

Chapter 14: Social Site Selection

The first step towards making the most of social media is to select the right sites to use according to your goals, capabilities and target audience.

Sites by Type and Capabilities

As we've discussed, there are all sorts of ways to participate in social media. Knowing your own abilities and the impression you're trying to make can play a big part in the types of sites you choose. There's a big difference between creating original content and simply participating – for example, posting a response or voting is much different than writing an article. If you're a creator, that is you have the time, talent or inclination to create original material, content sites are a good choice.

Whether you choose to be a creator, a participant or a blend of both depends on your strategy. Certain types of businesses are a natural fit with particular social media categories. For example, a speaker might post a video on YouTube, list events in online calendars, like Yahoo's Upcoming, and upload presentations to SlideShare. If you're low on budget, but long on talent, that may help you decide. Writers may choose blogs; videographers may choose content sites; social animals may choose networks; subject experts may choose Q&A's.

Knowing when to take advantage of another website's traffic is important, too. For example, if your website, blog or other property doesn't get much traffic, participating in someone else's that already gets a lot of traffic makes more sense. Otherwise, you'll be spending a lot of your time and energy promoting them. If you have no readers, there's no point in writing. Unless your business model depends on content, this may not be the best way to go.

Targeting

Next, you'll want to find sites that match your target profile. The first decision is whether you need sites that primarily attract consumers versus businesspeople. In some cases, you'll need both, but for different reasons. The former, if you offer a consumer product or service. Add the latter, if you're looking for business customers and/or referrals.

Mainstream vs. Niche

Before explaining how to find sites, I want to address the differences between mainstream sites, like Facebook, which attract a large, generalized audience, and niche sites, that aim for a particular audience by geography, interest, demographic, activity or affinity. It's kind of like the difference between network TV and cable. Facebook and LinkedIn get lots of traffic, but if you're trying to reach seniors, you won't reach them there. Better to go with a social site aimed at that demographic, like Eons. A balance of mainstream and niche may be the best strategy, since many social media users use both. "The one exception is LinkedIn, where the users are less likely to come from another social networking website."¹

Mainstream sites don't usually go deep on specific topics, reach influential people in a specific industry or address a particular geographic area. However, they do reach a vast number of people, because they're more about the functionality they deliver than the subject matter (i.e., Facebook for social networking, Yelp for reviews, Stumbleupon for bookmarking, etc.). And once they gain traction, there are more people to invite ever more people to them. The media hype doesn't hurt their growth rate either.

¹Hitwise Report, 2.

The fact that they're so big hurts your chances of being seen amongst all the other people there. You end up competing with lots of message *clutter*. For example, Facebook gives you the opportunity to reach a tremendous number of people, but your message could get lost in all the activity – and quickly be forgotten. To get any kind of traction, you need to up the ante on participation, and be a consistent, creative and frequent contributor or advertiser. On the other hand, you could choose a niched site. Granted, the numbers won't be as big, but they'll be more targeted. With less activity and participation on the network, you get the opportunity to stand out among people who have an affinity with you, are more likely to see your message and care about what you have to say. Niche sites may not be as well known or attract the same numbers, but they'll reach your audience in ways that a mainstream site can't (unless you can find some way to attract a niche audience to a group on one of those sites). It's a matter of quality over quantity.

Browsers vs. Buyers

There's also speculation around the idea that targeted, niche sites are better for attracting people who are in the mood to make a purchase, because they're looking for product-specific information. Participating there may put you in proximity to an actual purchase. Many mainstream sites are more about hanging out with friends, so they're better for building relationships and creating buzz.

There are several ways to find niche sites that your audience and the people who influence them frequent. The best ones will both cover the subject matter and have high traffic. You'll also want the ones that attract a good amount of activity – that means they have quality content (and people creating it), high caliber participants, marketing and the tools that make it easy for visitors to share information.

Style and Substance

When looking for appropriate sites, make sure they're focused on subjects of interest in a style that appeals to your audience. The right people will be attracted to it and they're more likely to engage with the site frequently. To find these types of sites, look for media entities with an online presence, such as magazines and TV shows. You may also consider industry associations, networking groups and vendors that cater to your audience. Think about where your colleagues and customers look for information.

