RESOURCE GUIDE

FACEBOOK FOR TOURISM BUSINESSES

Travel Alberta
Canada

FACEBOOK FOR TOURISM BUSINESSES

Facebook is the cornerstone of most social media strategies and remains a popular channel for businesses in the tourism industry. The popularity of Facebook has been both good and bad for businesses wanting to use it as a marketing and communications channel. The good: millions of people use Facebook every day as a way to communicate. The bad: the Facebook landscape has become very crowded and competitive. Businesses that choose Facebook as one of their marketing channels need a strategy to ensure they stay relevant and visible.

WHY CHOOSE FACEBOOK?

There are several reasons that Facebook has become such a popular social media channel for businesses.

FACEBOOK IS USED ACROSS A WIDE DEMOGRAPHIC

As of December 2017, Facebook has over 2.13 billion active users worldwide. The demographics of this active user base vary by country. In Alberta, it is estimated that nearly 70% of adults use the platform. (Source - http://canadiansinternet.com/social-media-use-in-canada-2017/)

FACEBOOK SUPPORTS A VARIETY OF CONTENT OPTIONS

Facebook continues to offer new and innovative ways to post content. Business pages allow for written content, photos, photo galleries, videos, blog posts (through Facebook Notes), 360 degree video, and live video.

FACEBOOK OWNS A LARGER SOCIAL MEDIA COLLECTION

Facebook has integrated new features by acquiring other companies. In recent years, they have purchased Instagram, Whatsapp and virtual reality company Oculus. These acquisitions, along with many others, have allowed Facebook to expand its offerings. Instagram and Messenger are two other popular channels under the Facebook umbrella.

FACEBOOK INSIGHTS GIVE YOU INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR AUDIENCE

Facebook page analytics (called Facebook Insights) offer business owners more in-depth information into who follows them. Insights provides information on audience demographics, habits, engagements, trends, and interests. Businesses can use this information to better tailor content and product offerings.

HOW FACEBOOK WORKS – THE BASICS

Facebook is one of the most robust social media channels available and lends itself well to brand storytelling. Business owners who use Facebook to its full potential have the opportunity to build a strong connection with their audience through targeted posts and ads.

Although the science behind the algorithm that powers Facebook is a closely guarded secret, there are a few things to keep in mind when creating your Facebook content strategy:

FACEBOOK IS BUILT ON RELATIONSHIPS

Regardless of the changes that Facebook makes, the core idea behind the channel remains the same: Facebook helps people communicate with those they know, like, and trust. Facebook determines which people and brands are most important to individual users by monitoring their actions on the platform. With that information, Facebook prioritizes content from these sources in a user's feed. For a business owner, creating content that resonates with their audience is key in building a strong relationship with followers.

INTERACTIONS MATTER

Customers generally show their interest in content through interactions - comments, shares, likes, and reactions (emojis that allow your audience to express themselves visually). Facebook considers these to be "meaningful interactions" and uses these signals to determine the relevance and helpfulness of the content to each user. If you're creating content that regularly generates meaningful interactions, you should see an increase in the number of people exposed to your posts.

FACEBOOK IS SMART

Some businesses see the importance of these interactions and try to create content that motivates users into doing something. A post that begins: "LIKE this post if you love the mountains!" is an example of engagement bait that takes advantage of the Facebook algorithm. Facebook has rules against engagement bait and could deem your content to be in violation of their rules. If this happens, both your post and your Facebook page will be penalized.

FROM FACEBOOK:

"Publishers and other businesses that use engagement bait tactics in their posts should expect their reach on these posts to decrease. Meanwhile, Pages that repeatedly share engagement bait posts will see more significant drops in reach. Page Admins should continue to focus on posting relevant and meaningful stories that do not use engagement bait tactics."

(Source: https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2017/12/news-feed-fyi-fighting-engagement-bait-on-facebook/)

Instead of focusing on how to work around the rules laid out by Facebook, business owners should focus on creating quality content and grow their audience organically.

