

# Viewpoints



## Using social media to grow your business

By Tim Cotton – Marketing Consultant

Social media has owned the past decade. It provides a place for people to obtain news on the subjects that mean the most to them, share their opinion, and to get amongst a conversation. In traditional media, the community has a very limited opportunity to truly feel part of the press. Social media allows everyone to share their thoughts on contemporary issues to the big wide world, literally within seconds of posting.



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Netflix, Uber, Amazon, and Airbnb are great examples of companies who have used social media to their advantage. During their early stages of growth, it was rare to see traditional advertising for these companies; they all cleverly utilised social media marketing to reach consumers and this has helped them to become the multibillion dollar companies they are today.

So, why should your business embrace social media?

In a nutshell, you risk falling behind if you don't use social media as a tool to grow your business. There's a very good chance your competitors are using social media to market their products and services.

But the idea of getting involved in social media can seem time-consuming and daunting. How can you do it well? Where do you start? Which platform should you use? It really is a matter of 'one step backwards for two steps forward'.

*One step backwards – taking the time to learn the art of social media.*

*One step forward – implementing social media.*

*Two steps forward – ingraining social media in operations.*

Here are five major benefits of using social media when seeking to grow your business:

### 1. Targeted advertising

Social media's advertising platforms are incredibly targeted, meaning you can get your product/service right in front of your specific target market. Age, gender, geographic region, interests and online searching patterns are just some of the features that can be utilised.

### 2. Analytics

Thorough analytics display which promotions have been effective and which haven't. This helps you understand what works well and identifies your specific reach and engagement levels, which can assist with follow-up sales execution.

### 3. Auto-posting technology

Once you develop an understanding of social media, there are many technologies out there such as Hootsuite, which allow automatic posting of social

media content at optimal times for your target market. The clear benefit here is that you can get on with your day-to-day activity without worrying about feeding your social media timelines, and you can just assess performance through analytics at a time that suits you. Let's say you are free to use social media between 1pm-2pm on a usual day but the ideal time for the content to be posted for your target market is 9pm. You can automate the content to be posted at the most valuable time, and spend that period during the day assessing performance and working on next steps.

#### 4. Cost

Compared to other advertising such as event sponsorship or TV and radio advertising, social media is extremely cheap! There is the potential to get great value for money, with the knowledge that you're hitting your target market.

#### 5. Brand awareness

More than 75% of Australians, across all demographics, use social media and it consumes a growing amount of their time. It's an exceptional way of building your brand, which can assist in growing your business.



## Social media – the biggest and most influential evolutions

Social media has changed dramatically over the past decade in sophistication, reach and impact. Here are the key ways it has evolved and the potential impacts for your business.

### 1. With commercialisation growing – it's getting harder for a business to be noticed

Social media was originally all consumer to consumer. Sharing of photos, links and opinions was mainly done in a public forum where peers would interact. But commercialisation has taken over. Business advertising has grown year on year. US marketing blog Invesp puts the annual growth rate at 24%<sup>1</sup>. As recently as 2010, around 5% of newsfeeds would be business content, and 95% would come from family and friends, however now it would be vice versa. Recently Facebook announced changes to its algorithms to ensure family and friends' content is prioritised in newsfeeds. But with millions of businesses worldwide pouring money into Facebook advertising, it is going to be a balancing act to ensure the platform can maintain profitability whilst keeping its users as satisfied as possible.

### 2. Social media used to be mainly chronological; now it's all algorithms

When social media was introduced, most of the content posted was chronological. If you posted something a minute ago, and checked your phone/computer three times straight afterwards, you would almost definitely see that same post on each occasion. Now, whether you see that post is purely dependent on how popular/relevant it is. For example, if you posted an opinion about something which didn't gain much traction or interest, you are likely to never see it feature in the newsfeed again.

Back in 2008 when the newsfeed was chronologically based, a post that picked up 300 likes would be well hidden in 2-3 days, whereas in 2018 that same post will show up higher on newsfeeds than a post which is 5 minutes old with no engagements.

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Footnote

<sup>1</sup><https://www.invespcro.com/blog/social-media-ad-spending/>

This algorithm-driven newsfeed has led to a huge amount of people in 2018 being less willing to post in a public forum, to save any embarrassment of losing the “popularity contest”. Nowadays, people will most commonly post about specific popular milestones online such as a birth, marriage or birthday in an algorithm based newsfeed, rather than what they had for dinner or what song they are listening to (Facebook and Instagram are two great examples of this). Funny how times change!