Once you've narrowed down the sites by subject, take a more in-depth look at them to see what the audience is talking about and what they expect to get from them. Listen in to see what questions they're asking, so you can see how you can make a contribution. If you're a realtor, it may not be cool for you to hang out on a travel site, simply because you think it matches your demographics. You need to have something relevant to say. If not, you could actually end up alienating people. Better to find the sites where you're a good fit.

Consider looking for local social sites. Geography can create an immediate affinity with certain audiences. Some people like to support businesses in their communities. It can be especially important for a service-type business to reach a local audience, because the service either needs to be delivered in person, or traveling a great distance is impractical. In addition to their online presence, local sites often host their own live events, too. That can be great for your business if it's important to meet face to face. As we talked about earlier, combining live and virtual networking can be more effective than virtual alone.

To find sites within a particular geography, include local magazines, newspapers, and radio and television stations that incorporate social tools. You can do this by adding a city name or

other location to your searches. Meetup may be a good place to look, too.

You'll also want to look for sites that share information automatically with other sites, which makes it easier for you to spread the word. For example, Upcoming's event calendars are shared with many other sites.

Reach & Frequency

Once you've created your list based on content, you'll want to prioritize the sites in terms of the numbers of people they reach and how frequently they get your message.

Reach is the percentage of people in your target audience who are going to get your message. Your goal may be to communicate a message to 30% of the Soccer Mom's in Seattle. To do that, you need to figure out where they go for information; then put together the right combination of media that will get you closest to that goal.

Not every medium or social site will be targeted to 100% of your audience, unless there's a Seattle Soccer Mom publication or website out there somewhere (there could be!). So you need to understand how much of each medium touches your audience. For example, women may make up 80% of a general parenting magazine's readers, but only 2% may have children who play soccer.

Each medium has a different name for how they measure audience. For print, it's circulation. For radio, it's coverage area. On the Web, it's visitors, viewership or eyeballs. For social media sites, we might use the same criterion as a website, but we'll want to look at members, followers and groups, as well. Media measurement isn't an exact science, yet publishers and media entities base the value of their ad space or time on those numbers. It's up to you to determine a social site's value by matching those numbers to your target profile.

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There are several tools to help you do this, but don't take the numbers literally; just use them to rank the relative value of each site. Some offer media planning tools for matching sites to your selected demographics. Some suggest related sites to ones you've chosen. Several offer toolbars you can add to your browser, so you'll be able to see the number of visitors when you surf to a site. Most of these work best for larger, more trafficked websites, but they're worth checking out in all cases because you can get a lot of data for free:

- Alexa
- Compete
- Quantcast's Planner
- Google Ad Planner
- Google Trends
- MSN adCenter Labs

What you're looking for is overall traffic, demographics and geographic dispersion. Page views per visitor and time spent on the site are good indicators of engagement.

Remember, the important numbers are the ones that show how many people fall within your target profile. With mainstream sites, you have to go a step beyond the big number to see if they're relevant. Look for ways to segment the audience by group, interest area, geography or other criterion. Often, the site will tell you how many members are in a particular group, but you may not be able to get a breakdown for the other areas.

Frequency is the number of times someone sees your message. In terms of online display advertising, one view is called an impression. And advertisers pay per impression. When it comes to social media, the cost isn't related to the number of times a message is delivered. That means you can build up a lot of frequency, without paying for each impression. This frequency has a lot to do with people

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remembering you, because as I've said, it takes repetition to create a memory. However, the messages aren't repeated verbatim, and social media messages need to be varied and subtle, so it may take more of them to create as deep an impression as an ad. On the other hand, hyperlinking and sharing increases the repetition and amplifies the message across the Web.

You also don't always know when the audience has a need to refer or purchase, so the frequency helps you build top-of-mind awareness and your message is more likely to be delivered when they're in the mood to buy.

Determining the reach and frequency of social media allows you to set numerical goals, which gives you a concrete target. The numbers allow you to measure the effectiveness of your participation and to make useful comparisons, although the results of course are open to interpretation, as you'll see in Part V.

