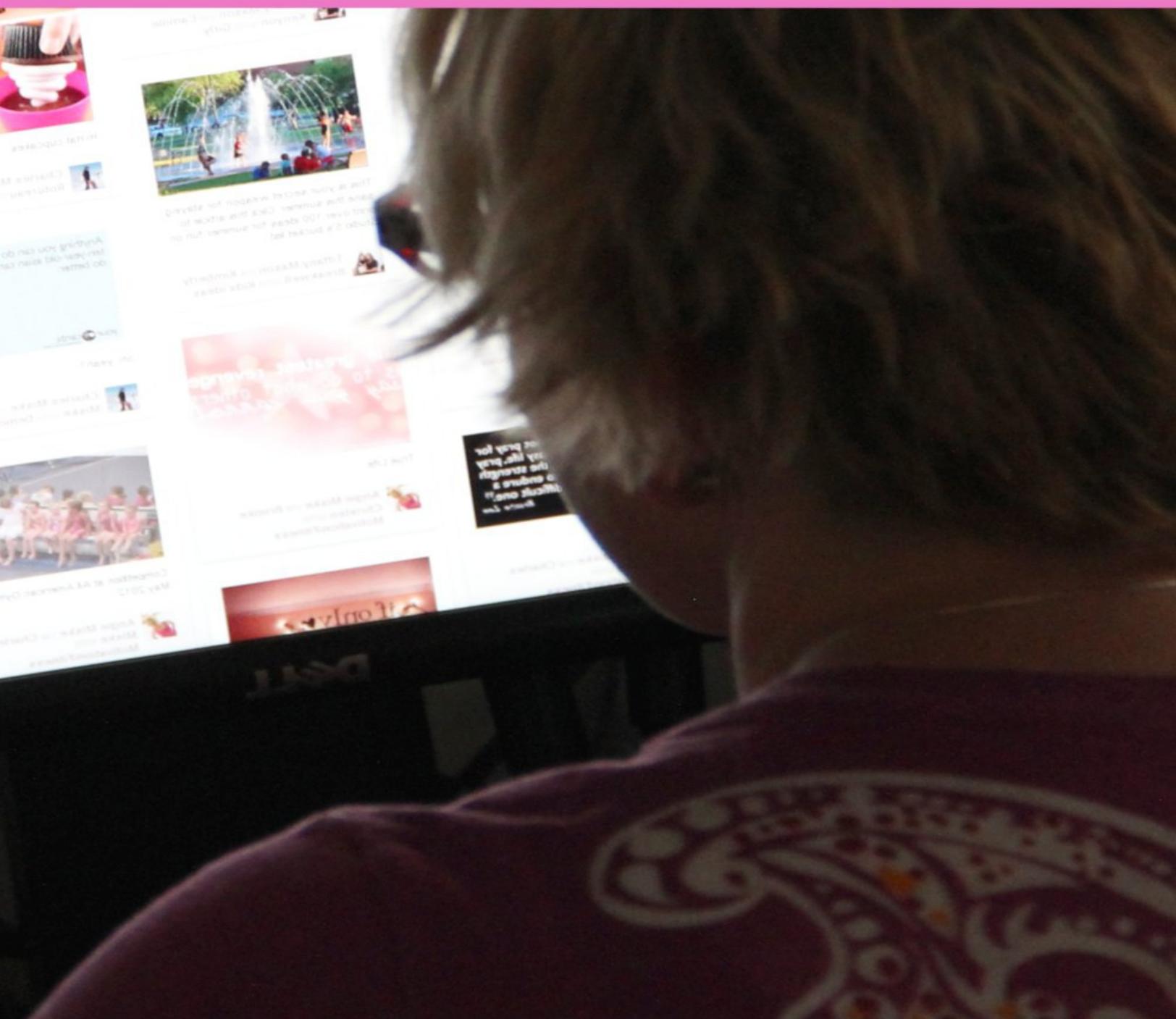


A simple plan to Build Links through Community Engagement



Do-it-yourself Social Marketing: Pinterest

by Charles Miske

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What is Pinterest:

Pinterest.com is a website for social image sharing. Currently it is by “invitation only” - which implies that you must be invited by a current member. This is one way to become involved, but you can also click the “Request an Invite” button, fill out your email address, jump through a few hoops, wait a few days, and you’re in. Generally.

