Textbook

SOCIAL SELLING

Discover How to Sell on Social Platforms Directly

NAMS

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What Is Social Selling?

As online shopping becomes increasingly popular, retail brands are looking at ways they can better connect with their audiences and improve the buying experience – and social media is the clear winning strategy.

A recent report from Accenture predicts that social commerce is going to shoot up three times faster than traditional e-commerce, from around $492 billion (worldwide) in 2021 to around $1.2 trillion by 2025.

Social commerce sales in America are expected to reach $45.74 billion in 2022 alone!

But what exactly is social selling (also known as social commerce) and why is it becoming so popular?

And more importantly, how can your company jump on the bandwagon and leverage the power of social commerce?

Social commerce is when your shopping experience occurs directly within a social media platform, or when you click a link in your social media platform and are directed to the retailer's product page for an immediate purchase.

Here are some examples of successful social commerce campaigns:

- Domino's Pizza accepting orders with automated Facebook Messenger flow,
- Mac Cosmetics' shoppable AR Lense on Snapchat,
- Gap using Instagram Guides for curated shopping lists,
- Nike using Product Pins on Pinterest,

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- Best Buy's Canada's Shop Tab on Facebook.

Between 2020 and 2021, according to Statista, "social media users increased from 223 million to 295 million in the U.S.—a figure equivalent to three quarters of the population." The upward trend is predicted to continue, also.

So, it should come as no surprise how profitable social commerce can be, and how it could help you grow or expand your business.

Social commerce lowers friction in your customer's journey and lets you engage with them on the social media platforms where they're already spending a lot of their time.

With machine learning and artificial intelligence, your business can obtain real-time information on customer behavior and turn that into practical insights you can put into action to increase your bottom line.

Online shopping has been changing with more and more people using their smartphones and spending hours a day on social media.

Today, these platforms already give customers most, if not all, the information they are looking for to research, compare, and eventually choose which products they'd like to purchase, or what brands they wish to follow.

And because they no longer have to leave a platform to further research, they can browse and compare prices on their favorite social media platform, then make the purchase on that same platform instead of having to navigate to the company's website.

Here are five basic types of social commerce you can try:

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- Marketplace sales (peer-to-peer), as in Facebook marketplace, eBay, Craigslist, etc.
- Native social media shopping, as in Facebook and Instagram Shops.
- Curated shopping lists on Pinterest.
- Live shopping events, as on Facebook Live.
- Shoppable AR filters, as in shoppable lenses on Snapchat.

If you make it easy for your audience to purchase without leaving their favorite platform, you'll reduce your risk of abandoned carts.

In other words, maximum conversion rates!

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Social Commerce Marketing Strategies

Of course, no single strategy is going to work for every brand out there. A social shopping experience for leisure wear is going to differ greatly from a campaign for electronics.

However, as Insider Intelligence states, “all brands can utilize influencers, consumer calls to action, and user generated content, to successfully compete in the social commerce market.”

You’ve probably seen social commerce calls to action yourself. “Swipe to purchase” or “Store link in comments” have become common on social media platforms, both urging you to buy the items or services you see advertised in your newsfeed.

Social commerce is all about simplifying the buying process and providing an improved shopping experience.

User-generated content has also become more important for businesses, with hashtag challenges and TikTok videos on the rise.

“This viewer-friendly content,” says Insider Intelligence, “combined with an appropriate call to action, has been a boon for advertisers and marketers alike.”

You could create your own company hashtag challenge, for example, or offer a reward for any customer who posts a video showing them using your product.

Here are some strategies you can use in your business to improve your social commerce marketing campaigns:

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Know Your Customers:

Your marketing campaign's success will hinge on your ability to understand shoppers' behaviors and adjust your company strategies to create the best shopping experience for your customers no matter where they are.

This means investing time in getting to know your target audience and then creating a social commerce campaign on the platforms they frequent most often.

Invest in the Right Channels:

The better you know your customers, the better you'll be able to aim at the correct channels to best utilize your marketing resources.

