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ViralBuzzAds- Social Media Marketing & Instant Commissions

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Introduction: Surveying the Field

"Social media" is defined by Wikipedia as "*media for social interaction, using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques.*" In laymen's terms, social media helps people connect online. In popular usage, the term "social media" typically refers to social networking and sharing sites, including the following:

- Blogs
- Forums
- Image/Photo-Sharing Sites
- Video-Sharing Sites
- Twitter
- MySpace
- Facebook
- LinkedIn

It has become the battle cry of the new Internet revolution that businesses MUST be involved in social media to succeed online. It is sometimes difficult to keep up with new social media outlets popping up all over the place. It is a real challenge for many online entrepreneurs to know where to invest their time and how to leverage social media effectively. Many frazzled business owners are asking themselves and others the following questions:

- What social media outlets are best for my niche?
- How much time do I need to spend online to be successful?
- I'm so busy working IN my business – how am I going to Tweet, blog, and spend hours on LinkedIn too?
- Do people really care whether or not I am on Facebook?

Managing your social media efforts can seem frustrating and overwhelming at first glance. But fortunately, you don't have to invest hours and hours posting tweets about what you ate for breakfast, or uploading videos of your cat to YouTube. In fact, I would recommend you skip those things.

A better idea is to approach social media with a plan, and focus on providing and sharing useful information while also interacting with your fans, friends, and followers. If you do that, social media can be an effective and even fun part of your marketing mix. And reap you some nice benefits along the way.

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In this guide, I'll show you how to create a strategy that will maximize your efforts and minimize the time you need to invest. It won't take hours a day either. In fact, if you approach social media marketing with the right goals, tools, and strategies, you won't have to spend more than 30 to 60 minutes a day in order to reap great benefits. Ready? Let's get started!

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Choosing Your Battles

If you were to advertise your business, you wouldn't start by creating a list of newspapers, Yellow Pages, and magazines, and immediately sign up to place ads in each and every one of them. No, you would set a budget and do an assessment of prospective advertising venues in order to determine which would be most effective in reaching your target market. For instance, if your ideal customer is a Spanish-speaking, 60-year-old male, you wouldn't expect great results from placing a full-page ad in a magazine for new moms.

Even though you can join most social media outlets free of charge, your involvement will cost you something that might be even more valuable than a modest sum of money: your time. As a result, you need to plan where to invest your social media "budget" much like you would plan on spending your advertising budget.

So don't go crazy and join 20 different social media sites just because they're there. Instead, start with just three or possibly four carefully selected sites. You'll get more bang for your buck if you focus on a handful of outlets and actually use them properly and consistently. Attempting to make a splash on many outlets at once without the proper follow-through will not serve you nearly as well. So before you create 45 profiles on everything from LinkedIn to Tumblr, ask yourself the following questions:

- Where are my customers?
- Do I prefer to share text, audio, video, or images?
- How much time do I have to invest in social media?
- What are my goals: Connecting with existing customers, reaching new prospects, or establishing relationships with potential partners?
- Am I ready to make a long-term commitment to social media?

The answers to these questions will help drive your choice of where to spend your time. If you're into arts, enjoy taking photographs, and many of your customers are already on Flickr, then Flickr is a natural place to establish yourself. But if you are an accountant who wants to reach new customers, Flickr might not make much sense.

Balance your natural preferences with logical choices about where you can best reach your desired audience. Yes, you want exposure to the people you need to "meet," but you also want to pick sites that are appealing and

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fun for you. If you hate video, don't commit to YouTube! Instead, select something that you enjoy doing.

Remember, there are millions and millions of people online, and hundreds of social media sites to choose from. You're sure to find a good match (or three!) between your target market and individual preferences. In the next sections, we will discuss many of the top social media sites and how to approach each one with a strategy that will let you create an effective presence in just 15 minutes a day.

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Facebook

With over 600 million active users who spend more than 700 billion minutes *per month* online, Facebook is a natural first stop for marketers looking to reach an online audience. The biggest benefits of Facebook include:

- Reach (Nearly everyone is there!)
- Ease of use (If my dad can figure it out, anyone can)
- Ability to add numerous media, including audio, images, and video to your page
- Ability to email entire groups of fans at a time

If you decide to go the Facebook route, your first step is to create a "Like" page for your business. This is basically a profile for your business. Until recently, these pages used to be called "Fan" pages. Personal profiles limit the number of people you can be friends with, while "Like" pages do not. Also, "Like" pages enable you to create an RSS feed and build custom applications. There are a number of tutorials online with step-by-step instructions for creating a "Like" page.