Pinterest is pretty much like any other Community, in that it may or may not be a good fit for your business goals or marketing strategies.

In Pinterest, there are a few basic things you can do.

- 1) Upload images from your computer to your own account
- 2) Pin - this attaches a copy of an image outside Pinterest to your own account. The image will be clickable, with a link pointing back to the original source.
- 3) Repin - this attaches a copy of an image already in Pinterest to your own account. Any linking to original sources will be retained.
- 4) Comment - write something about an image, either in your own or another Pinterest account
- 5) Like - like an image in your own or another Pinterest account

Boards can be associated with categories, to assist users in finding images that appeal to them, to browse, and sort. By clicking the Everything->Sports dropdown, you’ll get several hundred Pins associated with a Board associated with Sports, in descending order from most recent to oldest. This can give the appearance of randomness, which may or may not be true.

Before you get carried away with this, let’s first examine what Pinterest means and what it’s for. When it first became popular, primarily female members would post pictures of food and clothing. Much of the time the images were from various food and clothing blogs and shopping sites. Over time these links to blogs became noticeable by the various search engines, and improved the marketing for the blogs and shopping sites represented by, or linked to, the images.

Meanwhile, men as a group became more adventurous and began pinning images of cars and motorcycles. These are of course oversimplifications, but they are basically representative. Companies got excited about the marketing implications, but for the most

part, don't really have Social or Community Marketing figured out yet. They generally make fools of themselves much like on Twitter when they post every 3 minutes: "RT this now - big sale - Follow for coupons". A company that posts their catalog on Pinterest will be an epic fail.

This concept, in fact, is why many businesses have been avoiding Pinterest - it's not a really good place to publish your catalog photos. Businesses that are used to putting up photos on their own websites, where people have intentionally visited because they're interested in the business, or on Facebook or Twitter, where they already have a fanbase, might think that the apparent randomness means they get to force-feed their catalogs to unsuspecting soon-to-be-fans.

This glaringly obvious abuse of the Community is why just signing up for Pinterest and Pinning your catalog is a really bad idea. Let's first explore the idea of Community.

Community in a Nutshell:

Community is about involvement, about sharing and caring and being an active participant in discussions. Tossing your catalog in the face of potential viewers is not Community, it is marketing and advertising and really doesn't belong in a Community environment. If you're already a big big company, and everyone in the world really wants to see your logo in a hundred different formats, and you honestly believe that, please don't use a Social platform - buy magazine ads.

Community is actual involvement and communication with your potential customers, or even just people who are a little bit like them. This shows you are a truly caring and genuine human being, and helps to dispel the big bad "us vs. them" corporate image. Of course, small business owners can get past this pretty easily, since they really are people and not just marketing clones posting random nonsense that some ROI report said will become the next big thing.

Continue to be real, and your demographic will eventually notice. This is a slow patient ongoing process. You can't rush it or buy instant numbers and success. You can never stop being human, being real, being active, or you are basically withdrawing from the Community and your presence will soon be forgotten as someone more astute takes your place.

Enrollment Best Practices:

I recommend you do not enroll as your company. For one thing, like I mentioned above, Pinterest is not another online catalog for you, and while you can put up product pictures, and even add price tags to them (it's in the Pinning dialog options) you really don't want to do that. Studies show a severely reduced Community engagement (the number of Likes, Comments, and Repins) when you just put up product images from your catalog and/or put prices on items.

If you enroll as your very own human self, you will bring a level of authenticity to your Pins, and become a valuable and trusted member of the Community, rather than a mere marketer. Pinning as yourself also allows you to be yourself, and act as yourself without a direct reflection on your company. A layer of plausible deniability?

Much like on Twitter, some companies have adopted the practice of setting up a series of fake Community members, so they can roll off responsibility, but some clues to that abuse are a weird username, an avatar (profile picture, photo icon of yourself) that looks like it was snagged off a dating site and blown up, and they have a totally empty set of Boards (where you organize your Pins) or only one Board with a whole lot of catalog pictures from only one or two sites.

Don't do this either. If there is a real reason to Pin as your company, and you are fully aware of that reason, then by all means do so, otherwise, Enroll as you, and Pin as you.

