



By Bonnie J. Dewkett

You don't have to be a big business with a large prize to offer in order to host a successful social media contest. Contests are great ways to engage your customers, past and potential, and encourage them to participate in your social media conversation. You don't have to hire a special marketing company to help you—just think creatively! Here are some tips to make contests a part of your social media mix.

First, make sure you tell people how to win. The best way to have people enter is to ask them to tell others about the contest. This enters your advocates to win, and it gets more people interested in your page. But you need to be able to track this interest. Requiring entrants to tweet about the contest using your Twitter handle is a great way to do this.

In addition, you need to decide whether you will offer multiple entries for multiple actions. For example, you may offer one entry for a comment on your blog and another entry for a tweet about the giveaway. This tactic encourages your audience to take a look at multiple aspects of your online presence.

Next, make sure your contest has clear ending dates and times. Letting your audience know when your contest is set to end gives them a call to action, making sure they enter before the contest expires.

I like to run contests for a very short time and make them quick and easy to enter. The prizes can be small, but they should be valuable to the people participating. If you are a pet store, for example, you can offer a free pet toy. While the product doesn't have large monetary value, it will generate buzz for your business and create loyal customers.



Keep in mind that you are inviting others to connect with you, and that these individuals may not maintain the same level of professionalism that you do. Monitor what people are posting on your page.

Make sure you have an established way of choosing your winner. A number of websites can help you draw a winner at random. It is also a good practice to publicly announce your winner—you don't want to leave any room for people to call the results into question.

Here are some ideas to get your creative juices flowing:

- ⊙ For a pet store: "Show us your cutest pet bath-time picture to win a bottle of pet shampoo." "Show us your pet's smile in order to win a dental kit."
- ⊙ For a knitting store: "Show us your greatest creation for a chance to win a set of needles." "Tell us about your biggest knitting challenge for a chance to win a 30-minute lesson."
- ⊙ For an organizing or cleaning company: Have people send you a picture of their greatest organizing or cleaning challenge in order to win a free consultation.
- ⊙ For a flower shop: "Tell us about your most special day ever." "Tell us why flowers would brighten your friend's day." Winners would receive a free bouquet.
- ⊙ For a grocery store: "Share your favorite recipes for a chance to win a turkey." "Share your favorite holiday food story in order to win a dessert from the bakery."

Whatever you choose to do, the key is to make it fun. You want customers to enter *and* read the other customers' entries. The great thing about social media is that it costs very little, if anything at all, to run a contest. **N**

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