Here are two good ones:

- <http://www.squidoo.com/facebookpage>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igLDVCywlls>.

However, if that's overwhelming, I recommend you outsource this. You should be able to find someone affordable who can set this up for you.

[The online marketplace to buy or sell digital and internet skills.](#)

There are lots of people jumping on the Facebook bandwagon who want to make a name for themselves as social media experts.

Once you have created your Facebook "Like" page, your daily 15-minute to-do list includes the following:

1. Update your status. Be sure to make it relevant to your audience. Skip the "breakfast" posts unless you're a chef! (1 minute)
2. Add new blog posts, videos, photos, etc. to your wall. Many other social media sites like Twitter as well as your blog can be set up to add these updates automatically to your wall. (2 minutes)

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3. Review comments on your wall and respond to them. (4 minutes)
4. Review your news feed and spend a few minutes commenting on posts and updates from your contacts. (4 minutes)
5. Respond to invitations and messages in your inbox. (2 minutes)
6. Locate new people to invite to your "Like" page by checking out the friends of current page fans (2 minutes)

This timeframe may seem ambitious, but it is completely doable! You may also need a very fast internet connection to pull it off. Depending on how many messages and posts you actually get, and how quickly you want to add new friends, you might choose to be a bit more flexible.

Still, the idea is to focus on the most important activities and stop when you're done. Sure, you could easily spend the whole day puttering around on Facebook, but your goal is to set a time limit and use it to the max. If you have extra time, you can go back and play Farmville or challenge a friend to a game of Text Twist. Or you could decide to add more friends or get more involved in a conversation. In the meantime, though, get in, get out, and get customers! Easy, right?

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Twitter

Twitter may seem like a relatively new player on the social media front, but the site is actually five years old, having debuted in 2006. Now, Twitter has over 100 million registered users who are sending out a combined 55 million-plus tweets a day. Many people still see Twitter as a waste of time – but didn't they think the same thing about the Internet, 15 or so years ago?

If you're looking for a quick, concise way to reach a wide audience, Twitter may be your answer. Twitter's strength lies in its openness and its numbers. Of course, those are its drawbacks, too. It's so easy to connect with people on Twitter that it isn't much of a commitment – at first, at least.

As a business owner, you should observe what the “average” user does – and then do the opposite! For instance:

- The average user has fewer than 100 contacts. Business owners aim to increase their reach.
- The average user's tweet is “chatty.” Business owners strive to provide value.
- The average user hasn't tweeted in the past week. Business owners want to stay active.

If you are ready to commit to Twitter, one of the best things you can do is to enlist the help of one of the numerous third-party Twitter applications:

- [Hootsuite](#)
- [Tweetdeck](#)
- [Seesmic](#).

These services allow you to track conversations according to numerous keywords, post on different profiles, and create tweets to post at a later time or date.

Here's what you want to do in your 15 minutes a day:

- Post an update. As with Facebook, make your updates applicable to your audience. Provide a link to your latest blog post or an interesting factoid related to your market. (1 minute)

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- Check out your new followers. If they look like appropriate contacts (i.e., not spammers), follow them back. (2 minutes)
- Respond to DMs, i.e., direct messages, and "@" messages. The latter are tweets aimed directly at you, but posted publicly. (2 minutes)
- Check your keywords and hashtags. Through the services suggested above, you can track keywords in your niche. Read what people are talking about and asking about; answer questions where you can, and join in conversations where appropriate. (5 minutes)
- Read your feed and see what people are talking about. Some of your followers will be chatting about your area of specialty; others won't. Spend a minute or two joining a few conversations, even if it's about last night's Red Sox/Yankees game. (2 minutes)
- Retweet useful information. Did someone tweet a useful tool or a great blog post you think your market will love? Retweet it! You'll generate good karma while providing great content for your followers. (2 minutes)
- Create a few updates to post to Twitter at a later date. Make it look like you're on Twitter more than you are by creating a tweet or two and scheduling it to post later. (1 minute)

The key to Twitter success is brevity and consistency. Users' feeds scroll by so quickly that if you're not in the stream consistently, you're going to fade into the woodwork. Yet if you're out there with useful information frequently, you'll build a loyal following.

