

How to use hashtags to connect with customers

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You've seen the hashtag (#) trend all over social media, but do you know exactly what they are and how to use hashtags to connect with potential customers. Do you know how to use hashtags to search for posts and have your own posts found in other people's searches?

Earlier this week I attended a workshop at The Enterprise Center at Salem State University. The workshop was presented by Sperling Interactive who presented on the topic of producing content for social media.

Attendees ranged from seasoned bloggers to those just getting their feet wet in the pool of social media. While the information presented was incredibly valuable, I find that the interactive discussion amongst like-minded groups such as these brings about the most useful information. Attendees ask questions and while the presenters answered them well, the group was able to chime in with even more information.

I found that one big topic of discussion was hashtags. Attendees of every experience level were asking what hashtags were and when is the right time to use them; so allow me to explain hashtags...

WHAT IS A HASHTAG?

A hashtag is the name given to what is also known as the pound symbol on a telephone keypad (#). In social media, when attached to a word (or group of words) as a prefix, the hashtag allows that word (or word group) to be searchable and grouped together. It's now the most popular means for categorizing social media content.

Another way to explain it would be this... Hashtags are like a Google search for social media. When we run an internet search, we've come to often refer to that search as a "Google search" (since Google is one of the most popular search engines). Likewise, hashtags are a way to run a "search" on social media.

WHERE DO YOU USE HASHTAGS?

Hashtags are used on social media. They've become very popular on Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Pinterest, and other social media platforms. Hashtags follow a social media post and make that post searchable by the hashtag topic.

For instance, let's say you post to your Facebook timeline or Twitter feed about Boston College High School's recent hockey game. At the end of that post, you may include the following tags:

#BCHigh #BCEagles #EaglePride #BCHighHockey

Now if someone goes onto Facebook and runs a search for #BCHigh, your post will show up in their search results.

It's recommended that hashtags be either a single word or a word group of no more than two or three words.

HOW ARE HASHTAGS USED IN SOCIAL MEDIA?

As stated above, hashtags make content discoverable. Whether you're searching for information or hope to share information you've posted, a relatable hashtag helps the content be found on social media.

Hashtags also allow hashtag topics to be grouped. If someone were to go onto Facebook, Twitter, or Pinterest and search a hashtag term that you referenced in your post, then your post, along with anyone else's that referenced the same hashtag, would show up in the search results.

HOW CAN YOU USE HASHTAGS AS A BUSINESS OWNER?

The good news about this for small business owners, is that if your post shows up in search results for someone that's never heard of your business, it may encourage them to now click on your post, read more, hopefully follow you, and eventually become a customer. Hashtags allow you to build connections and interact with other people who are interested in and discussing similar issues.

Hashtags also allow you to search for relevant information. So let's say you're writing an article about a news story related to your business or industry and you'd like to find more information or even other people's viewpoints to share on the subject. Simply search social media with some keywords that others may have referenced with a hashtag.

For instance, if I'm writing an article about my **sidelight curtains**, I may want to first talk about what other options are available on the market today and then go into detail about why my design is better. In this case, I would go to Pinterest and search #sidelights, #sidelightcurtain, or #sidelightcovering to see what else is currently available and then run a comparison.

Another way businesses are using hashtags is to create unique hashtags related to products and events. Let's say you're organizing an event. Simply tag your event with unique hashtag and place that hashtag on every piece of marketing material so people can not only search your event by that hashtag, but they can later post to their own social media with that hashtag, resulting in publicity before, during, and after the event by multiple people!

So the next time you post on a social media platform, remember to add related hashtags to get the most out of your post.