Upon Enrollment:

In general, you will be allowed to connect your Pinterest to Facebook, and you should allow this connection - unless your really big thing on Facebook is to post your drunken party pics, or other things that might detract a bit from your business demographic, like your hotheaded political or religious or other strong opinions that at least 1/3 of your demographic doesn't share (face it, you're a business owner, and you need to grow up and accept that now).

You will be asked a few questions that again, you should answer considering your demographic, within the bounds of your honest likes and dislikes. These questions and your Facebook friends will be used to "pre-Follow" a series of Pinners. For the most part there is no reason not to allow this - Following is one-way, like Twitter, and in general only pre-fills in your default home page. Just allow all the defaults for the most part, and you'll be fine as a start.

At this point, you should install the browser "Pin It" button (available for many common browsers), which is easy to do - follow the instructions (About->Pin It Button).

Now, don't do anything. Relax and go slow. Commit to a week of just scoping it out. Cruise around in the various pre-defined searches. Look at Pins, and Comments, see what people Like or don't Like. Form your own opinion. Learn.

What This Is For:

While you are learning what Pinterest looks like to you from the inside, I'd like to examine what it is we're trying to accomplish.

Links. Getting honest links is tougher now that Google is doing all it can to eliminate links that look like they were paid for (Adwords aside). Pinterest has the potential to help you get links. In fact, many blogs report that the bulk of their visitors (traffic) come from Pinterest. If you can become an active member of the Community, you can help to spread your own links through your Followers and other Pinner who will Comment, Repin and Like your Pins.

Getting links through your Community is a multi-step process. I'm assuming you have the proper blog strategy in place (see my Do-it-yourself Social Marketing: Blogs) - if not, get these in place as soon as you can.

Don't worry, you'll have plenty of time as you build up your Community network. First of all, you will have Followers automatically if you're connected to Facebook. You'll need to slowly and (instant activity implies some level of spamming or insincerity) gently build up a network.

Network Building Task:

Generally, most people have hobbies. For this example, let's select "Mountain Bikes". Add a new Board "Mountain Bikes". Associate this Board with "Sports" in the setup dialog. Just hang with me as I explain this, and then use your own hobbies and pet ideas when you actually do it. Remember, this doesn't have to have anything to do with your business. In fact, it's better if it doesn't.

Now click on the "Everything->Sports" dropdown and scroll through a few hundred or so of the Pins shown. You can also type "Mountain Bike" in the search box for a different view. Your goal is to Like 5-10 Pins, Comment on 5-10 Pins, and Repin 5-10 Pins. Go through a few pages of Pins (at the bottom is a button "See More Pins" - click it for another very long scrolling auto-filling page). Be somewhat selective, don't go nuts, make sure you really like the stuff you're using here. Be sincere. When you realize the sheer volume of Pins available to Like, Comment and Repin, you'll become more and more selective, and get a better understanding of the Community environment.

Do this about 4 days a week from now on. Average 15-30 action items distributed roughly as above, every day between the various Board categories you are really truly interested in. When you Pin an image, you have the option of keeping the Caption as-is, or editing it. If you notice any obvious misspellings or inaccuracies by all means correct them. If you have a particular persona that would come out over the course of your social interactions, and it's applicable to your demographic, without any obviously offensive content, go with that.

Example: Repin image with Caption "hot d*** love this s****" - for your business demographic please rephrase it "Nice Bike"

Example: Repin image with Caption "Blah Mfg. Model 24-3333" - for your persona please rephrase it "Christmas Wish List Addition (hint hint)"

Example: Comment on image "Red is a good color for that frame"

Just be yourself and don't be offensive. If you want to be extra careful, click the image first to make sure it doesn't redirect to a dating site (it is possible, but considered bad etiquette, to rewrite the URL when you Pin) before you Repin.

It's pretty simple to spread this strategy among about 3-5 different Boards. Your

Community should grow a little quicker than you might expect, as long as you're honest and active.

If you notice any other users with similar Boards, and they generally have Pins you like, go ahead and Follow them. Either Follow the Board, or Follow All. Again, there is generally no repercussion associated with it. This just basically gives you simpler access to their Boards without having to click any buttons or search or dropdown - they'll be on your default "Pinner's You Follow" page.

Try to "Like" and "Comment" Pins from a mix of users. Users you "Follow" and not, users who "Follow" you and not. Much like Twitter, the idea is to have about 15-30 activity items per day, and Follow about twice as many people as Follow you.

