

The HVAC Contractor's Guide to Facebook

Social media has taken the working world by storm, and for many businesses, a strong social presence is every bit as crucial as a standalone website. Of particular importance to small, consumer-facing companies is Facebook – one of the greatest tools for customer acquisition, community outreach and long-term business-building.

Once a purely social tool for friendly networking, Facebook has become indispensable to HVAC contractors, who can use the site to reach out to both current and future customers with the click of a mouse. Homeowners of all ages are already using it to find local businesses, and it will only become more important as younger generations begin to buy their own homes.

In fact, now that smart shoppers are viewing you *and* your competitors through Facebook, a sparse or nonexistent business page may actually work against you. While traditional marketing still has its place, consumers now expect reliable, respectable businesses to maintain lively and engaging fan pages. Whether you have yet to build a page, or you're just not bringing in enough business with the one you've already got, this guide will help you to improve your Facebook presence and acquire more customers online.

Building Your Business Page

Your first step in creating a strong Facebook presence is to create a *unique* page for your company. Your personal page may come in handy later on, but you'll only be able to gain followers – and hopefully customers – by using Facebook's tool for businesses, organizations and brands. Plus, if you're already using Facebook to connect with friends and family, you'll want to keep most of your social networking separate from your business-building efforts.

To create a business page, head to facebook.com/pages/create, and follow these simple steps:

1. Choose “Local Business or Place” for your page category.
2. Select “Local Business” as your subcategory.
3. Enter your business name, address and other vital information.
4. Review the Facebook terms of service, check the “I agree” box and get started!

Once you delve into your new page, you'll have the opportunity to select more specific subcategories related to your contracting business, and you'll be able to enter more thorough descriptions of the products and services you offer. Don't skimp on these details! This is the info people will see when they land on your page and click the “About” button near the top of the screen.

After you enter your business information, you'll need to select a profile picture. Most businesses opt to use their logos, but you might also use a picture of your crew, your shop or even just yourself.

To finish off this phase of the process, you'll need to choose your Facebook Web Address, the actual

URL you'll use to send people directly to your page. You'll probably just want to use the actual name of your business. For example, a company called XYZ Contracting would choose Facebook.com/XYZContracting as their address. Choose carefully if you want something different, as you won't be able to change this part later on!

Finally, you'll want to select and customize the tabs people see near the top of your page, right next to your basic business info. You can use as many as you want, but since most viewers will only see the first four, you'll need to prioritize. The most useful tabs for business include:

-Photos. Put up pictures of you and your crew at work, and share funny HVAC-related images you find on the web.

-Events. Plug your promotions, giveaways and special deals.

-Maps. Help visitors locate your business – an especially useful tool for rural contractors.

-Videos. Share helpful videos on HVAC maintenance and advertisements from the brands you install.

-Reviews. Let your satisfied customers tell other Facebookers how great a job you do!

Using Your Personal Page

While your business page should be your main tool for Facebook marketing, your personal account can still come in handy. In fact, Facebook can actually seem somewhat *faceless* when every one of your company's posts comes from the business itself. To add a personal touch and better engage your customers, log in to your own page every so often to make posts and leave comments on the wall of your company's page. This is especially useful when responding to comments visitors have made, as most customers would rather read responses from a “real” person than from a legal entity.

If you do this, however, you'll want to make sure your personal privacy settings are bumped as high as they can go. Allow only the people on your friends list to see your wall, time line, comments and updates, and require reviews for the posts and photos in which you're tagged. You may not have anything to hide, but you don't want your entire personal life to become completely intertwined with your business!

Defining Your Goals

As with any other business initiative, you'll need to clearly define your goals in ramping up your efforts with Facebook. For most contractors, the end goals are to gain new customers *and* generate additional revenue from existing ones.

To achieve both of these ends, you'll need to get “likes” from people who've hired you in the past or who may hire you in the future. Every time someone likes your page, they'll automatically “follow” you and receive all of your posts and updates through the feed on their homepage – the most efficient way for you to market. If a visitor doesn't click “like,” they won't see any more of your content until they come to *your* page again!

Moreover, you need to focus on *relevant* likes. There are plenty of services – many of them scams – which promise to acquire hundreds or even thousands of likes for your business, but random, out-of-

state followers aren't going to be hiring you any time soon. If anything, a miles-long list of followers from all over the country will just make it less likely for your page to pop up in the contextual ads Facebook shows to locals. Share your page with legitimate business contacts, and encourage them to share it in turn with other likely customers. A small, targeted list of followers is infinitely more valuable than thousands of likes that don't lead to new business.

Tracking Your Success

Given the time and effort you'll be putting into your Facebook page, you'll want to track its success and determine at least a rough ROI. You might try to quantify customer acquisition by tracking the traffic from your Facebook page to your primary website – but that still doesn't tell you exactly which customers found and hired you *because* of Facebook.