In summary, take note of what is now ranked higher in algorithms and develop your content accordingly. The key to this is making sure your content is relevant to the here and now for your target market, valuable in making a meaningful impact to provide solutions, and engaging for your market to read or view. If these three are covered off well, you will give yourself the best chance to move up the rankings.

### 3. Video content is becoming the norm

In 2018, we now see essentially all of the more successful social media platforms having some form of video feature. Back in 2008, YouTube was just about the only platform for video although it was in its embryonic stages with Facebook. Now Snapchat, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Twitter all have video functionality.

Facebook has really come to the fore with video content. It can now more be commonly used for tagging and sharing of videos of visual news, general business advertising of interest; 24 hour visual video stories are now also extremely popular amongst Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat users - generally a 10-second visual snapshot. This is fast becoming a more popular method of daily posting than updating a text status into a public newsfeed.

Social media offers a great, (usually) free distribution channel for your video content. It is recommended you invest in a few video recording tools which you can utilise for hundreds and thousands of videos to come.

#### Some key tips on recording videos:

- Use your smartphone. Most modern ones have high resolution cameras – a great way of keeping costs down.
- Purchase a clip-on lapel microphone which can plug into the smartphone. The sound clarity makes a big difference, removing the echo and much of the background noise.
- Ensure the phone is still wherever possible. You could place it on a shelf, high table or alternatively purchase a tripod stand.
- Ensure there is good lighting in the room you use to record the video.
- Make sure you are in a distraction free, quiet room.
- A backdrop or pull-up banner is also good for branding purposes, along with making your video more professional. It helps bring life to your recording. It just needs to be big enough to fill the entire background of the screen.
- Keep each video under two minutes in length, to reduce the risk of losing your audience's attention.

Following the above tips will help you gain the best professional result and drive the highest engagement with your video content.

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#### 4. The meaning of a hashtag keeps changing

Twitter introduced and owned hashtags in 2006. They took a while to catch on, and it wasn't until approximately 2010 that they went viral and were widely embraced. Hashtags help link your content to a particular niche interest group or a contemporary event, which can pave the way to be part of the discussion. Both Twitter (more in the live and latest event space) and Instagram (primarily in grouping) are the marketing leaders in this space, with LinkedIn slowly catching on.

But the way hashtags are used has changed. Here's a 2011 style of tweet:

"That was the best game of football between Collingwood and Essendon, despite the cold weather #coldweather #winterfeels #cold #winter #bestgame #excitement #fun"

Or

"Despite Collingwood leading the whole game, Essendon deserved to win that game #justice"

Whereas today, tweets are generally more seen like this:

"That was an incredible game of football, the best for 2018 #AFLCollvsEss"

It used to be more about expressing emotion through a hashtag, whereas the hashtag now has the core purpose of linking your thoughts/content to a particular grouping/event.

Hashtags actually have a lot more to them than what meets the eye, and today you should certainly be tactical in the way you use utilise them. Businesses can now use hashtags to their advantage as a discovery metric for their target market. Many consumers will now use hashtags for online research before they commit to buying a product or service. For example, someone who wants to buy flowers in Melbourne may search #flowersofmelbourne – every single post related to this this will then show up. Buyers will do this to read reviews, view how the product/service looks, find out costs etc.

A tip for your business is to promote relevant, valuable and engaging content with an appropriate hashtag, which will then place your business in the group of what your target market is actively searching for. Research the best hashtags for your business.



## 5. Phone compatibility just keeps on rising






Facebook, founded in 2005, has been around longer than the iPhone (2007) and there was a time when we could only use Facebook on a computer or laptop. It's a crazy thought and it wasn't that long ago!

As smartphones have led the way with innovations through their devices, social media has followed suit with similar features on their platform.

Filters (predominately on Instagram and Snapchat), swiping and 24 hour stories are just some of the many features that can only be used on smartphone

devices. The use of artificial intelligence through chatbots can mainly be used through smartphones only, given desktops don't have the capability with some of their features. In fact, many Instagram and Snapchat features are smartphone only, leaving limited functionality on desktops.

Social media platforms now ensure they feature prominently in the various app stores for both IOS and Android and focus user experience efforts around smartphones primarily; desktops come in a distant second. It's a big change from platforms that weren't even able to be used on smartphones a bit over 10 years ago!

