

From ONLINE to IN-STORE

USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO DRIVE FOOT TRAFFIC BY BASIA HELLWIG

Your store has a Facebook page, and you've dabbled with Pinterest boards and maybe tried out Twitter or Instagram. You've gathered a respectable number of followers. The bigger challenge, you're now finding, is turning followers and fans into foot traffic at your store. What's the secret? "Social media is part of your marketing funnel," says Jill Tirone, founder of DanceFit Marketing, LLC. "No single social-media mode [can do all the] work, so don't put all your eggs in one basket." If there's any "secret," it's to keep at it. "You can't come out guns blazing and then suddenly drop off," she says. If you want to convert followers to sales, you must engage with your customers again and again, over time. Only when you have—and keep—their attention, can you get them to your store. She advises having a presence on two or three social-media platforms, along with your other marketing efforts, to see success.

Here are expert tips and techniques for driving traffic to your store through social media.

1 SCHEDULE POSTS. Posting regularly is a must, but no storeowner can be at it 24/7. Set a schedule (two or three times a week for Facebook, say, or once a day for Twitter), and then use apps like HootSuite or features like Facebook's scheduler for pages to automate some of your posts. Cross-posting (having new Instagram photos automatically go out on Twitter, say) can also help, although you don't want to put so much on autopilot that it seems like a robot's posting.

2 DEVELOP YOUR OWN AUTHENTIC VOICE. "Ask yourself, 'If I were standing face

to face with a customer in the store, what would I say to them, and how would I say it?'" says Tirone. "Talk that same way on social media." You can be sure you wouldn't always be saying, "Buy this, buy that."

3 MAKE SURE IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT YOU. "You can promote yourself without self-promoting," Tirone says. Keep people's interest with different types of posts. Ask questions, invite conversation and share useful information. Invite participation with fill-in-the-blank posts like: The number-one thing in my dance bag I can't live without is _____. Post about local arts events, studios and dancers.

4 TAP INTO THE POWER OF IMAGES. You may not be able to duplicate Ellen's Oscar selfie sent around the world, but posts with photos outperform plain text in all social media—150 percent more retweets on Twitter, 120 percent more engagement on Facebook. Pinterest and Instagram, of course, are all about photos.

Use images and video to motivate people to visit your store: Show them how much fun it is to be there, with a short video of a salesperson answering customer questions, or pics of a special guest, a beautiful window display or a girl showing off her first pair of pointe shoes. "Dancewear stores have amazing opportunities because they have so many products to show and events to share," says Tirone. Create your own original images, using a free photo editor like PicMonkey to incorporate a call to action or 20 percent off message.

5 POST COUPONS AND CONTESTS WITH PRIZES REDEEMABLE IN YOUR STORE. Communicate to customers that they're getting

special attention—and deals—by following you. "Only for our Facebook friends," or "Special for our Instagram followers." People are more likely to buy products endorsed by their friends, studies show. Add a gorgeous image to your coupon to make it more shareable than ever; if a customer puts it on her timeline, her friends will see it, too. A contest can be something as simple as posting a picture of a new leotard in the latest new colors and asking: "Which is your favorite?" Reward anyone who sends back comments with a small prize—which they must pick up in the store, of course.

6 RESEARCH KEYWORDS AND HASHTAGS. (#Ballet, #dancewear or #choreography, for example.) See what's trending and figure out what your audience is talking about; this can be a good way to learn what your competitors are posting, too. Follow dance studios or dance companies with the same audience. (You can share or retweet their posts, too.) On Twitter, click "Near you" in the column left of search results to focus on your geographic area. "You want to be spending time and energy on the people who are most likely to convert," says Tirone.

7 STAY UP-TO-DATE. Social-media platforms tweak their features frequently, so you'll miss out if you don't keep current. Joining a group like Socialmediaexaminer.com's Social Media Marketing Networking Club on LinkedIn (linkedin.com/groups/Social-Media-Marketing-Networking-Club-5088154) is one way to share tips and tricks with fellow business owners and learn from social-media mavens. Check out the apps' own blogs, too (see business.instagram.com/blog, for instance). 

GET TO KNOW EACH PLATFORM'S QUIRKS AND FEATURES

Key updates and new features on the leading social-media platforms, plus ideas that will help you get the most out of every post.

FACEBOOK

AUDIENCE: dance moms and their teenage kids

With the new algorithm (the computer calculation that decides who sees your posts), you may be frustrated that your posts aren't reaching as many fans.

- Ads are one way to work around this and get a better reach. For a small budget, you can target by geographic location, age, gender and interests. "Facebook ads are an ideal test to see what marketing messages work best to bring customers to your store," says Tirone. (See facebook.com/advertising/success-stories/state-bicycle for an example.)
- Cover photos can now include a call to action. Keep it simple, but use it to draw customers to a special sale or event at your store.
- Pin important posts, like a current deal, at the top of your timeline. (It will stay there for seven days, even when you add new posts.)

PINTEREST

AUDIENCE: moms buying stuff for their kids

One in three Pinterest users under 35 have bought an item in-store after pinning, repinning or liking it, according to a recent survey. "Their target demographic is the perfect storm for dance retailers," says Tirone, who suggests setting up multiple boards, some with products, others with themes like How to Do a Ballet Bun, or Creating a Costume.

- Try a Pin It to Win It contest, offering a dollar amount gift certificate as the prize.
- Embed product information in images. Use a photo for a deal; make the notice charming and people will want to repin it.
- Encourage repinning with a Pin It button on every page of your website and track what's getting pinned. Be sure to repin and "like" active pinners among your customers.
- Last fall, Pinterest added Place Pins. Use them to create a Place board—a dance lover's tour of your town, say. The map with Place Pins of local dance studios, your store, theaters and so on will include details like the address and phone number right on the Pins.

TWITTER

AUDIENCE: teen and college-age dancers

Minutes after you post, your tweet will migrate down your customers' feeds, never to be seen again. Use hashtags and keywords to extend the reach of your tweets; adding them means your tweet will show up in searches for those terms.

- Shorter tweets get retweeted more often. Keep them to 120–130 characters so people can retweet without editing. Encourage people to retweet with messages like "Retweet if you love Bloch's new stretch pointe shoes." (Include a picture.)
- Try a free or low-cost tool like Tweepi to see who's following your followers. Chances are they have similar interests.
- Use more photos—they're being showcased more than ever on Twitter.
- Be a follower, too. Shoe manufacturers may have a pointe shoe fitting video they've shared. Retweeting it is an easy post for you—and a useful one for your customers, who know that company's products are available at your store.

INSTAGRAM

AUDIENCE: tweens on up

This is where you can use photos to offer a view into the world of young dancers who make your business possible. And show off your own products. Ask customers to capture and share their own photos (with a hashtag you suggest).

- Don't overuse filters. When it comes to a product, says Tirone, shoppers don't want to be surprised by a different look or color when they see the real thing in your store.
- Use hashtags to find your audience: Add them to extend the reach of your own content. And research them on Statigram to plug into niches where people like your customers can be found.
- Last summer, the app added 15-second videos. Use them to bring the store experience alive—show how helpful the staff are, how beautiful a whirl in that new tutu looks or how cool it is to hang out with a visiting dance star.