# Planning Ulster

Ulster County Main Streets: A Regional Approach

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Why do we take a regional approach to Main Streets?

There are many different approaches to supporting these centers in our local economy. The goal of the Ulster County Main Streets approach is to develop a program that is based on our region's specific needs and support appropriate responses and strategies that are built and sustained from within our communities. It is also founded upon the idea that communities are stronger when they work together, share knowledge, leverage their resources, and think regionally to support their "competitive advantage."
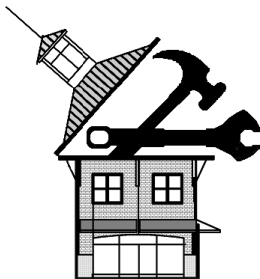
What is the Main Streets Strategic Toolbox?

Any successful planning effort requires solid information as a basis for decision-making. The Toolbox includes resources to help your community create a strong, sustainable strategy for Main Street revitalization. For a full list of topics in the toolbox, please contact our staff at 845-340-3338 or visit our website at www.ulstercountyny.gov/planning.

Social Networks for Main Street

The web has become more than a warehouse of information. Social networking (or "Web 2.0") is an interactive information-sharing platform that allows internet users add content and interact with others. Businesses are using Web 2.0 to increase customer loyalty and market visibility. This offers tremendous potential for Main Street businesses. Consumers are online. For them, this is "word of mouth" via the web. Some examples:

Main Street Webpage: *"Come see and shop New Paltz Main Street."*

Consumer on Facebook: *"Have you been to New Paltz?"*
Response: *"Yeah, great!""*

Twitter Tweet: *Just got back from New Paltz. You have to go!"*

Planning Guide

What kinds of tools are in the toolbox?

1. **Asset Based Planning**
   - *Developing a Main Street Strategy: How to work as a team to pursue a plan.*
   - *Asset-Based Planning Workbook: A hands-on guide to identifying your community's assets and working with others on a strategic plan.*

2. **Community-Led Initiatives**
   - *Asset-Based Planning Workbook: this also has a series of exercises to help develop community-led initiatives.*
   - *Social Networking for Main Street: The uses of web-based technology to keep the community connected.*

3. **Land Use and Design Analysis**
   - *Design Guidelines for Main Street*
   - *Supporting a Healthy Residential Mix*
   - *Using Incentives and Streamlining Approvals*
   - *Creating an Attractive Setting*
   - *Building Placement and Features*
   - *Street Design and "Wayfinding"*
   - *Traditional Neighborhood Design*

4. **Market and Economic Analysis**
   - *Cost/Benefit Analysis for Main Street*
   - *Market Analysis for Main Street*
   - *Creating a Destination Magnet*
   - *Identifying the Right Retail Mix*

5. **Targeted Development Initiatives**
   - *Case studies and best practices from Ulster County and elsewhere will be posted on the Toolbox.*

What Main Street business wouldn't be thrilled to have customers telling all their friends to go there?

Social networking sites such as MySpace, Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn can be used by businesses to shift the focus from static web pages to interactive communication with existing and potential customers. And, as seen above, it offers customers the ability to quickly interact with many others to spread the word.

Here are four ways that social networks can be used to create success on Main Street. Businesses can:

- **Marketing:** Communicate with customers
- **Research:** Find out what customers want
- **Relationships:** build a network of allies
- **Customer Service:** offer more services and personal attention to customers

Marketing: Communicate with customers

Word of mouth has always been essential for the success of small business and Main Streets. Web 2.0 can serve as a way to spread a word of mouth reputation to a huge audience. And it can benefit the smallest of small businesses, as Curtis Kimball—crème brûlée vendor in San Francisco found out when he began using Twitter (*see box on opposite page*).

Research: Find out what customers want

In addition to creating a direct link to customers, Web 2.0 applications enable businesses to conduct in-depth research about the preferences, needs and characteristics of customers and potential customers. For example, it is now common for schools of culinary education to set up Facebook sites that enable users ("friends") to learn about different types of cuisine and the variety of careers available in the field. While this is a valuable service to those "friends," it also enables the schools to learn about potential students including topics and careers that interest them, along with such background information as their geographic location age, current occupation, etc. Many restaurants and all manner of small businesses are taking a similar approach in using Web 2.0 as a business tool. You can even get your customers to help you come up with "the next big thing" as one small clothing company did:

Finding "the Next Big Thing"

Some small businesses are already using social networks to generate new ideas. After spending time on Twitter, employees at Cordarounds.com, a small American clothing company, noticed that many folk twittering in their area were using bicycles to get to work. So the firm produced a new line of trousers, dubbed "bike-to-work pants", with built-in reflective materials that make wearers more visible to traffic while cycling at night. And of course it used tweets to get the word out about its new creations.

