

# **Opportunities and Threats of Social Media in the Accounting Sector. Case: Steuerberatung Lang**

Lisa Christin Lang



<b>Author(s)</b> Lisa Christin Lang	
<b>Degree programme</b> Multilingual Management Assistant	
<b>Report/thesis title</b> Opportunities and Threats of Social Media in the Accounting Sector. Case: Steuerberatung Lang	<b>Number of pages and appendix pages</b> <b>40 + 60</b>
<p>Steuerberatung Lang is a small accounting company founded in 2003; it focuses on B2B as well as B2C services and consultancy in Southern Germany.</p> <p>The main objective of this product-oriented thesis is to create social media guidelines for Steuerberatung Lang to enhance brand awareness, differentiate it from competitors that are not using social media yet, foster dialogue with existing clients and to create means for acquiring new clients through targeted digital marketing.</p> <p>The guidelines will illustrate how to use various social media platforms to support the company's marketing efforts. By following the guidelines, the company is able to use social media effectively and avoid common mistakes. Furthermore, the guidelines provide insight into how to communicate online and demonstrate the company's professionalism and expertise in social media through the recommended tactics.</p> <p>Empirical data for guidelines was gathered through industry benchmarking as well as a survey that was sent to the company's existing clients, analyzing their use of social media and their needs and wishes for online communication. Furthermore, Skype interviews were conducted and other scientific sources were taken into consideration.</p> <p>The study shows that the use of social media can help companies to increase their brand awareness and enable the targeting and communication with existing and potential clients.. The most effective social media platforms for Steuerberatung Lang are Facebook, Youtube, Twitter and the mobile application Whatsapp, as those are the most frequently used by its clients.</p> <p>The final product of this thesis is a complete guidebook for the company, which illustrates detailed measures for social media communication and ways to get started in the most effective way, while avoiding common communication mistakes.</p>	
<b>Keywords</b> Social Media, Communications, Digital Marketing, Guidelines	

## Table of contents

1	Introduction.....	1
1.1	Thesis Scope and Objectives .....	1
1.2	Structure of the Thesis.....	2
2	Steuerberatung Lang.....	3
2.1	Company Introduction.....	3
2.1.1	Mission, Vision and Target Audience .....	3
2.1.2	Company's Social Media Objectives .....	4
2.1.3	Accounting Industry in Germany.....	4
3	Theoretical Framework.....	6
3.1	The Use of Social Media in 2015.....	6
3.1.1	Social Media and Its Use in Business.....	6
3.1.2	Benefits and Risks of Social Media For Companies.....	7
3.1.3	Traditional Media Versus Social Media .....	10
3.1.4	An Outlook Into the Future of Social Media .....	11
3.2	Communication on Social Media .....	12
3.2.1	Optimizing Social Media Communication .....	12
3.2.2	Social Media Communication for B2B and B2C Companies.....	14
3.2.3	Handling Negative Feedback on Social Media.....	15
3.2.4	Social Media Usage in Finland Versus Germany .....	15
4	Empirical Part.....	17
4.1	Conducting the Research .....	17
4.2	Respondents' Answers .....	19
4.3	Recommendations based on Survey, Statistics and Benchmarking.....	24
5	Developing a Social Media Guidebook for Steuerberatung Lang .....	26
5.1	Social Media Channels .....	26
5.2	Social Media Communication Planning .....	28
5.3	Search Engine Optimization and Organic Advertising.....	30
5.4	Paid Advertising .....	31
5.5	Evaluation of Social Media Success .....	32
5.6	Implementation of Social Media Guidelines.....	33
6	Discussion .....	34
6.1	Research Reliability and Validity.....	34
6.2	Development and Further Research Suggestions.....	34
6.3	Thesis Process and Individual Learning .....	35
	References.....	37
	Appendices .....	

# 1 Introduction

This product-oriented thesis was created during autumn 2015 and spring 2016. Its main objective was to create social media guidelines for Steuerberatung Lang, a German accounting company that currently has very little to zero social media presence. In order to come up with effective and specially tailored guidelines for this specific business, research in the form of a survey was conducted with the company's clients. This chapter gives further insight into scope, objectives and structure of the thesis.

## 1.1 Thesis Scope and Objectives

The main objective of this thesis is to create social media guidelines for Steuerberatung Lang to enhance brand awareness, differentiate it from competitors, foster dialogue with existing clients and to create means for acquiring new clients through targeted digital marketing activities.

The guidelines will illustrate how to choose and use different social media platforms for the company's marketing communication purposes. By following the guidelines, the company will be able to use social media effectively and avoid common mistakes.

Furthermore the guidelines provide insight into how to communicate and demonstrate the company's professionalism and expertise on social media through the recommended tactics.

The company wants to operate in a customer-oriented way, therefore a survey was used to find out what kind of needs and wishes its clients have. Additionally, scientific articles and literature on social media have been studied to further explore advantages and disadvantages of social media usage in business.

Study, benchmarking and research were conducted to mainly elaborate the following topics:

- Why should companies use social media?
- What are the advantages and risks of social media?
- How can companies communicate on social media?
- Which social media channels should be used by Steuerberatung Lang and why?
- What kind of content should the company create for each social media channel?
- Final guidelines to help Steuerberatung Lang to start with social media use



This thesis will concentrate on specific social media channels that are relevant for the company's business operations, mainly Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Focus also lies on Whatsapp marketing and a company blog. As Steuerberatung Lang does not have social media guidelines yet and does not possess any kind of knowledge of how to communicate digitally, the guidelines will focus on the beginning phase of social media use and give general instructions, as well as specific examples for posts on each social media platform.

## **1.2 Structure of the Thesis**

In chapter two the German case company and its main objectives and perceptions of social media use are introduced. There will also be a short look at the company's three main competitors and their social media usage, as well as an overview of the accounting industry in Germany and the market in which Steuerberatung Lang operates.

Chapter three will display the information that was gathered for this thesis through literature and online media. It will explain the use of social media, advantages and disadvantages and the differences between traditional communication and social media communication.

Chapter four will give insight into the quantitative research that was conducted for the thesis and provide detailed information about the research process and its results. It also includes recommendations based on research, benchmarking and statistics.

Chapter five will go into detail about how the social media guidelines for Steuerberatung Lang were developed and why specific social media channels were chosen based on conclusions from both the theoretical part, as well as the empirical research. It also illustrates different digital marketing methods and how to evaluate the success of social media marketing.

Chapter six will then discuss the validity of research and its ethics, and give suggestions for further research possibilities in the future. It will also reflect on the author's personal experiences and learning process while writing this thesis.

The appendix will contain the developed social media guidelines for the case company as the final product that can directly be taken into use by the company and its employees.

## **2 Steuerberatung Lang**

This chapter introduces the case company, its mission and vision, history, target group and the company's desired social media objectives. There will also be a short industry overview that describes the accounting sector in Germany and the changes it has gone through. The company's CEO has kindly provided information for this chapter.

### **2.1 Company Introduction**

Steuerberatung Lang was founded in 2003 in the German city of Reutlingen, which has approximately 150 000 inhabitants. The company advises companies within approximately 50 kilometres of its headquarters, as well as private clients, in all matters related to taxes and managerial economics. The company's workforce consists of 13 employees which are made up of two CEOs, one secretary, one trainee, five full-time employees and four part-time employees. (Lang, 01.09.2015.)

The main services of the case company include preparation of annual accounts, revenue-surplus-bills and tax returns for companies of all industries and legal forms as well as private individuals, participation in audits of tax and social security representatives, participation in extra-judicial redress, along with financial accounting and asset accounting. Other services, such as electronic transmission of data to tax authorities and social security institutions, consultancy in international tax issues, consulting of employee secondments (expatriates, impatriates), inheritance and gift tax advice for private and corporate area and business consultancy are also part of the portfolio. (Lang, 01.09.2015.)

#### **2.1.1 Mission, Vision and Target Audience**

Since every taxable person has different needs and goals, depending on the industry and legal form, a variety of challenges must be overcome in daily practice. The company's mission is to support its clients in their tax and business affairs, regardless whether it is a small or medium-sized business, craft business, freelancer or entrepreneur. The goal is to find solutions by personal advising and taking time for each individual situation. The clients' satisfaction is the main strategic goal of Steuerberatung Lang. (Steuerberatung Lang 2015.)

Future objectives for the company include the expansion of services, acquiring of new clients and the development of the company's structure in conjunction with the creation of new communication and marketing guidelines. (Lang, 01.09.2015.)

Currently, the case company has around 200 clients, of which 70 percent are businesses, 20 percent are freelance professionals and 10 percent are private individuals. 50 percent of the company's clients are between 30 and 50 years of age, while only 10 percent are aged over 50. This needs to be considered when creating the company's social media guidelines. The company's clients are also predominantly local and regional clients. (Lang, 01.09.2015.)

### **2.1.2 Company's Social Media Objectives**

Steuerberatung Lang wants to leverage social media to acquire new clients by offering new communication channels on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, enable an open two-way communication with existing clients and increase the company's visibility through regular participation on social media, as well as achieve a better and more targeted customer service by contacting its target audience through social media networks. (Lang, 01.09.2015.)

Additionally, social media can help to increase a company's strength of brand, also called brand equity. Professor Kevin Lane of the Marketing Science Institute (2014) defines brand equity as: "The set of associations and behaviors on the part of the brand's customers, channel members and parent corporation that permits the brand to earn greater volume or greater margins than it could without the brand name and that gives the brand a strong, sustainable, and differentiated advantage over competitors."

Even though the need for social media communication might not be as high in the accounting sector as in other industries, social media enables Steuerberatung Lang to gain a considerable competitive advantage over its competitors in the same industry.

### **2.1.3 Accounting Industry in Germany**

The accounting sector is part of the service industry, which is continuously growing and has nowadays become the sector undergoing most changes and developments.