The social platform that serves your business best will vary depending on what you're selling.

For example, clothing sells particularly well on platforms like Instagram, while gadgets and other tech-based products would likely sell better on Facebook or twitter.

Keep on Optimizing:

As new social platforms emerge and your customers' behaviors evolve, so must your social commerce strategies.

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Just because one channel has been working well doesn't mean it will continue to do so years from now. Today's business owner has more consumer data at their fingertips than ever before, but it's often a challenge to make sense of everything so you can stay one step ahead of the competition.

A good analytics platform or tool can help you efficiently utilize the information, so you're better positioned. You can check your social media analytics to see where most engagement is coming from, or you could also simply survey your audience.

Create Seamless and Shorter Paths to Purchase:

When it comes to online shopping, convenience is key.

Social Media Today says, "Brands that can craft an end-to-end purchase process, with as few frictionless steps as possible—across all key channels—will be the ones who most effectively connect with and convert browsers into consumers."

This means you'll need "a seamless, omni-channel social commerce approach" which is backed by your customer information and insights.

This can include things like shoppable social feeds, leveraging social checkout features, creating e-commerce, and integrating their online and in-store experiences.

Leverage Social Checkout Features:

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Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat have started testing checkout features that let your company seamlessly sell your products directly from your posts without ever making your customers leave their favorite platform.

Pinterest and some other platforms are also offering you the ability to add product tags to your posts, which would streamline the pathway to a purchase.

Showcase Shoppable Content and On-Site Social Proof:

"Incorporating visual and actionable social proof into your e-commerce approach," says *Social Media Today*, "is also a proven way to boost online engagement, as well as sales."

They've found that website visitors are six times more likely to buy a product if your page includes pictures from social media.

You can create an interactive catalog of social content—then add a "Buy Now" call to action to each item, which will take future customers directly to your purchase pages.

Leverage User-Generated Content and Influencers:

User-generated content is anything created by your potential customers: images, videos, reviews, etc.

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This promotes steady growth and sales as others see this user-generated content as being authentic and trustworthy.

In other words, knowing that other customers have purchased before them and are happy with their purchase is a huge incentive and will help to maximize sales quickly.

In fact, it can be up to ten times more influential in convincing a prospect to complete a purchase!

You'll want to find, engage, and motivate your genuine supporters to "build more loyal and engaged communities, while delivering authentic content experiences that drive real retail results," says Social Media Today.

Create Authentic Experiences Through the Buyer's Journey:

"Most marketers who leverage user-generated content (UGC) and influencer content," says Social Media Today, "tend to do so only on organic social, yet this compelling social proof can also be effective at creating authentic experiences across every point in the buyer's journey."

So long as you get permission from the creators of that content, the images, videos, etc. can be used in all your campaigns and across your channels.

Add UGC to social, digital, and print ads, and use it in promotional and community emails.

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UGC can also be featured as social proof on your website and mobile apps, used on your e-commerce pages, and even in your in-store signage or live event screens. UGC is a valuable resource for any company.

Get Your Customers Involved:

User-Generated content marketing is usually more reactive (finding, rights-managing, curating, and publishing content after it's already been posted by the consumers).

On the other hand, organic influencer campaigns use a more proactive approach.

Inviting advocates to join an organic influencer community allows you to get specific and creative about what sorts of content you'd like them to create about your products or services—and according to Social Media Today, studies show they'll be excited to participate.

So, create a hashtag challenge, begin a social competition, give out rewards points, or even host an event for your fans.

But whatever marketing campaign you launch, be certain what you're asking your community to do is specific and clear, and that the terms for participation are laid out in advance.

Embrace Chatbots:

Chatbots have become part of the core of many companies' marketing campaigns. With a chatbot, you can engage, inform, and promote your products or services to your potential customers.

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Facebook's Messenger chatbots, especially, have become quite popular with retail, giving your company direct, one-to-one, "always on" interactions with potential customers.

