Social networking has become a primary marketing tactic for many online businesses both large and small. It’s essentially using social media sites like Facebook and Twitter to connect with and grow your audience.

Unlike some other marketing tactics, social networking gives you, a business owner, the ability to connect with customers and prospects on more personal level. It gives you the ability to build a community around your brand and to learn more about your target audience.

There are now more than 200 mainstream social networking sites. Each one appeals to a wide variety of ages, interests, and demographics. Chances are your ideal customers are present on one or more of these sites.

This report is designed to walk you through the steps required to make the most of this powerful marketing strategy.

**Step #1 Create Your Social Networking Plan**

Before you simply head over to the social networking site of the moment, spend some time deciding why you want to use this marketing tactic. What do you need it to do for you? What are your goals?

Grab a piece of paper or pull up a new document on your computer and answer the following questions. You can use your answers to these questions to keep you on track as you move through the remaining steps in this report.

- Who is your target audience?
- What relationships are you looking to find and build?
- What do you have to offer social networking connections?
- How are you going to represent yourself?
- How often are you going to post/participate?
- Will you create specific promotions and offers for your social networking audience?

**Step #2 Choose Your Social Networking Sites**

One key ingredient to social networking is choosing the right sites to participate in. Not all are worth your time and energy. And some may have value you previously hadn’t recognized or considered.

Though there are more than 200 mainstream social networking sites, when we hear the word
‘social networking’ we most often think of a handful of popular sites including:

- MySpace.com
- Facebook.com
- LinkedIn.com
- Pinterest
- Friendster.com
- Digg.com

But don’t forget some of the forums and memberships sites in your niche industry. For example, if you’re in the Online Marketing industry them participating on Warrior Forum may make the most sense.

**Comparing Social Media Sites**

Go back to your social networking plan and use your answers to guide you. Visit both mainstream social networking sites and lesser known industry sites and evaluate:

**Membership Statistics** - Each site posts their membership data. Use this data to make determine if the site is right for you. Who uses the site? What are their demographics? Also, how many members do they have? If this data isn’t available, you can browse the site for a few days to get a feel for who is on the site and what their interests are.

**Features** – Some social networking sites have a number of useful features. They allow you to upload video, audio and to create amazing business building pages. Others don’t. They simply allow you a signature. Compare features as they relate to your social networking goals and plan.

**Profile Page** - When you join a social networking website, it’s likely that part of your strategy will be to create a profile page. This page will tell your friends and followers what you’re about. Compare your options. Some sites allow you to really customize your page while others give you little more than a URL.

**Check Out Your Competition.** What social networking sites does your competition utilize? This can be very helpful when positioning yourself above them. And it can help you track their activities.

**Sign Up**

Once you’ve reviewed a number of social networking sites, you’ll probably find a handful that meet your needs. Sign up for the top one or two on your list. No more. Focus your energy and attention on these two, you can add more later. Signing up for more than two can leave you unfocused and overloaded.

Choose an appropriate username. Your username represents you and your business. Most often, people sign up with their given name depending on how they’re recognized in their industry. Signing up with your business name can be considered impersonal and contrary to the theme of ‘social’ networking. Consider it carefully before you use your business name as your username.
Step #3 Create Your Profile Page

Before you launch into creating your personal profile – take a few minutes to search the profiles of others including your competition. What do you like? What do people do well? What don’t you like? Consider what your audience will prefer and respond to. And go back to your goals. Try to maintain a consistent brand image and personality.

Profile Page Essentials

1. Your Name. This is particularly important if you are identified with your business. When people search for you, and they will, they need to be able to find you.

2. Your Business Website URL. This is second in importance to your name but only slightly. Half the purpose of networking is to drive traffic to your website.

3. Personal Information – This can include photos, videos and other relevant information. Use this space to connect with people. Talk about what you do and why.

Once you have your profile it’s time to start interacting!

Step #4 Interacting With Others: Do’s and Don’ts

Do Engage. Social networking is about connecting with others. Engage other members in conversation. Respond to their posts and encourage participation in your posts. Ask questions. Provide polls or surveys as they relate to your industry.