GOOD CONTENT WINS

Being relevant, helpful, and informative are important traits that any business should have. Following this model on Facebook helps businesses reach a larger audience. Creating content that plays to the emotions and interests of the audience will help generate meaningful interactions.

MIXING IT UP

Increased competition and posting on Facebook has made it more difficult to successfully grow a page organically. Most businesses rely on a strategy that combines organic posting and targeted advertising. Growing a Facebook page doesn't have to be expensive if you follow a strategy.

QUICK TIP

Business owners should focus on creating quality content and grow their audience organically.

FACEBOOK CONTENT TYPES

To help generate audience engagement, a good Facebook page offers customers a variety of content types from a number of sources. The success of a page largely depends on the amount of audience engagement the business is able to generate.

CREATING FACEBOOK CONTENT

One content source is the business itself. A Facebook page needs to be a bridge between the brand and the customer. Content has to be interesting enough to grab the attention of a potential customer and entice them to learn more. Content that is solely focused on lead generation rarely does well on Facebook.

The content created for Facebook needs to appeal to the interests of a target audience. As with all content marketing, remember that customers tend to do business with those they **know**, **like**, and **trust**.

Using a ski resort as an example, here's how to apply the rule of know, like, and trust to create Facebook content.

KNOW

Content must give customers all the information they need to make a decision. Part of the posting mix should include posts that answer frequently asked questions about the ski resort and its services. Customer questions need to be answered in a timely fashion. This allows you to answer potential questions before they arise. Post topics could include:

- tips for bringing young children to the ski hill,
- pictures of current ski conditions, and
- videos of ski resort facilities.

LIKE

Content needs to be entertaining enough to grab the attention of an audience. Facebook content should regularly include members of your target audience. This helps make the posts more relatable to customers. For a ski resort, post topics could include:

- photos of families enjoying the ski hill,
- videos of ski resort events that appeal to the target audience (family events), and
- user-generated content sourced from social media.

TRUST

Content needs to educate your customers. Through their actions on Facebook, a business needs to demonstrate value and a willingness to provide exceptional service. For many customers, your Facebook page will be one of the first points of contact with your business. If you can build trust with people online, they are more likely to trust you offline as well.

By posting a short video of a senior ski instructor, a ski resort can use Facebook to build trust and confidence about the quality of their lesson packages. Not only does the instructor put a face to the brand, they help demonstrate that the business is able to share expertise and knowledge to customers, which creates a sense of trust for the brand. Examples of posts that create trust include:

- a short video of staff explaining how they make your visit more enjoyable, and
- visitor testimonials.

CURATING FACEBOOK CONTENT

Curating or sharing the content of others is a strategy that many businesses overlook on Facebook. Facebook offers a few tools to make curation easy.

FACEBOOK SEARCH

Business owners can use the Facebook search function to discover content created about their business. Owners should search mentions of the business name, the community, and related products to help identify what is being said about their business.

FACEBOOK SHARING

Facebook's sharing function allows business owners to share the content of others directly onto their own pages. Sharing is an easy way for business owners to cross promote partner businesses and share content created by their fans. A ski operator may want to share a post from a partner hotel or a picture taken by a recent visitor. Business owners should reach out to the creator of the content and ask permission before sharing.

TAGGING

When someone creates content that features or relates to a business, they have the ability to tag that business within the post. This is a great way to connect a piece of content to a business. If your business is tagged in a post, you will get a notification letting you know that someone has mentioned you. Businesses can also tag other businesses in posts. Tags are often used when acknowledging partners in campaigns or promotions.

CUSTOMER SERVICE VIA FACEBOOK

Customers often use Facebook pages as a way to communicate with businesses. Many see Facebook as a more personal connection than a contact form or toll-free phone number. It's important to regularly monitor your Facebook page for comments and questions and respond in a timely manner. Best practice is to respond within 12 to 24 hours of the comment being posted.

