

SelfInformed

Published by the National Association for the Self-Employed

March 2020



Member Spotlight

**Sharon
T. Hinton**

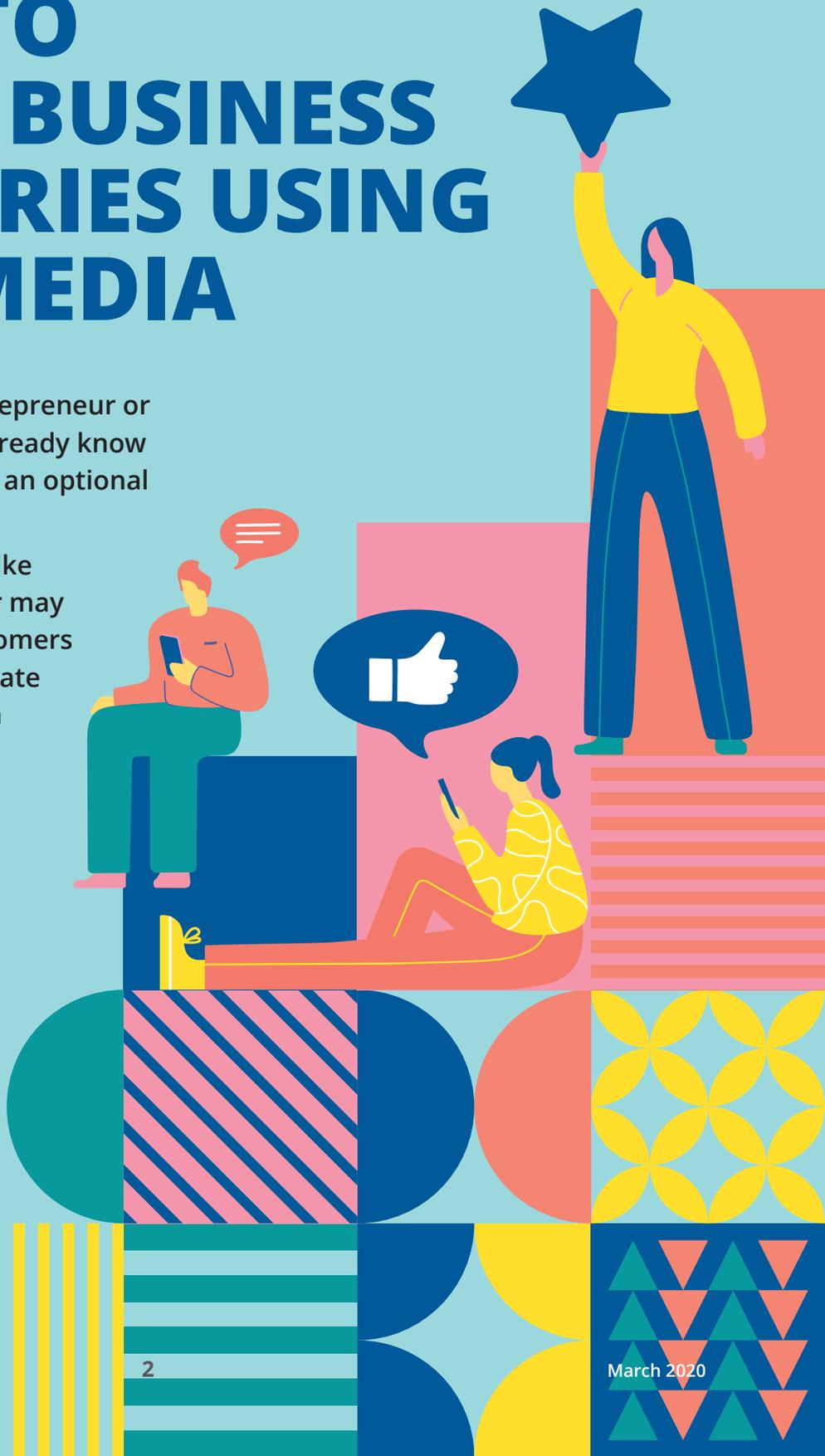
PepTalk Productions, LLC

8 WAYS TO STRETCH BUSINESS BOUNDARIES USING SOCIAL MEDIA

As a small business owner, entrepreneur or solo freelancer, you probably already know that in 2020, social media is not an optional part of your online footprint.

