



PHOTO Snowshoeing with aspirant International Mountain Leader on the Roc del Felip, Pyrenees Orientales.



Ian Pendry, International Mountain Leader, mountain bike guide, owner of Altitude Adventure Ltd. Based in the French Pyrenees.

verify the local rules before you fall foul of doing something you shouldn't. Most European countries have a much more draconian police system when there is a bad accident than the UK, and you could easily find yourself facing an unpleasant brush with the law or even prison.

On another level, you need to be aware of local access law. The map may show a path, but do you have the right to use it? In Spain and Italy, a large part of the countryside is privately owned and crossing a fence because the path does, doesn't automatically give you the right to. It pays to check with the locals.

Language. Can you communicate as needed in that country?

This relates to your legal rights in some ways as part of what the local government is checking when you register for equivalence – can you communicate as necessary? On a basic level this can be as simple as being able to communicate with the local emergency services or a refuge. In the situation where you plan to set your business up in a foreign country and will have the right to work with people from that country, they are verifying that you can communicate properly with your potential clients.

A working knowledge of the local language is also essential if you want to integrate with the local community. This is essential if you are planning to base your business in a foreign country as it will enable you to achieve much more, and much faster, than if you rely on third parties doing your talking for you. It will probably also save you

a huge amount of money, as the locals will also explain the best way to work the system locally.

Access. How your clients will arrive?

Very simply if there is no easy access then life will be hard! Most clients are on a limited budget and time schedule, so basing your business near to good access routes is essential. To quote Conrad Hilton of the Hilton hotel group "It is all about location, location, location".

WHO?

Clients. Local, British, international

Your clients are what make your business tick. We have already covered a number of points relating to your clients and each one needs to be addressed before you launch down a particular route: Insurance, Access, Payments, Rights, Communication.

Competition

Lastly but not least you need to think about the competition. Competition can be both positive and negative. It can make you "up your game", think of new angles to attract clients, be clear on your costing, it can even help draw customers to an area (the honeypot effect), so don't fear the competition; respect it and study it. On the other hand, be wary of a new competitor: the client/blogger who immediately posts up all your carefully researched itineraries for the world to read and perhaps inadvertently create access/security crises that you as the local find yourself having to defuse! ■

Social Media



Vital business tool or time-sucking distraction?

Without a doubt, Facebook, Twitter and the like are now an integral part of the marketing toolkit for most businesses. But they are not the whole picture, and it is tempting to get going on social media and suddenly find you've lost a whole evening!

WORDS BY SUSIE AMANN

So here are some questions to ask yourself about what you are doing on social media for your business, and how it fits into your overall strategy.

1 Why are you using social media? What are you trying to achieve?

Setting some objectives will mean you can be focused and use the time effectively. The most common objectives are:

- Awareness – Getting people to know you exist
- Direct Sales – Selling something to someone online
- Loyalty – Keeping your existing customers engaged

You can choose all three or just one or two, but your decision will affect what you do next. If you want awareness you need to aim for lots of followers and lots of shares to spread the word as widely as possible. For loyalty you want interaction and conversations to keep your customers involved and engaged. If you are aiming for direct sales you will be looking at paid advertising, links to your website and special offers.

2 Who do you want to reach?

This is the most important. It is the answer to the question 'Who is or could be my customer?' which is one of the fundamentals for your whole business plan. The answer is NOT 'everyone'. Time spent understanding this question and identifying one or more target groups is time well spent.

'Who is or could be my customer?' is also important because if you spend a lot of time tweeting and Facebooking to your existing network of people who are mainly your mates, then they are unlikely to be the ones who buy from you so your effort is not paying you back with more business.

3 Where do find your customers on social media?

Once you have figured out who you want to reach, the next step is to see where they hang out. Check out the demographics of the different social networking sites and find those that match most closely with your audience. Alternatively, you can ask your customers which ones they use. Coupled with this information should be your own preferences, as, realistically, you are going to be more effective if you choose a social media site you actually like and enjoy using.

4 What are you going to say?

After an initial burst of activity, many people find they have run out of steam and can't think what else to write about. That's why it's really important to have a content plan, so that you can keep posting relevant content regularly.

The first tip here is that it's OK to share other people's content, so it doesn't have to be all your own work all the time. There are millions of blogs on millions of topics, so, with a little googling, you are bound to find something that is useful to your followers. The best way is to start putting together a calendar of content ideas for each social network. Remember to leave room for your personality, with a smattering of fun, personal posts and questions so that people can relate to them and engage with you and be realistic about how much time you can commit to doing it.

5 When are you going to say it on social media?

The simple answer is regularly. It's important to have a consistent presence in your chosen social media so that people don't forget about you. Using a scheduling tool to line up your planned content in advance is extremely effective, especially if you are going to be working intensely and too busy to post.

If you have the answers to these five questions then you have the basis of an effective social media strategy that will help meet your business objectives. But remember, it is only part of the marketing mix and may not be the most important or effective communication for your particular business situation. ■

Susie Amann is an International Mountain Leader and ski addict who has spent the last 20 years working on strategy and marketing with businesses of all sizes. This is the first in a series of marketing articles for 'The Professional Mountaineer'. Susie will be running an interactive, workshop based programme 'Marketing for the Outdoor Professional' in the autumn. If you're interested, please get in touch susie.amann@gmail.com or **07967 226025**.