For most small HVAC companies, a simpler and more reliable method is to just ask customers how they found out about your business or a specific promotional you're running. You might also offer small discounts or cheap freebies for Facebook fans who tell you that they saw a recent deal on your fan page.

Providing Relevant Content

So, how do you go about getting those likes and generating business from your Facebook fans? You provide great content! We're not just talking about advertisements, either. Your followers want to see posts that inform, entertain and persuade – *in that order*. Online shoppers are already bombarded with ads left and right, and you'll need to set yourself apart by helping people *before* you ask them for business. Here's how:

Inform

Homeowners want to save money first and foremost, and they'd rather repair and streamline their current heaters and AC units than install new ones. While that goal may not be great for purely short-term business, you'll create long-term loyal customers by helping them make their systems as efficient as possible.

To that end, you can appeal to your audience by providing informative posts, including:

- Tips on maximizing efficiency through proper thermostat use, exhaust fans, window maintenance and other measures that laypeople might not know about.
- Advice on do-it-yourself maintenance and repairs.
- Updates on local weather trends that affect heating and cooling costs.
- Linked articles from other contractors and vendors.

Entertain

As helpful as all that info may be, your page will seem dry and boring if you don't add anything to spice it up. Entertain your readers with jokes, funny pictures and other content you create or find elsewhere on the web. It doesn't all have to relate to the HVAC industry, either. A few ideas include:

- Articles and blog posts relevant to your community or niche audience.
- Gifs, memes and videos related to current weather trends.
- Polls and surveys on upcoming holidays or events – anything that gets readers to leave comments is a plus!

Persuade

Once you've built a rapport with your audience by informing and entertaining, you'll be in a perfect position to sell! New readers might ignore offhand requests for business, but a simple message like “It's cold out – are you warm enough?” might be enough to persuade people who've already enjoyed your other content. Just about everyone would rather hire a familiar “face” than a stranger, after all.

Of course, you can do a lot more than ask such simple questions or reiterate your offerings. Given all the flair you can add with pictures, videos, polls and more, Facebook is the perfect place to advertise and entertain at the same time. To spice up your offerings, add visual content to your seasonal ads, link readers to articles on upcoming weather trends and offer drawings for discounts and freebies.

Consistency is Key

You now know *what* content you need to post, but how often should you post it? The answer will vary from one contractor to the next, but in general, the more often the better! A few posts per week is a good baseline, and every day is ideal – especially during the hottest and coldest parts of the year.

This kind of frequency may seem excessive, but remember, your readers are probably viewing material from several competing companies. You'll need consistent content to stand out, and as we've discussed, most of it will need to be informative or entertaining. Even if you're making a new post every day, a good rule of thumb is to limit your actual ads to once or twice per week.

Aside from your outreach to current fans, you should also consider the viewpoint of the first-time visitor. If a potential customer sees a ghost town of a page, they might assume your business itself is unpopular and poorly managed – even if you just haven't had the time to create more content. On the other hand, a frequently updated and comment-heavy page is like a clean and bustling shop. It puts people at ease, letting them know that you take pride in your business, and that other customers are already satisfied with your work.

So, if you can't make the time to post often yourself, delegate the task to someone else in your company. Make sure you've got a mix of information, entertainment and ads – some original, some linked from other sources – and log into your personal page to reply to commenters when you can.

Promoting Your Products

In addition to promoting your contracting business, your Facebook page is a great place to push the brands you install. 92% of homeowners buy the brands their contractors recommend, so you can boost your own revenue by advertising for your favorite vendors. Plus, positioning yourself as a discerning professional who prefers certain high-quality brands will only make you seem more legitimate in the eyes of your customers.

For the most part, promoting your favorite brands won't require a whole lot of effort on your part. Most big names put out their own marketing materials for contractors and distributors to use as they wish, so post up their videos, images and brochures before you create custom ads. If you do want to use original content, a simple text ad or video clip will go a long way in persuading your visitors to buy your brands – especially if you're already hooked them with other helpful content.

Engaging Your Community

As a small, local business owner, community outreach should be one of the cornerstones of your marketing plan. You'll thus want to add plenty of posts that highlight local events *and* your own involvement in your community – even when they have nothing to do with the HVAC industry!

Remember, one of the most important roles of Facebook is to help you engage your customers on a personal level. Example of community-focused posts include:

- Congratulatory messages to local sports teams, businesses and trade associations.
- Promotions for restaurants, bars, shops and other non-competing local businesses.
- Charitable giveaways and sweepstakes, especially around holidays.
- Promotions for your company's appearances at local events.

Ultimately, Facebook is just another part – and hopefully a *big* part – of your overall effort to advertise your services, personality and brand to your community. People buy from people, after all, and you need to integrate your business with your community as much as possible.