According to the German Federal Chamber of Accountants (2015), the number of accounting companies and accountants in Germany in 2014 amounted to approximately 94 000, which incorporated a growth of 1.7 percent as opposed to the previous year.

The continuous growth of the accounting industry reflects the interest and attractiveness of the profession and can be seen as a sign that also the industries that are generally seen as traditional ones need to adapt and grow in order to remain successful and to meet the arising demand, especially in the digital market.

If Steuerberatung Lang wants to start using social media in its daily business activities, it is necessary to have a look at the company's competitors and their usage of social media. Benchmarking can be a great way to get insight into a competitor's social media strategy, and to observe which of its strategic points work well and which do not. This way, the company can gather ideas for its own social media use.

Steuerberatung Lang has three main competitors in its immediate vicinity, all of which have a similar size and amount of clients as Steuerberatung Lang. In order to find out the competitors' use of social media, search engines such as Google have been used to explore the availability of competitors' social media networks. Additionally, search functions on specific social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter have been utilized to search for company accounts and the competitors' websites have been analyzed.

Nonetheless, benchmarking made obvious that none of these competitors is using social media at the moment. Thus, using social media could be a great competitive advantage for Steuerberatung Lang, because it can utilize communication tools that its competitors are not using and therefore can reach an audience that is so far untouched by its competitors.

## **3 Theoretical Framework**

### **3.1 The Use of Social Media in 2015**

This chapter will have a look at the global use of social media in the year 2015 and its developments during the past few years in order to illustrate the growing importance of social media for businesses worldwide. Furthermore, it will compare the social media usage in Germany and Finland and explore potential differences and similarities, while highlighting the benefits and risks for companies' social media usage.

#### **3.1.1 Social Media and Its Use in Business**

Between the years 1982 and 1987 the base of modern internet was established and grew. What we nowadays call Web 2.0 is a model that most commonly describes the present state of the internet. A recent survey taken by the McKinsey Global Institute showed that over 1 700 executives from all over the world described significant benefits of using social media, such as cost savings and increase of revenue. (Roberts & Zahay, 2013, 5–8.)

Social media can be defined as a number of web-based tools and applications that allow its users to create and exchange content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, 61).

This means that social media depends on technologies to design interactive platforms that allow individuals or communities to share, discuss and change user-generated content (Kietzmann & Hermkens, 2012, 241–251).

Social media has many different options for use in business due to its versatility. It can be used for internal communication, for example through company forums, online groups or apps in which employees of a company can communicate easily with each other, and it can be used for external communication, such as marketing activities, creating brand awareness and visibility, and two-way communication with existing, as well as potential customers. Social media can help a company to reach a broader audience than it could reach through traditional means of communication.

For Steuerberatung Lang, social media can be an opportunity to communicate externally with its existing and potential clients, while demonstrating the company's expertise. It also helps to exhibit the young mindset of the company by showing that also companies operating in traditional sectors, such as finance and accounting, can be up-to-date and modern by being active on different social media platforms and not withstanding trends that occur on the market nowadays.

### **3.1.2 Benefits and Risks of Social Media For Companies**

Social media has many benefits for companies if they know how to utilize it correctly. Firstly, social media is a brilliant way to get to know a firm's audience better and to learn about their preferences and behaviors. With tools like "Facebook Insights", a company can learn which languages are spoken among its audience, which age groups follow the company's Facebook page and which gender prevails. Consequentially, a company can create marketing campaigns that are better targeted at relevant customer groups and will therefore get a better return on investment. (Cisnero 2014.)

When talking about audience targeting we also need to look at geo-targeting, which is available on many social media platforms. Geo-targeting means sending out a message to a specific target group located in a certain area or country (Rouhiainen 2015).

This is useful especially in today's world where we are constantly subject to an immense flow of information and our attention spans are getting shorter and shorter. People do not have time to engage with useless information, therefore messages need to be targeted only towards those customers who will find it useful.

Companies that operate only regionally, such as Steuerberatung Lang, can make great use of geo-targeting, because it allows the company to directly target only the customer segment that is in the company's immediate vicinity, while making the advertising unavailable for people living in different regions or areas of the world and therefore ensuring that irrelevant customer groups are not subject to unnecessary information.

Social media can also help a company to reach new customers. It not only allows firms to locate existing customers, but also to find potential ones (Cisnero 2015). Through location-based search a company can find relevant customers and can then specifically target them with its marketing activities.

Another substantial advantage is that social media allows a company to receive immediate customer feedback (Cisnero 2015). While in traditional communication a company needs to conduct customer satisfaction surveys in order to find out what its customers think about the firm's products or services, social media allows the company to directly access positive and negative feedback through quick and easy digital two-way communication. Customers that are not satisfied with a product or service might directly contact the company via Facebook or Twitter to share their discontent, while happy customers will

share their contentedness with the company itself, as well as with other existing and potential customers online.

In today's markets the competition is extremely high. Customers have the chance to find information everywhere and compare companies within different industries in order to find the best or cheapest one. Social media can be a competitive advantage for companies, especially if competitors on the market do not use social media yet or not in the right way. As a result of this, a company has the chance to get ahead of its competition by offering services on social media that its competitors do not. (Cisnero 2015.)

Another advantage is that social media creates website leads. A post on social media might bring people to a firm's website, therefore it creates traffic (Cisnero 2015). More traffic means a higher ranking on search engines, which in turn might lead to a bigger amount of potential customers. Therefore, the higher a company's search engine ranking is, the better the chances of gaining new customers are.

As a matter of course, social media also makes it easier to share information, because sharing content is significantly faster and easier than through email or in paper-form. Customers will receive the desired information instantly, can access it from their mobile devices and even share it with other people. Sharing information has never been easier than with social media. (Cisnero 2015.)

Hootsuite (2014), a company that is specialized in social media marketing, says "Social customer service is the future of customer satisfaction" and this is very accurate in today's age of digitalization. Customers expect that companies use the trends that are available on the market and they are constantly looking for easy ways to find the information they need without having to search for it. There is a huge difference between a company that is not active on social media at all and offers all its services solely via personal appointments or telephone conversations during office hours, and a company that enables its customers to contact them at any given time and to receive information quickly and easily whenever it is needed.

Social media can be a way to create meaningful relationships with customers, because it allows a two-way dialogue (Rouhiainen 2015). This is not possible in traditional advertising, where it is much more difficult for customers to directly answer to a specific topic or address concerns quickly.

Social media nowadays is the place where customers talk about products or services they like. They give recommendations or use it to make buying decisions. Being active on social platforms not only means talking to existing and potential customers, but it also means listening to what they have to say and using their feedback to further develop the company's products and services. According to Hootsuite (2015) "71% of consumers who experience a quick and effective brand response on social media are more likely to recommend that brand to others" and "85% of consumers say that they will change their shopping behavior in response to social media content."

This means that consumers do talk on social media. It is better if the company they talk about is there as well, so that it can take influence on the way it is seen as a brand.

Generally, we can say that social media efficiently increases a company's visibility and consumers' brand awareness (Hootsuite 2015). Whereas traditional marketing methods require a large amount of money to achieve awareness, for example through newspaper advertisements or television spots, social media can do the same within a much lower budget. It is an easy way to instantly connect with key stakeholders and to reach a broader audience in different locations.

However, social media does not only offer benefits for companies but also inherits certain risks that firms need to consider when using social media for business.

The biggest risk for companies is the inability to use social media effectively. Social media is a great way to reach a broad audience and to share information, but at the same time it is essential to share the right kind of information. Therefore, it is recommended that social media is not just operated by "someone" in the company, but by a dedicated person who knows what he or she can post online. Sharing the wrong things on social media can easily lead to a damage of brand reputation or even to a loss of customers.

Another risk can be competitive exposure. Companies that use social media very frequently might give competitors insight into their strategies or activities and competitors could then utilize successful tactics and ideas for themselves. Depending on the industry, this can be more or less dangerous for a company. (Marsh 2014.)

These kind of risks can be minimized through social media guidelines that can be followed by a company, which is why they are so important. However, according to Accountingweb (2014), only "33 percent [of companies] have a social media policy."



### 3.1.3 Traditional Media Versus Social Media

Traditional communication and social media communication are very different in their entirety and it is important to understand these differences in order to communicate well on social media.

Traditional communication channels are face-to-face communication or telephone communication, but also channels such as print media, TV spots, written communication such as letters or poems, or even theater plays (Masterful Marketing 2010).

Except for face-to-face and telephone communication, these kind of communication channels are usually based on one-way communication, which means that only one party is communicating its message and the receiver of the message cannot reply directly. Social media communication however enables a two-way communication between a company and its clients. The company can send out its message and the receivers of the message, usually the customers, can directly reply or ask questions to clarify. (Rouhiainen 2015.)

The goal of traditional communication is to send a "me-message", which means that a company wants to inform its existing or potential customers about what it does, its strategy or its products. Social Media sends a "you-message", because it allows the company to actively ask questions and to directly take the customers' feedback into consideration. (Rouhiainen 2015.)

Through Social Media, customer behaviors, needs and preferences can be easily determined and communicated. Social media communication allows a company to show that it is customer-oriented. It promotes good customer relations instead of just promoting its own products and services. (Rouhiainen 2015.)

Furthermore, some channels of traditional communication can be very expensive, such as TV or print advertising. Even though social media advertising can inhibit certain costs as well, depending on the platforms and marketing tools used, it is still significantly cheaper than traditional marketing channels.

Additionally, social media communication is usually less formal than traditional communication, and it takes place in real-time, whereas traditional communication is usually pre-written or pre-filmed. Therefore, social media communication makes it easier to react timely to certain events and occurrences.