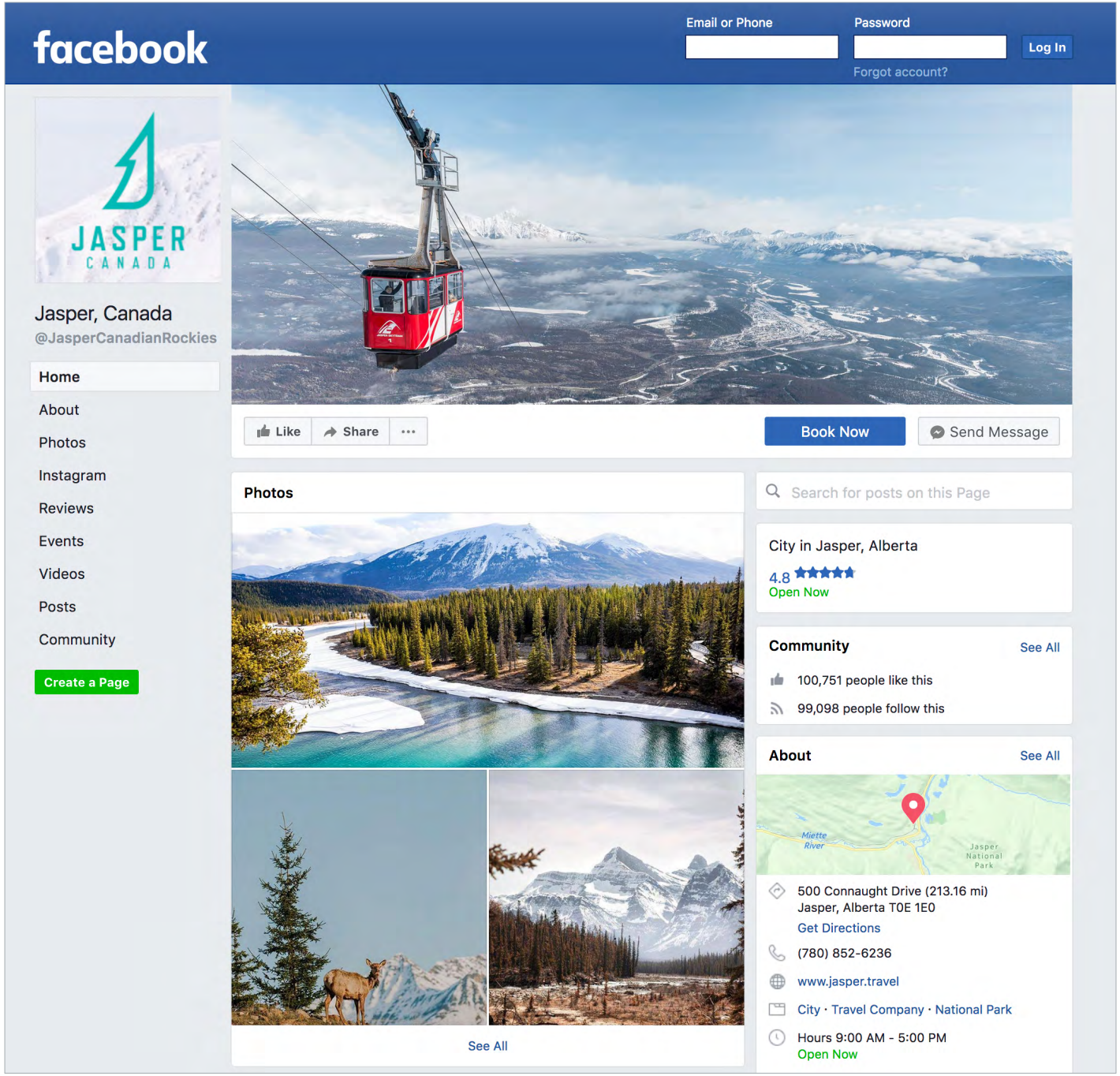
Customers may also choose to contact your business through Facebook Messenger. There is an expectation that messages through this feature are responded to even quicker.

