

SelfInformed

Published by the National Association for the Self-Employed

April 2017

*NASE Member
Matthew Bernier*





Managing Social Media

About ten years ago, Facebook introduced business pages, providing companies of all sizes a cost-effective platform for promoting themselves, attracting new clients and delivering customer care.

Entrepreneurs flocked to set up Facebook pages, a communications channel opening them to previously unimaginable potential customers. Experts championed new platforms like Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram as leveling the marketing playing field for entrepreneurs.

But if you asked an entrepreneur today their opinions about social media, you might find their responses decidedly mixed.

“Ten years ago, entrepreneurs treated social media as an all-you-can-eat buffet. Ten years later, business owners understand the risk of over indulging, and know they need to dine selectively,” said Lorraine Ball, owner and marketing strategist at her own firm, RoundPeg, Indianapolis, IN.

“From the time I get up, to the time I go to sleep, between liking statuses, posting and reposting content, I probably spend two hours a day minimum managing my social media,” said sole proprietor Christin O’Brien, Haverhill, MA. O’Brien owns a SpiritBox franchise, selling monthly subscriptions for custom-packaged gift boxes for cheerleaders, dancers and gymnasts ages 6-22.

“My kids and my husband would probably say that’s higher,” O’Brien said.

Ball at RoundPeg says this is one of the greatest jeopardies small business owners face jumping into social media. Entrepreneurs must be careful about how much time it takes them away from managing their business offline.

WHICH PLATFORM IS BEST?

Entrepreneurs should be looking at their business strategically, and understanding which platform will give them the best opportunity to have a dialogue with their customers, without overwhelming the owner.

“If you’re a B-to-C company, it’s likely many of your customers are on Facebook—the network is just that huge,” said Rieva Lesonsky, CEO of GrowBiz Media, a content and consulting company specializing in small businesses and entrepreneurship. Previously, Lesonsky was Editorial Director at Entrepreneur Magazine. “Most B-to-B customers hang out on LinkedIn. That said, the best way

to find out what platform is best for you is to ask your customers where they spend their time. Your primary social outlet should be the one most of your customers use—for business.”

Lila Ermel Fox, a home-based travel agent based in New Orleans, is most active on Facebook because it helps her remain “front of mind in my social circles when my friends and clients think of travel. I get a lot of referrals from friends and friends of friends on Facebook resulting in anything from one hotel night to four- and five-figure trips. Those smaller bookings add up.”

Fox also finds that most of her clients on Facebook use the instant messenger function to communicate with her about travel bookings.

Scott Koepf, Senior Vice President of Sales at Avoya Travel, a Fort Lauderdale-based company that helps mainly solo entrepreneurs start and manage their own travel agencies, advises agents who join his network to follow Fox’s approach.

“You need to ask yourself, why are you on social media in the first place?” Koepf said. “The number one reason should be communicating to customers already in your network, to get them messaging to their friends and contacts, and endorsing your brand. By focusing on building a stronger community, you will generate new customers. Other people will reach out and say, ‘hey, my travel agent posted about Tahiti.’”

Koepf recommends Instagram and Facebook for Avoya agents because the platforms allow for lush photography, a major vacation motivator. For food retailers and coffee shops, Ball recommends Instagram for its ability to make followers salivate – with good photos of course. She recommends consultants and business service industries use LinkedIn principally.

Fox uses an Instagram handle to express her love for photography.

“I’m not seeing that I get many clients from Instagram. I love photography – whether posting photos from when I’m traveling or when I’m cooking in my kitchen at home – that’s the space that I share more creative imagery. I also find that these two platforms have different audiences so I ‘speak’ to each accordingly.”



FIVE TIPS FOR LEVERAGING SOCIAL MEDIA EFFECTIVELY



Set limits

"You can find yourself down a rabbit hole real quick with social media," said Fox, "so I set time limits for myself for checking my accounts throughout the day."



Use time-saving tools

"There are lots of great 3rd-party posting tools that can post to multiple social platforms at the same time," Lesonsky said, recommending Hootsuite, TweetDeck, Postcron and Buffer. "This way you can post the same message and see which platform/s give you the most engagement and concentrate your future efforts there."



Schedule your posts

Lesonsky recommends small business owners sit down and automate as many posts as they can in advance. For example, if your coffee shop is going to have Valentine's Day cupcakes, you can start planning those posts in January. "When you can find downtime, create a calendar (HubSpot has one), and schedule the software to post for you," she said.



Keep it professional

Said Lesonsky: "No cursing. No "shouting" No politics (especially today). If you have an unhappy customer, respond to them politely ASAP. Say you're sorry they're upset and try to take the discussion offline. Ask them if you can you give them a call to try to solve the problem? The idea is to get the negative discussion off a social platform as quickly as you can."