### 3.1.4 An Outlook Into the Future of Social Media

A study conducted by Statista displays the amount of social media users worldwide between 2010 and 2014 and makes further predictions until the year 2018. It estimates that in 2016 there will be approximately 2.13 billion social media users globally, compared to only 1.4 billion in 2012. By 2018, the number is expected to reach roughly 2.4 billion.

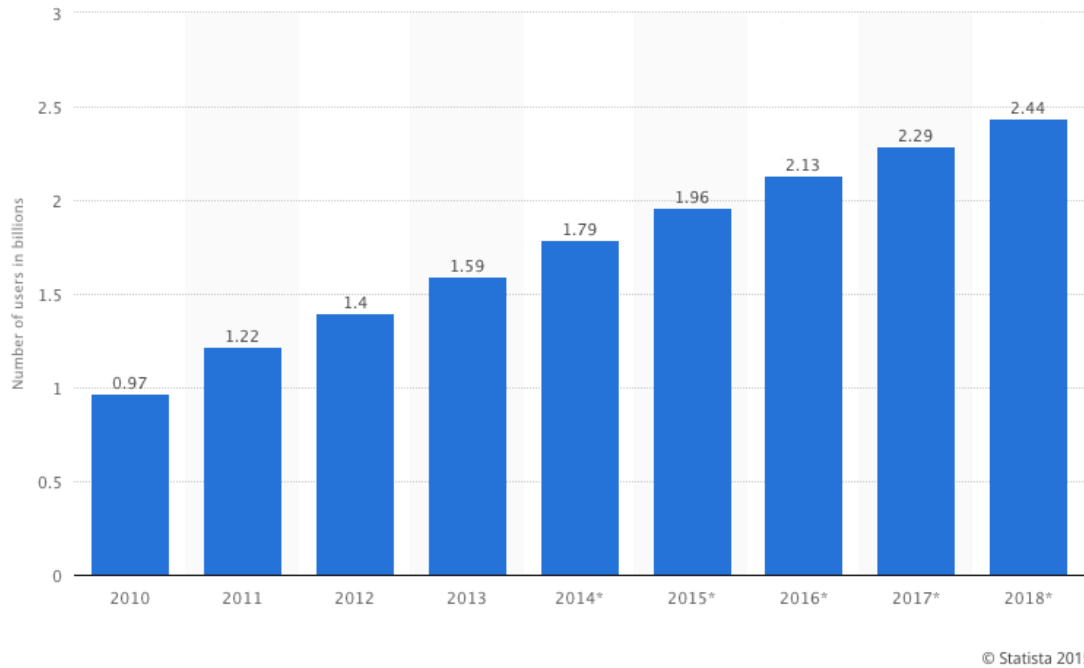
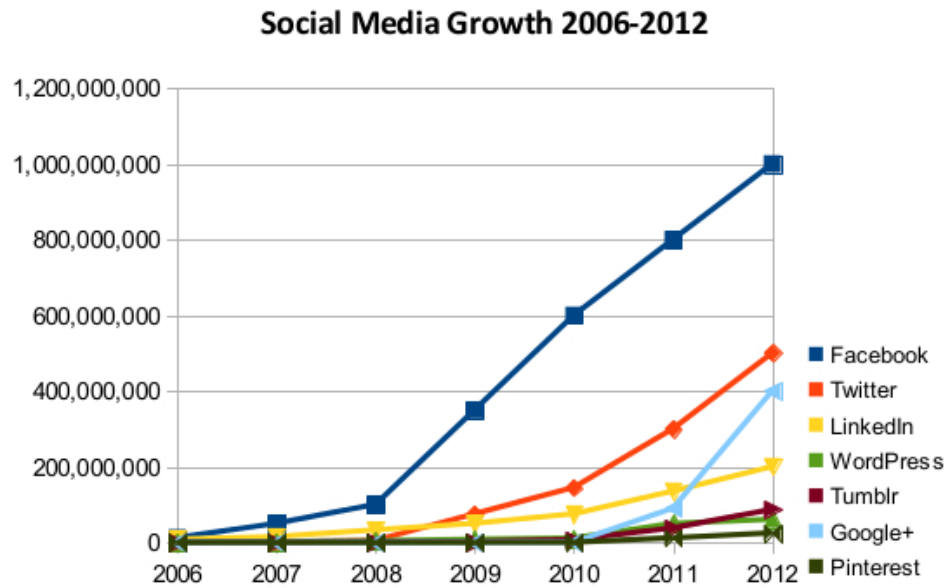


Figure 1: Growth of Social Media 2010 – 2018 (Statista 2015).

Generally, we can say that the use of social media has grown exponentially during the last years. Between 2006 and 2012 alone the use of Facebook has increased more than eightfold, while the use of Twitter has quadrupled and the use of LinkedIn has doubled.



<http://www.dstevenwhite.com>

*Figure 2: Social Media Growth 2006–2012 (White 2013).*

As the Internet and social media are becoming a bigger and bigger part of our lives, we can expect that this exponential growth will continue also in the following years.

### 3.2 Communication on Social Media

This chapter will explain common terms and abbreviations used on social media, as well as show specific tools that can help companies to optimize their online communication. Furthermore, the differences between online communication for B2B and B2C companies, as well as differences between social media use in Finland and Germany are studied and practical advice on how to handle negative feedback is given.

#### 3.2.1 Optimizing Social Media Communication

There are a several useful tools that can help companies to optimize their communication on social media.

One of these tools is a content plan (Rouhiainen 2015). A content plan is similar to an editorial calendar and is used to organize what kind of content will be published on different social media platforms on which specific day. This helps to keep an overview of the

different types of content the company wants to publish and also to have a clear time-frame in which this content shall be published.

Without a content plan, social media communication can quickly turn very chaotic and especially if more than one person is responsible for the company's digital marketing or social media marketing, it can be very confusing. Creating a content plan helps to divide tasks and to know when these tasks need to be executed.

It might also make sense to create a "content idea bank", in which the company can simply store possible content ideas for the future and whenever new content is needed, the content idea bank can be used as an inspiration. (Rouhiainen 2012, 27.)

Another step to optimize social media communication includes consistent engagement for interaction (Rouhiainen 2012, 31). The main goal of social media is not to submerge followers with the biggest amount of information, but to encourage followers and users to participate. Therefore it is important to ask questions and allow users to share their personal experiences and opinions. According to Lasse Rouhiainen (2012, 32), "this enables companies to know their followers better, allowing them to collaborate in creating a powerful community".

But not only will a company be able to know its potential customers, it will also show that it cares about its customers and is customer-oriented, which in turn will improve the company's reputation among customers.

The third tool every company should use in its digital marketing is a promotional plan (Rouhiainen 2012). It is not enough to create social media accounts and invent interesting content, it is also important to ensure that potential clients can find a company's social media channels easily. Therefore, the company needs to promote its social media sites through sharing them on the company's website and in newsletters, through online advertising and through encouraging employees to share the company's social media channels on their own accounts.

Furthermore, links to the company's social media can be added to email signatures and document footers, which is an easy, but efficient way to reach more visibility online, as well as offline.

### 3.2.2 Social Media Communication for B2B and B2C Companies

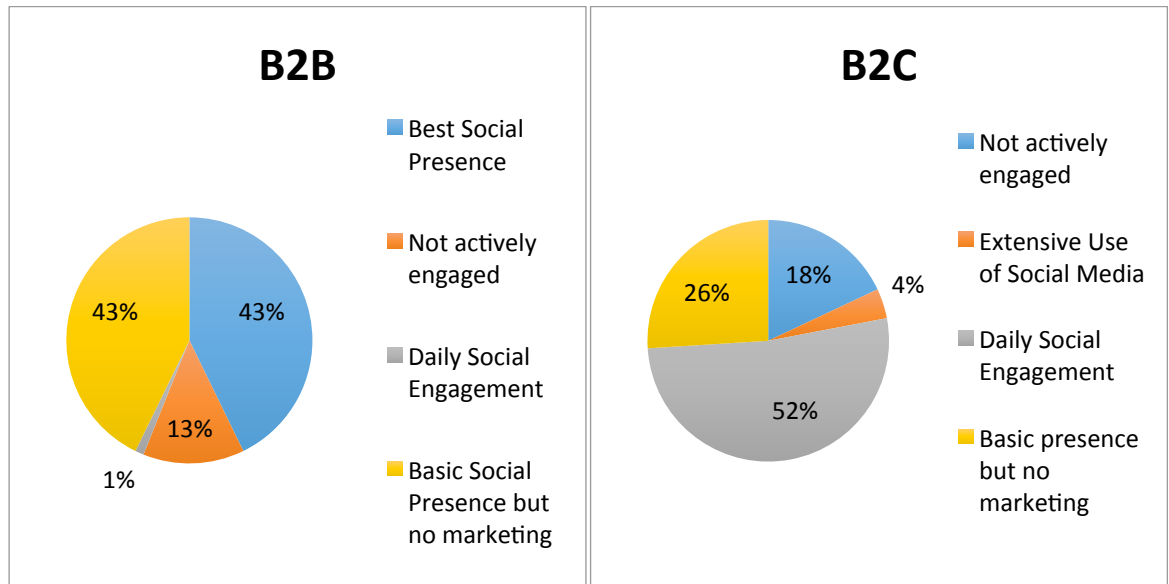


Figure 3: Use of Social Media by B2B and B2C Companies (Roberts & Zahay 2013).

Generally, all types of businesses do utilize social media communication in order to reach their business objectives. As we can see in the charts above, approximately 43 percent of B2B companies and 26 percent of B2C companies do have a basic presence on social media websites, but do not use digital marketing. However, 52 percent of B2C companies are engaging daily with their social media sites, whereas only one percent of B2B companies does the same.

Thus, it is recommended that especially B2B companies focus more on their social media communication, because it could give them a considerable competitive advantage over competitors that are not using social media.