In fact, social media platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter may be the first place potential customers find you — even before they locate your business website. How can you maximize these valuable pieces of digital real estate to reach new customers and grow your brand?

In this article, NASE will share ways to stretch your business boundaries using social media.





1. Enhance SEO with social media

It almost goes without saying: businesses with an online presence look more legitimate and trustworthy to potential customers. Like the Yellow Pages of yesterday, today Google is the place most people turn to find a business, service provider, or expert — making where you turn up in search result rankings one of the most important factors in whether they choose you.

Search Engine Optimization is your leg up in a crowded field. Search rankings can be improved by SEO techniques that utilize keywords people are looking for and local references to place you both literally and figuratively “on the map.”

What’s often overlooked in the SEO efforts of small businesses is that social media accounts can give search rankings a big “organic” boost. In fact, Twitter or Facebook profiles can show up as high as a company’s website in Google search results.

Social media is a free way to distribute your content more broadly and increase the number of links back to your website, **one factor that Google may use to determine organic search result rankings.**

The most important way to **increase SEO-boosting backlinks** to your website is to create content that is share-worthy, both on social media and beyond it.

Beyond Google, it’s worth considering social media platforms as their own search engines

when it comes to customer searches. Companies that categorize their business pages properly in Facebook and use precise hashtags on Instagram and Twitter are more likely to be found by users interested in their services.

2. Make real connections

Social media provides businesses unparalleled and often unfiltered access to customers. It’s more than a chance to tell the world what you can do. It’s also a chance to hear what the world needs.

Listen to your social media followers — learn what they want. Pay attention to your feed and see what followers are thinking about, especially problems they might have.

Sometimes you’ll hear complaints about your own business, or suggestions for improving it. This can be stressful, but it’s really an opportunity to show you are responsive to your customers. According to Twitter, **77 percent of Twitter users feel more positive about a brand** when a company they contact on the platform responds to them.

Connect with customers. Engage with your audience and tag others. The more connections you can make out there beyond your business account pages, the more “social proof” you have of being a company that genuinely listens and responds to customers.



Your strongest brand voice are your customers. Encourage them to tell your stories, acknowledge and highlight them on your business page, and you've not only boosted your content — you've strengthened your relationship to your ultimate company advocates.

By sharing content from your customers, you're likely to receive shares from those followers who want to show their own network that they've been featured somewhere else.

Connect with employees. Beyond your customers, there's another vital segment of social media users who can amplify your message and serve as advocates: Your employees. If you have employees active on social media, talk to them about helping extend your company's content with shares and original posts.

Tap into influencers. One of the surest ways to broaden your reach is to engage with what *AdWeek* calls "**micro influencers**" — those who have 10,000

followers or fewer — who tend to have a higher rate of engagement than influencers with huge audiences. Because these users are more active in responding to their followers, they are more trusted.

3. Calm down on the marketing ploys

This might seem counterintuitive, but try to let go of some of the hyper marketing tactics aimed at building engagement.

Facebook has demoted business content it deems "**engagement bait**" for including language that it considers spammy. Posts that include calls to action like "Share if you're happy it's spring!" are probably going to hurt you more than they help.

According to Facebook, this kind of content is an attempt to "take advantage of our News Feed algorithm by boosting engagement in order to get greater reach."

Instead, the name of the game is "**authenticity.**" That might mean posting updates that include no links, and no call-to-action.