Do Build a Community. Link, find friends, and start building your following. It’s not enough to have a presence on a social networking site. You must connect and on most sites that means inviting friends to connect with you and following others. However connecting indiscriminately doesn’t build a business. Skip spammers and people who don’t fit into your desired target audience.

Do Connect with Industry Leaders. Find and connect with influential members on the site. Find people who match your target audience and have a large following and connect with them. When you connect with people who have a large following you almost immediately receive the benefit by attracting some of their followers.

Do Update Frequently. To build a community and make your social networking strategy work, you have to get involved. Create a plan to interact and stick to it.
If your time permits, update at least once a day. If you don’t have time to commit to updating daily, consider outsourcing your social networking. We’ll talk about social networking time management tools and resources in the next step.

**Do Behave Professionally.** Communicate with your audience as if they were customers because they are potential customers. They’re also potential partners and valuable resources. What impression do you want to leave them with?

**Don’t Market Tirelessly.** Yes, it’s okay to occasionally talk about how excited you are about a new product or service you’re offering. However, barraging your followers with promotional message after promotional message makes them drop you like a hot potato. Market strategically.

**Do add a “Follow Me” button on your website and other relevant marketing tools.** In order to grow your community, make sure to integrate your social networking tactics throughout your marketing strategy. For example, if you create a viral report, include a “follow me on…” link in the report to generate followers and build a connection with readers once they’ve finished with your report.

One of the best methods for driving traffic to your website is to simply link to new content. For example if you’ve uploaded a new article, report or blog posts, place the headline in your post or copy a teaser paragraph and then link to the new content. Use headline creation tactics in your post to generate curiosity and interest and motivate click throughs.

**Step #5 Managing Your Time Effectively**

Once you’ve been networking for some time you may notice that it takes way more time than you have available. One of the goals for any business owner is to focus on the tasks which produce the most profit and to delegate, automate, or outsource the rest. You may find that social networking is one of those tasks.

And of course one of the biggest mistakes people make when integrating social networking into their marketing strategy is spending way too much time on the sites and not focusing on productive and profitable tasks.

Let’s take a look at how to make the most of your social networking strategy and still have time left to have a life!

### #1 Schedule Time for Networking

Just like checking email, social networking can eat up a lot of time if you let it. To eliminate this and stay productive, schedule time for networking each day. For example, network for 30 minutes during lunch and then again after dinner in the evenings. Or schedule time each morning.
You can also outline at the beginning of your week what you plan to post about and when. This will help you stay on track and focused.

This leads us to #2:

#2 Use Technology To Streamline Social Networking

Technology offers a number of options to make social networking quick and easy. For example, if you’re using Twitter you can use services like HootSuite that allow you to schedule posts in advance. You can create your plan at the beginning of the week, implement it and half of your networking is done. All you have left is checking responses later in the day and commenting on posts that are interesting and relevant.

Other options include:

**Aggregators** – These are services that pull together your social networking sites into one page or reader. Some of the more popular ones include:

1. SocialURL
2. Tabber
3. Naymz

**Email** - Most social networking sites allow you to set preferences where you can be emailed each time someone posts. Often you can customize these preferences to fit your needs.

#3 Outsource Your Social Networking

Just like people outsource their blogging, you can also outsource your social networking. You can have a virtual assistant or a writer do everything from:

- Create posts for you
- Schedule and upload posts
- Follow, unfollow and invite people
- Create your profile
- Manage your communications

Choose this option wisely and make sure you’re getting your money’s worth. Sometimes it takes a while to see a benefit from social networking and it’s important to keep your budget in check while you grow your business.

With that in mind, we have one final bit of advice.
Test and Track Your Social Networking Efforts

Social networking is like any other marketing strategy. It’s important to have a goal, a plan and a system to measure and track.

For example, if your goal is to reach 500 followers within your first 10 days, then measuring your success is easy. However, if your goal is to increase traffic by 10% from your social networking efforts, then you’re going to need systems in place to test and track.

This can be accomplished by sending social networking friends to a specific webpage or by using Google Analytics to track your data.

Also test to find out what posts receive the most activity and click throughs. This will help you understand your audience a little better and hone your messages for the maximum effect and benefit.

Social networking has become too huge to ignore as a primary marketing tactic. Like other tactics in your strategy, however, it is important to have a plan, goals, and to test and track for success.

To your success!