When using social media websites such as Facebook or YouTube, companies need to consider their target audience. The target customer for B2B firms might be very different from the one for B2C companies and the communication with customers can be more informal in B2C environments, as it is in B2B ones.

Generally, the communication style on social media is significantly more informal than in traditional media, however the way of communicating still needs to be adjusted to the company's target audience.

### **3.2.3 Handling Negative Feedback on Social Media**

The main goal of social media for businesses is to create a high customer retention rate and customer loyalty. However, not all of a company's customers are always happy about the service or products received. Especially in the age of social media it is easy to voice discontent online and, in the worst case, this can influence other potential customers who use social media to collect information about a product or company they are interested in. Therefore, it is important to know that customer feedback is not always positive and a company needs to be able to handle negative feedback or complaints in the right way.

Nowadays it is extremely easy to find information online and more information means a broader range of possibilities that customers can choose from. In effect, customers are more demanding than ever (Roberts & Zahay 2013, 349).

A survey from ZenDesk (2013) found out that "90 percent of customers say that buying decisions are influenced by online reviews". Additionally, 62 percent of respondents said that they bought more products from a company following a positive customer service experience.

That in mind, a company should best react to negative feedback on social media by offering to continue the conversation offline. If a customer is very angry or upset, there is no use continuing the discussion publicly on the company's social media site, because this could lead to a serious argument that is seen by other customers and will not leave a good impression of the company's customer service. Therefore, it is important to apologize to the customer and immediately offer to call them or send them an email to talk about the bad experience in private.

Additionally, it is important to always respect the customer's opinion and take them seriously. A professional company should always want to show the customer that his or her opinion is valued and that the company is making efforts to improve bad customer experiences.

### **3.2.4 Social Media Usage in Finland Versus Germany**

According to several studies, the use of social media in Finland slightly differs from the use of social media in Germany. Statistics Finland (2015) found out that 87 percent of Finns aged between 16 and 89 use the internet and 68 percent even use it more than once per day. Furthermore, 96 percent of Finnish citizens use the internet with their

smartphone and the percentage of those using the internet several times a day increased by four percent compared to the previous year (Statistics Finland 2015). This shows that the popularity of the internet is still growing in Finland, especially because there are more and more devices that can be used for surfing the internet, such as tablets and mobile phones.

Smartphones specifically have altered the way the internet is used, because they enable the participation on social media in real-time, regardless of the user's location. Social media channels accompany users all throughout the day, and can be used at any time. Therefore they enable their users to be more active communicators. (Statistics Finland 2015.)

It is noticeable that especially the age group over 60 has increased its social media use and one in three 60-year-olds uses social media networks regularly.

Statistics Finland (2015) found out that the Internet is mostly used for communication and following current news and developments in the media. This shows that many people in Finland rely on the Internet when it comes to being informed about what is going on in the world. Therefore, also companies can use the popularity of using the Internet for information-seeking for their own advantage by publishing their own news online.

When it comes to Germany, approximately 85 percent of the total population use the internet regularly. Almost every single person aged between 25 and 45 is active online and 50 percent of over 65 year-olds are using the internet. Furthermore, 70 percent of internet users go online through smartphones or tablets. (DeStatis 2015.)

87 percent of all German internet users use social media platforms to find information about companies and their products. This significantly high number illustrates the importance of being present on social media for companies, however, according to DeStatis (2015) only 22 percent of all German businesses use social media.

In summary it can be said that the differences between social media use in Finland and Germany are relatively small. Importance in both countries lies on using social networks to gain information about products and services, as well as staying connected to other people and being updated about different happenings in the world.

## **4 Empirical Part**

In this chapter the author will discuss the research process of this thesis and give recommendations for Steuerberatung Lang's social media guidelines based on own research, existing statistics and further conducted benchmarking.

### **4.1 Conducting the Research**

As stated in chapter one, the purpose of this thesis is to create social media guidelines for Steuerberatung Lang's social media presence. This was achieved by conducting a survey with the company's existing clients in order to determine how social media is used by the clients, as well as possible needs and wishes that clients have for the case company's social media usage.

A survey was chosen because it was the easiest way to contact all clients at the same time and enable them to remain anonymous when giving their personal opinions. Furthermore, a survey was the best way to detect the clients' preferences regarding social media.

Quantitative research allows to choose a sample of the population of interest and to evaluate opinions and interests in that chosen sample. Usually, this kind of research is representative and descriptive for the selected population sample and can be used to produce statistical results. Quantitative research allows to find out how customers behave, which is what the author of the thesis wanted to achieve in regard to social media behavior. (Marketing Donut 2015.)

Respondents were selected randomly and the survey was sent out to 100 of the company's clients. In order to achieve a relatively high answer rate and to animate more people to participate, the possibility to win a voucher for a dinner at one of the region's best restaurants was offered. The survey was sent out via the CEO's email and a personal letter of the CEO that stated the purpose of the survey was included in order to create trust among the company's clients.

The survey itself included 14 questions that consisted of free text answers, as well as multiple choice questions. Between 23 September 2015 and 7 October 2015 there were 50 answers to the survey and thus the answer rate was 50%. The complete questionnaire of the survey can be found in the end of this thesis (Appendix 1).



Additionally, qualitative research in the form of two Skype interviews was conducted with clients of the company that gave their contact information and agreed to answer additional questions in order to clarify their survey answers. This was done to get a deeper insight into the specific answers that were given in the survey and to find reasons for either a positive attitude towards social media or a negative one. This qualitative research is not representative, but helped in understanding the mindset and preferences of the case company's clients, as it focused on the respondents' own opinions and thinking that was voiced during the survey. The questions that were asked during the Skype interview can be found in the end of this thesis (Appendix 3).

All contacts for the survey were acquired through the case company's client database. Questions for the survey were based on logical assumptions about social media use of a small business and the starting phase of social media activities. In order to find out which social media channels the company could use for its future digital marketing and communication, it was necessary to determine which social platforms are frequently used by the company's clients. Furthermore, it was important to find out what kind of communication channels the clients would be interested in in the future. The company wants to offer specific social media communication based on its clients' needs and therefore the survey aimed to observe the clients' use of social media and the time spent on different platforms.

Benchmarking of Steuerberatung Lang's main competitors was done to determine if and how the company's competitors are using social media and if the usage of social media could amount to a significant competitive advantage for the case company. Competitors' websites were analyzed and additionally, several search engines were used to find out if any competitors' social media presence would be found.

Survey, benchmarking and research were conducted to explore mainly the following topics:

- Which social media channels are used by the clients?
- How much time is spent on social media weekly?
- What kind of social media communication are clients interested in or regard as important?
- What wishes do the company's clients have regarding the social media use of Steuerberatung Lang?

The first part of the questionnaire evaluated the respondents' demographics, such as age and mode of employment. As the case company's clients are aged mostly between 30 and 60, it was important to find out the social media use of this age group and the platforms that this group frequents the most in order to specifically tailor the company's guidelines to that target group.

The second part determined the general opinion of the respondents about the use of social media in business. It aimed to find out which ones of the clients consider it necessary to actively participate on social media and which ones do use social media for their own enterprises. It also evaluated the prejudices and fears of clients regarding Steuerberatung Lang's social media usage and the handling of private or sensitive data.

Finally, the survey gave a little bit of information about how accounting company Lang is planning to use social media in the future and then asked for opinions regarding these plans to find out if there would be a ready market to put these plans into practice. Furthermore, the possibility to voice specific ideas and wishes was given.

## 4.2 Respondents' Answers

This part will evaluate the respondents' answers of the survey, their demographics and specific wishes for Steuerberatung Lang's social media activity. It will also address different statistics and compare statistical results with the results of the survey conducted.

Of those asked, 20 percent are private clients of the case company, 40 percent work as freelancers and 40 percent are business clients, which illustrates that the main clients of Steuerberatung Lang are other businesses and entrepreneurs.

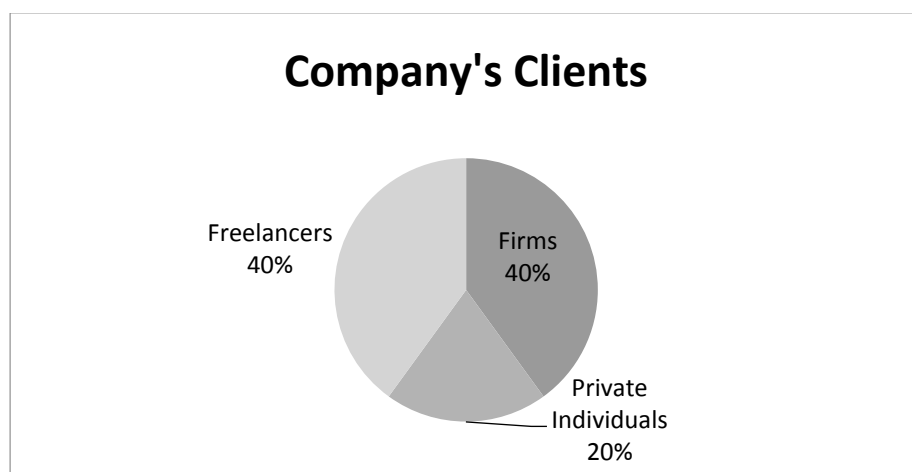


Figure 4: Case Company's clients

As stated above, the main age group of the survey respondents lies between 30 and 60 years of age. This age group makes up 88 percent, therefore the majority, of the company's clients.

Most of the clients use social media more than 3 times per week, with 68 percent of respondents using social media in their freetime as well as for business.

The main social media platforms that are used by the company's clients are YouTube and Facebook, followed by Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram. These results need to be considered later on when deciding which social media channels Steuerberatung Lang should use for its business operations.

