

Key Ingredients to Successfully Promoting Your Brick and Mortar Store Online

by Courtney Rodgers

Connecting with shoppers online is essential to the success of your business - even when you don't sell online. Shoppers today are engrossed in the digital world. With the rapid growth of social networks and improvements to local search options, customers can access any information they want in a few simple clicks. That is, unless you aren't online.

Gone are the days of neglecting your online marketing or only being active on occasion because it was "nice to have." Your online presence is now a requirement that heavily influences the success of your business.

If you're feeling intimidated by getting started or overwhelmed with your current online marketing process, have no fear! You can have an effective, professional web presence in no time. Follow our helpful tips to make sure you spend your time online where it will make the most impact.

Make Sure Shoppers Can Find You

If you do nothing else, you need to make sure your shoppers can find you both online and in the real world. Search engines like Google, Yahoo and Bing are the first resource most people turn to when looking for local information. If your business isn't showing up in those results, you're missing out on opportunities to connect with new customers and you risk frustrating existing customers who are trying to find you.

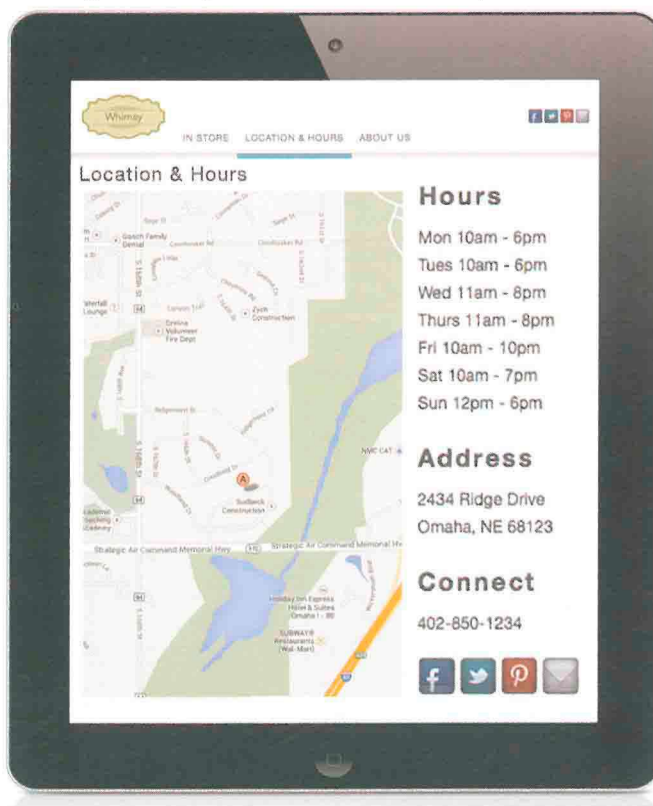
Your Website

Think of your store's website as your online home base. It's where you should be directing shoppers for more information and where they will end up if they find your store in search results. At a minimum, your website needs to tell shoppers where you are located, when you will be open and what you sell. (We'll elaborate on the "what you sell" part in the next section.) Include your full street address along with your store hours. It is important that this information

is accurate and up to date. You can make it even easier for shoppers to find your store by including a link to driving directions.