Facebook Messenger chatbots also give you a new way to obtain both qualitative and quantitative customer information.

Just remember that direct messaging can become annoying and invasive, so use it judiciously. If not, you could create an irreparable breach of your customer's trust.

Personalize as Much as You Can:

Customers expect personalized experiences from the brands they love. They want to feel rewarded for their loyalty, to feel special and recognized.

Thankfully, personalization throughout the shopping process is quite easy. You can serve up product suggestions based on past purchases, or personalize your customers' experiences based on past social actions.

According to *Social Media Today*, almost half of retailers using social commerce say it "helps them to personalize customer experiences, based on behavioral signals and the increased visibility of their product listings."

Social Media Today says personalized recommendations have gotten nearly fifty percent of shoppers to buy products they didn't initially intend to purchase.

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You'll need to connect behavioral indicators like previous searches, browsing history and frequency, past purchases, etc. to your recommendation engines, retargeting ads, and email campaigns.

This way, you'll be able to provide timely, relevant content that can help move a shopper from hesitancy to certainty—and a purchase.

Social commerce has had a significant impact on the retail industry already, and it's a huge opportunity for your company if you can put a winning strategy together.

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Choosing the Right Platform

You're not going to be able to have a presence everywhere. Trying to spread yourself too thin across *every* social media channel is a recipe for disaster.

Instead, focus on the platforms that your customers use and engage with the most.

Let's look at some of the top social media platforms where social commerce is growing:

Pinterest Product Pins:

Pinterest is "a content-sharing service" which lets its members post or pin images, videos, photos, etc. to their "pin boards," which can then be shared and browsed by other members and casual users.

This site has a predominantly female audience. It's perfect if your business uses visual imagery as a main selling point.

For example, if you're selling wedding planning, interior decorating, fashion, travel, foods, or anything else you can sell with a stunning photo or video, you should be using Pinterest.

You can comment on someone's board, share images, like what you see, pin it to another board, and even click onto the websites from which the image originally came.

Each of your boards is linked to your profile page so people can see you, your business, and your brand when they're browsing through your images.

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They don't offer on-site shopping (yet), however you can create "Product Pins" which will be displayed in your brands Pinterest Shop.

Product pins provide space for price and availability details and redirect to product landing pages.

Product pins are expected to account for more than 15% of all US social buyers by 2023!

Twitter Shop Module:

The Twitter Shop Module launched in 2021 and allows you to showcase your products at the top of Twitter business profiles.

Users can then scroll through a carousel of products on a brand's profile page, tap on the individual products that interest them to learn more.

They can then purchase directly, without having to ever leave the platform.

Instagram Shoppable Posts:

Instagram is an image-driven platform, now owned by Facebook. In 2019, they launched Instagram Checkout, streamlining the way companies allow direct purchases on the platform.

In 2020, Instagram took this idea even further by adding a shop tab icon at the bottom of their homepage. This lets users click on the icon to instantly view and buy products advertised by companies, influencers, or celebrities they may follow.

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For this platform, you want vivid images that will entice the users to buy. You do need to have products for this site, not services.

Instagram Shoppable Posts lets their users buy your products or services from anywhere in the app, but you do need to have a Facebook Shop set up first (see below), since they're owned by Facebook.

The Instagram Shop will be pulling information from that catalog. You can make "a customizable storefront page that acts as a curated collection of products for sale."

Each of your products will get its own detail page, with pricing, a detailed description, and its own media.

"Shopping Tags" let you tag your products in your Stories or posts, and American brands also have the option to highlight their products in post captions and bios.

Facebook Shops & Facebook Live Shopping:

Facebook is one of the best-known and powerful social media platforms out there.

If you just consider its massive size, it's great for almost any business because so many people are using it.

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Facebook Shops are hosted within your Facebook business profile and are fully customizable. You can choose which collections or goods to feature. You can also customize colors, fonts, and images, import your existing catalog, or create one from scratch.