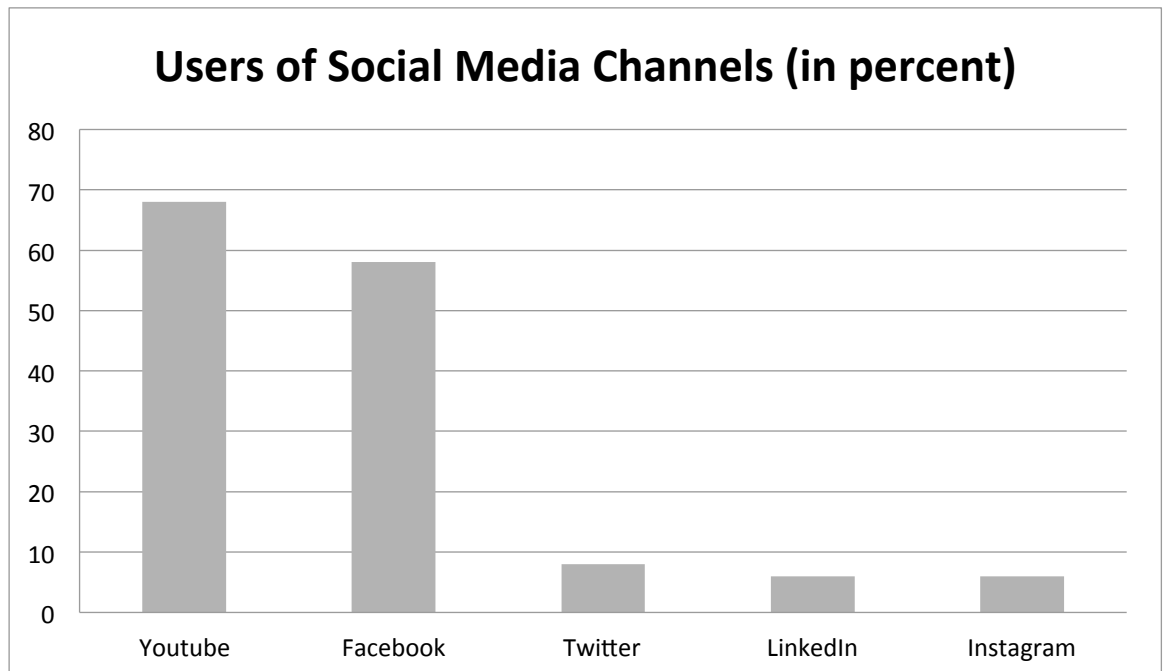


Figure 5: Users of Social Media Channels (in percent).

When asked how many hours respondents spend on social media weekly, 78 percent said they spend over five hours per week on social media, while only eight percent spend less than five hours online. The remaining ones polled to spend between zero and five hours per week on social media. However, these results showed that all of the respondents do spend a specific time per week on social media, even if it is less than five hours.

Furthermore, with 58 percent of respondents, the majority said that companies should be present on social media, whereas 30 percent were not quite sure or stated that it depends on how social media is used. The survey clearly showed that many of Steuerberatung

Lang's clients are scared that a use of social media could result in an overflow of irrelevant information. Therefore it is necessary for the case company to communicate its social media objectives to the clients to ensure them that the information shared will be useful and in moderate frequency, and clients' personal data will be safe at all times.

Interesting to see was that 62 percent of survey respondents said that Steuerberatung Lang should not be active on social media. However, when explaining how the company is planning to use social media channels, almost all of the respondents polled that they would be interested in using social media to communicate with Steuerberatung Lang. Therefore, it is evident that the case company has a chance of effectively using social media to enable two-way communication with its clients if it is open and clear about its intended use of social media platforms. This means that in addition to creating social media guidelines, it is important to address possible fears of clients related to information flow on social media.

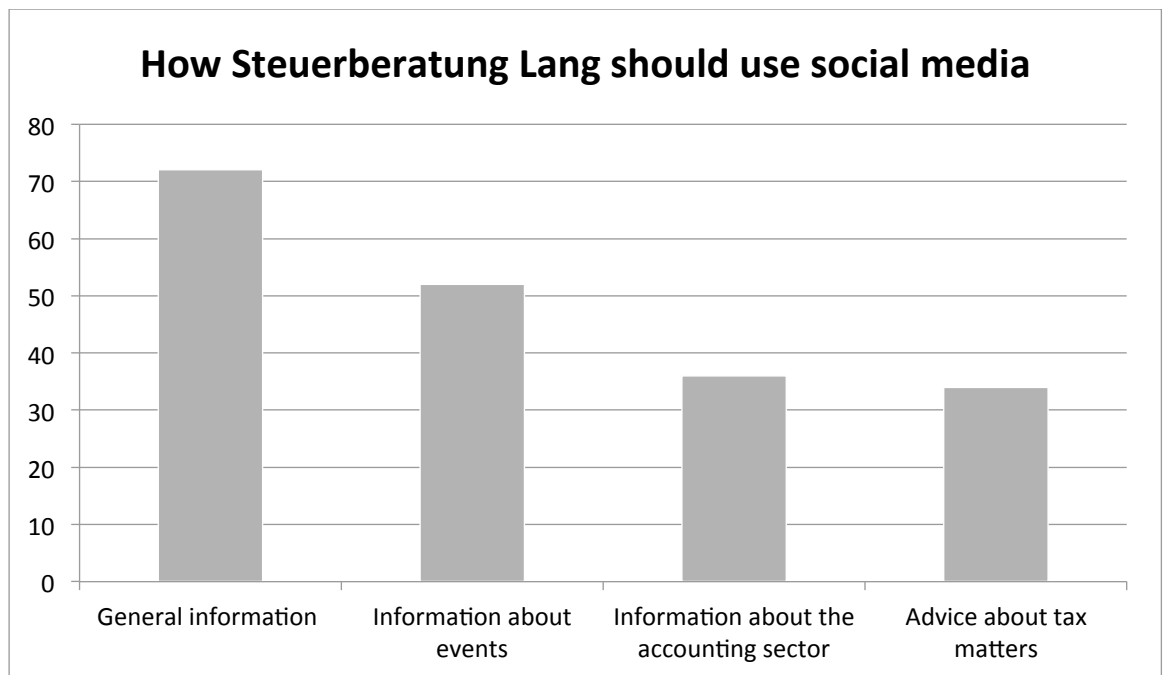


Figure 6: How Steuerberatung Lang should use social media.

As illustrated in the chart above, more than 70 percent of respondents would be interested in receiving general information about the case company on social media, such as changes of opening hours or specific company news. More than 50 percent are interested in receiving news about events and seminars, 36 percent would like to receive general information about the accounting sector, such as changes in regulations, and over 30 percent would like to get advice on tax related matters, for example how to fill out a tax declaration or information about tax deductibles.

66 percent of survey respondents also said that they are interested in a Whatsapp service, which they would use to request a call back, ask about opening hours, arrange appointments or ask questions that do not require elaborate answers.

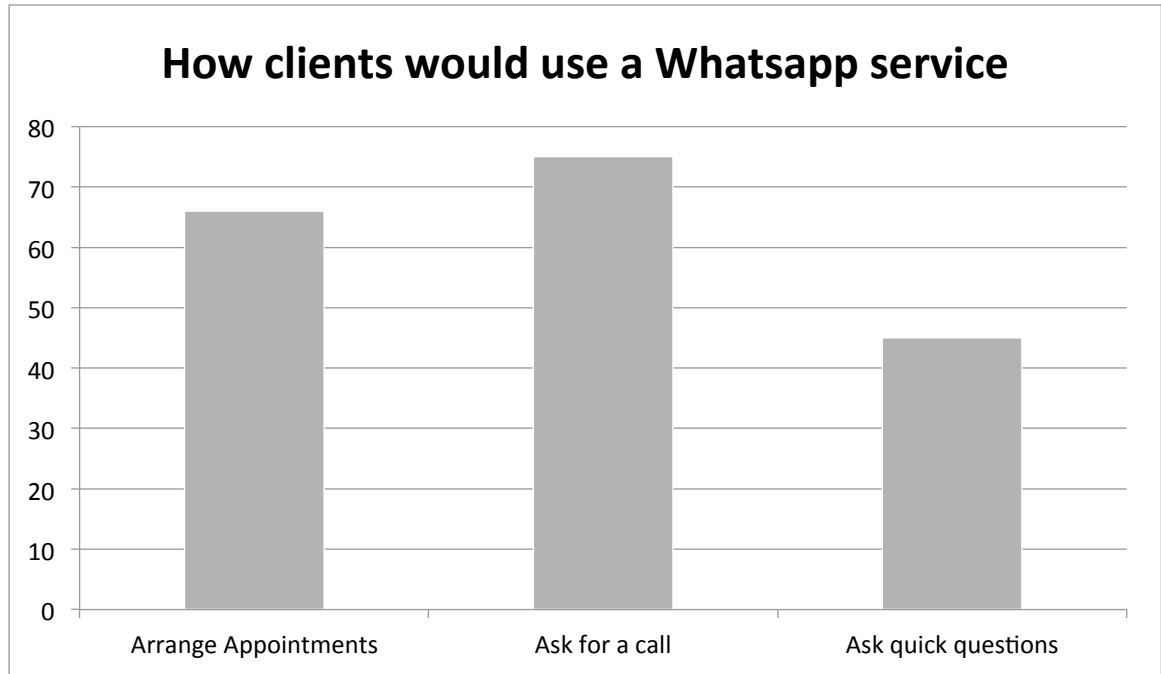


Figure 7: How clients would use a Whatsapp service.

As a summary it can be said that all of the company's clients use social media in their personal lives and many of them are active on big social media platforms, such as Facebook or YouTube. When first asked about Steuerberatung Lang's social media presence, the majority of respondents was sceptic in regard to how the company is planning to utilize social media. The company's clients made clear that they do not want to receive too much or unnecessary information and they do not want to have to be scared of their personal data being wrongfully used on social media.