Site Swag

Choosing the right sites to participate in can depend on what you're allowed to do at those sites. Many offer a chance to gain exposure and links just for the taking. Start by looking in the header and footer navigation for these free promotional opportunities:

- Directories to list your company
- Blogs to comment on
- Press release submission
- Q&A
- Forums or discussions
- Article, video, photo, etc. submission
- Event postings
- Opportunities to speak

The Case of the Interior Designer

Let's go through this thought process with an interior designer client of mine who is trying to drive more traffic to her website. Here's her situation and the materials she has on hand:

- Design expertise
- A beautiful portfolio and a number of awards
- A couple of articles written
- Several scheduled speaking engagements

Now let's take a look at the information we have about her target profile:

- High income earners, but could be retired
- Interested in contemporary design
- Live in the Seattle area
- Married, possibly Empty-Nesters
- Make design purchases in the Spring and Fall

Let's break it down by category first. We can immediately eliminate a blog, because she doesn't have the time or inclination to do much writing. Videos could be a great way to show off her work, but are too difficult and costly to develop at the moment. We'll have to stick with her still images, but they could easily be converted to a slideshow to put up on Slideshare or a similar tool. Since she provides a service, review sites like Yelp are a good idea, which also targets by city.

It's also important to think creatively about finding sites that appeal to her target audience. Although she's looking for people interested in interior design, they may have related interests like travel, wine and golf. They may also be grandparents. Participating in these sites may set my client apart from other designers; the trick will

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be to communicate in a way that connects the dots between these interests and interior design. In other words, an interior design article would be out of place on a travel site, but discussing how and where to display souvenirs may be appropriate.

For mainstream social networking, Facebook makes sense because of its consumer focus, but it will be useful to narrow it down on that site to groups targeted by her demographics and interests.

General contractors often refer interior designers, so adding business sites to the list makes sense, but not LinkedIn in this case, which targets managerial professionals. Twitter makes the list for announcing articles and awards, which may get picked up by journalists. For other followers, she could post design tips on a regular basis. And I would post her speaking engagements on Upcoming. However, before firming up these recommendations, I'd want to be sure her target profile uses these websites. I'll do that once I figure out the appropriate niche sites. Here are the steps I took to find them:

1. Used Quantcast's Planner tool and plugged in my client's demographics and geography, along with the "home decor & design" category filter. The top sites by affinity included: Better Homes & Gardens (BH&G), Hometime, Martha Stewart and Taunton. The only freebie on BH&G was a forum, but I imagine there are loads of advertising opportunities. Hometime and Martha are about the same. That's the issue with the larger sites; they're not giving much away for free. Taunton publishes books. So all in all, not as useful as I thought it would be.
2. Searched "interior design" on social media directories. I found many sites for students and other professionals – not the right audience. Ning showed how many members were in each social network and how many joined lately, but many weren't very active. But then I found *Zabatat*: *Inspiration for Your Home*, which

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had 878 members, but only 8 joined in the last month. ViroPop had 2,561; no members joined in the last month, but 8 photos were added. Okay, not too promising. At findasocialnetwork, I found *Curbly, a site for DIY'ers*. It had 5,764 members. I also found *30Elm*, but it seemed to be out of business. Socialnetworklist didn't return any results. Blog Catalog turned up *Decorati*, *Interior Design Ideas*, and *EhomeE*. There were many interior designer blogs, such as *Interior Design Resources & Budget Decorating*. I saved these for future reference for when my client had some extra time for posting comments. Then, since it sounded like a magazine, I checked out *Decorati*, because media-related sites are likely to have bigger audiences and participation than blogs. According to my Compete toolbar, there were 13,318 visitors. Much more promising.

3. To find more local sites, I narrowed the list with the following search query: “‘interior design’ magazines seattle.” That turned up *Seattle Homes and Lifestyles Magazine*, where I found an event calendar and a blog to comment on; and a link to *Seattle Magazine*, which had blogs, but they were off-topic and basically a directory of remodelers, which I imagine came with their advertising packages. I saved this for when we were ready to do PR.
4. I used the sites World-Newspapers and AllYouCanRead for a more general search. I found *Dwell*, *Architectural Digest* and *Contract Magazine*. *Dwell*, a consumer magazine, seems to attract the right audience. I circled back to Quantcast to check the audience profile, and it was showing about 2,000 visitors from the Seattle area. Opportunities for marketing include: advertising, blogs, project and event submissions, blog tips and a place for a client to submit a review.