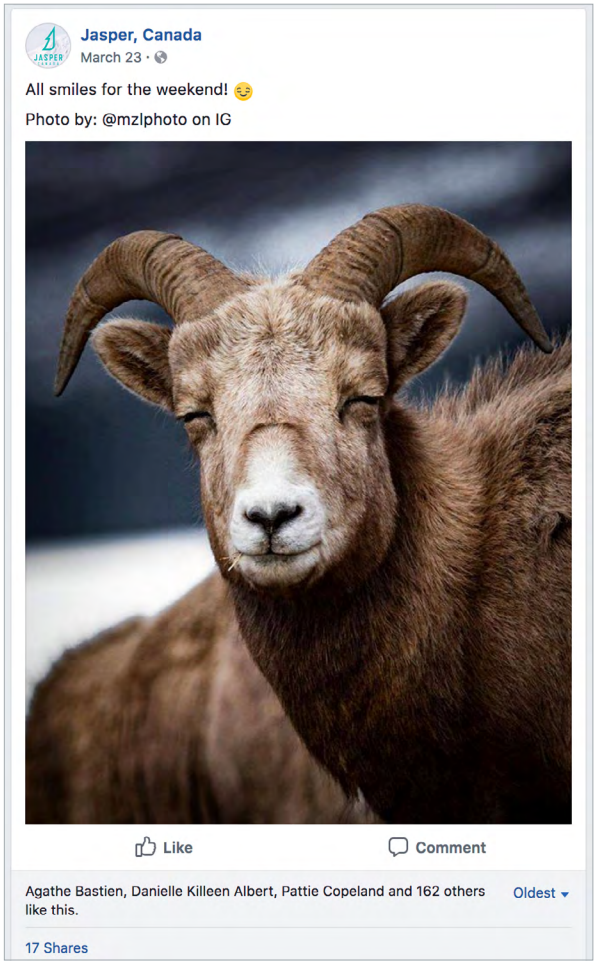
The best tool for a business owner to monitor customer engagements on Facebook is a smartphone. The Facebook for Pages application can be set up to notify page administrators every time someone engages with the page or sends a message. You can correspond with customers through the app, and business owners can stay in touch with their customers from anywhere.

THE MAKINGS OF A GOOD FACEBOOK PAGE

A good Facebook page is informational, helpful, and engaging, without being too focused on sales.

The Tourism Jasper (@JasperCanadianRockies) Facebook page is a good example of how quality content helps drive engagement.





Here are a few of the strategies that help make this Facebook page so successful.

A VARIETY OF CONTENT TYPES

Tourism Jasper varies the type of content it posts to the page. Its content plan includes images, videos, and links to stories and related news.

A VARIETY OF CONTENT SOURCES

The Facebook page is a mix of content created by Tourism Jasper, its partners, and visitors. This mix offers different perspectives of the region and helps keep the content engaging.

A COMMON THEME

Despite using a number of content sources, the page maintains a consistent theme and tone of voice. Tourism Jasper has done a fantastic job of keeping the page aligned with its brand and providing customers with a consistent source of information and entertainment.

UNDERSTANDING THEIR AUDIENCE

Based on the consistency and level of customer engagement, it is apparent that Tourism Jasper has a good understanding of who its target audience is. This consistent engagement (comments, shares, reactions) is visible to anyone that visits the Tourism Jasper Facebook page. Page administrators are able to see additional audience metrics through Facebook Insights.

REGULAR POSTING

The Facebook page is updated frequently, and this consistency helps maintain a high level of engagement. However, more posts do not guarantee more engagements. Business owners must watch their engagement levels and develop a threshold for the ideal number of posts. Too many posts can cause audience fatigue, which can be just as detrimental as too few posts.

CONTENT PLANNING

The ability to constantly create compelling posts can be a daunting task for a tourism business. Social media often becomes a forgotten task for a busy business, and both the quantity and quality of posts can suffer.

A Facebook page without regular updates will struggle to grow an audience. Facebook may view a page with little activity as not relevant and posts run the risk of being ignored or not being seen by the audience. A content schedule can help ensure a consistent flow of posts.

QUICK TIP

A content schedule can help ensure a consistent flow of posts.

CREATING A FACEBOOK CONTENT SCHEDULE

A simple formula for creating a Facebook content schedule starts by assigning posts to two different groups.