However, after explaining how the company is planning to utilize social media, almost all of the respondents changed their minds and said they would be interested in the services that the company plans to offer. This shows that, as long as accounting company Lang is open and communicative about its social media use, the clients have trust in the company and would use its online services. Additionally, the company needs to communicate that no private data will be shared online and sensitive information will always be handled personally. Furthermore, social media will only serve as additional opportunity to communicate, but will not replace traditional means of communication, such as personal appointments or telephone conversations.

Additional comments that were received in the survey said that social media is a good tool to show that the company is modern and has a young mindset. It was also seen as an excellent way of being visible on the market. Especially the accounting industry, which often has the reputation of being old-fashioned or even outdated, needs young and modern companies that do know how to use current trends. This in turn is appreciated by the clients as well, who expect to always receive a service that is up-to-date.

Another participant of the survey stated during a Skype interview that the company is very competent during personal meetings, but they also need to show it outwardly by using social media in the right way to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

In addition to the survey, other research conducted by different companies and organisations was taken into consideration. It shows that the usage of social media is constantly increasing and offers many benefits for companies.

Online Social Media (2015) found out that some of the positive effects of social media usage are increased exposure, increased traffic, a loyal customer base, better market place insights, as well as improved sales and reduced marketing expenses.

Other statistics show the most frequented social media platforms in 2015, calculated by active monthly users, are Facebook with 1.3 billion active users per month, YouTube with 1 billion and Twitter with 284 million active users monthly. (Online Social Media 2015.)

This means that Facebook, YouTube and Twitter all have a very high amount of monthly users and therefore it makes sense for a company to target these platforms in order to reach the broadest audience.

Additionally, Smart Insights (2013–2015) has concluded a survey that explains what happens on social media every single minute. For example, 400 hours of video are uploaded every 60 seconds on YouTube, over three million Facebook status updates are created and over 44.4 million Whatsapp messages are being sent.

When we look at how many posts, hours of videos, photos or text messages are posted online every single minute, it becomes evident that social media has an extensive amount of users and cannot be ignored by today's businesses.

### 4.3 Recommendations based on Survey, Statistics and Benchmarking

The author's recommendations for Steuerberatung Lang, based on the survey conducted, above mentioned statistics and benchmarking, are to focus on **Facebook**, **Twitter** and **YouTube**, as well as on **Whatsapp**. The company's clients are predominantly using these channels and statistics show that these networks have the biggest active audiences, which means that targeting potential customers will be more efficient and fruitful. Additionally, these networks correspond best with the company's objectives, as they enable Steuerberatung Lang to enhance brand awareness by showing visibility, improve communication with customers through specifically targeted posts, as well as demonstrating expertise through sharing relevant links, articles and videos.

Furthermore, most of the company's clients said they would be interested in a Whatsapp service. As the company wants to develop its services based on the customers' wishes and needs, it should take this feedback into consideration.

Another possibility to show professionalism and to reach existing and potential clients is to include a blog on the company's website where the CEO regularly publishes information that is related to the accounting industry and gives clients useful information. Not only does a blog create traffic on the firm's website, it will also bring new users to the website via search engines and other social media networks.

LinkedIn, even though it is a big social network, will not be handled in this thesis, as it is mostly used outside of Germany and does not offer the case company many advantages at this point, because Steuerberatung Lang only operates regionally in Germany.

One social media platform similar to LinkedIn that is used in Germany, is a professional network called Xing. It is used by companies and jobseekers alike in order to connect with other people and businesses. It is recommended that case company Lang also creates a profile in this social network as it can help to connect to other companies and enables the company to show its expertise on a professional level. However, only a meager amount of the company's clients is using Xing, therefore it will not be taken into further consideration in this thesis.

Ultimately, it is important to have a clear understanding of the purpose of social media marketing and to communicate this purpose to the company's clients. Since many have expressed worry about social media becoming the only communication channel of Steuerberatung Lang, it needs to make clear that social media communication will not

replace traditional communication means, but will merely function as an additional possibility to get in touch.

By creating social media guidelines for Steuerberatung Lang, the author wants to show how to use different social media platforms that are relevant for the company and its industry in the best possible way and furthermore explain why it is essential for a company to use social media at all.

Accounts on Facebook, YouTube and Twitter will be created for the company and screenshots will give a step-by-step illustration of recommended types of posts and status updates. Additionally, Whatsapp and blog ideas will be given and common mistakes will be shown and explained in order to enable the case company to avoid mistakes that could possibly lead to a damage of reputation.

The final product will focus on content creation as well as on social media as a communication tool that enables two-way communication with existing and potential customers. Therefore, also rules on how to communicate effectively online will be given, especially when dealing with negative customer feedback or inappropriate comments.

The goal is to offer clear instructions on how to start with social media communication that can easily be put into practice by every employee without the necessity for taking digital marketing classes.

This, ultimately will help the company to show expertise, open up further means of communication for its clients and to acquire new clients through targeted digital marketing.

Additionally, a half a day training for the company's employees will be offered by the author in order to explain the final guidelines further and answer any questions that might arise. The guidelines itself will be updated every quarterly year in accordance with upcoming market trends and needs of the company regarding digital marketing activities, paid advertising or the use of new social media platforms that are not yet included in the guidelines, such as LinkedIn or Xing.



## **5 Developing a Social Media Guidebook for Steuerberatung Lang**

This chapter will describe how social media guidelines for the case company were developed, how the firm's resources should be used to deal with social media and digital marketing and which channels should be used in regard to research results of the survey taken. Furthermore, different types of digital advertising will be described, as well as the evaluation process to measure the success of social media marketing.

### **5.1 Social Media Channels**

When choosing the appropriate social media channels for the case company's digital marketing, it is important to look at its clients' use of social media. In regard to the survey taken with 100 of the company's clients, the most used social media channels are Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Furthermore, the clients would be interested in using a Whatsapp service.

According to a recent survey done by Statista (2016), Facebook is by far the most used social media platform with around 1.5 billion users worldwide. Steuerberatung Lang's clients are no exception to that, with 58 percent of them using Facebook. However, it is important to consider also the company's potential but not yet existing clients. As Facebook is the biggest social network in the world, chances for finding and acquiring new clients are exponentially higher than on other social media channels, simply because many people use it.

Nowadays Facebook is not only used to share personal status updates and stay in contact with friends all over the world, but also to look for information about new products and to rate companies and their services. People can search for a specific company and see what others have to say about it, as well as look up opening hours or contact information.

Therefore, being active on Facebook brings several advantages to Steuerberatung Lang, the most subtle one simply being visibility. If a company has its own Facebook page and is visible, it means that potential customers can find the company and easily get in touch. Thus, the second advantage is having an easy and fast way of communicating. Facebook allows users to send private messages to companies in order to ask questions or to solve specific problems and it allows the company to answer directly. Users can also write comments and leave their opinions, which allows the company to gather feedback and to react directly to customers' wishes and needs.

If a company is not on Facebook, the possibility to follow what customers say about its products or services and the opportunity to react to this kind of feedback, is lacking completely, which in turn means a shortage of important knowledge that the company could utilize for its success.

Another platform that is frequently used by the case company's clients is YouTube with 68 percent of survey respondents using it several hours per week. Visual marketing and video marketing are nowadays becoming more and more important for companies, because many users utilize YouTube to search for information about certain brands or products and Youtubers' opinions can be in great demand when it comes to testing out new products. However, YouTube can also be used by companies to showcase their skills and knowledge through filming short videos that either inform users about the company or give helpful advice to the company's customers. Steuerberatung Lang could therefore use YouTube to inform clients about news in the accounting sector, for giving advice on how to fill out a tax declaration or to answer frequently asked questions by clients. This enables the firm to demonstrate professionalism and expertise, to help its clients by giving information and to be seen by potential future clients.

However, it is important that a company's YouTube videos are kept short and to the point and are filmed with professional equipment and in exceptionally good quality. Furthermore, it is necessary to plan the videos in advance, as it is not enough to just sit down and start talking.

Twitter is, according to Statista (2016), used by around 320 million people worldwide. Even though only 8 percent of the case company's existing clients use this platform, it is good to be active on Twitter nevertheless as it can function as a channel to reach new clients, to answer questions in a very short and compact form and to advertise the company's blog posts or other social media platforms by sharing links to relevant updates.

What is special about Twitter is that it allows the user to share statutes with a maximum of 140 characters, which means that all information needs to be short and to the point.

In addition to the participation in these social networks, 66 percent of survey respondents would be interested in a Whatsapp service offered by Steuerberatung Lang. Whatsapp is a mobile phone application that is available for all kinds of operating systems such as iOS, Android or Windows and it allows users to send text messages to other Whatsapp users for free. According to Statista (2016), around 900 million people worldwide actively use this service.

Especially in Germany not many companies offer a Whatsapp service yet, but those who do receive a very good feedback, because Whatsapp makes it easy for customers to contact a company at any time or place and to receive an immediate reply. Additionally, voice messages can be sent to record longer messages instead of typing them out.

The case company's clients would like to use Whatsapp to ask short questions such as inquiring about opening hours, to quickly arrange appointments or to request a call back from one of the accountants.

Lastly, a company blog on the firm's official website can help to publish relevant information and to demonstrate knowledge and expertise. Companies can publish press releases related to the company itself or news about the industry they are working in. Furthermore, sharing links to a company's blog post will bring more people to the company's website and might generate new sales. Readers of the blog can also leave comments and share their opinions. In any case, it is a good way to create trust between the company and its clients, because a blog serves as a reference to the company's knowledge and skills.

Steuerberatung Lang could use a blog to publish news about the accounting sector, for example relevant changes of law or regulations, inform about seminars given by the CEO, publish photos of events or simply give advice on how to deal with tax related problems.