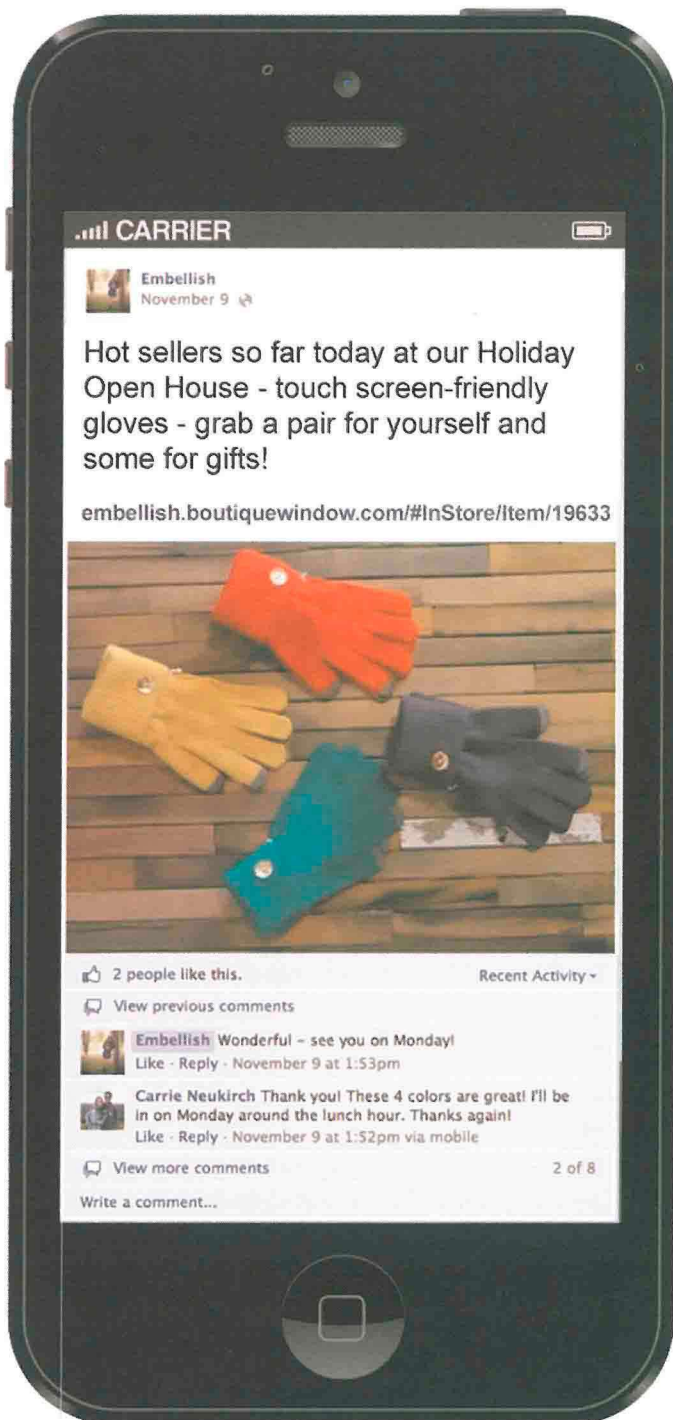
Local Listing Services

Chances are your business is already included on local listing services like Yelp, Google Places, and your local retail association website. Inaccurate information on these sites can confuse shoppers. Review your listing to ensure your location and hours of operation are accurate. Remember to update your store's information on these sites if you make a change in the future. These listings should also link your shoppers back to your store's website to give them a preview of the merchandise you have in store.



Social Networks

Social networks like Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest have become part of daily life for many people. These networks provide a great way to stay connected to your customers. It's important to make sure your store's profile pages are up to date with your current address, store hours and a link to your website, but the key to being found on these networks is sticking to a consistent and frequent posting schedule. The best way to connect with your shoppers is through posts that show up in their feed. Posts should include a mix of timely information about your store (such as new arrivals, featured items and in store events) along with helpful tips and expert advice (because shoppers trust your expertise and look to you for product information or style guidance). We recommend posting at least 3 times per week to stay top of mind with your customers.



Show Off What You Sell

Back in the day, customers would stroll down Main Street and gaze into store windows to browse and decide where to shop. Now customers are window shopping on the web. In fact, Forrester Research estimates that in 2014 50.5% of in-store retail sales will be influenced by online research. Showing off what is currently available in your store is the best way to attract new customers and turn existing customers into loyal, repeat shoppers.

Make a Lasting Impression

You only have a few seconds to grab the attention of shoppers online, so it's important to post content that will pack a punch! According to Wishpond, social media posts that include photos receive 120% more engagement than the average post. The most relevant visual content you can share is photos of your merchandise. When a potential new customer finds you online, they want to get a feel for your style and what you offer before planning a trip into your store. When a returning customer visits you online, they are looking to see what's currently available: they want to see new merchandise that has arrived since the last time they visited and if older styles have gone on sale. Bottom line, if you aren't showcasing your current merchandise online, you're missing out on sales.



Ecommerce Not Required

Showing off what you sell doesn't have to be a complicated process. Many retailers jump to the conclusion that they need a complex e-commerce site, but this isn't a great fit for all businesses (or all shoppers!). According to a recent study from Synqera, 67% of customers prefer to shop in store vs. online. Take time to think through your goals. If your primary focus is selling in store to local customers, then e-commerce likely won't be a great fit for your business. Think of your website as a "sneak peek" that entices customers to plan a shopping trip. Aim to upload a few photos of your merchandise each day with concise, relevant descriptions. Show off your newest merchandise that is the most likely to attract customers into the store.