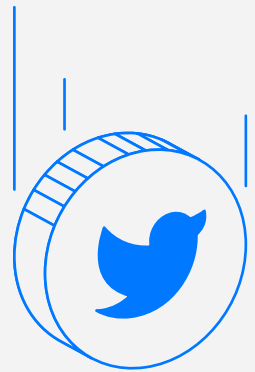


Get started with social selling

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Get started with social selling

Sales is changing because buyer behavior is changing. Research suggests 75% of leading B2B buyers use social media in their decision-making process (FreshBusinessThinking.com, 2015).

If you're not using social media to help boost your sales, you're missing out. But it's a tricky area to get right and getting it wrong can have serious implications for your brand.

Done well, social selling introduces customers to your brand and products in a way that does most of the work for you. It gives you a credibility that can smooth over any problems you might have. It helps you build long-term relationships with customers. It builds word of mouth very effectively.

Done badly, and you could get a reputation that nuisance-callers would be embarrassed by.

There are many aspects of traditional sales that transfer to social selling, although not always in the most obvious way. And there are many aspects that don't.

So how do you do it well? What traditional methods still work? We asked some experts to help us put together this beginners' guide to social selling. We've got 5 golden rules and plenty of top tips.

But first things first. Who are our experts and why do they think social selling matters?

Casper Vive Nielsen and Thomas Lay

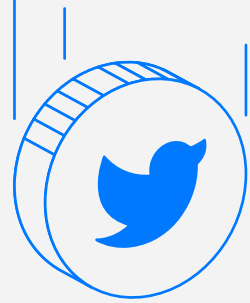
Co-founders, Social Proof

Social Proof are LinkedIn specialists who have a passion for helping their customers strengthen their relationships and their network online. They advise on how to create and maintain a personal brand, which in the short and long term will attract new exciting opportunities, such as customer recommendations, new job opportunities, and anything else that belongs to a strong brand built around a good social network.

Why do you think social media so important now in sales?

There are several reasons for this. No one today trusts ads with a company as the sender of the message, we all have a kind of mental filter that turns it off. People are dealing with people, and social media is today the easiest and fastest way to find personal experiences with the product being advertised.

Also, it is possible to deliver your message to so many people in a very short space of time, while customizing your advertising to your target audience, thus increasing the chances for a sustainable ROI.



Anneliese Sabitzer

Market Development Representative, Falcon.io

Anneliese has been working within the Sales and Marketing sphere for more than six years, beginning her career in direct sales within the Travel industry in Australia, which provided a strong foundation for subsequent roles balancing both sales and marketing, and specifically social media.

Since settling in Copenhagen, she has found a firm footing in leading Danish tech company (Falcon.io) as a Market Development Representative, handling inbound channels across social and webchat.

Why do you think social media so important now in sales?

Social Media is now intrinsic to the Sales process because, just as consumers use social to evaluate and make decisions about future purchases, so do key contacts making decisions about selecting new B2B tools and systems.

Decision-makers often use social to get suggestions and anecdotal information from their industry network, which forms a large part of their overall decision-making process and the recommendations they put forward to Management.



Martin Strube

Sales Manager, Management Events

Martin Strube has more than 12 years of experience in Sales, with a strong focus on digital marketing and social selling with LinkedIn. He has worked with a wide range of Danish companies, from startups to major media corporations. Martin is currently Sales Manager Denmark for Management Events, where he works to connect C-level management in large companies with the right solution providers to match their needs.

Why do you think social media so important now in sales?

Social media is important for several reasons. It helps you research the customer, their company and their network. This helps you build a better and more personalized pitch, and not do "cold calling" but more research evidence-based meeting booking. It also helps in the meeting with the customer. You must also be prepared that customers will research you. I've experienced several times that customers have approached me based on a connection we made, and the "pitch" I have on my profile.

Research also shows that when a customer approaches you, they are more than 50% through the decision making process.

At Ocean.io, we think that social media channels can be platforms from which to reach millions of people, and places of creativity, innovation, and humour. At their best, companies on social media contribute to trends and conversations in an engaging and uplifting way, and create content for people to genuinely enjoy and appreciate. It might be the place where a customer/user is first introduced to a company they truly value.

The five golden rules

These rules won't teach you everything you need to know about social selling. But we think that you can't go far wrong if you keep them in mind and they're a solid foundation to build from. Get these right and the rest will follow.