## **5.2 Social Media Communication Planning**

Another important issue is to determine how social media channels are used by the company, who is responsible for digital marketing and if there should be clear guidelines for social media usage.

According to Roberts and Zahay (2013, 230) "Good social media results from a carefully planned strategy, not from a series of random activities". As mentioned previously, it is recommended that one person is responsible for all social media communication in order to avoid confusion or posts on social media that do not follow the company's values. If a company uses social media without clear guidelines and everyone can post on social media platforms, the danger is that controversial information is given or harmful actions are done by reacting inappropriately to negative feedback or customer complaints.

Generally, there are four things that are important when interacting on social media and they should also be considered when creating social media guidelines. These four things are listening, communicating, engaging and collaborating. (Roberts & Zahay 2013, 230.)

**Listening** is one of the most important activities on social media, however, it is often completely forgotten. Social media is not just there to immediately talk and share information, but at first every company should listen to the content that its customers are sharing and the tone of the conversation before engaging actively. This means that a company should first observe and then develop ways to reply accordingly.

Another important thing on social media is **communicating**. However, rules for communication on social media might be different than the ones for communication outside the internet (Roberts & Zahay 2013, 232). When a company operates on social media, it must understand its target audience and the needs of that audience. Therefore it should communicate in a way that the audience understands and values. The target audience of an accounting company might communicate differently and have different values than the target group of a software company or fashion store. This needs to be considered when communicating on social media. Furthermore, a company must be responsive and always act respectfully towards its clients, even if a client is upset or expresses disappointment. The responsible person for social media marketing should never engage in an argument online as this can permanently damage the company's reputation. It is also important to be consistent in communication, which means that communication should happen regularly and it should always follow the same guidelines.

When it comes to social media success, it is necessary to **engage** the audience. Roberts and Zahay (2013, 233–234) say that "the company's communication needs to be relevant and engaging, or it will not attract attention."

While it is good to share information and have users consume it, it is better to encourage a two-way communication and **collaboration** where users reply and possibly even share content. One way of engaging the audience is to ask questions and to animate users to share their own experiences. If the company's clients are then engaged, it is possible to also collaborate with them. This means that customers can write product reviews, share their customer success stories or even share the company's news on their own social media profiles.

As Steuerberatung Lang is relatively small with only two CEOs and five full-time employees and the company operates mainly locally, it might be possible that either one of the

CEOs takes care of the company's social media channels or another employee is assigned the role of being responsible for the company's social media and takes care that the company's social media guidelines are followed. If too many people have access to the online presence and one person is not informed about the actions of another person, the company's online communication can become inconsistent and confusing. However, it is good to encourage also the other employees to share their ideas for social media and to forward them to the person in charge, who then decides if the ideas are in line with the company's guidelines or not and posts the relevant content on the company's social media accounts.

It is also important to set a limitation on how much time the company will spend on social media every day and what message the firm wants to send. Limiting the time used for social media communication will avoid wasting the company's resources by spending too much time without actually communicating effectively.

### **5.3 Search Engine Optimization and Organic Advertising**

One way to increase traffic on a company's website, which means to encourage more people to visit the company's website, is Search Engine Optimization, also called SEO. SEO refers to the ranking that a company's website has on search engines, such as Google, when a user searches for a specific type of company or subject. The higher a company is ranked in the search results, the more likely it is that the user will click on the link and visit the company's website. Therefore, every company should aim to be ranked as high as possible, preferably on one of the first pages of the search results.

There are several ways to achieve a higher ranking and most of them are organic, which means the company does not need to pay for them. According to Roberts and Zahay (2013, 210), "it is estimated that 33 percent of search ranking comes from link activity, including links to blogs and social media". Other important influencing factors are the content on the website, the domain name and the social media footprint. The domain name refers to the extent to which a domain name is considered to be reputable in a specific category. For example universities or charities are considered to be reputable. Social media footprint in turn refers to the company's activity on social media and the amount of mentions or shares of the company or its social media content. That means the more active the company is on social media and the more its content gets shared online, the higher the influence on the search ranking. (Roberts & Zahay 2013, 211.)

A blog on the company's website is a good way of Search Engine Optimization as it provides relevant content and sharing a link to the blog on other platforms will increase link activity, which in turn positively affects the search ranking. Also other factors can influence the ranking, such as the website itself and its functionality.

Generally, every type of organic advertising is free advertising. This means that a company does not need to pay for its advertising efforts. The opposite is paid advertising, which will be described in the next chapter. Whenever a search engine lists its search results, both types of advertising will be displayed, organic as well as paid. Organic search results are listed according to SEO measures if they match the search term.

Other types of organic advertising are every kind of activity on social media, such as status updates that are shared by the company's followers or word-to-mouth campaigns that do not invoke costs for the company. As many small companies do not have a very high budget for their social media marketing, organic advertising can be a great way to achieve digital marketing goals without acquiring costs. However, often organic advertising alone is not enough to ensure a company's digital marketing success. Therefore, it is best to combine organic and paid advertising, at least if the company has gained some experience with social media already and feels secure enough to invest money in its social media activities.

#### **5.4 Paid Advertising**

Paid advertising is, as the name suggests, advertising that a business needs to pay for. This can be done offline, for example through newspaper adverts, or online through paid advertising campaigns. Generally, paid advertising allows a company to better control what kind of information it wants to share online and who the specific target group is.

There are several tools that can be used for paid advertising, such as Google Ads, Facebook Ads or Twitter Ads. Almost every social media platform allows companies to pay for specific advertising campaigns that allow them to come up in the top search results.

Google, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube allow businesses to generate specific ads that can be targeted to users in certain locations, age groups or genders. Especially Facebook Advertising allows a detailed targeting of customers by language or even interests.

The goal of a company that uses paid advertising is that enough people will click on its advertising, so that the cost of the advertising is covered and even more is earned through new sales.

This thesis focuses mostly on organic advertising, as Steuerberatung Lang has no presence on social media yet and is only getting familiar with different platforms. However, Facebook advertising will shortly be explained in the final guidelines in order to enable case company Lang to try out paid advertising if the interest or need arises. Other possibilities for paid advertising might be included in one of the quarterly updates that will be done of the company's guidelines to ensure that they are always up-to-date.

## **5.5 Evaluation of Social Media Success**

There are several ways to evaluate the success of digital marketing, such as monitoring the follower count on different social media platforms, the amount of shares of the company's status updates, the amount of clicks on the company's advertisings, or the number of visitors on the company's website.

Common ways to measure social media success can be customer acquisition, which means how many new customers buy a specific product that has been advertised on social media, or cost per lead. Cost per lead refers to the costs that the company has for its paid advertising in regard to the amount of people who click on the advertised link. Only if enough people click on the advertisement, will the paid advertising be effective and successful.

Social media platforms like Facebook or YouTube also allow a business to see how effective a company's social media presence is by offering tools, such as Facebook Insights or YouTube Analytics that enable the company to see how many people follow its Facebook page or YouTube channel, and how many people actually click on an advertisement created by the company. This is also useful for determining what kind of status updates are most effective and which ones might not work very well.

It is important to observe these numbers in order to measure the success of any social media marketing campaign. This avoids spending money for advertising that is not efficient or wasting other resources to create statuses that are not relevant for the company's clients.

Further details on how to use specific tools to measure social media success will be given in the final social media guidebook for Steuerberatung Lang (Appendix 4).

## **5.6 Implementation of Social Media Guidelines**

In order to implement the guidelines developed through survey and research, and to notify all of the company's employees about upcoming changes at the same time, the author of this thesis offers Steuerberatung Lang a personal training, in which the final guidelines will be explained and practical examples will be given to ensure that all employees understand the guidelines properly and know how to utilize them in the future. Additionally, any kind of questions that might come up will be answered.

Furthermore, as social media can evolve and change quite rapidly and it is important to always be up to date, these guidelines will regularly be updated in regard to evolving trends on the market, so that Steuerberatung Lang will always have the newest information and will know how to use upcoming tools and new social media platforms.

As the company's CEO, Daniel Lang, made clear that the company is also interested in trying out paid advertising, while at the same time being hesitant about it, only instructions for Facebook's paid advertising were added to the guidelines in order to enable the company to try out one of the paid advertising options in a relatively safe and easily understandable environment and to prevent confusion by giving too many different paid advertising options. However, if paid advertising turns out to be something beneficial for Steuerberatung Lang, the following updates of these guidelines will also include more information on this specific topic in regard to the company's wishes and needs, as well as new market developments.

The guidelines itself are very detailed and elaborate, because Steuerberatung Lang does not have any previous experience in social media. Therefore, detailed instructions were needed in order to ensure that different social media platforms can be understood well and that the company can start right away with its social media efforts by using the step by step instructions given in the guidelines.



## **6 Discussion**

This chapter will address research liability and validity, give suggestions for further research and development of the topic, as well as evaluate the author's own thesis process and individual learning experience.

### **6.1 Research Reliability and Validity**

Generally, research validity is an indicator of how convincing a research is and if the research, for example a survey, measures exactly what it intends to measure (Research Methodology 2015).

The questions of the survey were chosen in accordance to the research problem. They gave the necessary information to determine the clients' social media usage and to create social media guidelines for Steuerberatung Lang based on the needs of its clients. The gathered information was supported by further conducted oral interviews via Skype, as well as by several studies from other organisations and the author's and CEO's perceptions. Thus, the research conducted for this thesis is valid.

"Reliability is the degree to which an assessment tool gives consistent results" (Phelan & Wren, 2006).

Even though social media develops very fast and changes rapidly with new social media channels being developed continuously, the study is reliable now and also should be in the future, because big social networks such as Facebook or YouTube will continue to exist even in the forthcoming years and infact, their amount of users is still growing. In the research there were no contradictions and the respondents' answers correlated well. Additionally, different means of gathering data, such as conducting the online survey and seperate Skype interviews with some of the respondents, delivered similar results. Therefore, the study is reliable.