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LinkedIn

LinkedIn may not be as flashy as Facebook or as trendy as Tumblr, but for most people with a business, it's definitely a must in the social media world. With a solid user base of over 75 million people, LinkedIn is popular among high-level business people; according to the LinkedIn PR page, executives from each of the nation's Fortune 500 companies belong to the site. LinkedIn focuses more on professional activities and accomplishments, and less on cute games and applications. So if your target market trends a bit to the older, corporate side, LinkedIn may be the place for you.

The first thing to do on LinkedIn is to create a profile that highlights your professional expertise and experience. Currently, businesses cannot create profiles online, so your profile will represent you as an individual. Then you'll link up with friends and colleagues. The site makes that easy by showing you users who have attended the same school or worked for the same companies. Once you've requested to be made a contact and your request is approved, you'll be able to see your contacts' contacts, making it a virtual game of six degrees of separation.

One of the best aspects of LinkedIn is the ability to request an introduction to someone who is not in your immediate network but is a contact of one of your own contacts. If you're looking to partner with a specific person, you can ask to be introduced through a mutual contact, thereby smoothing the way. Another great resource is the large number of "groups," for everything from sales and marketing professionals to White House staff members. These groups allow you to follow conversations, suggest topics of interest, and find additional contacts. For small business owners trying to gain visibility, these groups can be invaluable.

Once you've created your LinkedIn profile, search the groups directory for appropriate groups to join. You can currently join up to 50 groups, but be judicious; just as with social media in general, you're better off joining just a few groups that you can really participate in, rather than joining dozens you can barely remember you're part of. Once you've identified your groups, here's your daily to-do:

- Post an update to your profile. While profile updates are less critical on LinkedIn as on other sites, they still demonstrate that you're using the site and are updating regularly. (1 minute)

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- Respond to invitations to connect. You can arrange for these requests to be sent directly to your email in-box, too. (1 minute)
- Add additional contacts. Each time you approve a request to connect, you'll automatically be shown other people you may know. Spend a few minutes looking for potential new contacts and requesting to add them to your network. (3 minutes)
- Read current updates in your groups, and respond to questions and conversations. (4 minutes)
- Post new threads in your groups with related topics and points of interest. (3 minutes)
- Request introductions. Spend a minute asking for introductions to anyone you may want to "meet." (1 minute)
- Write a recommendation. LinkedIn allows you to write and receive recommendations from your contacts. Writing one creates good karma, and increases the likelihood someone will write one for you in turn. (2 minutes)

LinkedIn is a much more serious site than most other social media outlets. While you can still express your personality, realize – and respect – that most people are there for professional networking purposes, not to share their latest exploits at the foosball table. As long as you stick with the vibe, your updates and posts will be welcomed and appreciated.

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MySpace

Once strictly the purview of bands and teenyboppers, MySpace has proven to be a worthy outlet for truly social networking. Founded in 2003, MySpace is frequented by over 25% of US Internet users. In comparison, Facebook is estimated to reach twice that.

In recent years, MySpace has taken a beating as users migrated to greener – and “cooler” – pastures such as Twitter and Facebook. Many professionals – particularly the staid, Wall Street types – wouldn't be caught dead there, seeing it as a spot for the tattooed and pierced crowd. But if you're in a field that appeals to the younger Internet user, or if you're in the arts or non-profit field, you may find spending time on MySpace a worthwhile investment.

