



MAGNOLIA SOLUTIONS

NANCY GEORGES 'THE RETAIL MISS FIX-IT'

Social Media 101 by Nancy Georges

The way we communicate, promote and brand our business has changed forever with the emergence of Social Media. The old rules are obsolete and now is the time to embrace the new media and take full advantage of the new communication age. In an increasingly competitive market, retailers need to stand out from the crowd and increase their profile online and offline. Retailers have a great opportunity to connect with current customers and find new customers at a low cost without technical/programming skills.

Over the last few months I have fully immersed myself in Social Media, predominantly **Facebook, Twitter & Blogging**. The results have pleasantly surprised me! I knew that there was a strong online community but being a part of these conversations and building relationships has enriched my business and me personally.

I have received many queries and questions from retailers and thought this article was a great opportunity to at least introduce the concept, demystify the media and encourage innovative entrepreneurial retailers to get started (or seek help starting!). I have included theory and practical application to help you start creating your Social Media strategy.

Wikipedia defines Social Media as:

“**Social media** are media designed to be disseminated through social interaction, created using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques. Social media supports the human need for social interaction, using Internet- and web-based technologies to transform broadcast media monologues (one to many) into social media dialogues (many to many). It supports the democratization of knowledge and information, transforming people from content consumers into content producers.”

The objective of a Social Media presence is to:

- establish your business as an authority in your field, be the ‘go-to’ store
- communicate with current customers
- reach out, find and connect with new customers who may be out of your local area (or country)
- create excitement about your brand
- increase your online profile and consumer awareness
- encourage regular contact with your market
- customise communications to suit different groups of customers

To understand where we are now, let’s look back a few years.

My Space (www.myspace.com) was launched in 2003 and quickly became ‘the’ must-join site. It predominantly engaged and was used by Gen Y, artists and musicians. It was easy to dismiss as it did not have an obvious business application, even though it did launch many bands and artists worldwide. It connected them directly with their market and encouraged direct interaction. For the first time, people could have a ‘personal’ interaction with their favourite artists, as well as other people that spanned time zones, countries and demographics.

My Space challenged Gen X and older. We did not share our personal information with perfect strangers! We were more private and did not see a place for this social site in our lives.

Facebook (www.facebook.com) quickly followed and was not as easy to dismiss or ignore. Initially, developed in 2004, as a ‘keep in touch’ tool for Harvard graduates, Facebook quickly spread around the world and across many generations. **It allows users to have their own FREE mini-website and a voice.** Users set up their page, invite people to connect with them and share information, photos, music and videos. It was the photo application that was quickly adopted by users and led to Facebook’s incredibly rapid adoption among the not so tech-savvy public.

Facebook Applications were added to extend the interactions on the site. There are over 35 000 applications on the site, ranging from surveys, quizzes, petitions, fortune telling & real time chess! In addition to a personal page, Facebook allows business pages, blogging, advertising, creation of group and events. All of these tools/applications can be used to promote your business and develop a close relationship and interaction with current and new customers.

Pages can be public, so that anyone can view them, or private, where connections are made by invitation only. Generally, personal pages are private and people must request or be invited to connect. Business Pages and Events are generally open and can be followed at the click of a button.



Facebook users can post regular status updates, comment about information on friends' pages or join a conversation on public interest pages. The choice is endless, the result is a closer immediate interaction. The beauty of Facebook is the ability to use images and text to make it more interesting.

Facebook retail store application:

- you can create a page for your store
- link to your website, blog, twitter
- provide store location & contact details
- update your status daily with: new stock in store, sale information, product information, funny short stories, nice customer interactions, website updates, loyalty program information etc
- upload pictures of your product lines
- invite customers to upload pictures with your products or experiences
- ask questions and engage your customers (Discussions tab)
- provide reviews / testimonials of past sales (Reviews tab)
- add a calendar of in-store events to your page so customers know what is coming then review it and upload photos after the fact
- remember to promote your Facebook page instore on your information and on your website and other media.

Twitter (www.twitter.com) is the social media of the moment, despite starting in 2006. Twitter asks users to answer "What are you doing right now?" in 140 characters or less. It is, in essence, a status update or a micro blog.