Don't post if you can't respond in a timely fashion

"I've learned over time that I won't post something if I don't have the time to respond," said O'Brien. "If I was going to offer a new box, or a contest, I have learned not to swing from the hip. You need to have the time and logistics behind a post to fulfill it. These kids look forward to my doing fun and new things."

Koepf also sees some travel agents on Pinterest.

For her SpiritBox franchise, O'Brien uses Facebook to target moms, and Instagram to reach cheerleaders, gymnasts and dancers.

"Instagram has a wonderful community of dancers and athletes, and they like to be ambassadors of brands they use," she said. O'Brien looks for active Instagram "cheerlebrities," posters with upwards of 800-900 followers. She will offer them a free box and do a photo shoot with them to get them to post about her company. "I can grab 400-500 followers on my Instagram account by finding the right ambassador," she said. Currently, her SpiritBox franchise generates about 20 inbound sales queries a day from Instagram.

"I fulfill more than 500 boxes a month. It's very exciting, because I am doing this mostly from my phone, while I am at a cheer competition," O'Brien said.

TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE

While social media can drive sales, small business owners need to be careful not to overwhelm themselves with the seemingly 24/7, "respond in 60-minutes" nature of the communities they create, owners and experts say.

"You do not need to be everywhere," Ball at RoundPeg said. "To manage your time and your resources, it is fine to step back from platforms that don't work for you. A great example of this was when Copyblogger, a prominent blogging and social media consulting firm, deleted their Facebook page. They did this even though they had 30,000 followers because they were having significantly better results elsewhere. You will be more successful if you do a great job in one place rather than a mediocre job everywhere."

"I used to have a Twitter account and a blog in addition to Facebook and Instagram," Fox said. "It got to be time-consuming to manage all four myself, in addition to operating a demanding travel agency. So I took a step back and evaluated which social media platforms had the most traction and which I enjoyed the most."



Only 23% of the respondents to the RoundPeg survey spend more than an hour a day managing social media, most likely, Ball said, because 63% of business owners create their own social media content and simply don't have the time to do more. In fact, 44% of entrepreneurs now use staff to create content, the RoundPeg survey reports, versus 33% when Ball first launched her survey.

Dawn Pease, President, Dawn's Sign Tech, North Andover, MA, has three employees, other than herself. When a staff member completes a job at a site, they capture digital photos and e-mail them to Pease, who forwards them to an agency that works for her on a monthly retainer. The agency posts the pictures on her Facebook and Twitter account.

HANDLING COMPLAINTS

Like most small business owners, Pease has to be careful about her online reputation because 75% of her business comes from repeat customers, and they follow her online. She monitors her reputation via a Yelp page, which costs her \$200 a month, though she finds she has increasingly less use for the expense.

Maureen Campaiola, Nottingham, MA, offers debt and personal finance consulting through her website, www.adebtfreemessfreelife.com, and manages both a blog, as well as Pinterest and Facebook pages.

She said she has seen an uptick in people making negative contents on Pinterest. "You

post something, and some people will start slamming you," Campaiola said. "You thought they liked your page because they like you, but eventually you start to see some followers' true colors.

Campaiola now manages a private Facebook group for followers, to better control the online dialogue.

"You can't be on Facebook all day waiting to see negative comments. In the private Facebook group, members will message me privately, that something is going on at my public page. I've had to ban people, blocking them."

If you do find a customer complaining on your social media platform, acknowledge them as soon as you see their post, Ball said. "Tell them, 'Let's talk.' You don't have to admit you were wrong, simply invite the customer for a more detailed conversation off line. And when the issue is resolved, ask the customer to post a new comment about how you solved the issue."

"I had a customer being unreasonable on my Facebook page, and they posted that I had "terrible customer service," O'Brien said. "They posted a complaint in the morning, and I didn't notice it and respond until two in the afternoon. I gave them a refund instead of having them impact me on social media. She still posted I had the worst customer service. Even though I have ten other really positive reviews, that one, one-star review bothers me."

Ask the Expert

Q: *I heard that I don't have to file my tax return by April 18 so that I have more time to get the money together. How does that work?*

A: The information that you heard is part correct and part incorrect. Individual taxpayers can certainly request more time to file their tax return and, in fact, the approval for the extension is automatic. Simply complete **IRS Form 4868**, Application for Automatic Extension of Time to File U.S. Individual Income Tax Return and mail to the IRS by April 18th, 2017. The extension will provide an extra six months to complete the forms and file your final income tax return.

Keep in mind that the extension provide by Form 4868 is an extension of TIME to file the return and NOT and extension of required payments. If you will owe money with your return, you are still required to pay the amount due by April 18th. If you are unable to do so, then you will incur penalties and interest based on the number of days that the payment is late. So if you indeed expect to owe money to the IRS on April 18th, take a few minutes to try and

estimate what that amount might be. Your first thought may be, "If I had time to do an estimate, I would just go ahead and finish the return!" That may be true, but the estimate only needs to be close. Use last year's tax return as a guide and then make adjustments based on the things you know will be different. You don't have to send the calculation or the method of your calculation to the IRS, just make a good guess and then send the amount of money that you think you will owe with the extension and you will be all set.