"A peach of an opportunity: Small businesses are using networks to become bigger," *The Economist*, January 28th, 2010.

Twitter Pushcart

Curtis Kimball, owner of a crème brûlée cart in San Francisco, uses Twitter to drive his customers to his changing location.
Source: Peter DaSilva for The New York Times

Three weeks after Curtis Kimball opened his crème brûlée cart in San Francisco, he noticed a stranger among the friends in line for his desserts. How had the man discovered the cart? He had read about it on Twitter.

For Mr. Kimball, who conceded that he "hadn't really understood the purpose of Twitter," the beauty of digital word-of-mouth marketing was immediately clear. He signed up for an account and has more than 5,400 followers who wait for him to post the current location of his itinerant cart and list the flavors of the day, like lavender and orange creamsicle. "I would love to say that I just had a really good idea and strategy, but Twitter has been pretty essential to my success," he said. He has quit his day job as a carpenter to keep up with the demand.

Claire Cain Miller,
"Marketing Small Businesses with Twitter,"
New York Times, July 23, 2009

Mutual Support: Build a network of allies

Small businesses have also found that Web 2.0 can be an important way for them to build key relationships with other businesses. They use the web to connect to supplier and sources of special expertise and technical assistance. As the example below from rural Oklahoma shows, this connectivity can make it easier for small businesses to get the help that they need.

"Small Biz Survival"

Even if a shop's customers are not on Twitter, the service can be useful for entrepreneurs, said Becky McCray, who runs a liquor store and cattle ranch in Oklahoma and publishes a blog called Small Biz Survival.

In towns like hers, with only 5,000 people, small-business owners can feel isolated, she said. But on Twitter, she has learned business tax tips from an accountant, marketing tips from a consultant in Tennessee and start-up tips from the founder of several tech companies.

Claire Cain Miller, "Marketing Small Businesses with Twitter," *New York Times*, July 23, 2009

SMALL BIZ SURVIVAL
The rural and small town business resource

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Mobile - RSS - Posts by email

Tools to get to know your customers
Posted by Becky McCray on Monday, November 08, 2010   5 comments

46 tweets
retweet

Knowing each customer as a real person is a strength of the best small town businesses. New tools allow you to keep that kind of small town connection even as your business grows or moves online.

You probably keep an email address list of customers, right? Do you feel like you are using it effectively? For most of us, the answer is no.

How well do you do at recognizing and connecting with new customers, or new prospects who email you? If you're ready to improve, here are examples and tools to get you going.

How well does the College Street Pub know these customers?

SMALL BIZ SURVIVAL

Howdy!

Glad you dropped in to the rural small town business blog, here since 2006.

Meet our authors Becky McCray, Glenna Mae Hendricks, Jeanne Cole and Jon Swanson.

Take our guided tour. You might also read our disclosure. You can give us a holler on the contact form.

Get our small town biz newsletter.

A BlogRank Top 20 Small Business Blog

Featured at Alltop Small Business and Alltop Rural

Customer Service: Offering more personal attention to customers

Main Street businesses are learning that their competitive edge comes from the personal and knowledgeable services they provide their customers. So why not extend this to building your internet relationships? It is important, however, to monitor often any social media spaces you set up as if it is another doorway for "foot traffic" into your business.

How does Social Networking fit on Main Street?

Consumers are increasingly focusing on interesting and engaging experiences as a central part of their shopping experience. This provides Main Street areas with a built in source of advantage.

Social networking can be a powerful vehicle to bring merchants together to identify the experiences their Main Street has to offer and to tightly engage their customers in that experience. The National Trust for Historic Preservation has reported on successful efforts of its Main Street program participants to use Web 2.0 to build their Main Street experience:

Whole Foods NYC is building customer loyalty with Twitter.

It has 13,999 followers for its six stores in New York City.

