



IS IT TIME TO RUN FACEBOOK ADS?

How to make the most of your marketing on this social-media platform **BY BASIA HELLWIG**

Facebook pages have been a marketing boon for small independent retailers, helping level the playing field by offering reach and visibility that would be unaffordable via traditional media. But social platforms evolve fast, and it's important to adapt marketing strategies as they do. Page algorithms change frequently, and only a small percentage of people who "like" your store's Facebook page will see your posts. "Facebook is definitely a pay-to-play model now," says Jill Tirone, head of DanceFit Marketing in Williamsville, NY. "Long gone are the days of organic reach." That's why she and other marketing experts are recommending Facebook advertising to their small-business clients. "It's a great way to get your message out in your feed and beyond," she says.

Many storeowners dip their toe in Facebook advertising by paying to boost their regular posts. But beyond that, you can also create Facebook ads to run in the news feed or the right-hand sidebar next to the news feed. Renee Allen of Linden's Dancewear has paid for boosting posts and advertising her Durham, NC-based store on Facebook. "We have had a significant increase in page likes, and our unpromoted posts seem to do better now also," she says.

As a small business with a lean marketing budget, you obviously want to know that the dollars spent on ads are worth it. New Facebook features help address this issue. Its "local awareness" ads for local brick-and-mortars now have tools to drive traffic to a store, and analytics to see if the dollars spent on ads are paying off in store visits and in-store sales.

Here, then, are some tips on increasing your impact through Facebook ads, without blowing the bank or spamming your followers.

START SMALL. Boosting posts is the easiest and fastest way to start exploring advertising with Facebook. For as little as \$5, storeowners can get their regular posts on

their store page before a bigger audience—and many do. When DreamStar Dance Supply & More in Shrewsbury, MA, boosts posts, for instance, it has seen "likes" increase, as well as posts being seen by more people. "A lot of experimentation is the way to go," says Tirone, who recommends using Facebook's extensive analytics to see what works best.

DON'T GO BOOST CRAZY. It gets so easy to just throw \$20 on a boosted post, cautions Tirone, "but don't fall into a boosted-post money pit." It's easy to forget what you've boosted, says Tirone, and too many boosted posts or repeats can start looking spammy. You can do more with a created ad, she recommends, especially if it's a series of well-thought-out ads with specific objectives.

CREATE YOUR OWN FACEBOOK AD. Through Ads Manager, you can create a single ad or an ad campaign, target a specific audience and set a budget (daily or for the lifetime of the ad). What's nice about Facebook, says Tirone, is that there's not a big barrier to entry. "You can set a small budget—\$100—and see what foot traffic you get," she says. And that means you can afford testing your ad, too. A dance studio that Tirone works with recently tested four different images for an ad, with the same text. One was the clear winner. Knowing what resonated, they only used two images for the next set of ads, so it was more economical.

TARGET EXACTLY WHOM YOU WANT TO REACH. Facebook's many targeting parameters let you focus on the audience you want. "You can target people who already like your page, their friends or people who haven't liked the page," says Tirone. You can show your ad to only mobile, or only desktop computers. A mobile ad is more expensive, she says,

but will reach more people. In addition to age, gender and geography, you can target particular interests or shopping behaviors. Say you're promoting the new season's activewear that's just arrived in-store; you could include shoppers at Lululemon among your target groups. You can also target custom audiences—for instance, people who have visited your website or taken a certain action on your website, like claim an offer. (For this, you need to add the Facebook pixel to your web pages.) By cross-referencing categories, you can test ads with very specific different audiences. (For more on targeting, see megalytic.com/blog/5-tips-for-building-effective-facebook-ad-campaigns.)

DRIVE TRAFFIC TO YOUR STORE—AND CALCULATE SALES THAT RESULT. Facebook ads come in multiple formats, with different objectives. An interesting format for brick-and-mortars is the "local awareness" ad. It aims to bring people who are nearby to your store. (For ideas on how it can be used, see facebook.com/business/news/8-Ways-Businesses-Use-Local-Awareness-Ads.) Now, for ads on mobile, you can embed a store locator so the shopper doesn't have to make multiple clicks to find you. They'll also see the address, hours, phone number and website without leaving the ad. Plus, a new metric in Ads Reporting—store visits—lets you track how many people come to your store after seeing that ad. (Store-visits data is based on people having location services enabled on their phones.) This way you can optimize your ad creative and targeting based on this information. And, the Offline Conversions API matches transaction data from your customer database or point-of-sale system to Ads Reporting. Square, for instance, has made it possible to buy Facebook ads and monitor sales that result through its customer engagement tools. So you'll be able to see that you made \$600 in sales from people who came to the store after seeing your Facebook ad campaign, which cost you \$100.

Other formats include: a Page Likes ad to promote your page and connect with more of the people who matter to you; Offer ads, which create offers for people to redeem in your store; and Carousel ads, which let you display multiple images—an excellent format for retailers to show a range of products, says Tirone. Choose formats carefully: For instance, Events ads work within Facebook; if you want to drive ticket sales to a store event, you may be better off using a web-conversion ad to drive people to a ticket-sales page on your website.

TRACK RESULTS AND MAKE IMPROVEMENTS. Facebook analytics are plentiful and "very straightforward and easy to understand even if someone isn't a marketing expert," says Tirone. You can track how many people saw your ad, how many clicked, how much money was spent, what the cost per click was, how your ad budget was spent. Learn from what works and do more of that. ■

WHAT MAKES A GREAT AD?

MARKETING EXPERT JILL TIRONE OFFERS SOME TIPS.

Have a specific goal.

Want to drive traffic to your store? Get people to a store event? Build the audience for your Facebook page? Push people to your website? Get people to click on an offer on your website?

Use a strong headline.

Be concise and clear: "Flash Sale This Weekend," or "Buy One, Get One Sale."

Don't use too much text.

"If you have to click the Read More button, that's a bad sign," says Tirone.

Have a strong call to action.

Never make people wonder what they have to do next. For an offer, do they come into the store? Call with a coupon code?

Use good photos, not stock shots. Imagery of happy smiling faces wearing the product are good.

Videos are always strong visuals, especially if they open directly on Facebook.

Do some prep work on your website. If you're sending people there, walk through the process. Are they landing on the right page? Is your location clear? Clean it up and make it mobile-friendly.



From top: Panya/Thinkstock; courtesy of Jill Tirone