If you are making a payment with the extension then you can also consider using the IRS Electronic Federal Tax Payment System or EFTPS to make the payment. You can indicate that



24/7 business expertise.
Help yourself.

Get free answers online from our experts for every business question.

Find an expert now >

nase

the payment is for the extension and the payment itself satisfies the filing requirement and you don't need to actually mail the Form 4868. You can access the EFTPS system directly from the home page at www.irs.gov. The most important part, whether you include a payment or not, is to make sure the extension is completed on time.



As always, don't forget that you are not alone. Bookmark our website at NASE.org as well as the IRS website at IRS.gov and you will always be able to find the help you need.



Member Benefits

Visit www.NASE.org to learn more about the following benefits!

SMALL BUSINESS GROWTH GRANTS

Sponsored by



QuickBooks Self-Employed is supporting small business growth by sponsoring the March and April, 2017 NASE Growth Grants.

[Press Release](#)

Apply for a business development grant from the NASE worth up to \$4,000! Designed to help address a specific business need.

[Apply Now!](#)

You could receive up to **\$4,000** for your small business through the NASE Growth Grants program. The NASE has already awarded more than **\$600,000** to NASE Members just like you.

Grants can be used for marketing, advertising, hiring employees, expanding facilities and other specific business needs. You could be the next grant recipient. To be eligible for an NASE grant, you must:

- ✓ Be an NASE Member in good standing.
- ✓ Demonstrate a business need that could be fulfilled by the grant.
- ✓ Provide a detailed explanation of how you will use the grant proceeds.
- ✓ Show how the grant will improve your business growth and success.
- ✓ Offer supporting documentation such as a résumé and business plan.

Growth Grants are awarded at the sole discretion of the NASE. Unfortunately, not everyone who applies will receive a grant. Decisions of the selection committee are final and are not subject to appeal. No application feedback will be given. [Click Here](#) for recent grant recipients.

Tax season is officially underway. Make this your most organized tax year yet by using QuickBooks SelfEmployed + TurboTax – and get back to focusing your energy where it matters most: Building your business. [Click Here](#) to get started!

New!



24/7 business expertise.
Help yourself.

Get free answers online from our experts for every business question.

[Find an expert now >](#)



Expert Advice 24/7

Get answers, advice, and tips from our team of professional experts. Ask a question online 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



Hire Your Kid and reduce your taxable income by \$6,000!

Creating a job for your child can be a rewarding experience for both you and the child. A job can promote maturity, understanding, a sense of pride and self-worth. However, creating this new job will do one thing for sure, and that is save you thousands of dollars in taxes.

Member Spotlight



Capturing Self-Employment

*Matthew Bernier is the owner of **Flashbulb Memories Photo Booth** located in Tucson, Arizona. Matthew started his business after taking pictures at a holiday party in a photo booth and enjoying the experience. From that, he did some research and ended up creating a company to be a premium photo booth option for those who wanted professional results without the eyesore of a typical photo booth or photographer setup.*

The best part about starting my business is that I am a part of creating thousands of smiles and knowing that we are making the world a happier place.

When and why did you join the NASE?

I joined the NASE in early 2016 and thought it was a good idea, considering they are one of the largest organizations for small business/self-employed that I could find. Any way I could get additional resources to help me succeed with my business and continue learning was something I felt obligated to do.

When and why did you start your business?

I started my company, Flashbulb Memories Photo Booth, at the beginning of 2015. I've always been an entrepreneur at heart and starting a company at some point just seemed natural. Even as a kid, I would constantly come up with new ideas and ways for making

money on my own (fixing game stations, selling candy, and removing computer viruses, to name a few). While I didn't originally plan to start a photo booth business, I had so much fun taking pictures in one during a holiday party, that I decided I wanted one for myself! Since then, I've enjoyed servicing many parties and events and creating smiles all over Southern Arizona, allowing my company to quickly become one of the most notable photo booth companies in the region. The best part about starting my business is that I am a part of creating thousands of smiles and knowing that we are making the world a happier place.

What challenges have you faced in your business?

One primary challenge was entering a semi-saturated market where every other company was selling their services as a commodity, and not something to be valued. Instead of selling an experience, which is what my company provides, they would sell an hourly rate to take pictures and print photos, many times with subpar equipment. Having no prior reviews and no reputation as a photo booth company, I offered many of my services for free/cheap in order to gain a "resume" of experience, so to speak. This helped me to ultimately grow my network and become one of the most reputable and highly recommended companies in Southern Arizona. It also let me justify my prices with photo proof of what kind of experience my company provides.