MySpace works much like the other social media sites: You create a profile, “friend” people, and personalize your “space” with a blog, video, audio, and more. As such, you're going to approach your daily “to-do” list with the same basics that you already know from the other sites:

- Update your blog. Remember, your goal is to impress your contacts with your expertise and information. Choose what to post based on one simple criteria: Will this be of interest to my audience? If not, skip it. (1 minute)
- Respond to friend requests. Go through your requests for contact, and approve them. (2 minutes)
- Seek out additional contacts. You can search by category, school, and email address. It's important to keep expanding your circle because each new contact puts you in touch with their contacts, too. (4 minutes)
- Search forums and groups for additional contacts. Spend a few minutes exploring the existing forums and groups on MySpace, looking for ones that complement your niche. Join in the conversation where appropriate. (4 minutes)
- Add to your profile. Many people use their MySpace profiles for more personal information, but I recommend keeping the boundaries between work and business strict. Focus on keeping things professional – after all, you want people to give you money, right? Instead of adding photos from frat party blow-outs, add inspirational quotes, areas of expertise, photos from professional events, etc. (2 minutes)

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- Write on your friends' profiles. Go through your friends list and add comments to establish stronger relationships. Comment on photos, answer questions, etc. (2 minutes)

It can be tough to maintain a businesslike demeanor online when everyone else seems to be chatting about who's hooking up with whom, and what they think of the latest episode of *Jersey Shore*. While you can relax a bit if the environment calls for it, remember that what happens online rarely stays online. Expect that whatever you post on MySpace will be available for widespread public consumption... and quite possibly for years to come. If you're okay with that, you're staying on the right side of that fine line that separates the personal from the professional.

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Your Blog

Many “professional” bloggers would like you to believe that blogging requires nothing short of an advanced degree and a full-time commitment to creating words worthy of being chiseled in stone on the side of the New York Public Library. That's just not the case. In fact, one of the biggest mistakes online businesspeople make is seeing blogging as some secret skill that they couldn't possibly learn. The truth is that if you can hold a conversation with a neighbor or coworker, then you can blog.

The benefits of blogging are many, and have been covered extensively in a variety of other forms. But the bottom line is that blogging is one of the most effective ways to showcase your expertise, connect with potential customers and partners, and establish your on-line persona.

You'll be able to find plenty of books and videos covering the basics of setting up a blog. But what I would like to cover right now is how to blog in 15 minutes a day.

Once your blog is set up, your energy will be spent on two main aspects – adding content and promoting your site. Because both of these topics are critical to the success of your blog, I recommend alternating between them; one day, add a new post or other content to your blog. The next day, spend your 15 minutes promoting your blog. Here's how you can create valuable content in 15 minutes:

- Create a list post: the top five mistakes people make in your industry, the top five bloggers to follow in your niche, or the top five books for newcomers to your industry.
- Add a video. Go on YouTube, search for videos in your area of specialty, and pick one to embed in your own blog. Add a few sentences of commentary.
- Record an audio. Hook up your microphone and record a short monologue on a topic that moves you, makes you angry, or makes you laugh. Better yet, use an app on your smartphone and record on the go to save even more time.
- Upload a photo – one of your own, or one you find on a photo-sharing site. Again, make it applicable to your market, and add a few lines of commentary.
- Write a short review of a book, product, or service in your market. Share pros and cons.

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- Ask someone in your industry a few questions by email and post the interview.
- Answer questions you receive from readers.
- Create a "round up" of posts or resources online that your readers may be interested in.
- Use Private Label Rights. Private Label Rights content, also known as PLR content, is content you can purchase and publish as your own. Check out EasyPLR.com for more information.

Once you've got some great content, the next step is to promote it. On your days off from writing or posting content, use the following to-do list for promoting your blog:

- Link to some of your most popular posts on Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, LinkedIn, or your other social media sites. There are services and plug-ins that will do this for you automatically. (3 minutes)
- Respond to comments from readers. You can do this on your blog, in the comments section, or directly by email. (4 minutes)
- Create internal links on your blog posts from one link to another. For instance, if you write a post on a great recipe, link to other posts you've written on the same topic. (3 minutes)
- Make a few changes to your blog post and submit it to an article directory (5 minutes)

As with other social media forms, the most important thing to keep in mind is to make your content useful to your audience. You are much better off creating great, useful content twice a week, than throwing up garbage several times a day. Post great stuff, tell people about it, and they will come.

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Other People's Blogs

Commenting on other people's blogs is one of the most overlooked social media strategies, which makes it a great opportunity for you. Not only is there little competition, but it's actually a highly effective way to increase your visibility. By posting on other people's blogs, you'll be able to leverage the other bloggers' success and audience quickly and efficiently.

Before you start posting, though, you need to plan your strategy. Create a list of 10-20 top blogs in your niche that are vibrant and have a strong readership. It won't do you a lot of good to create a passionate, compelling persona on a blog that only a few people are reading, so it's okay to be picky here. You're looking for a site that is a social hub in your industry.