Like other social media sites, Twitter users are encouraged to connect and interact to build relationship and communications. 'Twibes', a wordplay on Tribes, are people with common interests. Connecting with members in your Twibe of interest ensures you get the most from your interactions and make better quality connections.

At the moment, on the Twibe site (www.twibes.com), there are:

- o 21 'Retail' Twibes
- o 40 'Sales' Twibes
- o 19 'Customer' Twibes
- o 29 'Gift' Twibes
- o 35 'Shopping' Twibes
- o 40 'Shop' Twibes

That is 184 Twibes that you as a Gift Retailer can interact with immediately. Once you find a Twibe you would like to join, you simply hit the button and enter your Twitter account and password (the first time only) and the information is automatically attached to your account.

It is important to make your 'Tweets' interesting and relevant.

Although Twitter is mainly text based you can upload photos to sites such as Twitpic (www.twitpic.com) and write a comment which will automatically update your Twitter status (too easy!). If you have more than one photo per topic then it is best to upload on your site, Facebook or blog and then Tweet about that via a link.

Twitter retail store application:

- Update Stock just in or on its way (create excitement)
- Communicate instore promotions
- Create 'Spot Special' excitement – clear stock that is not moving at what is normally a quiet time
- Interesting stories you have read online
- Interesting magazine articles
- Keep emphasising the thing that makes your store different
- Connect with complimentary businesses to promote your business
- Connect with suppliers, customers and other local businesses
- Connect with relevant Twibes



Blogs (short for Weblog) are the closest thing to a website of all the social media. The user can choose the content and update it at will (within a choice set templates). Blogs are usually more text and supported by images, audio or video. They can be a simple page with things of interest; a business site where customers and owner interact and share information or a series of articles/stories with pictures, videos and links to other sites or blogs. Like the other social media mentioned here, you can set a Blog up for free. Create your own blog on: Google's Blogspot (www.blogspot.com) or Wordpress (www.wordpress.com), these are the most popular. Each allow the user to customise the look and content of their page with tools to enhance your blog (called 'widgets' in blog speak).

Blogs are prolific at the moment. Visitors are invited to 'follow' or subscribe to' the Blog. They are updated every time there is a new update, or 'post' in blog-speak. There is the facility for visitors to leave comments and interact with the author of the blog as well as each other.

Blog retail store application:

- you can create a blog for their store
- think of your Blog as your own magazine, newspaper or TV channel
- invite communication across a broad scope of people, including customers
- ensure the look and feel of the store is reflected in your blog (colours, style, design)
- link to website, Facebook, twitter
- provide store contact details
- post regularly, expanding on the things mentioned on Twitter and Facebook:
such as: new stock in store, sale information, product information, funny short stories, nice customer interactions, website updates, loyalty program information etc
- upload pictures of your product lines and discuss them, providing information that will help with the buying decision
- invite customers to comment on posts
- ask questions and engage your customers
- provide information that will serve as post sale service (how to look after the item – additional uses etc)
- feature staff members (they will then link with their social media.....)
- add a calendar of in-store events to your page so customers know what is coming then review it and upload photos after the fact
- remember to promote your Blog instore on your information and on your website and other media
- link to associated blogs, as well as to customers and suppliers

Creating an account is easy on all of these sites; they are designed to encourage you to join. Each have step-by-step instructions as well as comprehensive help pages. If you get really stuck you can always ask your Twitter or Facebook community for help and advise!

The beauty of all these social media is that you can connect them so that an update on one updates the others. By connecting Facebook and Twitter; every time you Tweet, it shows on Facebook, every time there is an update to your Facebook store page; it will show on twitter. By adding the Facebook & Twitter 'Widget' to the Blog, visitors will see a 'feed' in a box on one side of the Blog that will show the last few Tweets and Facebook status updates. They are also linked to each other so visitors can click from one to the other and still stay on your pages. EASY!