How do you market your business?

The primary way in which I market my business is by going after organic searches on the internet. While many will not see this as marketing, per se, it is indeed one of the highest sources of leads we have. The way I do this is by optimizing my website as much as possible by including relevant (and updated) content, blog postings, and local references, as well as back links across the web. Due to the nature of this business, past event photos and reviews are our top priorities, as it helps us build trust with potential clients without having to meet everyone in person. In addition to this, another huge source of leads for us comes from referral marketing; i.e. a guest or past client tells someone they personally know about how much fun they had and how great our company was at their event. To capitalize on this further, we pay a referral fee to the person who recommended a new client, when they book with us. Many times however, people simply feel an obligation to tell people about their experience, whether or not they have a monetary incentive to do so; this is why our focus is on ensuring everyone's experience with us is unforgettable.

Do you have any employees?

Yes, currently I have one employee who works part time to help as a photo booth assistant. I plan within the next 4 months to hire 4 more part time employees who will be able to eventually run the photo booths without my assistance.

What's your schedule like, what's a typical day for you?

At the current time I am also employed full time, although I will be switching gears to being full time self-employed in a couple months. Since my work weeks are occupied at my corporate job, I spend my nights and usually half my weekends working on my business. Typically this consists of answering emails on upcoming bookings, designing templates, reading about new technology applicable to my business, testing and troubleshooting all sorts of problems, running the booth during events, and networking with other business owners and industry professionals.

What's the best thing about being self-employed?

Honestly, the best thing about being self-employed is that I can create the future I desire. While working for a company full-time, I was forced to work 40 hours a week, regardless of how much work I had to do, or how productive I was being. There was no real incentive to come to work (in my mind), knowing that I could never accelerate my position or pay, strictly on my performance. Through owning my business, I also own my future. If I want to take on more work, I can choose to do so, or I can choose to take a break and spend time with loved ones. Right now, I am ready to accelerate my business performance and plan to expand my photo booth to local cities around me. This means a lot more hard work will be needed up front, but I know what the payoff will be, and in the end, I know it'll be worth it.





What's the best compliment you've ever received from a client?

This is hard, since so many of our clients give amazing compliments! If I had to pick one, I would say the best compliment we received was when one of our clients basically told us, that we were the best photo booth company she had ever used, and she was so glad she paid a little more, as it was beyond her expectations.

What's the most important piece of advice you would give to someone starting their own business?

Do your research! There are many things that I overlooked when starting my business due to simply not having extensive knowledge of my industry and some legal requirements in general. This led me to spend a lot of unnecessary money and also hindered my growth. Having looked back, I would have enrolled the help of an accountant, and would have talked to others in my industry to get their advice and learn from them prior to diving in head first.



Want to be Featured in Upcoming Issues?

Log onto NASE.org and fill out the **Get Publicity** form. Don't miss this unique opportunity to showcase your business and get noticed by your fellow NASE members.



Learn More in the NASE Member Directory

Learn more about other Self-Employed businesses in the **NASE Member Directory**. You can add your own company to the NASE Member Directory at no charge – it is a free benefit to NASE members.



THE DUST SETTLES

On Thursday, March 23, Republican Leadership pulled the *American Health Care Act (AHCA)* from being considered by the House of Representatives, citing that they did not have the support of the Republican Caucus, specifically, the influential Freedom Caucus who continued to withhold their support even after numerous concessions had been granted.

The bill faced significant challenges and received no support from Democratic lawmakers. The Congressional Budget Office announced the bill would reduce the deficit by \$337 billion over the next 10 years due to the changes the bill made to health insurance subsidies and Medicaid support provided to States. Under the ACA, individuals and families can secure a health care subsidy to help pay for the costs of their insurance, however, under the AHCA that would transition from a subsidy to a tax credit that would

encourage the purchase of health insurance. The ACA expanded Medicaid eligibility and provided significant grants and dollars to States that elected to expand their state Medicaid program, the AHCA would phase out this support and change eligibility requirements. These changes would put significant budgetary pressure on States who had accepted the expansion.

This bill had a lot of challenges and if it had passed the House would have faced significant rewrite in the

Senate and potentially would have never been able to clear the House in its rewritten form. That being said, millions of Americans and 28 million self-employed that look to secure health insurance via the exchanges face continued market instability and increasing premium prices, known of which were addressed in the AHCA.

The NASE continues to pro-actively and thoughtfully work towards putting forth solutions that not only ensure a robust health insurance marketplace, but allows for our members to choose the plan that best suits their lives. There are several key initiatives we are currently championing, including: stabilizing the health insurance marketplace so that consumers have options, improve access to health insurance, and in general, ensure that we continue to reform our health insurance market so that all Americans have access to great health care.