

LESSONS LEARNED | BY GERSON ROSENBLUM

# Your Friend, Social Media

Given the option, most people would choose to do business with friends. When you're about to make a major purchase, wouldn't you prefer having the guidance of someone with whom you have a trusting, personal relationship? In my previous life as a retail store owner, I always taught my sales staff to focus on turning customers into friends. It makes the sales process much easier.

Understanding that business relationships work better when people are personal contacts, I noticed an interesting phenomenon at January's NAMM convention. As I walked the show, I seemed to have a lot more friends. The advent of social media — such sites as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn — has enabled people I've known for many years to feel, as do I, that our business relationships have grown more personal. Through social media, people I might not have been in contact with have stayed in touch on a regular basis. In other words, social media lets people form deeper, more consistent relationships that transcend their purely business nature.

## THE SHRINKING OF THE INDUSTRY

Those of us using social media immediately understand its impact as a new communications tool. It's as if Facebook has taken an already small industry and cranked up the intimacy level several notches. When I posted this observation, that the whole industry felt more like family, I received an overwhelming response from my online network. It literally took moments for a flurry of acknowledgments to fill my in-box.

The benefit here is the ability to stay connected to your network. No longer are these industry folks just acquaintances. They're friends. And when you have a friend in the business, it's a whole lot easier to get things done. For me, it has yielded a

number of consulting assignments. I've been able to help people reconnect, and I've made introductions that have yielded great results.

## SOCIAL MEDIA IN RETAIL

Having seen the effectiveness of social networking, I regret having not used it more effectively in my retail career. All retail associates should establish their own individual social media accounts, and they should collect e-mail addresses from every client. (They should be doing that for the

company mailing list, anyway.) Retail associates should attempt to become friends with each of those contacts by inviting them into their social networks. Then, they can tell contacts to count on them as their personal source for advice, help and support.

Key to this tactic is avoiding any attempts at blatant advertising or commercialism. The goal is to become an available resource and so familiar with customers that they consider you their friend — that *they* choose to come to you as their trusted source. Don't miss the chance to befriend the bands and/or companies associated with these people.

Another powerful use of social media is to set up a presence for your company. Key to this is having someone handle these duties. This person needs to create an online personality for your company. Once again, he or she can't be out there as a huckster but should become a valuable resource and a trusted advisor. Most of all, remember that social media is a two-way communication. Allow feedback, both positive and negative, and use it to improve what you do.

I'll see you next month, or you can Tweet me, Link me in or friend me on Facebook. **MI**

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**Social media transforms you from the seller into the customer's personal source for advice**