It is often during challenging times when businesses get the most creative to survive. More and more retail entrepreneurs are using innovative ways to stimulate business to survive in a tough economic climate. Using new social networking tools available on the internet has enabled Candles Off Main in Annapolis, MD to reach out to its ever expanding customer base. What they didn't realize, however, was how much they would interact with their on-line customers three years later. This emerging business now utilizes Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Ustream, videos and blogs to engage with potential customers.

Successful Main Streets are True to Themselves

"Urban authenticity usually emerges out of 'bottom up' grassroots marketplace realities," reported Joel Kotkin in his urban study *The Future of the Center: The Core City in the New Economy*. "It is rarely the product of civic engineering or subsidized 'urban renewal. . . "

To be truly authentic, not an artificial version of ourselves, we must remember what makes Main Street work. Big Box wants to be more like Mom and Pop to capitalize on current consumer desire, but in the economics of retail, it is important to keep in mind that there is more to commerce than mere consumption. . . [You] can't mass produce authenticity.

Elizabeth A. Evitts, "The Quest for Authenticity," *Urbanite*, #13 July 05

"To survive this slow economy, we need to get economical and creative with how we reach our customers and attract new business. We need to be everywhere our customers are."
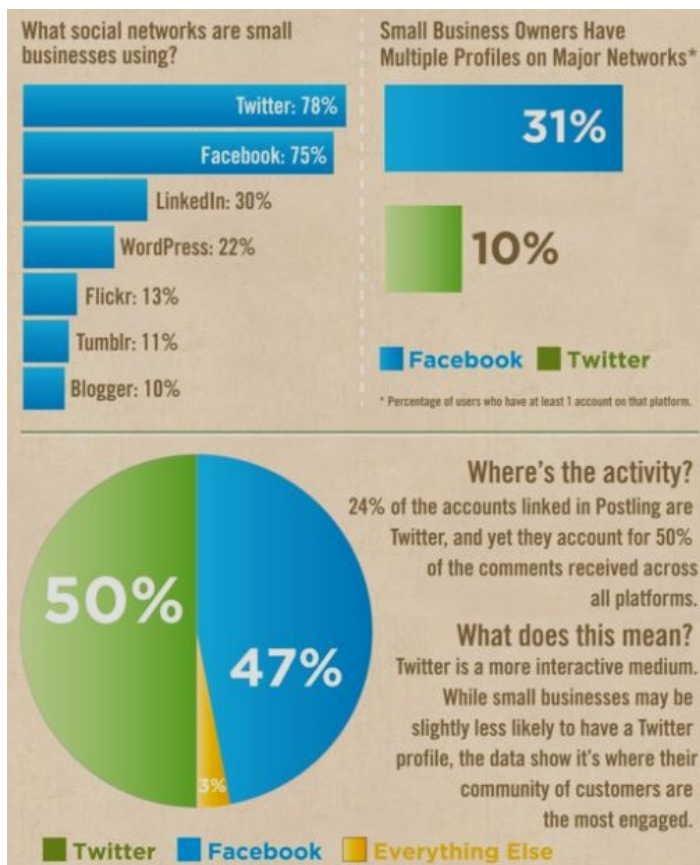
How do you use these tools?

Social networking is a powerful tool, but it requires new ways of relating to customers, suppliers and partners. Traditional advertising is a one way communication. Web 2.0 is best used to foster a conversation. Rather than forcing slogans and jingles into unwitting eyes and ears, this type of promotion can draw customers closer by asking their opinions, linking to their own pages (on Facebook and elsewhere) and otherwise engaging their interests. In conventional advertising, the idea was to inform and/or persuade. As illustrated in the case below, Web 2.0 is all about engaging people on a personal level.

David and Susan Adams, the founders of Candles Off Main, launched their internet webcast, The Main Event, to feature new products and announce fragrance launches. The couple airs one episode a day on their video blog. They have also launched their "Cyber Store" using Ustream, which streams live from their shop, offering visual assistance during customer phone calls.

"It used to be that all a retail business needed was a storefront," Susan remarked. "Then came websites followed by e-commerce functionality. Now companies need blogs, videos and live chat functionality to be more interactive with customers to survive. The game has changed and we are embracing new technology to stay current with our clientele to offer more than just products."

