I've been helping business owners get better business results from social media since 2012 - and in that time, something really startling has struck me. The reality is that there have only been two approaches to social media that I have seen generate business wins during that time.

In other words, **there are only two approaches that work**.

Yes, you read that right! I decided to create this short guide to help business owners figure out if they are on the right track to getting great results, or are at risk of sinking significant resources into social media with little prospect of generating any return.

Typical Social Media Results

Unfortunately, most business owners end up frustrated by the lack of real business outcomes being achieved through social media. This can lead to a situation where owners simply do not invest fully in social media any longer - and lose out to competitors who have cracked how to make social media work for their businesses. So my goal with this short guide is to help inform your strategy, such that you maximise your chances of producing real business wins and go on to make social media a key component of your business success.

So what are the two approaches that we have seen work? Well, we'll put to one side the paid advertising approach since most small businesses we deal with simply do not have the budget to be spending £$£$ tens of thousands each quarter on advertising. Smaller businesses tend to be much more interested in organic approaches to social media.

Organic social media? That's to say, the type of social media that you and I can freely do without the need for any significant budget being invested - beyond the time of the people who'll be doing the social media (and some tools and subscriptions to help boost their effectiveness).

Approach 1: Attracting Inbound Enquiries At Scale

The first of the two approaches I've seen work is, in fact, very hit-and-miss. But it's also the approach people seem most fixated on. I'm referring to the desire to become highly visible on social media and have your posts generate huge engagement levels and virality. From this visibility flows a trickle of inbound leads - through the sheer volume of exposure your social media has generated, you are seen by (and impress) enough of your ideal customers to generate qualified enquiries.

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The problem with this approach is twofold. Firstly, we all perceive that this level of mass visibility is perfectly attainable. It's easy to see why we would all think that, because our homepage feeds tend to be filled with the posts that are generating the most interest and engagement on each social media platform - so that level of engagement is perceived as normal.

"I just need to achieve the same kind of visibility and engagement that they are achieving" is the mentality you'll commonly see take hold here.

Unfortunately, **our homepage feeds show us the most successful posts on the platform.** What that hides from view is that there are are 100 people getting hardly any engagement and visibility for their posts for every 1 person who is appearing a great deal in homepage feeds. The challenge of achieving this level of visibility is therefore significantly underestimated.

The second problem with this approach is that doing it well requires large amounts of engagement on other people's posts - by the business Founder or whoever is going to be the figurehead for the business on social media.

That, of course, means it's a very significant time commitment for the business owner to give themselves a shot at achieving success. This isn't the type of social media activity that can be easily delegated to other team members, or outsourced to an external agency to handle. So it's a major commitment if it's to be done well enough to have any prospect of generating success. Some of the things you'd need to be doing would include:

- Befriending large numbers of people in your industry through consistent and proactive commenting and engagement with their social media posts over a period of 6-12 months.

- Researching who the influencers are in your sector and going the extra mile to strike up relationships with them and then nurture those relationships.

- Create a wide variety of different content types (videos, blogs, newsletters, audio events, polls, PDFs, etc.) so that you have something that'll appeal to everyone.

- Getting comfortable with sharing more personal posts and giving people insights into what's happening in your business and the highs and lows of your business life.

As you can see, this isn't a small undertaking - and business owners will often pursue this approach without fully appreciating everything that's needed to have a shot at success. The upshot of which is that business owners will often pursue this strategy and be disappointed with the results.

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For some that'll be because they simply aren't the type of person whose posts were ever likely to go viral (it does take a certain type of person to do this, just as some people can command the attention of a room of people and others can't). For others, they simply weren't able to to devote the necessary time to the task to see it through to fruition. Either way, there's a higher risk of failure if you pursue this approach to generating social media results.

So if you are thinking of pursuing this approach as your social media strategy, it's well worth getting a second opinion on whether you are likely to succeed - as well as the time that you need to be factoring in. If that would be helpful to you, we'd be more than happy to find a time for a chat (you can pick a time that works for you here).

Approach 2: Proactively Generating Warm Leads

The second approach that we have seen work well - and also work far more predictably it must be said - is to focus on nurturing a much smaller number of your ideal prospects. This is particularly effective for any B2B business that stands to earn handsomely from winning a modest number of additional clients (or hiring a modest number of candidates).

The reason your business results are far more predictable and scalable when using this kind of approach is that your success is being built around repeatable processes and a scientific approach to testing what works. That's in contrast to relying on the vagaries of being rewarded by a social media algorithm, as is the case with the first approach we looked at.

To help you visualise this, let's give some examples of Approach 2 working in practice:

- A consulting firm grows its audience of ideal major corporate client prospects and then succeeds in inviting many of those prospects to attend a business breakfast or networking event, where they then enter the regular business development pipeline and can be converted into clients in much the same way as any prospect from any other source would be.

- A business coaching company grows its audience of ideal business owner prospects and then manages to get lots of them booked onto a taster call or planning session, meaning they can be converted into clients in much the same way as prospects from any other source.

● A SaaS platform or technology vendor grows its audience of ideal customers and then entices that audience to take a free trial, book a demo or schedule a call to talk through the solution. Meaning that social media has started to generate the same kinds of client leads that the business is already closing when generated through other channels.

● A recruitment agency grows its audience of either potential new clients or ideal candidates and then figures out how to get meetings booked with those potential clients or gets those candidates to register their details so they can then place them into jobs with employers and earn a placement fee.

● A training company figures out how to grow its audience of purchasing decision makers, that's to say the types of people who would typically sign off on paid training engagements, and then finds a way to have those decision makers experiment with sending someone on one of their training courses or gets them onto calls to understand their needs and propose bespoke solutions.

The common thread here is that each B2B business is undertaking three key activities to produce the desired end results - and these are activities that are more easily delegated or outsourced, so are far less of a time burden on the business owner.

Focus On Three Key Activities When Adopting Approach 2

So what are these three things that each business has done to generate great results when adopting this approach to social media marketing? Well, these are the common threads...

Firstly, the business has identified where its ideal clients or candidates can be most effectively reached on social media and has also **figured out how to consistently grow the audience of those prospects on that social media platform.** Meaning that every quarter, the company can clearly see and track that their audience has grown by a known amount.

Growing an audience isn't that effective on its own though, As what we really need is an audience of prospects **who view us as a credible supplier or expert in our field**. So, the second thing that businesses focus on to achieve outcomes with this approach is to ensure they are posting great content - in ways that the platforms reward and that therefore get them good visibility. Ideally resulting in some good levels of engagement too! But note that we're only talking about a fraction of the visibility and engagement that is needed to make the first approach we talked about work. So it's far more attainable.

Now if you grow an audience and you persuade that audience that you are a credible business with some solid expertise, what have you achieved? Well, you have then done a good job of of raising the profile of your brand with your ideal clients or candidates. But on its own, this will not result in a stream of calls or meetings being booked. For that to happen, a business needs to master a third element of social media - namely, **figuring out how to convert their audience into doing something more meaningful for the business.**

So the three elements to achieving success with Approach 2 can be summarised as:

- Figuring out how to grow a targeted audience of prospects

- Ensuring you build trust and credibility

- Experimenting with how to convert that audience into more meaningful results

Let's Chat Further About This?

I hope this short guide has helped you understand why most small businesses are still struggling to generate any meaningful results from social media. I also hope it's helped you think about which of the two proven approaches to social media is most likely to work for your business. If it would be helpful to talk this through, or you'd simply like to understand how we might be able to help, we'd be more than happy to find a time for a chat. Just pick a convenient time using our call booking scheduler.

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