

# GROWERTALKS

Acres & Acres

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## Social Media Then & Now

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If you've been in this industry long enough to remember when "social media strategy" meant asking the youngest person on your staff to post some pansy pictures to Facebook, congratulations: you've lived through one of the quickest shifts in communication since the invention of the telephone. Ten years ago, social media was a novelty—a digital bulletin board where you pinned up sales flyers and hoped customers would wander by. Today, social media is the front door of your business, the customer service desk, the marketing department and sometimes the therapy couch, all rolled into one.

I've been watching this evolution since I first joined America Online in 1994. I remember excitedly telling then-publisher John Martens that I was in my first AOL

chatroom.

"Ask them where they buy their poinsettias," he suggested—the first bit of online horticultural research (which introduced me to my first experience with internet flaming).

Anyway, since then, and especially in the last decade or so, I've seen that the biggest change in social media isn't the platforms, the algorithms or the technology. It's the expectation. Ten years ago, social media helped customers find you. Today, it helps them know you.

I did a bit of research into the biggest changes to social media since 2016 to see what has changed. In doing so, I found eight ways your social media efforts might be behind the times.

Then: Build followers—Now: Build relevance. It used to be just about numbers—how many views, how many likes. That's gratifying, but it doesn't convert to visits or sales. Today, you want to post content that will inspire viewers to tune in for more, and spur them to a visit and a purchase.

Then: Post to your audience—Now: Create for discovery. Before, social media was primarily a way to communicate with people who already knew and followed you (I guess like my Acres Online readers). Now, it's increasingly a way for a person to encounter your business or products without ever having heard of you. That's the beauty of those short videos—they pop up where you least expect them.

Then: Maintain a presence—Now: Earn attention. Frequency used to be everything. Keep the content flowing! Now, people are drowning in content, including AI-generated content. So quality, usefulness, entertainment and originality matter more than just hitting a daily posting goal.

Then: One size fits all—Now: Platform-specific. Each main platform (YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, LinkedIn) has its own audience, culture and content formats. So don't simply repurpose content; adapt it to fit—or concentrate your resources on the platform where it has the best chance of working.

Then: Static posts—Now: Video and visual storytelling. A photo, a caption and a link are still perfectly respectable social posts. But more and more, short-form videos are dominating the attention economy. (There's a reason I share videos in the "Finally ..." portion of my newsletter.)

Then: Marketing—Now: Customer service. Social media used to be something the marketing person was responsible for. Now, customers expect businesses to answer questions, respond to complaints, handle problems and sometimes even conduct transactions through social platforms and direct messaging. In other words, your social account isn't just a billboard, it's part of your service/help desk. It also means ignoring a nasty comment isn't necessarily ignoring a troll. Sometimes it's ignoring a customer.

Then: Polished corporate voice—Now: Human voice. Businesses often tried to make their social presence look like advertising: polished graphics, carefully worded copy, corporate messaging. Now, consumers tend to respond better to personality, authenticity, behind-the-scenes material and actual human beings. For a small business like yours, that's particularly encouraging because while you can't outspend Walmart, you can be considerably more interesting than Walmart.

Then: Be everywhere—Now: be somewhere worthwhile. The conventional wisdom used to be to establish a presence on every platform, then use an app to spread one post across all those platforms. But that shotgun approach results in impersonal, diluted messages. Instead, find out where your customers actually are (ask them!). Pick one or two social media sites where you can consistently do good work. Ignore the rest—until you have a reason not to.

In the final analysis, I think this evolution of social media works in your favor. Tell your story, in your own voice, answer questions, solve problems, be spontaneous, be entertaining and share it on the one or few channels that work for you.

And if you still don't want to do it, ask the youngest person on your staff. **GT**