

Think about this: without our content, companies like Facebook, Google+, Instagram, LinkedIn, Medium, Pinterest, Tumblr, Twitter, and YouTube wouldn't have anything to distribute and nothing to sell. They rely on us to drive interest in, and traffic to, their sites.

The more content we create for free, the more valuable these platforms become. We sow the work. They reap the profits.

And, frankly, we don't give it much thought. In fact, we are enamored with the business model—contributing our content in exchange for attention, not dollars.

What are the Problems with That?

Social media platforms should only augment the presence we already have with our own(ed) website and blog or newsletter. Social media platforms shouldn't be the presence. It's dangerous. Here's why.

1. If we're relying on these platforms to generate leads, we're hoping the landlord will continue to like us and support our business. But the fact is, the landlord has no idea who we are (unless we're an "Influencer") and likely doesn't care.
2. We don't own the content. I mean the content is ours if we keep a copy for ourselves, but once it's on a site, the social media company's terms of service take over.
3. If the terms of service change, as they often do, our existing and future content is subject to those changes.
4. If we inadvertently violate the terms of service and our account gets temporarily or permanently shut down, we just lost everything we had invested in that platform.
5. Or what if the platform, which was distributing our content for free to everyone that followed us, intentionally reduces our reach so that we now have to pay to "boost" the same content to the same audience?
6. The landlord could alter the user interface and alienate its followers (e.g. LinkedIn), fall out of favor among their members over a newer platform (e.g., Digg), or disappear completely (e.g., MySpace), and our content would fall by the wayside with them.

So, What Should We Do Instead?

I think the solution is obvious. First, we need to spend most of our time and energy building assets that we control. And so there are three things we should be creating today and continuing to focus on for the life of our practices.

1. A great website with our own hosting.
2. An e-mail list with leads, prospects, clients, and referral sources in our niche.
3. A reputation for providing high-quality content for #1 and #2.

Then, our operational strategy should be to use social media platforms to build an audience of leads and prospects, convert them to a community (Seth Godin calls it a tribe), and drive traffic to our websites for products and services we currently sell or plan to offer.

(Note that “selling” does not occur on social media platforms—it happens on our websites. Simply put, social media platforms should only be used to provide evidence of our credibility while sharing glimpses of our personality—you know, like good old one-to-one relationship marketing.)

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