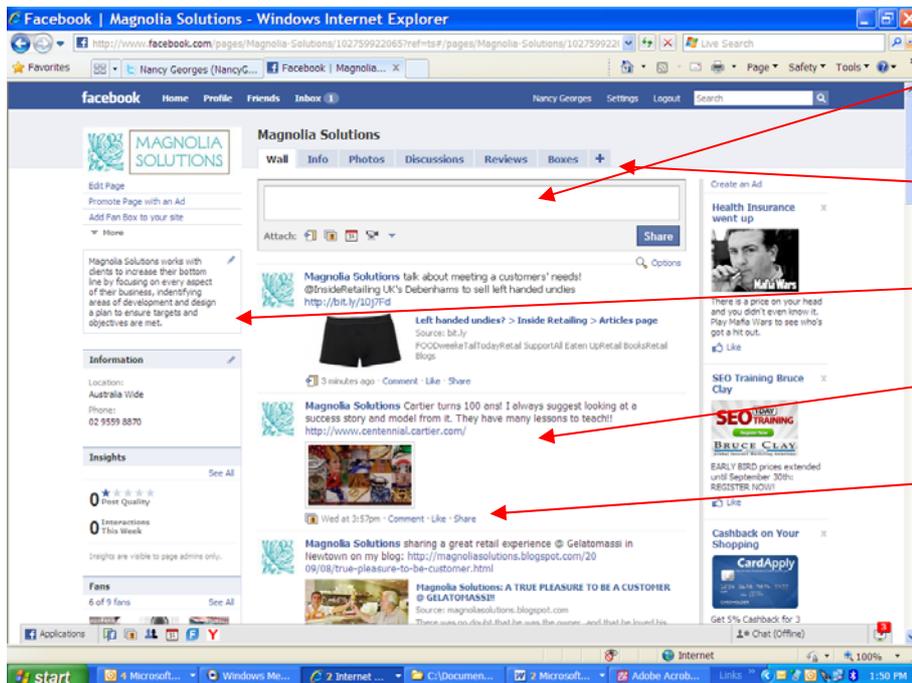
All the sites mentioned here are free to use and have a great support network. What could be easier!?

I have not really touched on the content of your communications in this article but it is important to say it must be interesting, engaging, relevant and original. Any mistakes or exaggeration you make online, will spread quickly and harm your business irrefutably.

Social media does not necessarily replace your website, it is meant to compliment your website by driving more traffic to the site and increasing your online profile.

I thought I would show you a real life example; my own Magnolia Solution pages to help tie all of the information above together.

Magnolia Solutions' Facebook page: I use this page to drive traffic to the blog using the Facebook network.



Status Line

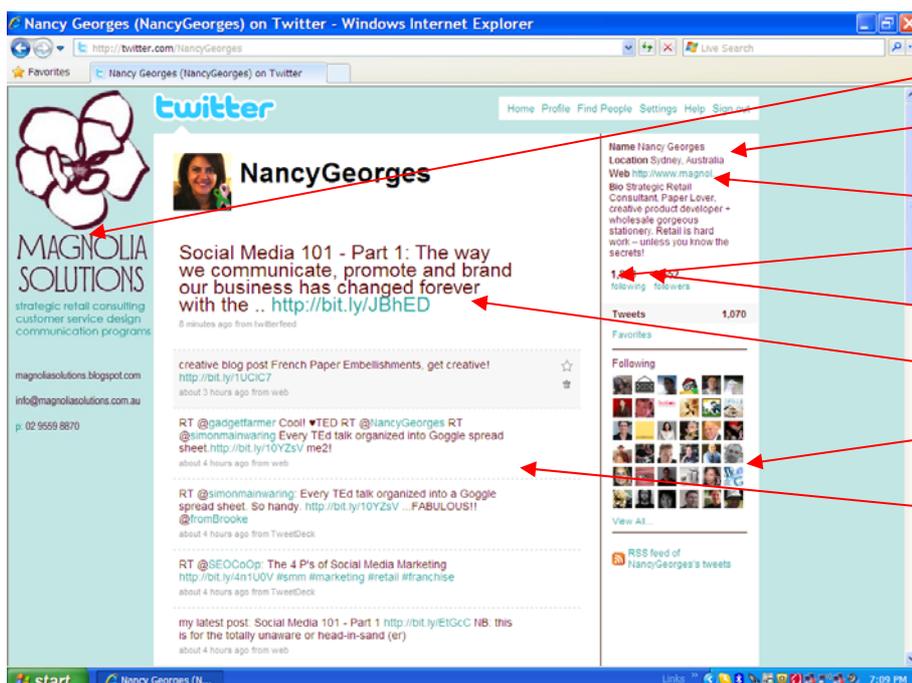
Tabs with more information / interaction options