Keep at it for a few weeks, and very slowly, gently, start to add your own Pins. Remember to be diverse, but within a few relatively narrow bands of categories and topics. You're building a Community network now, not advertising. It doesn't matter a whole lot now if your topic is not exactly aligned with your business, but follows a compatible demographic where it is possible.

I'll mention this again, but if your primary marketing demographic is 30 year old men, a Board of "Accessorize your Kitchen" will not be all that helpful. But the above "Cool Mountain Bikes" might be close enough. Think about that some before you go overboard.

Upload Your Own Pins:

As part of your activity item daily goal, you should slowly begin to upload your own Pins. Again, these probably don't need to be at all associated with your business. In regards to the example above, if you have a great mountain bike, and have the ability to have some great pictures, like action shots from a good angle, go ahead and upload one every other day or so. You don't want to trigger any insincerity detectors among your Followers by moving too fast.

Another idea is to create a new Board of something completely different. For example: Kids Art. Then every few days upload a scan of your own kids artwork, if that fits with you as a person. Pictures of your pet chasing balls. Anything so long as it's really your life.

You want to establish a reputation as someone who is not spamming the system with catalog pictures. Photos of your dog or your kids' artwork go a long way to being genuine. Leave the URL blank. Sadly, for something this personal, unless your Mom or Stalker is Following you, don't expect a lot of Repins, though you might get some Likes and Comments out of it.

The point then is to be genuine and establish yourself as a person, not a robot. You're doing activity and it all adds up. One really important thing to note is that once you Upload a Pin you can edit it to change the URL. In general, it might not be a good idea, unless you know right now that it will work better for you. In which case go ahead ...

The reason I think it's not a great idea is that you can get double (or more) duty out of a photo on your blog or company website than you can one that is on Pinterest. If you blog it, then Pin it from your blog, you look more genuine. If someone clicks the Pin and goes to an identical picture on your blog, there's verification that you were honest. Also, you can Tumblr your picture from the blog for double duty.

But, that aside, here are a couple reasons you might want to Upload with a URL:

Generate traffic to your Pinterest pages by Uploading to Pinterest and then using the Embed Pin dialog to get the code to put in your blog so the picture comes from Pinterest instead - warning: do not then make the URL this post on your blog, or you create a vicious circle of links.

Use the Pin to generate traffic to your Twitter or other web presence instead of your blog, if that's your marketing goal of the moment, since Pinning from a few other Social sites is cumbersome at best, and will most likely fail with a warning (unless they change something in their programming soon).

Pin Your Blogs:

Now, assuming your blogs are all set up, the idea is to go to your blogs, and using your “Pin It” bookmarklet, Pin images from your blogs. Again, don’t go nuts here. Keep it within your 30 daily actions as mentioned above. Preferably, your own blog images should be only 1 or 2 per day maximum. Otherwise you’ll look spammy.

If you’re using a Lightbox style blog plugin, you might try clicking the image to enlarge it in the overlay, then click the “Pin It” button. This should make pinning the larger image possible. I’ve noticed that by default the smaller image is what it will put in the “Pin It” dialog gallery. Scroll to the end of the popup for the larger image, which is what you want for best results (for me anyway, YMMV).

Also, some blogs put the posts all together on an index page and you click a headline to show a post on its own page. Click to make sure you are on the one page with the one article with the one image you want to Pin before you click “Pin It”. This prevents some issues with the Pin being linked to your blog in general, and not the specific page you’re marketing.

Test your Pin to make sure it goes to the proper page in your blog. If anything is messed up, just delete it and try again. Some Javascript will interfere with other scripts, so be patient sometimes waiting for the different popups and overlays to appear and fill.

Cross-Market Your Blog and Pinterest:

To market your Pinterest, and get links out to your account, you can upload a Pin, leave the URL blank, and then use the Embed code to insert it into your blog post. There is a small glitch in the way the Pinterest Embed code interacts with some blog code, so if you notice it not separating nicely from your other content, check with the URL given in the resources at the end of this booklet.

Another possible issue is that the default Embed code includes a second link to the original source for the image. If you uploaded it, that code will be empty and trigger a 404 to the blog post. It's not awesomely easy to fix, but again, check the URL in the resources. If this is way over your head, relax, let it go - it's not critical and in general Google will figure it out.