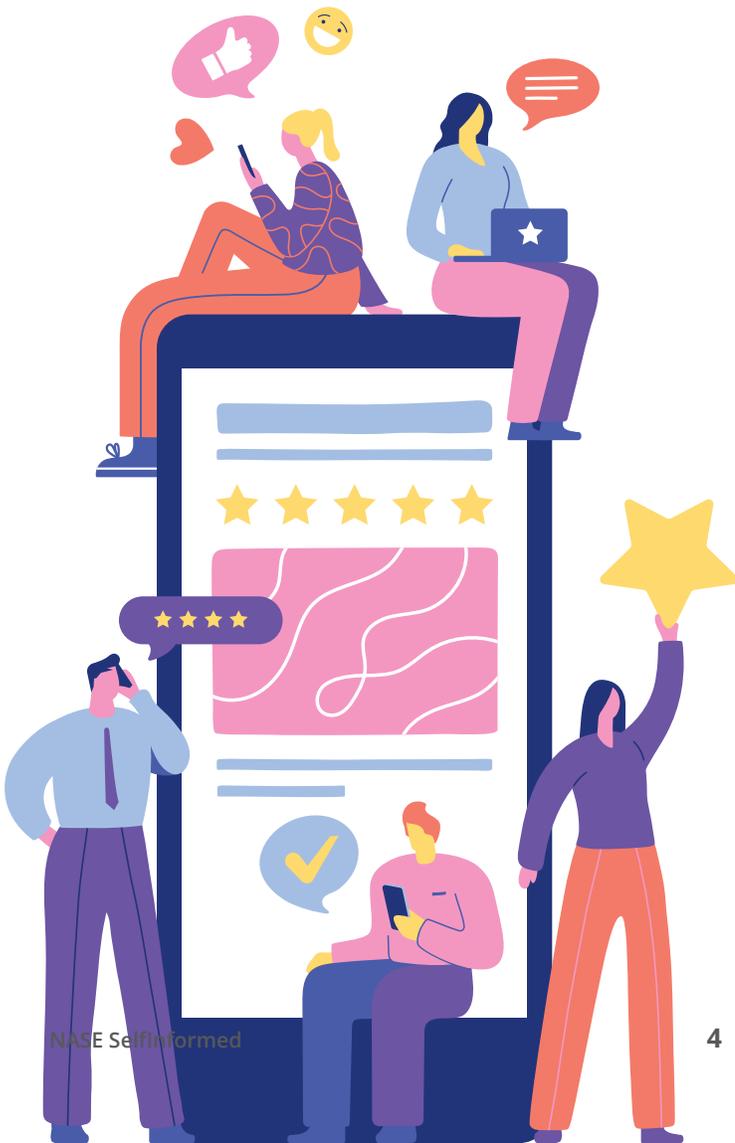
Twitter is a hungry beast, and to succeed on the platform requires playing the long game. It also requires regular posts, optimally at least three per day.

Schedule tweets ahead of time with **Hootsuite** or **Tweetdeck**. Participate in trending hashtags, join chats or initiate your own — and share your Twitter account everywhere else you are marketing.

Tweets can run the gamut from brand-specific posts to retweets of influencer content and generally interesting reads, eye-catching images, and questions crafted to engage. The majority of posts should be non-salesy, and they should reveal a little personality.

In the US, the **median Twitter user** is followed by 25 accounts and tweets only twice a month. A business that focuses on building a following will easily outstrip those numbers and raise its profile on the platform.

"Micro influencers" ... tend to have a higher rate of engagement than influencers with huge audiences.





4. Social storytelling

People expect more from your social media accounts than self-promotion or sales. Tell stories on your social media that highlight your customers. You may not even have a call-to-action in every post.

Instead, focus on creating interesting content that draws people in, wins them over, with authentic storytelling.

Stuck on what to say? Your starting point is fundamentally the same as your inspiration for starting a business in the first place: the problem your business solves in the lives of your customers.

Good stories address the challenges of your customers and how your business helped overcome them. Your customers are the main characters, not you — that's the main difference between storytelling marketing and traditional advertising.

These types of posts not only are more likely to be viewed as meaningful content by your followers, they are more likely to be favored by social media platform algorithms over link-heavy promotional posts.

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5. Repurpose content

It takes time to create good content — it shouldn't be a one-off effort.

Everything you write for your business page, especially if you maintain a blog, ought to be done with an eye toward repurposing it across platforms.

Remember, social media means *regular content*. On Twitter, you'll be posting multiple times per day, because a single post can get lost in the noise. Generating a continuous stream of content can feel like a daunting task.

