

BUSINESS



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To succeed with social media, listen, talk, listen some more

People tell us all the time that they want to get started on sites like Twitter, but they don't know what to say — or do.

So here's some advice for them, as well as to others already immersed in the world of social media: Use your ears.

That's the one thing that stood out when we spoke with Peter Shankman recently. He's a New York advertising and marketing executive who runs one of the few organizations that has made money from social media. Shankman likes to say he thinks social media isn't a broadcast platform. It's not just a way for you to shout, or scream your opinions to the world; it's a two-way street that involves engaging people. There's a reason we use the



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poked@MiamiHerald.com

word *interactive*.

That's a lesson many people who use social media probably don't do frequently enough. But it's also essential for people who are just getting started.

"The first thing people have to do when they get on social media is to listen," he said. "The concept of talking will come next."

That's what Shankman did when he started a site called Help a Reporter Out (helpareporter.com), which connects reporters to sources. Within a year, it went from a Facebook group to a company that made

\$1 million in advertising revenue, Shankman told a group of local public relations executives.

It helps to think of social media as the process of listening then talking, then doing more listening.

For example: You're a small-business owner who has thought about opening a Twitter account. Sign up. Fill out the profile, making sure you've added an appropriate photo.

At this point, most people start hawking: Buy my product! Visit my store! Instead, start following people with similar interests. When you find something that deserves repeating, retweet the message. Join in on conversations and offer valuable commentary.

Use it as a platform to show-

case your expertise — not just to push out links to your business. And, make sure you're asking your customers or clients what they want.

People are increasingly getting their information from social media networks. That's why you want to be part of the conversation, and why it's so important to be engaging while you're there.

For more on what Shankman thinks about social media, visit our blog, Poked, where we're always happy to answer your netiquette questions. Or you can send us an e-mail to Poked@MiamiHerald.com.

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