There are a ton of great features such as inventory syncing or uploading tools that make it easy for you to keep your shop up to date while using Facebook Messenger to communicate directly with your target audience.

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Streamlining the Customer Experience

"One of the biggest advantages of online shopping," says Entrepreneur, "is the sheer convenience of the process."

However, for this to work for your company, you'll need to remove any barriers between your company and your customers and create a seamless shopping experience for them.

Here are a few ways to do that:

- Creating clear calls-to-action and directly linking to product pages will help. Each unnecessary click leads to lost sales, and the checkout process is especially crucial.

  A confusing checkout process means an abandoned shopping cart. The easier you can make this process for the customer, the better you'll do.

- In addition, to create a truly successful social commerce campaign, you'll want to add real-life social media images or user-generated content.

  These are not only more relatable but are more authentic and therefore likely to encourage purchases from other customers.

  TikTok is one platform that has built a reputation for terrific user-generated content that can easily go viral.

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- You'll also want to focus on ways to integrate personalization into your social commerce strategy. Digital marketing has made personalization not only possible, but something people have come to expect from their shopping experiences.

Social commerce not only speeds up the transaction process, it also gives you a great way to collect feedback on your users and your products.

You can get clear information about exactly who your customers are, and you can have a chance to chat with them via comments or direct messaging, to provide personalized customer service.

Hootsuite suggests getting your audience to vote and weigh in on product development and inventory decisions while they're reviewing your products.

With all the data available on social media, giving you a clear idea as to who your average customer is, you have a fantastic opportunity to target your ads directly to your customers.

Advertise your individual automobile floor mats directly to car enthusiasts. Old West themed bathrobes can be sent right to the feeds of John Wayne fans, and so on.

In other words, social commerce gives you the chance to place specific, ready-to-buy products right in front of the specific people who will love them—"in a way that traditional e-commerce and marketing cannot."

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6 Tips for Effective Social Commerce

1: Streamline sales and customer service with an AI Chatbot.

A quick, professional reply to a customer's question can make the difference between securing the sale or seeing a rise in abandoned shopping carts.

"With the right tools," says Hootsuite, "you can automate your customer service and make sure your customers are taken care of 24/7/365 (a.k.a. even when your team is not online)."

Set up your chatbot to help people move seamlessly forward with their shopping journey.

2: Engage with your Followers.

Remember the "social" part of social commerce. It's important to engage with your customer base and to solidify your brand's position in your market through reliable and consistent communication.

Offer valuable and interesting content, answer questions, be "human and authentic," etc.

3: Listen Strategically.

On social media, you have a front-row seat to your audience. You need to make the most of that.

Keep a close eye on comments, likes, and shares. Respond to these and offer customer service when needed.

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You should be monitoring all platforms to keep a pulse on feedback, current trends in demand for new products, and industry news.

4: Encourage Reviews.

93% of online shoppers, say Hootsuite, have indicated that a review can "make or break" their decision to purchase.

If people are happy with your product, encourage them to help spread the word.

This can be with an automated follow-up email once your product has been delivered or even a contest encouraging previous customers to share their experiences.

"Social proof" is essential to a positive brand reputation. And once you've gotten those positive reviews, share those creatively on your platforms.

Hootsuite has some ideas for you besides just posting user-generated content: host a Live video with your happy customers or create a carousel of positive comments.

5: Target your Reach.

You need to take advantage of all that information you're collecting on social media and place your products or shop before the right folks. Target your ads to the perfect customer.

6: Price your products to move.

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Luxury products, says Hootsuite, aren't typically successful on social media platforms.

Customers are reluctant to spend a lot of money on a sight-unseen product.

You can sell a lot of different products but follow Shopify's rule and keep the price under $70 so your customers will make that impulse buy.

Thanks to the power of social commerce, brands can and should use social media platforms to connect with their audience, maximize exposure, and of course, drive sales.

Start with the platforms you already have a presence on, and grow your ecommerce offerings from there.

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