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Social media's trendy, but does it lead to sales?

- By Nick Gilbert
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Twitter may be trendy, but does it lead to sales? The answer is yes, but you've got to know the trick.

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SOCIAL media is something of a holy grail for big businesses, who are prepared to spend big to tap into the online consciousness.

But for some of Australia's smaller companies, the key to success is simple — keep it real.

Janna Fikh, principal at Fletcher Tax Accountants in Sydney, says she wasn't sold on social media when she first thought about using Twitter in her business but now says it's a key tool for growth.

"(Social media) caught my attention because bigger companies and bigger brands were advertising on Twitter quite heavily," she said.

"Because I'm so analytical, as an accountant, I used a three month trial.

"I did a trial from January to March this year, and I did it very grudgingly. I thought it was a mess when I logged on to Twitter.

"I thought: 'Oh my god, people sit here and talk.'

"Amazingly, it's been fantastic."

[Follow Janna Fikh on Twitter](http://twitter.com/FletcherTax) (<http://twitter.com/FletcherTax>)

Ms Fikh says before she started making use of Twitter, most of her clients arrived through word-of-mouth and people who already knew of her business.

Now she says people regularly cold call asking for her services.

"I get either a client enquiry or an actual client at least twice a week.

"(Before) it was more scheduled, and unless someone said 'go see Fletcher Tax', or 'you have to see Janna', it didn't happen that way."

A large part of her success, she says, comes down to not talking about tax.

"As you can imagine, tax isn't the most exciting subject in the world," she said.

"If I tweeted about tax all day long I would definitely have no followers.

"(I do it) just by being myself, and just, you know, mixing it up with my day, or my clients' stories, or tax tips every couple of days.

"People even think of me as the 'tax girl', they tweet me tax questions every once in a while."

That thought is echoed by another small business owner, Richard Smith, who is the managing director of recent Australian start-up New Zealand Wines Online.

"I think it's critical to retain your audience," he said.

"You don't want your Facebook page to simply be a sales page. If everyday we said there's this wine that's 50 per cent off, get it now, then I think we'd lose a lot of interest from people very quickly.

"Wine is an topic that people are interested in talking about outside of specials we're trying to flog at the time, so its critical that we keep our audience with wider interest articles."

[Follow NZ Wine Online on Facebook](http://www.facebook.com/pages/nzwineonline/74003673460) (<http://www.facebook.com/pages/nzwineonline/74003673460>)

Unlike Ms Fikh, though, Mr Smith built social media into his business from the very beginning.

"We launched 14 to 15 months ago, and Facebook was very much a part of that. In fact, I think we had Facebook before our website went live to build some interest," he said.

"We spend about 90 per cent of our time and efforts on Facebook. It's a far more dynamic channel for us to communicate with our client base.

"We probably get, I would say, anywhere up to a hundred hits from our 2000 member base (on Facebook).

"When we have new wine on the website, or maybe a wine has just won a trophy at a recent event, we probably get around a hundred hits directly to our website from that one post.

"When we're posting within our Facebook page, the conversion rates (into actual sales), depending on what we're talking about, would be anywhere from three to five per cent."

Mr Smith's business also has a Twitter account, but he says he mostly uses it as a way to engage with his industry, instead of his customers.

"Twitter, certainly with the wine industry, seems to be all within the industry itself," he said.

"It's great for communicating with other wineries, industry bodies, etc, but in terms of customers following us, its almost none.

"I'd say that less than ten per cent of the total people following us are customers."

Ms Fikh is only a recent Facebook adopter, having already found success through her 600 or so Twitter followers. With Facebook, though, she's not sure she'll last the distance.

"I don't know if I'll survive my three months, to be honest. Maybe I just haven't worked out the strategy," she said.

"Everyone goes on about the millions of people there, and that you should try to target them and try them out, but I personally haven't had success yet.

"Then again, it's only week two."

But both Ms Fikh and Mr Smith agree on the benefits that social media has brought to their business, thanks to low costs and the opportunity for real financial returns

"I will gladly put my hand up and say yes it does (translate into sales)," says Ms Fikh.

"Considering my occupation, I assure you I wouldn't be on it otherwise."

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