1. **SCHEDULED POSTS**
   As the name implies, scheduled posts are created and set to post at a future date and time. The ability to schedule posts for future dates is a popular tool for businesses, but it does come with potential risks. Content set to be posted should be sustainable, long-lasting, and free of mentions of things like world events and weather that may become outdated. Business owners do not want scheduled content posted at an inappropriate time resulting in customers viewing the brand in a negative light. For example, a restaurant should avoid scheduling a post about their patio in case it goes live during a thunderstorm.

   Posts about specials, event information, packages, and general news are possible options for scheduled posts. Several posts can be created at the same time and scheduled to go live throughout the week.

2. **REAL-TIME POSTS**
   Having an aspect of immediacy is important on social media. Customers want to know what is going on right now and have become accustomed to receiving information as it happens. Real-time posts are just that - content created and shared in real time. These posts offer a nice contrast from the scheduled content and often allow businesses to show a more personal side.

FACEBOOK CONTENT SCHEDULE – EXAMPLE

Based on the information above, the following is an example of a Facebook content schedule for a whitewater rafting operator.

SCHEDULED POSTS

Created each Sunday and scheduled throughout the week. Examples include:

- Monday - highlights from a past trip or a testimonial from a recent customer,
- Wednesday - information on upcoming tours and promotions, and
- Friday - an answer to a frequently asked customer question.

REAL-TIME POSTS

Planned over the course of the week and posted as they happen (goal is 2 to 3 per week). Examples include:

- pictures or video from a trip,
- behind-the-scenes look at trip preparation,
- funny, strange, or unique things that happen over the course of a day,
- content from staff in the field, and
- throwback images or video from previous seasons (can be stored on a smart phone and posted as needed).

ENGAGEMENT

The business owner would also allocate time each day to respond to customer comments and monitor engagements.

By combining scheduled content, 2 to 3 pieces of real time content, and customer engagement, this business owner can maintain a Facebook presence with few resources. The Facebook page offers customers some content even if the owner is away from the business for a few days.

If the owner wishes to allocate more resources to Facebook in the future, they can look at creating additional scheduled posts or investing time and technology that allows them to create a wider variety of real time posts. For example, a business could invest in a higher resolution camera, video production software, or a 360 degree camera if they wanted to expand their Facebook video capabilities. They could also look at bringing in additional staff to help with their marketing and communications.

FACEBOOK ADVERTISING

The Facebook Advertising network allows businesses to promote on Facebook, Instagram, and Messenger. In comparison to radio and television, Facebook Ads can be a more effective and cost efficient way to target customers based on personal traits, interests, and geographic location. Keep in mind there are traveller types who avoid advertising on social media, so ensure you complement Facebook advertising with great content and other creative ways to encourage your best customers to get involved with your business.

While many tourism businesses regularly use Facebook Ads to help reach their target audience, others have yet to embrace the opportunity. Here are some frequently asked questions about Facebook Ads.

WHERE DO FACEBOOK ADS APPEAR?

Facebook offers advertisers a variety of placements and formats.

CHANNEL	PLACEMENTS AVAILABLE	SUPPORTED AD FORMATS
Facebook	News feed, right column	Video, photo, carousel, slideshow, canvas (mobile only)
Instagram	Feed, Stories	Video, photo, carousel, Stories
Audience Network	Publisher-owned apps and websites outside of Facebook	Video, photo, carousel
Messenger	Messenger app (mobile only)	Photo, carousel

WHAT ARE BOOSTED POSTS?

Boosted Posts are a popular and simple option for businesses that want to use Facebook Advertising. As the name implies, this advertising option allows businesses to turn the posts it creates on its page into ads. After posting content on your page, the blue "Boost Post" button will appear. Clicking this button will reveal an ads dashboard with audience targeting options. Once an audience and budget have been determined, the post will be boosted. Boosted Posts help businesses place their content in front of a specific audience even if these individuals don't follow the page.

ARE FACEBOOK ADS EASY TO CREATE AND MANAGE?