Blurb about the company

Past Status Entries / Posts

Visitors can interact with each entry by leaving a comment, showing their interest by clicking 'like' or sharing it on their page

Nancy Georges' Twitter page: I use this page to promote Magnolia Solutions as the owner of the business as well as promote the blog and posts on Facebook.



Personalise the background

My Location

Link to blog

Number of people I am following

Number of people following me

Latest Tweet

Thumbnails of people I am following

Past Tweets and conversation with others on Twitter

Magnolia Solutions' Blog; Use this page to promote Magnolia Solutions, contains Twitter and Facebook feeds & links:



Blog title – say who you are and what you do

Bit about the Author (me)

Latest Blog Post

Visitors can sign up to follow

Can't see:
Twitter feeds
Facebook status updates
People following
Fav Links

The new emerging media and demand has generated a new product for Magnolia Solutions, one of our newest packages is a Social Media package. We set up Twitter, Facebook & Blog accounts for our clients, with the objective of handing over the management of the sites to them at the end of 3 months. It is my belief that it is important for store owners to take over this communication themselves, as they ultimately are the ones with the relationship with the customer.

Social Media takes a bit of understanding and getting used to. There are many dismissive comments made about it in the traditional media and amongst Gen X and older. However, to ignore it, or worse to dismiss it, will mean that you will miss opportunities for your business that your competitors will take advantage of.

While I am writing this I am very aware that only 34% of Australian retail businesses have a website. This is partly due to the lack of understanding of the benefit the business will gain as well as the cost of a traditional site. Social Media allows you to gently enter the online world in an engaging way and expand it in line with your Marketing Strategy.

The Social Media Strategy must work in with the Marketing Strategy. Your online presence must be backed up by the offline reality and vice-versa. Don't forget your customers now have a voice that is louder and stretches further than ever before. To benefit from an increased profile and closer communication with your customers; ensure that their experience with your business is positive.

Please visit me on Twitter, Facebook and Blog, follow and have a look around, send me any questions, leave comments or suggestions – always welcome!

Useful Websites:

- My Space: www.myspace.com
- Facebook: www.facebook.com
- Twitter: www.twitter.com
- Twibes: www.twibes.com
- Twitpic: www.twitpic.com
- Blogspot: www.blogspot.com
- Wordpress: www.wordpress.com



About Nancy

As The Retail 'Miss Fix It' and the Chief of Ideas at [Magnolia Solutions](#), I have drawn on my own experience of over 20 years in retail and with my first business [Paper Magnolia](#), to help clients create integrated marketing solutions online and offline that are based on sound retail practices.

In June 2011, I released my first book "[7 Powerful Ways to Boost Retail Profits, in any economic climate](#)", to help retailers identify the 7 key things they need to address in today's market.

In 2009, I gave myself the challenge of finding a super low cost solution to get Paper Magnolia started selling online and am now developing a website & e-commerce solution for retailers and business owners.

At the same time, I started to use this new 'thing' called Social Media with great results! In 2010 I co-founded [Social Media Women](#) and continue to support new social media users.

I hope my experience will help you start off on the right foot.

I work with retailers, manufacturers, brands and service-providers in various roles including external Marketing Manager. My focus is on Customer Service, marketing, new media, product, retail principles and retail as a craft. I utilise online and offline tools in a wholistic approach. I am an avid user and participator in Social Media as an extension of my marketing activity.

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YouTube: www.youtube.com/MagnoliaSolutions

Social Media Women: www.socialmediawomen.wordpress.com