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# Business Monday

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## Be open to social media's benefits to your business

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SPECIAL TO THE MIAMI HERALD

For many individuals and organizations, social media remains a nebulous dimension of marketing. Finding the right path to pursue and understanding the associated benefits are -- at present -- hard to discern.

Bringing social media into your online marketing mix is further complicated by other unaccomplished web-related priorities you want to tackle that have more tangible outcomes.

So what is the rationale for getting serious about Twitter, Facebook, etc., and devoting resources to have an impact? The answer is that it's time for the next shift in how marketers "market" and recognize that social media is going to play a central role in this evolution.

Any company proactively marketing itself understands a key metric that needs to be watched closely is "cost per lead."

Cost per lead matters with call centers and direct mail, and it is a vital dimension of online marketing.

The challenge that most companies face is maintaining a cost per lead that fits with their expense structure and revenue opportunities.

Companies have relied on lead generation as a way to build their prospect databases.

Whether through direct mail, telemarketing, e-mail marketing or search engine marketing, organizations continue to build databases of prospects they can stay in front of on a consistent and low-cost basis.

Here is where social media can play a vital role for your organization and justify a meaningful investment of resources. Adoption of this philosophy, however, requires a shift in mindset.

The change in thinking centers on what a future database will actually contain.

I believe that it will be more about followers and fans than actual names and addresses that someone types into a landing page or lead-generation form.

It is time to begin thinking about a cost per lead for fans and followers, and treat this type of lead acquisition effort with seriousness and resources.

Don't misunderstand: Like all other elements of Internet marketing, everything is more difficult than it should be.

However, the quandary of how to justify the cost of social media marketing is straightforward if you acknowledge that fans and followers have value, that they are the next generation of leads, and that -- through willing participation in your social media universe -- they are more apt to be interested in whatever it is you sell than the others whom you "interrupt" during dinnertime or by clogging their inboxes.

So, don't use antiquated means of judging a lead to dismiss the power of social media marketing.

By being able to broadcast messages to qualified fans and followers, you are, in essence, accomplishing the same -- or better -- marketing than you do through e-mail or other means.

Take advantage of that self-created audience and recognize the opportunity that it presents.

Lastly, please follow me on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/andrewwetzler](http://www.twitter.com/andrewwetzler).

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