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I figured my list was more than my client could handle at this point, but I didn't want to leave any rock unturned. So I went to the Washington State listing of associations and found the *American Society of Interior Designers*, *Interior Design Coalition*, and the *International Interior Design Association*. These sites are more useful for industry connections, which are better if you're looking for referrals, rather than direct customers. I put these aside for the time being.

So here's my list so far with number of visitors and associated demographics:

Site	Visitors (Compete)	Demographics (Quantcast)
Upcoming	142.3 million This could be all of Yahoo, not just Upcoming.	Female, young adult, less affluent. Female is good, since women often make interior design decisions. Young and less affluent misses the mark, but Upcoming's data is shared with other sites.
Facebook	122.5 million/over 500 groups related to "interior design." Largest has 58,847 members. Few in Seattle, however.	Young (18-34), but more affluent. We could keep Facebook on the list, but perhaps not spend too much time on it until we test the results.
Yelp	25.7 million with 75 other interior design professionals in Seattle area. Only one had ratings; my client was listed, but hadn't claimed her page, and no reviews or ratings.	Female, young and less affluent, but highly educated. The less affluent bothers me a bit, but it couldn't hurt to try to get happy clients to post reviews. Search engines would pick up the data.

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Twitter	23 million, but only people following will see posts, unless found through search.	Once again, female, young and less affluent for now. The growth rate is phenomenal and may prove useful as time goes on.
Slideshare	Nearly 1.2 million Searching for "interior design seattle," I found 227 slideshows.	No data at Quantcast
Dwell	68,861	Male, middle-aged, more affluent, educated. Jackpot!
Decorati	13,318	Female, middle-aged, more affluent, highly educated. I'm wondering if this includes interior designers, not customers?
Seattle Homes & Lifestyles Magazine	3,187	Female, middle-aged, more affluent, highly educated.

Once at Decorati, I took a look at the menu in search of Site Swag. Of course, I could advertise. Decorati Connect allows consumers to find a designer (an Angie's List of decorators you might say). But I needed to be a registered member to be a recommended designer. No problem, registration was free. And designers can add their portfolios and press links, too. Then there was the "Find a Designer" link. I also found forums and events under Community, where my client could easily respond to forum questions. Although I couldn't track down an easy way to add an event, I could send them an email request. The site even offers some handy advice to help designers market themselves through the site.

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So here's what I came up with for a recommended short list, in priority order:

- Upcoming: this is first, since advance notice is needed for events.
- Dwell: get involved fully.
- Seattle Homes & Lifestyles: not a big audience, but it's local and targeted.
- Decorati: test it out.
- Facebook: join biggest decorating and travel groups.
- Yelp: take ownership of your page and get customers to write reviews.
- Slideshare: post portfolio here, so it's easy to add it to other social sites, email and at my client's website.
- Twitter: announce events, awards and published articles; add a Twitter link to the website and other properties to grow the list of followers.

Site Selection Checklist

- Look for sites that leverage your strengths.
- Match your target profile by geography, interest, demographic, activity and/or affinity. If meeting people face-to-face is important, look for sites that also host live events.
- Measure the amount of traffic they receive.
- Make sure the style and substance is a good fit.
- Review the site's media kit for more information about their visitors (if the site takes advertising, a link to it is usually found in the footer).
- Check out the blog, Q&A, groups or whatever you find there to see how active they are. You may also look to see how many new members have joined recently.
- If they pass muster, add them to your short list.
- Look for Site Swag promotional opportunities.
- Track your results and revise as necessary.

Try It Now

Now it's your turn. Make a list of the types of sites most appropriate for your business based on your marketing objectives and skills.

1. Start by choosing the right mainstream sites.
2. Create a general list of niche sites you think may be appropriate based on subject matter, geography and a general idea of target audience.

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3. Narrow down your list to about 5 niche sites based on your research into audience composition and site traffic.
4. On those sites, make a list of the promotional freebies available (Site Swag). Create a chart listing the sites down the left side of the page. Across the top, list the types of Site Swag. Add checkboxes in the appropriate spots.