The solution is “evergreen” content, material that can be used again and again over months and even years, and repurposed in different forms:

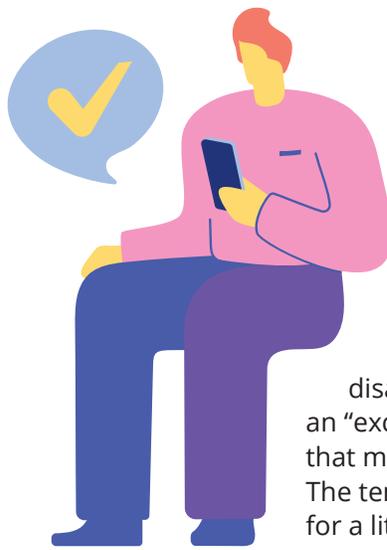
If you've written an article, pull a few key quotes or data points out and spin them out as graphics to share. Free image creation tools like [Canva.com](#) can help you generate graphics in the perfect dimensions for each social media platform.

Or, write a listicle (an article comprised of a list) and then spin each point out as a separate post across social media accounts. From an article comprising 1,000 words, it's possible to generate *dozens* of different kinds of social media posts.

6. Go live

Live video has high engagement on social media. Why? It's simple: People love the idea that you're right there, ready to really connect. Live video is easy and popular on Facebook and Instagram. It's also encouraged by the platforms and will show up higher in your followers newsfeeds.

Facebook reports that their algorithm privileges live posts with higher placement in followers' news feeds because they “generate conversation between people.” Live videos, Facebook notes, “often lead to discussion among viewers on Facebook — in fact, live videos on average get six times as many interactions as regular videos.”



On Instagram, use of the “Stories” option has exploded to nearly 400 million people posting live updates daily. The Stories feature is a temporary post that disappears after 24 hours — lending an “exclusive,” must-see character to posts that make them attractive for followers. The temporary nature of Stories also allow for a little more creativity and latitude in your content.

Sprout Social suggests live content is a perfect format for “**step-by-step, how-to style content**” that provides a captivating alternative to traditional blog posts or formal video presentations.

Far from being “big, polished productions,” followers enjoy live videos because they show another, more intimate side of a business. This off-the-cuff style is refreshing in a world saturated with marketing content.

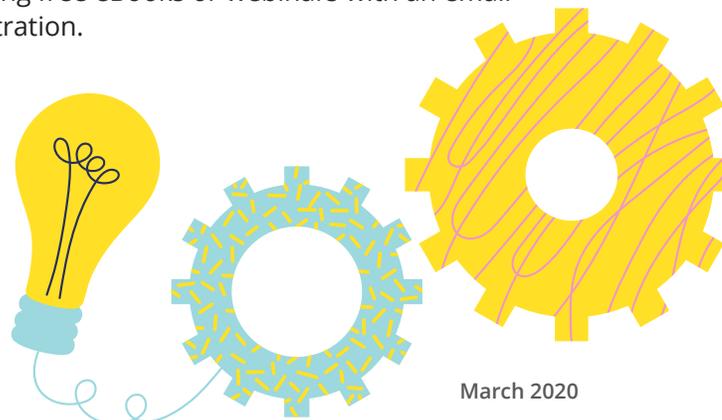
7. Offer premium content

Like the temporary live content, special offers to loyal followers can help deepen your ties to regular customers and generate excitement that draws in new ones.

Contests and prizes: One way to attract visitors to your social media is to run contests that require a name and email to enter. Depending on your business, you might offer free meals, consultations, or tickets to an event.

There are **several easy-to-implement apps** for creating contests on Facebook with proven results for business pages. **Heyo**, **Wishpond**, and **Shortstack** all offer free introductory trials and accessible user interfaces.

Provide valuable information: Other ways to boost engagement with your page can include offering free eBooks or webinars with an email registration.



Offer discounts: You can also offer special discount codes to regular followers of your pages, and encourage them to share links to sign up for the offers.

Share expertise: Be generous with what you know. People will look to you for expertise if you demonstrate your acumen.

8. Don't underestimate LinkedIn

One vital social media platform that can get lost in the mix of online marketing is LinkedIn. For small businesses and contractors, however, this professional networking platform can be one of the most important ways of connecting with important influencers and gaining business insights.

Update regularly. There are multiple ways to raise your LinkedIn profile, but the surest way to start gaining traction is simply to update your status by sharing interesting and relevant content. Commenting on posts will likewise put you on the radars of other professionals.