You could approach this task with a variety of goals in mind. For example, you might want to create a relationship with the blogger or with others in your niche. Your goal might be to establish yourself as an expert. Then again, maybe you just want to create backlinks to give your own blog or website a boost in the eyes of Google. Either way, you'll accomplish your goals by reading posts, making insightful, helpful comments, and building on the conversations already taking place.

Each day, spend 15 minutes visiting some of the blogs on your list and reading the day's posts. Then make comments where appropriate, and provide links back to your own website or blog. Here are some guidelines to make your efforts most effective:

- Be a gracious guest. First and foremost, keep in mind that you are a guest on someone else's blog. That means you need to be supportive, polite, and kind. You can disagree with what the other blogger has said, but do so in a polite manner. Don't hijack the conversation or steer every post back to you.
- Be thoughtful. No one is going to pay much attention to comments that just say, "Great post! Thanks!" In fact, those kinds of posts are generally considered comment spam and are unlikely to be approved. Instead, respond to the post specifically and provide additional insights or context on the topic. Steer people to places online for additional resources. Sometimes those might be on your blog or website, but sometimes they will be on someone else's site.

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If you look too self-promotional, don't be surprised if your posts are deleted.

- Stay on track. Imagine this scenario: You and a friend are at Starbucks, sitting and sipping your lattes, chatting about the best place to buy a digital camera. If someone at the next table suddenly pulled up a chair and said, "I sell ink cartridges – wanna see?" you'd likely roll your eyes and move as far from him as possible. But imagine he said instead, "I'm sorry to interrupt; I overheard what you were saying and I just saw that Joe's Cameras is having a half-off sale on all digital cameras next week. I got mine there and the customer service was awesome!" You'd probably buy the guy a pound of coffee to thank him. See the difference? One comment is about HIM; the other one is about YOU. Keep the comments focused on the conversation already in progress and you'll be a welcome guest.

Commenting on other people's blogs won't make you rich or an overnight success, but it's a great way to build relationships with the movers and shakers – and the customers – in your industry. And those are the types of relationships that last... and can help you grow your business.

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Forums

Forums, or message boards, are sites that provide a place for people interested in specific topics to exchange ideas, ask and answer questions, and meet each other. They were probably the original social media sites that were around long before blogs, Twitter, and Facebook ever came along.

The challenge with forums is not to find them, but to choose the right ones. With hundreds of thousands of forums online, on topics from architecture to zoology, there will be at least a few in your niche, no matter how esoteric your interests. But how do you decide which forums to join? You want forums that are big enough, but not too big, and active enough, but not so active that your every post is buried immediately among hundreds of others.

If you've picked an industry you're passionate about and already knowledgeable in, you likely already know at least one or two of the leading forums. Start there, and ask others where else they like to hang out. You'll soon get more choices than you know what to do with, but resist the temptation to join them all. After all, you want to manage your forum participation in only 15 minutes a day, and that means staying focused. One or two active forums, or a handful of quieter ones, will be plenty. Each day, set aside 15 minutes to do the following:

- Check to see what topics are trending. This is valuable information for future blog posts, products, and content you can generate on your own site. (3 minutes)
- Answer any personal messages or comments made directly to you. (3 minutes)
- Post answers to questions people have posed, provided you have useful information. (5 minutes)
- Send a few private messages to deepen relationships with other forum members. (2 minutes)
- Start a new topic. Ask a question you're interested in ("What's the biggest challenge facing you about X?" or "What are your favorite resources for Y?"). This can be great content for future blog posts or products. (2 minutes)

Participating in forums is an excellent way to gather information, not just a way to connect with others. Where else can you ask potential customers

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exactly what their concerns and questions are? Make the most of your access!

And here's another perk of forums: Most of them will allow you to add a custom signature to your posts. Make the most of that valuable piece of real estate by offering a free gift that would be of interest to your fellow forum members. You'll find that you'll lure a lot of them to your website or blog where they might sign up for your newsletter... and join your "list."

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Image-Sharing Sites

It's been said that a picture is worth a thousand words. If that's the case, then the millions of images and photographs posted on image-sharing sites are worth billions. Try some of these out and see which one is the right fit for you.

