Using social networking to win customers

As a busy small business owner, you may not have had time to learn much about social networks. Or, you may think that social networking is just a way that teenagers "meet" other teenagers through the internet using applications like FaceBook or MySpace. However, many small businesses have found that social networks are a great way to get new customers and retain existing ones. According to Forrester Research (November 2008), membership levels in the leading social network sites are as follows:

- **Bebo**: 40 million
- **Facebook**: 120 million
- **LinkedIn**: 30 million experienced professionals representing 150 industries
- **MySpace**: 110 million
- **Reunion**: 32 million
- **Second Life**: 16 million
- **Twitter**: 5.57 million

**What is social networking?**

Social networking web sites allow you to connect with friends, family, and colleagues online, and to meet people with similar interests. The largest social networking sites have millions of members. Common to most social networking sites is the viral nature of building contact or friend lists and sharing with them. It is an exponential process. Mary knows ten people who each know ten more people — and soon there is a network of hundreds of people communicating with one another about what is happening in their lives.

When new members join a social networking site, they provide profile information about themselves and their interests. They also have the option to join groups that have similar interests within the social networking space. For example, on MySpace there are 34 group categories, each with tens of thousands of separate groups. Many individual groups have over 10,000 members. People in the groups and forums provide information to one another about their experiences and thoughts. For a small business, the utility of social networks comes from these groups with similar interests. Here is a sample comment about a local dentist I found on a recent forum post:

"Awesome Orthodontist (name withheld)! He’s got a great staff and they all have a great sense of humor … I live downtown Dallas and it's worth the drive”.

This type of unsolicited endorsement, read by potentially thousands of people, is worth much more than a paid ad. Social network members will trust words from people just like them more than they will believe slick advertising or yellow page listings.
Social networking success story

This recent news story illustrates the power of social networking: "Electoral triumph built on a Web revolution". As Barak Obama considered running for President of the United States, he had a meeting with Marc Andreessen, the founder of Netscape and a board member of Facebook. Obama wondered if social networking could help him. "It was like a guy in a garage who was thinking of taking on the biggest names in the business," Andreessen recalled. "What he was doing shouldn't have been possible, but we see a lot of that out here and then something clicks. He was clearly supersmart and very entrepreneurial, a person who saw the world and the status quo as malleable." The rest, as they say, is history.

How your small business can take advantage of the power of social networking

- Tune in to what is being said about you on social networking sites.
- If someone asks a question that is within your expertise – help them.
- Track online comments about your organization or your products. If there is misinformation, provide corrections.
- Register with LinkedIn – this is a site specifically committed to linking businesses and professionals.
- Join in. Add your own comments to the blogs or upload short videos. Who is more qualified than you are to talk about your company?

Small business owners are very busy people, and monitoring and interacting with social networks may seem like another task on your already full plate. This is where your IT consultant can help. By setting up monitoring and tracking alerts on your system, you can optimize the time you spend on these important activities. Your IT consultant may also suggest software services that help you assess the return on your investment.

Advanced Managed Solutions specializes in network management, network design, and network infrastructure. Along with sales, support and management we offer IS support services, technical outsourcing, and 24 X 7 monitoring. AMS offers quick reliable services with our number one goal is to protect our client assets and ensure that their network is performing optimally. In today’s world, the cost of a network being down in a company is greater than the cost of the equipment itself. And now with the convergence of voice and data networks, companies today need to emphasize network reliability in the work place. Whether it’s at the office or on the road.

AMS has a number of qualified support specialists and engineers available to insure that your needs can be meet rapidly in this ever changing network environment. Whether it’s a network move or upgrade, cabling project, or data center design and implementation, we can provide the necessary people to ensure quality service and a commitment to excellence.

Our Company works regularly on the latest networking technologies. This enables AMS to bring new and innovative solutions for improving reliability and performance. Our Managed Services solution allows us to monitor your network environment to protect against surprises that can lead to costly repairs. It also allows us to view the network performance and see where improvement is needed as your company evolves and make technology a pleasant experience.

As a leading technology company, AMS can provide solutions for servers, systems, software, upgrades, service and support. We can also provide project management and design capabilities as needed for your office. Our customer specialists are very knowledgeable and are willing to assist in any way to keep each company’s network performing optimally.