Many businesses use the **Facebook** platform to provide information on company events, new products and discussion boards to initiate conversations with customers for input. **Twitter** is also used to provide immediate information on new product arrivals and make other announcements, as well as to provide impromptu photos and polls. Not only have creative businesses like this survived the recession, they have come out ahead by using Web 2.0 to offer unique customer service.

What social networks are small businesses using?

- Twitter: 78%
- Facebook: 75%
- LinkedIn: 30%
- WordPress: 22%
- Flickr: 13%
- Tumblr: 11%
- Blogger: 10%

Small Business Owners Have Multiple Profiles on Major Networks*

31%

10%

■ Facebook ■ Twitter

* Percentage of users who have at least 1 account on that platform.

50%   47%   3%

■ Twitter ■ Facebook ■ Everything Else

Where's the activity?
24% of the accounts linked in Postling are Twitter, and yet they account for 50% of the comments received across all platforms.

What does this mean?
Twitter is a more interactive medium. While small businesses may be slightly less likely to have a Twitter profile, the data show it's where their community of customers are the most engaged.

Using Twitter to Increase Awareness of Your Business

Twitter is one of the fastest-growing blog sites on the Internet. It is a free, online forum in that allows people update a network of friends about their activities in a brief message, e.g., "meet me at Christopher's wine tasting after work" (see box below).

Small businesses are using Twitter as a marketing tool to increase awareness of their business and services. By posting regular messages about sales, products, events or personnel, you can give a human face to your company. In addition, regular tweets also inform customers of business updates and provide a chance to interact with you personally. Finally, tweets inform bloggers and techies about your company, which can influence online reviews of your products.

- *Twitter* – the service/web site that provides free accounts to internet users
- *Tweet* – The short messages (up to 140 characters) you type for the public to see
- *Twitterati* – Members of Twitter; users of the site with large followings

Scott Seaman of Blowing Rock, N.C., uses Twitter to expand his customer base beyond his town of about 1,500 residents. Mr. Seaman is a partner at Christopher's Wine and Cheese shop and owns a bed and breakfast in town. He sets up searches on TweetDeck, a Web application that helps people manage their Twitter messages, to start conversations with people talking about his town or the mountain nearby. One person he met on Twitter booked a room at his inn, and a woman in Dallas ordered sake from his shop.

The extra traffic has come despite his rarely pitching his own businesses on Twitter. "To me, that's a turn-off," he said. Instead of marketing to customers, small-business owners should use the same persona they have offline, he advised. "Be the small shopkeeper down the street that everyone knows by name."

Claire Cain Miller,
"Marketing Small Businesses with Twitter,"

Seaman's website directs his clients to Facebook and Twitter

News about wine tastings and new products are shared with clients. The business also actively follows others on Twitter.
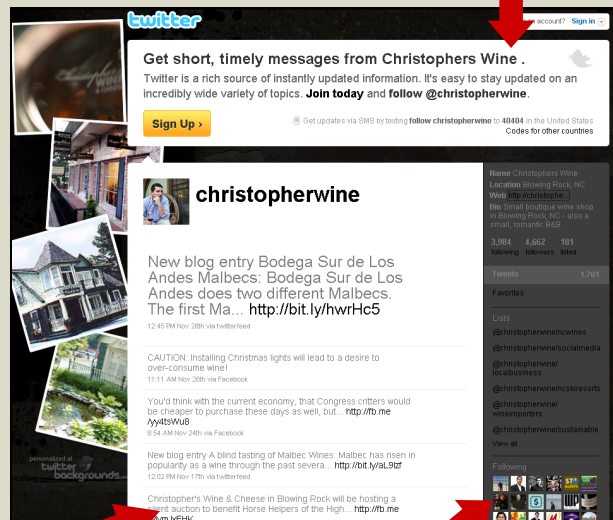
People following the Tweets for this business:

Some Useful Main Street Links:
see our website for additional links

New York Main Street Program:
www.dhcr.state.ny.us/Programs/
NYMainStreet/

National Main Street Center, a program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation:
www.preservationnation.org/main-street/

Center for Community and Economic Development, a program of the University of Wisconsin Extension in Madison, WI:
www.uwex.edu/ces/cced/

Project for Public Spaces, a nonprofit planning, design and educational organization dedicated to helping people create and sustain public spaces that build stronger communities:
www.pps.org

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