If you can, you should use a Widget Plugin for your blog that shows your Pinterest recent pins. If you do a search in "Add New Plugin" for "Pinterest" then read some reviews you can figure that out pretty easily.

Interconnecting your blog and your Pinterest with two-way activity is the best way to utilize the Community you've been working so hard to build.

Reacting:

You can monitor your progress on Pinterest using some demographic and statistics tools Pinreach.com is one of my favorites, though it's very simple. You can view your progress in building an activity level and Community.

If you notice that various users have a preference, for example, three people always "Like" or "Repin" when you post a picture of a red mountain bike, then by all means, try hard to get more red mountain bikes up. If you notice that someone who follows your Mountain Bike Board also follows a lot of Bike Shorts Boards, then maybe you should add one too.

Be active, engage, try to solve the needs and wants and preferences of your Community. Even if it's not directly measurable ROI. You're building a Community, not cashing checks. This is the point that most large companies just cannot get through their heads.

Do not object, or argue, or disagree with a troll in any Comments. Just let it roll off, assume everyone has an opinion, and go on with your life. It's that simple. Remember, in general, when it comes to building Community, any action is good enough when it's inbound.

If you have any kind of statistics associated with your blog, you can monitor the traffic from Pinterest, to see if any of your images have a better impact in attracting viewers, and see if you should make adjustments in your topics, your posts, your photos, to attract even more.

No-No Stuff:

Think long and hard about the following. There might be a reason or exception to these, but if you can't express it or explain it or defend it, maybe you shouldn't do it.

Never Pin or Repin the following images:

- Logos
- Catalogs
- Advertising Copy
- Coupons or Promotions
- Pins with Prices

Iffy Pins:

- Employees at work
- Business Events
- Business Locations

Example: your office has a great view of the beach at sunset. Having a "Pretty Sunset" Board and Pinning pictures of the sunset would be cool enough, even with the Caption "View from office window". This would be excellent from your own personal blog.

Example: your office throws an Open House. This event is best blogged about, then maybe one image from a gallery Pinned, but it should be a pretty generic image, like you could use for the background of a motivational poster "Teamwork" or whatever, and post it to your Teamwork Board.

Make it real. Don't advertise - engage.

Tips and Things:

If you're a professional photographer, you might be okay with Pinterest so long as you only do "samples" - smaller, cropped-out versions of your work. I would shy away from watermarking, myself, but that's up to you to experiment with. The problem is to show how good you are without giving anything away that you charge money for.

Pinterest allows you to Pin video. It might not be the best idea. The worst videos a company can produce are typically the ones they think are the coolest. A simple example would be a video in which someone at the company interviews someone else at the company, and it ends up mostly being about 5 minutes of talking about talking. Video is about moving images - if it isn't moving it probably isn't a good subject for video.

Sometimes users on Pinterest mis-label or don't label a Board. Click on the "Everything" or "Everything->Other" every now and then to see what interests you for the things you normally Like, Comment, or Repin.

Stay somewhat consistent, keep the business goals, appearance, facade and demographics in mind. If your job is financial planning, Repinning expensive wine photos might be appropriate for finding a Community within your demographic. Repinning tattoo pictures might not be.

Check my blog page for this book for helpful pictures and any additional information that I might need to supplement this booklet with.

<http://charlesmiske.com/blog/category/marketing-pinterest/>

I have a few explanatory illustrations posted if you are having difficulty imagining some of the items I describe in this booklet. If you need more, please feel free to post questions or suggestions on my Facebook Author page.

<http://www.facebook.com/CharlesMiskeAuthor>

Pressing Forward:

Your Pinterest Community Marketing should be subtle and generally slow paced. Do not rush. Build a solid Community of Followers. Follow Pinner with similar interests. Be true to yourself. Stick with 15-30 activity items per day about 3-5 days a week. Honestly, you can do this in about 15-20 minutes a day. If you're blogging on schedule, it takes only a second to click "Pin It" when you Publish your post.

Author Bio:

Charles Miske has been a partner in a successful online marketing company for ten years, and has been part of their Social Media development team for the last three years. He's participated in several experimental social marketing programs, some that paid off, some that didn't, and has developed a simple time-efficient strategy to increase visibility in Social Communities. This booklet is part of that strategy.