1. Focus on social over sales
2. Give value
3. Be true to your personality
4. Put on your best face
5. Know when to close

It's crucial to remember there is paid advertising on social media and unpaid advertising. We don't recommend focusing purely on paid advertising but, if you have the money, a combination of the two can be extremely effective. Otherwise, there are a lot of things you can do without paying on social media and that will be the main focus here.

It's also important to remember that buyer behavior has changed. The quality of the product is no longer the whole measure. Value from the brand and the user experience are both aspects of buying that customers now prioritize.

Researching a product is no longer just a matter of asking advice from someone you trust – now, customers research their purchases online and, often, on social media. The value and experience you provide online contributes to the decision-making process.

Moreover, your potential customers don't want you to contact them. They want to find you themselves. They want to engage with your brand because of the content and value you provide and they want to get there in a way that feels organic.

They don't want you to tell them why your product is good and why it's better than your competitors. They want to decide themselves.

With those quick lessons in mind, let's get started.



Focus on social over sales

Remember, these are social platforms. They are increasingly tailored to help you sell but that's not their primary purpose.

Users are savvy and they will not respond well to content that is repetitive, too competitive, or cynical. Likewise, they can see when content has been generated for the sake of a post rather than because it offers some sort of value.

It helps to think of your company as a person that's interacting with other users. Post content that feels in keeping with your "personality". Talk about it naturally. Anneliese Sabitzer says:

"Get creative and join the conversations".

If you see something that's relevant to your industry trending, get involved. That can be something as simple as a comment or a "like" as well as new content. The point is to treat it like a conversation, not a notice board.

Sabitzer also suggests using manual or automated social listening, joining relevant industry groups, and staying on top of job ads. That way you can identify potential new audiences and connect with as many people as possible.

Again, though, it's important to engage with these audiences. If they feel like they're being spammed, they'll block you like the proverbial racist uncle.

So comment on other people's posts: give advice, praise progress, share relevant content. Martin Strube recommends this approach:

"Be humble but be bold. Every once in a while it's okay to post that you are proud of something or even share a product pitch. But, most of the time, make sure that you don't boast and sell."

We think this is great advice. Get people interested in your journey and engaged with you as an expert and you're halfway there to selling to them anyway.

Top tip: Don't just share your own content. If you see something that's genuinely relevant to your audience (and isn't by a competitor, of course), share that with a comment on why you are doing so. It will make you seem authentic, as well as demonstrating that you're genuinely engaged with the topic and recognize valuable external contributions.

Strube also believes in this approach. He says,

"It's about helping as much as you can, help your network before you need help from it. That means sharing open positions, 'ready for new challenges' posts, requests for ideas or help in any matter, congratulating on new positions and much more."



Give value

We can't stress this enough. All of our experts agreed that providing value was essential to successful social selling. Not only do buyers want value, they expect it. And we mean real value. You don't have to share your business strategy but you should consider sharing your experiences when they might help others.

Does someone in your team have expertise in a new, exciting area of your industry? Ask them to blog about it. Is there someone with a varied, extensive career, who could share their best practise? Interview them and share it. Have you recently read an industry-relevant book that you thought was excellent? Review it.

Remember, however, this isn't a paint-by-numbers exercise. Good content needs to be different in some way to what is already available, whether that's the ideas, the tone, the presentation, or the knowledge.

The value of what you share isn't just the words you write down or deliver in a video. It needs to fit in with your brand voice and identity. It needs to look good. Your audience wants to feel like you put time and effort into this.

One thing that offering value does is establish you as a thought leader, something that Social Proof emphasize. It gives you, and therefore your products, credibility. It also connects your customers to you in a broader way. If they feel they are getting value from you outside of your products, they connect with you more strongly.

Have a clear idea of what you want to offer. Stick to it – don't use the idea and pivot to a pitch about your product/s.

1. Keep it relevant. It's better to be short and sweet than long and rambling.
2. Don't make spelling mistakes. Always get someone to proof-read before you publish.
3. If you want to add design aspects, make sure they look good and fit with your branding.
4. Try different media: sometimes a video interview is better than a printed one.
5. Consider your audience. Make your content available in the best form for them.

Top tip: value your own work. Make it look as good as possible. Share it in a way that's honest and gets your audience to engage with it in the way it deserves. Social Proof advise using storytelling to draw your audience in and maintain their attention – we think that's a great idea, especially if you're writing a blog or a LinkedIn long post. Framing it as a story makes it enjoyable to read, as well as more memorable.



Be true to your personality

Branding is essential for companies, especially when social selling. If you saw a person who dressed, spoke, or acted in a drastically different way each day you would be confused – maybe you wouldn't recognise them at all. The same is true for a brand. It is crucial that you're consistent.

