

PART 2: JOIN THE CONVERSATION

SOCIAL MEDIA FOR SMALL BUSINESS

[FACEBOOK.COM/DELLSOCIALMEDIA](https://www.facebook.com/dellsocialmedia)

powered by:



OVERVIEW

When small businesses take time to listen to the online conversation happening in [blogs](#), [forums](#) and [social networks](#), they often discover that a lot of people are already talking about topics related to their business. The next logical step is to join that conversation.

Many people equate “PR” to “digital PR” or “digital influencer relations.” While they are similar in many ways, there are some important nuances to consider. Most importantly, online conversations are much more direct and personal, requiring the highest level of transparency and candor. In this section, we will share ideas and best practices to help you get started.

THE OPPORTUNITY FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

In the past, most marketing communications were either one-way, such as advertising, or filtered by mainstream media. Today, social media allows company owners and employees to engage in direct, two-way conversations with prospects and customers. This is a big opportunity for small businesses that may not have the budget for advertising and PR agencies or the “news” to attract mainstream media attention.

Joining the online conversation also allows you to:

- Build relationships with digital influencers – like [Joel Spolsky](#) in the software industry, for example, who are driving the conversation about your company and your industry.
- Generate positive word of mouth about your brand or a new product or service.
- Share thought leadership to demonstrate that your business is innovative.
- Put a name and face on your company. After all, customers want to talk to real people with real expertise – not brands or “company spokespeople.”
- Gain insight to improve your company’s products and services.
- Manage issues and crisis situations by responding quickly.
- Influence mainstream media coverage. These days, [many journalists](#) are also blogging and often look to social media for story ideas.

GETTING STARTED

As a small business owner or employee, you engage in conversations about your business every day. Joining the conversation online really isn’t all that different. Here are tips for getting started:

- Take time to listen. Monitor social media to understand what people are talking about and who is driving the conversation. [Technorati.com](#) is a great tool to discover influencers. Check out “Social Media for Small Business Part 1: Learn to Listen” for additional tips on this topic.
- Find ways to join the conversation. You might start by leaving comments on blog posts or responding to questions in a forum or message board. If you have new information to share with an influential blogger, you might email him or her directly. You can even offer bloggers the chance to review your company’s product or service and write about their experience – no strings attached.

GETTING STARTED (continued)

- Expose brand evangelists within your own company. Your employees are likely some of your biggest fans. Encourage them to participate in online conversations, and make sure your company policies allow them to do so. Dell recently [opened up social media Web sites](#) to all employees to allow them to listen and engage in conversations online.

BEST PRACTICES

Based on our experience at Dell and conversations with small- and medium-size business owners, we've identified several best practices for joining the conversation, such as:

- Be transparent. Clearly identify yourself by name and your role at the company. Be open and honest in all communication. It's a good idea to use one user name in all online interactions so that customers will easily recognize you. For example: [RichardatDell](#) or [JJDavis](#).
- Be ethical. The Word of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA) is the authority on best practices for ethical online marketing. You should review its [Practical Ethics Toolkit](#) before embarking on a social media program.
- Be relevant. Share information and perspectives that are valuable to the online community. If you focus only on your own agenda, you will fail.
- Personalize and be personable. Let your unique personality, expertise and interests shine through. No one wants to hear a canned corporate message.
- Address negative discussion head-on. You might discover people speaking negatively about your brand or an experience they had with your product or service. Savvy companies respond to these issues directly. You can't please everyone, but you can show that you're listening and you care.
- Thank your happy customers. Companies tend to focus a disproportionate amount of energy on customer complaints. It's important to recognize your happy customers who may become brand evangelists. A simple "thank you for saying thank you" goes a long way. Dell's SMB team [makes a point to do this](#).

CASE

Pinder, an online retailer of stylish, lightweight laptop bags and cases, has successfully worked with bloggers to generate positive word of mouth about its products. By listening to the online conversation, the company identified an influential marketing blogger named Kate Trgovac, who happens to have a passion for laptop accessories. Pinder sent her a sample of its latest laptop sleeve, and she reviewed it on her site, <http://www.mynameiskate.ca>. After Trgovac wrote about the sleeve, Pinder's sales jumped 30 percent.

ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA FOR SMALL BUSINESS

Visit www.facebook.com/dellsocialmedia to read all eight guides written by Dell's Small Business and Communities & Conversations teams:

- Part 1: Learn to Listen
- Part 2: Join the Conversation
- Part 3: Start a Blog
- Part 4: Tap into Twitter
- Part 5: Crowdfund Your Next Big Idea
- Part 6: Harness the Power of Facebook
- Part 7: Share Photos and Videos Online
- Part 8: Measure Your Success Online

We hope you will join this Facebook community, share your own ideas, and continue the conversation with Dell and small businesses around the world.

A series of light gray, wavy, overlapping lines that flow across the bottom half of the page, creating a sense of movement and connectivity.