2008		2018
Facebook was the dominant only choice	➔	Facebook/Snapchat/Twitter/ LinkedIn /Instagram and a raft of others available 
 Facebook mainly to post your own photos and videos	➔	Instagram now where photos and videos are mainly placed, to avoid businesses mining content for marketing purposes. Facebook is mainly used to tag friends and family for videos and photos that aren't their own
People used to get special deals off mobile phone providers to get international deals or use niche apps such as WhatsApp or Viber	➔	Facebook Messenger/Instagram messenger /Snapchat internationally through wi-fi 
Barely any businesses on social media	➔	Nearly all businesses on social media
Newsfeed chronologically based	➔	Newsfeed algorithm based
 Liking comments only reaction possible	➔	Liking, angry, cry, wow, love laugh reactions available
Limited emojis available (under 50)	➔	1000's of emojis available
Facebook was where you would most commonly express your opinion about something	➔	LinkedIn and Twitter now used more for this purpose
No real live video feature	➔	Facebook / Snapchat / Instagram all allow live video feature ability 



## Predictions for 2028 – what will be the norm?

Existing social media platforms and newcomers will keep devising new ideas as a means to stay ahead of competitors. Given the nature of the tech industry, sitting still for any period of time can lead to the risk of them becoming irrelevant. Ideas will continue to stem from market research findings and the goal remains devising valuable solutions which disrupt common day-to-day activities to make life easier for the everyday person. Here are some predictions on what the future will look like:

### *Voice Intelligence*

With Artificial Intelligence ingrained for a couple of years now, voice intelligence is the next big thing which is currently underutilised on social media. Users will have the ability to take photos and use their voice to post them on social media (along with the caption) without having to do any typing on their phone. They will tell the phone to do it for them, and it will.

### *Back to the past with user experience*

All social media platforms will strive to go back to what made Facebook so successful and popular in the first place – creating a forum where family and friends can chat and share memories, without the fear of their data being leaked, or businesses trying to advertise. This will be a unique differentiator now, given that so many platforms are becoming increasingly commercialised.

### *Coming at a cost*

Whilst the user experience itself is likely to become less commercialised, it will be inevitable that having a social media account will come at a small cost to users, to ensure the continued profitability of social media companies.

When this happens it will be a massive change, given billions of people around the world are used to accessing social media free of charge. Will people want to continue if they need to pay for it? Will Facebook offer rewards and discounts to long-standing members?

### *Spot the text*

With gifs and videos now becoming the norm, in 10 years from now there could be no words/ text at all to read on social media with it all being video/gif only.

### *Less profiles and personal information*

In 2028, personal profiles and timelines may well become extinct, as people become increasingly aware of data breaches going on around the world, along with increasing cyber-attacks. As a result we'll see more usernames and aliases, with the input of fewer real names and less personal information. Facebook currently holds the majority of demographic and geographic information about its users which is likely to change over time.

## *Facebook to buy-out more companies to add to its offering*

Order an Uber through Facebook. Order a pizza through Snapchat. Do your grocery shopping through Instagram. The first social media company who buys out GoPro will be at a huge advantage. Imagine live videos on social media of people sky-diving, or scuba diving, or surfing and everyone being able to stream it live first hand through social media. It will happen, it's just a matter of when! Facebook will try to emulate Google and improve its offering by buying out and partnering with companies. Google started as a search engine but has evolved to include maps, online document editing, the Chrome browser and Google Home.

Businesses need to make sure they don't just follow the rest or do something the way they always have. It is important that they identify future trends and deliver marketing efforts with an eye towards the future and based on what their particular target market desires. The majority of Australians (over 75%) are utilising social media in some capacity and those who choose to ignore it will lead to their business falling well behind.

There is definitely a smart way to go about it. It's not about pouring all your money into advertising. It's about understanding your target market and having an approach which will appeal most to it. The customer is king, and their user experience must be optimised. If it isn't, they will look elsewhere for a product or service that is easier, cheaper, quicker, and provides a better overall experience.

## *A quick history*

Facebook set the tone when it launched in 2005 and created a ground-breaking platform that brought the world closer together than ever before. People could connect with each other through this free-to-use website (it was accessed only via computer/laptop to start with). If someone had an opinion to share or a photo to post, they could do so, knowing it would provide a great way for everyone to keep in touch.

Facebook also pioneered an easy to use private messaging system, which can now often be used just as much (if not more) than text messaging. Due to private messaging being so easy to use, it has meant that people have less reliance on emailing to keep in touch electronically and, with a wi-fi connection, free of charge – unlike some text messaging.