Branding is about establishing trust and solidifying your position in the minds of your customers/users by always showing a distinct and consistent brand personality. This helps you communicate more effectively across all marketing mediums and ensures you are always being seen in the most flattering light.

Don't abandon your brand values just because you're talking to a customer on Twitter instead of an investor in a boardroom. Everyone you communicate with should be treated with the same level of respect and they should all feel like they are communicating with the same person (or company). If honesty is one of your brand values, show that. If humour is, keep it light-hearted and funny.

That doesn't mean that you should have the same tone in all your communications, however. You wouldn't talk to your doctor the way you talk to your best friend. Buffer has a handy guide to all this that we recommend taking a look at (it's

always better to get tips from more than one source). They summarise the difference between 'voice' and 'tone' very succinctly:

“Essentially, there is one voice for your brand and many tones that refine that voice. Voice is a mission statement. Tone is the application of that mission.”

Being true to your brand values doesn't stop you from tweaking your tone to make sure you stay appropriate for the platform you're using.

Top tip: different platforms have different tones. LinkedIn, for instance, is a professional network. Twitter and Facebook are much more “social”. Instagram almost has a language of its own. Make sure you're aware of which platform you're using and check your tone!



Put on your best face

Just like tone, your presentation matters. This is quite likely the first impression your potential customers will have of you, so you need to look sharp. And your shoes need to match your outfit, so to speak. One of Social Proof's top 3 tips is "Be consistent".

Remember, the first thing people are likely to do once they find out about you is Google you. You need to make sure that everything they see is positive – and consistent.

It's no good having a swish, beautifully designed website if you expect all your traffic to come through messy, mistake-strewn marketing channels. You have to create a coherent user experience across your marketing channels.

Start with your website and go from there. Make sure your logo is the same across all the channels (and make sure the image is high resolution). What are the key visual aspects of your brand? As much as possible, keep the colours you use the same.

Tailor your descriptions of yourself on each channel so that you are presenting the best possible version of yourself for each platform. What's suitable for Instagram might not be suitable for LinkedIn, so tweak the language and maybe even the images as appropriate.

However, you need to make sure a viewer could look at both channels and recognise you as the same company without difficulty. If you've nailed your branding, this shouldn't be difficult.

Once you've sorted those all things, check for typos. Make sure everything you've written is grammatically correct too. Don't just dot the i's and cross the t's – make sure the T's are consistently capitalized across all your channels. These might seem like small, insignificant details but it's like tiny cracks in a glass. They can weaken the whole thing.

Top tip: "Green" cannot be one of your brand colors. But #2c932f might be. Make sure they're identical: anything else looks sloppy.



Know when to close

Of course, you are still selling. Knowing when to close still matters. But how you apply this rule really depends on whether you're focusing on inbound or outbound marketing.

If your aim with using social media is inbound marketing, then your content will do most of the closing for you. There are only a few simple rules. Make the product easy to access but don't push it too much. Don't overly advertise your products in your content. Use pop-ups discreetly and make sure there are always links to other content, not just sales.

If you think you're doing all this but visitors are still leaving your site in droves without buying, it's worth looking at the visiting data and checking which pages are most commonly visited last before exiting. Analyze what it might be about this/these page/s that puts your audience off and tweak to see what works best.

If your aim with using social media is outbound marketing, then you need to approach the close as you would with a call or a meeting. Judge the mood of your audience: maybe it would be better to move the conversation offline and arrange a meeting? Maybe you just need to send a link to your product, suggesting they check it out?

Either way, be careful. And remember rule 1: focus on the social aspect. Don't just send a link saying "check out this amazing product" as soon as someone voices an opinion that might, maybe, just about be related to it.

Consider your tone: how would you talk about your product to a friend over a drink? Try

suggesting the product after a conversation about an issue, saying, "I'm/we're obviously biased but this might solve some of your problems?"

Or perhaps send a short note, acknowledging the previous discussion and asking if they want to talk further about your product offline. If they reject you, privately or publicly, be sure to take it with grace, just as you would in real life. It's easy to forget online that we're dealing with real people – but it's essential to remember that when you're selling.

And with that, we'll close. Stick to these rules and we are confident you will get off to a flying start with your social selling.

But don't forget: you can always learn more, do better, improve your approach. Don't rest on your laurels once you've got started.

Final top tip: Don't be 'salesy', says Anneliese Sabitzer:

"Be yourself, let your tone, language, and messaging reflect your personality and approach to sales. This builds trust and authenticity and makes your outreach feel more conversational, real, and personable."