Flickr.com
Photobucket.com
ImageShack.com
SmugMug.com
Picasa.com

Far from being “just” a site to swap photos of your dogs and your vacations, Flickr and its cohorts are places to connect with others who share some of your deepest passions. If you are in a visual field like the arts, graphic or web design, landscaping, hairstyling, photography, makeup, or the like, you need to be visible. And image-sharing sites provide a fantastic opportunity to strut your stuff.

Creating a compelling profile is an essential first step. You need to make sure people have a way to get in touch with you after you've grabbed their attention. Your profile should include a link to your website or blog, and a description of your products or services.

After you've created your profile, you can find and connect with contacts and groups, just as you can on other social media sites. Here's what you can do to use image-sharing sites to connect with your target audience in 15 minutes a day:

- Upload new images to your site. Choose your best stuff – assume each image might be the only one a new contact would see. Make sure it properly conveys your brand and personality. (2 minutes)
- Tag images. Descriptive tags on your images will make them easier to find. Think of how someone would search for images like yours, and use those words and phrases in your tags. (3 minutes)
- Write descriptions for your images. Use vivid words, and make sure to link them to your website or blog. (3 minutes)
- Locate new groups to join. Search for groups by keyword, and sign up. Some groups may make you wait for approval. Once again, choose carefully; a few active groups can keep you quite busy. Once

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you've joined, make sure to add your images to your new groups. (4 minutes)

- Comment on images from your contacts and fellow group members. (3 minutes)

When connecting on image-sharing sites – and any other social media sites, for that matter – focus on quality over quantity. Share your best images, and others will be drawn to you.

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Video-Sharing Sites

With over 2 billion views per day, YouTube – the best-known video-sharing site – is a must-visit on every marketer's list. Add in the other video-sharing sites like Vimeo, Viddler, and Blip.tv, and the number of potential viewers you can reach is astronomical. Video is also a terrific relationship-builder. A good video can really boost the trust factor as a customer or partner “meets” you face-to-face. So if you have any on-camera abilities, video marketing is a must.

Most video-sharing sites work like other social networking sites. You create a profile, “friend” contacts, and leave comments on their videos. Make sure your user profile includes a way for people to get in contact with you. Include a link to your website or blog, and add a compelling description of your business. As with image-sharing sites, the quality of your videos is crucial. For best results, focus on creating one or two high-quality videos instead of a bunch of mediocre ones.

Here's how to spend your 15 minutes most effectively:

- Record a short (1-2 minute) video on a topic of interest. This could be an abbreviated how-to, an overview of something on your blog, or just a top-of-mind “vlog”-type entry. Don't worry about creating a broadcast-quality video; be natural and relaxed, and focus on conveying something of value to your viewers. (5 minutes)
- Upload the video to your photo-sharing site. Note: There are some services like TubeMogul.com and TrafficGeyser.com that will distribute your videos automatically to a number of different video-sharing sites. Consider using them for greater impact. (3 minutes)
- Create a powerful title and description, along with appropriate keywords or tags. Make sure to include your main website or blog in the description. (3 minutes)
- Connect with other users in your industry. Search by keywords in your niche and establish a relationship with fellow video creators. Leave comments, “friend” them, and “like” their videos. (4 minutes)

Using this method, you could easily create a short video each day. Over the course of a month, that will allow you to have more than two dozen powerful pieces of video out there, earning you new viewers, new partners, and new customers.

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Conclusion

Using social media can be overwhelming – but it doesn't have to be. Take a look through all the varieties of sites available, and choose the three or four that best fit your goals, market, and personality. Spending just an hour a day promoting yourself online through social networking can have powerful results, but you have to be consistent, both in your image and your efforts.

Think of each tweet, each blog post, and each uploaded image as a brick in the wall that will become your brand. It won't happen overnight, but it can – and will – happen soon enough if you are diligent and professional in your strategy.

I hope this guide has shown you how you can develop your own social media marketing strategy. And if you thought it would swallow up all your time, you now can see how you can easily fit social media into your schedule. If you consistently invest an hour a day, I bet you'll be amazed at the results.

Thank you for reading!

To Your Social Media Marketing Success!

[The ViralBuzzAdsTeam](#)