

Social media sites can be incredibly useful. Pinterest, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and all the rest have created new means of communication and enabled companies to connect organically with users whose interests are already vetted.

That said, they can also be destructive. The difference lies in the way you use them:

If you publish an article on your own website, tweet about it, and post a link on Facebook, that's fantastic. If you post an article as a Facebook note and then share it, your marketing and outreach are headed for a crash-and-burn moment.

Social media: the value of building a tribe

We, as businesspeople, understand the value of the connection economy. What we need to focus on is making sure that those connections endure over the years and decades. We do that by providing value and by not cheapening the relationship. We also do it by maintaining connections, and most importantly by not having a middleman.

Having 10,000 followers on Facebook, Tumblr, or Twitter is helpful. But having 5,000 subscribers on your email list, that's much more valuable. Unless I knew a magic spell for converting "likes" and "follows" into email subscribers, I'd take a 100-person email list over a thousand-like Facebook or Twitter page any day of the week. Those emails will still be valid in a year or five. Will their social accounts?

Even more important, I know that when I send an email to their inbox, it arrives safe and sound. The same cannot be said for any social networks.

The only way to truly own that connection is to write on your proper platform (a website you control or a safe email program) and gather email addresses from members of your tribe.

I love the word tribe; it instills a feeling of community. A family in a way that there are common interests and views.

Email is enduring

It's been around since the dawn of the Internet. It survived Geocities and Myspace, and it'll survive Facebook and Twitter. There's no reason to rely on a social media site when there's a reliable and consistent contact medium available to you, for free. Almost all — 95 percent — of your address book contacts are not on the same social sites they used a decade ago, but they probably signed up for the new one with the same email address as the first.

Social media services are a fantastic way to spread the word and share information, but relying primarily on a publishing platform you do not control can hurt your marketing efforts. While there's value in social likes, follows, shares, and retweets, those are worth far less, in the big picture, than passionate email subscribers.

People on your mailing list will always get your message. They may just skim it, but as long as you're sending it properly, that email will always land in their inbox. The same can't be said for most social media sites. Unless they're on Twitter at the right time ... unless you pay Facebook the right amount ... unless you're popular enough on Tumblr ... they may never see your content. And that's a shame, because we know your content, your advice, and your thoughts could impact the right audience. Email subscribers are your friends and email deliverability can grow your business.