Publishing articles on LinkedIn will show you know your stuff and increase your credibility. More people, including members who are not in your network, will see your content, share your work, and want to connect with you. The platform makes it easy to **publish articles from your homepage**.

Engage with others. It's not spam to send invites seeking to connect with other professionals — that's the point of the platform. Your requests should be short, personalized, and explain why you would like to network. If you've worked with a connection, don't hesitate to endorse them for their skills. It often results in their reciprocation on your own profile.

Hone your profile. Your contact information should be prominent on your LinkedIn profile — and your LinkedIn account should be connected to your other social media profiles. It should also be included on your website about page and business cards.

The purpose of providing expert insights is not to give away your trade secrets for free, of course; it's to give potential customers and those who might prove to be valuable for referrals enough of your wisdom to know you're the real deal.

Social media stretches business boundaries with organic connections, authentic engagement, and building the credibility of your brand. It takes time and commitment, but some of the most effective social media business tactics are also free.

In the past decade, many companies have drastically reduced their advertising budget by cutting back on billboards, mailed advertisements, television and radio ads. Others have worked their digital marketing into the full advertising suite, making it one more powerful outreach tool in their business toolbox.

What can building your social media presence do for you?



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Producing Self-Employment

Sharon T. Hinton is the Founder and President of PepTalk Productions, LLC located in Memphis, Tennessee. PepTalk Productions began in 2000 and provides presentations, courses, and other resources for personal and professional development to nurses, chaplains and anyone interested in spiritual care.

When and why did you join the NASE?

I joined in NASE two years ago to have a resource for information, education and a connection to others who are self-employed.

What inspired you to enter the field you are in?

I enjoy encouraging and mentoring others to grow personally and professionally. By supporting those who provide direct care, such as nurses and chaplains, not only do I enjoy helping them to be healthier but in return they also provide better care to those they serve. The ripple effect of my work is inspiring and satisfying.



When and why did you start your business?

When I closed my nonprofit, I kept PepTalk Productions as an LLC in order to have a framework to continue speaking and creating the courses and resources to encourage others.

How do you market your business?

Currently my marketing consists of word-of-mouth from family, friends and past associates as well as my website.

What challenges have you faced in your business?

As an LLC, the challenges include finances and a physical location. I have overcome these by using a home office and teaching at locations with low cost rental fees. It was also difficult to move to a new state after 25 years. I found it was very important to learn the rules and regulations for the new state as they are different from where I lived before.

Do you have any employees?

Currently I am the only employee. I do use scholars and interns for specific projects when needed. In the future, I would like to expand to have multiple full-time employees as my business grows and expands.

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

My schedule depends on whether I'm speaking or teaching. Often this includes travel. When I am preparing for and providing a presentation or course, I may work 10 – 12 hours a day. During slow times I may work for 3 – 4 hours a day. I try to keep Friday's as a writing and planning day.

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

The best part about being self-employed is that I love the freedom to set my own schedule, especially time off for holidays and special days with my family.



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

The greatest compliment I received was, "You have changed my entire life, thank you!"

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

The best advice I would give is, Know what you want, plan out your dream, and then work hard to achieve it.

Which NASE member benefit is most important to you?

I find the information and resources available from NASE.org to be very valuable.



Supporting America's Self-Employed Through Coronavirus Impact

As our members face the growing uncertainty of the economic impact of the Coronavirus, we wanted to share the growing list of resources that are being made available to support you during this challenging time. Please note that the NASE remains a strong and supportive partner to you as we all navigate these choppy waters, remember to leverage our [Ask the Expert](#) resource and continue to subscribe to our social media channels for the most up to date information, you can find us on Facebook and Instagram. Through this all, we will continue to advocate for the self-employed as legislation is being considered and regulatory action is taken.

Please visit
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resource
page here

We will continue to provide timely updates on proposed legislation making its way through Congress and the additional activities the Small Business Administration is considering as the full weight of the federal government turns to supporting businesses and their employees.

As a strong community of resilient, innovative and proud entrepreneurs, we will work to provide timely resources to you and information that will help you in this time of uncertainty. ■

Katie Vlietstra is NASE's Vice President for Government Relations and Public Affairs; You can contact her at kvlietstra@nase.org.