Facebook has done a good job of making their advertising platform relatively easy to use. Boosted Posts allow those with little advertising experience to promote their content. Those with more knowledge and experience can dive deeper into more complex campaigns and ad types.

HOW MUCH DO FACEBOOK ADS COST?

The cost of Facebook Ads are determined by an ad auction. This ad auction helps to decide which ads will be shown to which people. Based on the information that you provide when creating your ads, Facebook will determine a price and give you an idea of your potential reach. Advertisers submit a campaign budget and Facebook works to deliver ads while staying within the parameters provided.

DO I NEED TO USE FACEBOOK ADS TO BE SUCCESSFUL ON FACEBOOK?

Increased competition has made it harder to reach your audience even with the right content and a good strategy. Businesses will often supplement their organic posting efforts with targeted ads. A Facebook strategy that combines quality content, steady organic growth and targeted ads should be considered.

HOW DO I GET STARTED USING FACEBOOK ADS?

Visit facebook.com/business/products/ads to learn more and get started.

NEXT STEPS – TIPS FOR MAXIMIZING YOUR FACEBOOK PRESENCE

WATCH FOR CHANGES

Facebook constantly changes its platform and algorithm. These changes, both big and small, have an impact on how business owners post and engage with their audience. It's important that business owners stay informed of these changes and modify their strategies to reflect the Facebook landscape. **Facebook Business News** and **Facebook Newsroom** are two excellent resources to monitor.

EXPERIMENT WITH POSTS

With Facebook constantly changing, it's important that business owners not only watch for changes, but constantly experiment with their posting strategy. There will never be a perfect Facebook post because there are so many variables. A post style that works one week might need to be tweaked or overhauled a month later. As business owners become more comfortable managing their page, they should begin to test posting variables such as the time and day of week of the post, the post type, key messaging, call to action placement, and post length. Watching how these variables affect engagement and reach will give owners valuable insights into their audience and ideal post structure.

INVESTIGATE MESSENGER

With over 1.3 billion active users, Facebook Messenger remains an unknown entity for many businesses. The channel offers a number of interesting elements from a marketing standpoint. Messenger can be used as a "click to call" alternative for businesses to reach customers either via the Facebook platform or as part of their own website. There are also opportunities for businesses to advertise through Messenger via Facebook Ads. Automated messages can be created that allow businesses and customers to communicate 24/7.

GET INVOLVED ELSEWHERE

Facebook allows page owners to engage in conversations that don't take place on their page. When leaving a comment on another page, users will see a small drop down icon on the top right of the comment box. This drop down lets the user select which account (business or personal) they wish to use to comment.

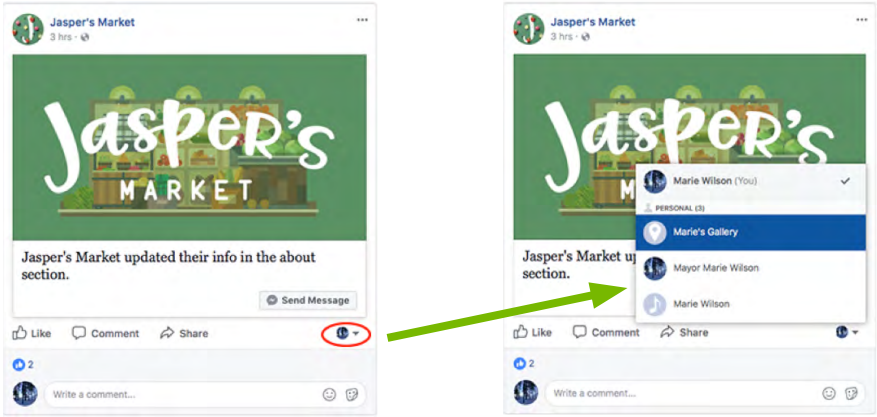


Image: facebook.com/help/465690686905994/

Getting your business involved in conversations away from your page is a great way to increase your brand recognition with new audiences. Getting involved in conversations doesn't mean actively selling your products and services. Rather, businesses that are helpful, informational, and relevant in these conversations stand a much better chance of building a relationship with potential customers.

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