For example, you can search Twitter for the hash tag #taxnews to view discussions pertaining to taxes.

**TweetUp:** When people who use Twitter come together to meet in person.

### ***Finding people to follow***

In addition to listening for people who are talking about the topics we are interested in (see the Listening section above) there are also a plethora of directory sites where you can find people to follow. Here are a few to help you get started:

- ✓ Twellow (<http://www.twellow.com>)
- ✓ WeFollow (<http://wefollow.com>)
- ✓ Just Tweet It (<http://justtweetit.com> )
- ✓ Twitter Search (<http://search.twitter.com> )

### **Combining the online and offline worlds**

More communities are using a mix of online social media tools with live, in-person events. These communities strive to combine the strengths of online tools (asynchronous communications, network visibility, etc.) with the strengths and comfort of traditional networking.

One such community is Biznik (<http://biznik.com>). Biznik describes itself as a “community of entrepreneurs and small businesses dedicated to helping each other succeed.”

Biznik provides tools to help business owners connect where ever they may live. They also encourage members to meet and network in person.

Another community that combines the online and offline worlds to connect people is Meetup.com. Meetup.com provides the tools to help you find local groups of people who share your interests. If you can't find a local group, Meetup.com lets you create one. While Meetup.com is not restricted to business related groups, many groups exist related to business networking and education.

As of this writing, Meetup.com returns over 1,200 groups when searching for the term “accounting” – is there one near you?

### **Protecting yourself online**

For all of the great benefits of social media, there are those who will use it for ill gotten gains. As is true in the physical world, it is important to protect yourself.

Protect yourself by being aware of what information identity thieves want and how they try to obtain it.

#### **What they want**

Credit card numbers, Social Security numbers, passwords, driver's license numbers, and employment information are examples of the valuable personal information identity thieves want to steal.

#### **How they try to get it**

While there seems to be no limit to the creativity of cyber criminals, most scams involving social media involve "social engineering". A fancy way of saying “lying”, social engineering involves manipulating people into doing things like divulging passwords, credit card information or to install a piece of dangerous software.

A common technique social engineers employ, is to try to trick you into logging in to a fake Web site, thereby getting you to submit your username and password. For this reason, be cautious when clicking on any links within emails. To be safe, rather than clicking on links in any email message, type the web address directly into your browser instead and then log in to access your account.

### **Know what you are posting about yourself**

It's a common practice for online accounts to ask you for a "security question" for use in the event that you lose or otherwise need to reset your password. These questions may relate to your birthday, home town, high school, or your pet's name. Make sure the answer to your security question is not found on your social media profile(s).

### **Other tips**

- ✓ Never give out credit card information or Social Security numbers in a "private" message on a social media platform.
- ✓ Assume that everything you put on a social networking site is permanently available.
- ✓ Remember that interactions on social sites are conversations that are being held in public. Avoid posting anything you wouldn't be comfortable being overheard by a stranger.
- ✓ Be selective about who you accept as a friend on a social network. If you don't know someone, or you are not sure, most sites will allow you to send them a message to learn more about them before accepting them as a friend or connection.
- ✓ Avoid clicking on links in messages from people you don't know. If you receive a suspicious message from someone you do know, contact them separately and ask them about the message. They will want to know if someone hijacked their account.
- ✓ Be careful about putting your home address or home based business address on your profile.

### **How much does social media marketing cost?**

While most of the tools used for social media marketing are free, there is a real cost related to the time spent on creating content and engaging with your different social media communities. How much time you choose to dedicate is up to you, but most accounting firms will benefit from a focused, consistent approach, rather than trying to engage all audiences on all platforms.

Surveys have shown that as people become more experienced with social media, they tend to dedicate more time nurturing and contributing to their social media communities. So start slow and focus on building quality relationships.

### **How to measure the results of your social media efforts**

While having thousands of followers may be nice for the ego, it is not necessarily a measure of social media success for accounting firms.

If the role of social media marketing is to support your company's overall marketing goals (see The Role of Social Media in Your Marketing Mix), then social media activities should be measured in terms their contribution toward achieving those goals.

It is important to remember that people may not buy your services just because they found you online. Rather, finding you may be the first in a series of steps that leads to a purchase.

For example, part of your overall marketing strategy may be to get interested prospects to attend an educational seminar. You have found that once prospects attend this event, they are highly likely to become clients. One of your goals is to increase attendance at these events. Therefore, you should track how many people learn about the event and sign up via social media channels.

### Wrap up

Hopefully you can see how social media can be a powerful tool for helping you market your practice. By taking advantage of social media tools, you can increase the chances that you will be found by people who are looking for the solutions that you provide when they are ready to buy. The following is a recap of the key points to keep in mind as you move forward with your social media marketing activities.

#### **Make sure you can be found by people searching for your services –**

A blog is a great way to make sure people can find you via search. Also, remember to complete your various social media profiles and to include keywords that prospects use when searching for solutions to their problems.

**Provide a clear next step –** Once they find you, be sure to provide a clear next step. That step may be instructions on how to obtain more information, including how they can contact you.