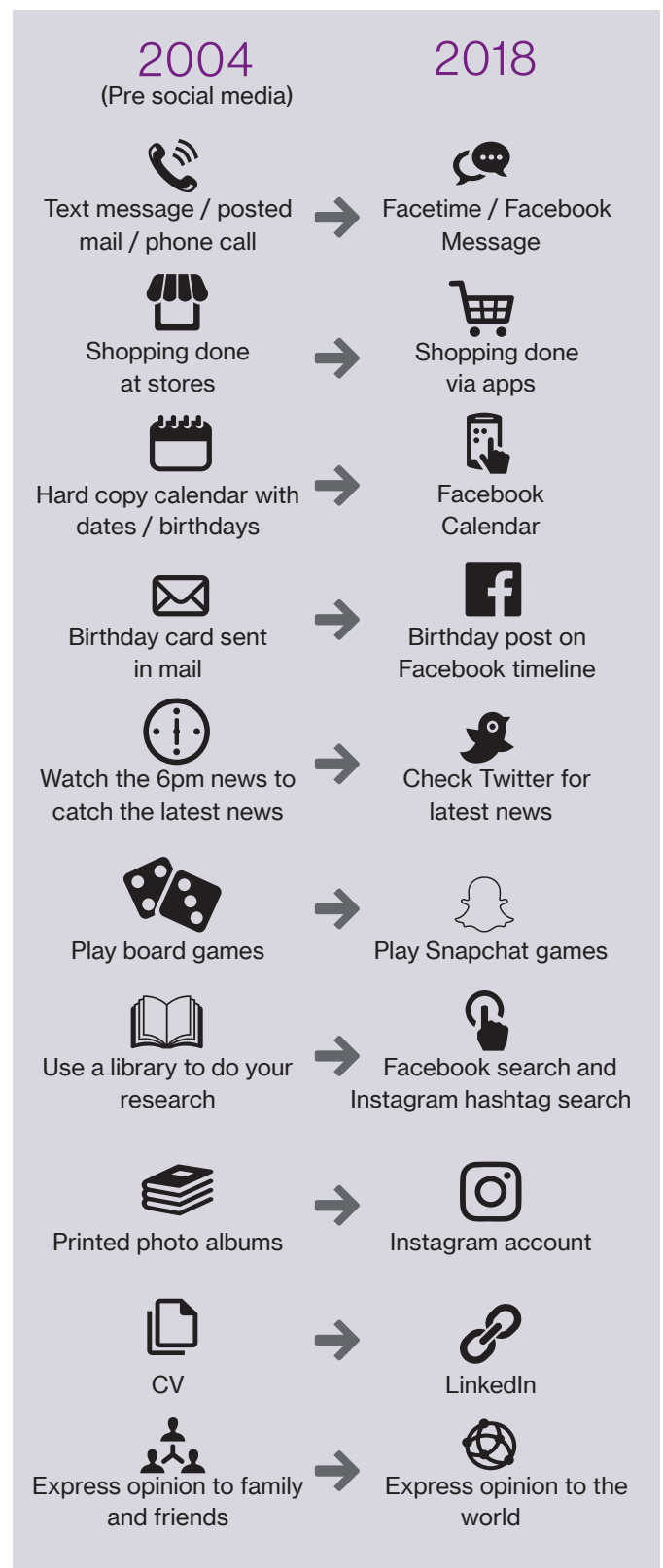
## So what has changed?

It did not take too long before Facebook was not the only social media channel available, as other entrepreneurs around the world moved in. Instagram (2010) and Snapchat (2011) have been two key challengers for Facebook (before Instagram was bought out by Facebook in 2012 for an extraordinary US\$1 billion). These channels tried to disrupt the disrupter by providing even greater features and user experience than ever before. Some of these included filters on photos/videos, hashtag groupings, and 24 hour stories. These were areas that Facebook was not particularly strong in at the time.

In the early days of newcomer social media apps, large corporate companies around the world took their time finding out about them (and still do), making Instagram and Snapchat far less commercialised with advertising than Facebook. This has allowed them to make the user experience much more personable which has led to their explosive growth patterns (Instagram has grown to over 9 million Australian users since its launch in 2010 and Snapchat over 6 million Australian users since 2011). They are enjoying such success as they are doing what social media was introduced for in the first place – less commercialisation and a great user experience.

As time has progressed, many other social media platforms have joined the ever-growing number of social media networks. The likes of LinkedIn, Pinterest, YouTube and Twitter have also become leaders of social media. Each and every one of them knows they need to stay ahead of the pack through innovative ideas that become new features for their platforms.

## Pre social media to today



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