**Use your marketing messages to educate –** Remember, no one likes to be sold, but everyone likes to buy. Use social media to provide educational content that helps buyers feel comfortable that they are making informed purchasing decisions.

**Go to where your clients and prospects are –** Don't just sit back and wait for people to find you. Join LinkedIn groups, Facebook communities, and discussion boards to connect with and contribute to the community.

**Connect your online and offline worlds –** With all of the power and convenience that social media provides, people still like to engage with people. Combining your online and offline activities strengthens your relationships and reputation in both arenas.

### Case Study – FlyDragon Consulting

FlyDragon Consulting teaches clients “how to fish” by offering virtual bookkeeping and accounting services that enable small business owners to take control of their finances and administration.

**Challenge –** Many small business owners are looking for useful information related to bookkeeping and accounting. FlyDragon has answers, but traditional marketing tactics where limiting the number of people they could reach.

**Solution –** JoAnn Ortiz, the founder of FlyDragon, began using social media to help answer questions. JoAnn usually spends roughly an hour every day combing Yahoo! Answers and Twitter for questions related to her field. She always answers them using her name with her business contact info. “Social media is about real people connecting,” JoAnn explains. “I’ve gotten much better results sending personal replies.”

She’s also built Facebook and LinkedIn profiles for herself and her business. Across all the major social networks, small business owners seeking FlyDragon Consulting are greeted with consistency in messaging and personality.

**Results –** “People started responding to what I know,” JoAnn recalls. “And I’d always include my contact info and a link to my Web site in every answer I provided. It took a little time for call volume to pick up, but a quick increase in Web traffic was pretty noticeable. And it didn’t cost anything—just a little time.”

**Don't forget about your current clients** – Marketing doesn't end with the sale. Social media can be a powerful tool for staying connected with your clients. Use the listening tools described in this paper to stay informed about current developments in your clients' world. Let your clients know about the other services you offer. Leverage social media tools to make it easy for your clients to refer you to others.

## Where to get more information

Inbound Marketing – <http://www.hubspot.com>

Privacy settings in Facebook - <http://www.facebook.com/settings/?tab=privacy>

Privacy setting in LinkedIn - [http://linkedin.custhelp.com/cgi-bin/linkedin.cfg/php/enduser/std\\_adp.php?p\\_faqid=66&p\\_created=1204036669&p\\_sid=VpNDch1k&p\\_accessibility=0&p\\_redirect=&p\\_lva=&p\\_sp=cF9zcmNoPTEmcF9zb3J0X2J5PSZwX2dyaWRzb3J0PSZwX3Jvd19jbnQ9MjA0LDIwNCZwX3Byb2RzPTAmcF9jYXRzPSZwX3B2PSZwX2N2PSZwX3BhZ2U9MSZwX3NIYXJjaF90ZXh0PXByaXZhY3kgc2V0dGluZ3M!&p\\_li=&p\\_topview=1](http://linkedin.custhelp.com/cgi-bin/linkedin.cfg/php/enduser/std_adp.php?p_faqid=66&p_created=1204036669&p_sid=VpNDch1k&p_accessibility=0&p_redirect=&p_lva=&p_sp=cF9zcmNoPTEmcF9zb3J0X2J5PSZwX2dyaWRzb3J0PSZwX3Jvd19jbnQ9MjA0LDIwNCZwX3Byb2RzPTAmcF9jYXRzPSZwX3B2PSZwX2N2PSZwX3BhZ2U9MSZwX3NIYXJjaF90ZXh0PXByaXZhY3kgc2V0dGluZ3M!&p_li=&p_topview=1)

## References

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## About Bill Brelsford

Bill Brelsford is the owner of Rebar Business Builders. Bill is a Duct Tape Marketing Authorized Coach located in Lenexa, KS (a suburb of Kansas City). He specializes in helping professional service firms create and implement marketing systems that allow them to spend less time chasing business and more time serving profitable clients.

## Ways to Contact Bill Brelsford

- ✓ For more information and business building resources, visit Bill's Web site at <http://www.RebarBusinessBuilders.com>
- ✓ For lots of free marketing tips, check out Bill's blog at <http://blog.rebarbusinessbuilders.com>
- ✓ Follow Bill on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/billbrelsford>
- ✓ Connect with Bill on LinkedIn <http://LinkedIn.com/in/billbrelsford>
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## About SurePayroll

[SurePayroll](#) is the online alternative to ADP® and Paychex®. SurePayroll's service and team members are dedicated to providing an easy, convenient online payroll service at a price small business owners can afford. Tens of thousands of customers rely on [SurePayroll](#) to process payroll wherever they want in as few as two minutes.

In addition, SurePayroll offers small businesses solutions for managing [401\(k\) plans](#), [health insurance](#), [workers' compensation](#), [HR compliance](#) and [employee screening](#). For accountants and banking partners, [SurePayroll](#) provides private-label services that enable them to offer payroll processing to their small business clients.

Over the last decade, [SurePayroll](#) has received numerous prestigious awards for its innovative technology and outstanding customer service, including recognition from *PC Magazine*, *Inc. 500*, *Accounting Today*, the Stevie Awards and many others.

For more information, you can visit <http://www.surepayroll.com> or call 877.868.8012.

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