### **6.2 Development and Further Research Suggestions**

Further research could be the conduct of research regarding the evaluation and success of Steuerberatung Lang's social media efforts. If the company's social media activities lead to an increase of new clients and a better way of communication with existing as well

as potential customers, further research could be conducted to find out which other social media channels could be used, such as rising mobile applications like Snapchat, or how the digital marketing can further be improved by using other kinds of tactics or tools in order to reach an even broader audience.

When looking at the landscape of social media, it becomes obvious that social media changes rapidly and therefore new possibilities and tools are developed all the time. One of the newest upcoming trends are 360 degree videos that simulate a kind of virtual reality for the viewer. Further research could aim to find out how effective it is to use this kind of visual communication for businesses or which other possibilities arise through the constantly changing landscape of social networks, and how effective it would be for an accounting company to utilize these trends.

### **6.3 Thesis Process and Individual Learning**

The thesis process started in August 2015 by contacting different companies and exploring possible subjects for my thesis. Since I was always very interested in social media and digital marketing, it became clear quite early that I wanted to focus my thesis on this topic. However, what I really wanted to do was to prove that also companies that are considered more traditional and maybe even old-fashioned can use social media effectively and even should do so in order to be up-to-date.

When agreeing to write the thesis for an accounting company, many people were sceptic and said that all the clients of an accounting firm are aged and not using social media, therefore I wanted to prove the opposite and by doing so, wanted to overcome general prejudices about accounting firms and social media, which I believe I managed to do.

I chose this specific accounting company because they were not active on social media before, even though they had created a Facebook page. However, they were only using it to upload pictures of events that were extremely bad for the company's reputation, such as photos that showed the employees partying or drinking. I wanted to not only create social media guidelines, which were extremely necessary for this company, but also to inform about things that should and should not be shared on social media. I wanted to show that there should be a clear difference between a private social media account and the account of a professional business. Therefore I chose a company who urgently needed my help and I am extremely happy that I managed to improve the company's online communication.

My thesis was finished in February 2016, which means that it took about 7 months to write the thesis. I would say that I could have proceeded a bit faster if I had searched for a topic earlier. However, I am content with my progress as I was also working during the thesis process. Writing the thesis definitely improved my time management skills, because the limited free time I had needed to be structured well in order to find time to finalize the thesis. I also learned how to motivate myself even in times when I did not feel like working or doing research, which I believe will be a great asset for my future career as well.

Ultimately, I feel that the thesis process has brought me forward as a person and has strengthened my character in a way that I learned that good things take time and that it is necessary to never give up, but to always go on step by step. Furthermore I have gained more insight into social media and digital marketing and through my research process I have acquired knowledge that I did not possess before, which I see as a success.

I feel that my thesis is very useful for the case company and that the final guidelines are easily understandable, even for someone who does not have any previous experience in digital marketing. I hope that the guidelines will improve the company's social media presence and also lead to a better communication between the company and its clients while avoiding possible risks.

I am also very thankful for the guidance and feedback I received from my thesis advisor, the great and professional cooperation with the case company and my family and friends who supported and motivated me a lot during the thesis process.

I would be happy if I could continue helping companies with their social media also in the future and see this as a career prospective for myself, as it is something that really interests me and that I have a huge passion for.

## References

Alter, M. 20 February 2014. Risks to Consider Before Using Social Media For Your Business. AccountingWeb Blog. URL: <http://www.accountingweb.com/practice/practice-excellence/here-are-some-risks-to-consider-before-using-social-media-for-your>

Accessed: 3 September 2015

Bundessteuerberaterkammer 2015. Berufsstand wächst auf fast 94 000 an. URL:

[https://www.bstbk.de/de/presse/pressemitteilungen/2015/20150217\\_pressemitteilung\\_001\\_bstbk/index.html](https://www.bstbk.de/de/presse/pressemitteilungen/2015/20150217_pressemitteilung_001_bstbk/index.html) Accessed: 9 September 2015

Chubb, M. 3 March 2015. Social Media Benefits for B2B Marketers in 2015. Online Social Media Blog. URL: <http://www.onlinesocialmedia.net/20150303/social-media-benefits-for-b2b-marketers-in-2015/> Accessed: 20 October 2015

Chaffey, D. 5 January 2016. What Happens Online in 1 Minute / 60 Seconds. Smart Insights Blog. URL: [http://www.smartinsights.com/?attachment\\_id=64902](http://www.smartinsights.com/?attachment_id=64902) Accessed: 7 January 2016

Cisnero, K 25 July 2014. 10 Benefits of Social Media For Business Every Sceptic Should Know. Hootsuite Blog. URL: <http://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-for-business/> Accessed: 3 September 2015

DeStatis 2015. Internetnutzung von Personen ab 10 Jahren in Deutschland. URL:

[https://www.destatis.de/DE/PresseService/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2015/12/PD15\\_466\\_63931.html](https://www.destatis.de/DE/PresseService/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2015/12/PD15_466_63931.html) Accessed: 17 January 2016

DeStatis 2015. 22% der Unternehmen in Deutschland nutzen soziale Netzwerke. URL:

<https://www.destatis.de/DE/ZahlenFakten/ImFokus/UnternehmenHandwerk/SocialMediaUnternehmen.html> Accessed: 17 January 2016

Hermkens K. & Kietzman J. H. 2012. Social Media? Get Serious! Understanding the Functional Building Blocks of Social Media. Business Horizons. 54, 3, p. 241–251. URL: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0007681311000061>. Accessed: 19 September 2015.

- Hootsuite 2015. Benefits of Social Media for Businesses. URL:  
<http://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-for-business/>. Accessed: 25 July 2015
- Hootsuite 2014. Social Customer Service. The Future of Customer Satisfaction. URL:  
<https://hootsuite.com/resources/white-paper/social-customer-service> Accessed: 3 September 2015
- Kaplan, A & Haenlein, M. 2010. Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons*. 53, 1, p. 61. URL:  
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0007681309001232> Accessed: 19 September 2015.
- Lang, D. 1 September 2015. CEO of case company X. Telephone Interview. Helsinki.
- Marketing Donut UK 2015. What is Quantitative Research? URL:  
<http://www.marketingdonut.co.uk/marketing/market-research/what-is-quantitative-research-> Accessed: 3 February 2016
- Marsh, E. 4 September 2014. 7 Serious Business and Legal Risks of B2B Social Media Marketing. Hubspot Blog. URL: <http://blog.hubspot.com/insiders/legal-risks-of-social-media-marketing> Accessed: 3 September 2015
- Masterful Marketing 2010. Traditional vs. New Media Channels. Small Business Marketing Blog. URL: <http://masterful-marketing.com/marketing-channel-strategy/> Accessed: 7 February 2016
- Phelan, C & Wren, J 2006. Exploring Reliability in Academic Assessment. URL:  
<https://www.uni.edu/chfasoa/reliabilityandvalidity.htm> Accessed: 3 February 2016
- Qualman, E. 16 April 2014. Socialnomics. URL:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxpa4dNVd3c> Accessed: 13 August 2015
- Roberts M. & Zahay D. 2013. *Internet Marketing: Integrating Online & Offline Strategies*. 3rd Ed. South-Western. Cengage-Learning.
- Research Methodology 2015. Validity. URL: <http://research-methodology.net/research-methodology/reliability-validity-and-repeatability/research-validity/> Accessed: 3 February 2016

Rouhiainen L. 2012. Smart Social Media. 1st Ed.

Statista 2015. Number of Social Network Users Worldwide From 2010 to 2018. URL: <http://www.statista.com/statistics/278414/number-of-worldwide-social-network-users/> Accessed: 7 October 2015

Statista 2016. Leading Social Media Networks Worldwide. URL: <http://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/> Accessed: 1 February 2016

Statistics Finland 2015. More mobile internet use, more personal devices. URL: [http://www.tilastokeskus.fi/til/sutivi/2015/sutivi\\_2015\\_2015-11-26\\_tie\\_001\\_en.html](http://www.tilastokeskus.fi/til/sutivi/2015/sutivi_2015_2015-11-26_tie_001_en.html) Accessed: 19 January 2016

Steuerberatung Lang 2015. Company Information. URL: <http://www.steuerberatung-lang.de>. Accessed: 5 August 2015.

White, S. D. 2013. Social Media Growth 2006 to 2012. URL: <http://dstevenwhite.com/2013/02/09/social-media-growth-2006-to-2012/> Accessed: 7 October 2015

ZenDesk 2013. Research Report: The Impact of Customer Service on Customer Lifetime Value. URL: <https://www.zendesk.com/resources/customer-service-and-lifetime-customer-value> Accessed: 8 January 2016

## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Survey

This survey was originally conducted in German. The following questionnaire was translated from German to English in order to facilitate an easy understanding for the readers of this thesis.

Dear sir or madam,

In cooperation with Finnish Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences in Helsinki and the Degree Program for Multilingual Management Assistants, we would like to conduct a client survey as part of a Bachelor's Thesis about social media and the creation of social media guidelines for our company.

Our office would like to create a social media presence that is customer-oriented and focuses on your wishes and needs. Therefore, you would help us a lot if you take 5 minutes to fill out our online survey. You can remain anonymous if you wish. Every kind of feedback is welcome, positive as well as constructive.

This survey ends on 7 October 2015. Among all participants we will give away a dinner at Ristorante Da Maria in Pfullingen worth 50 Euros. For a chance to win, you will need to enter your email address. The winner will be informed via email.

We would be very happy if you participate in our survey and thank you very much in advance for your support!

You will find the survey under the following link: <https://anskuu.typeform.com/to/RidBvX>

Kind Regards,

Steuerberatung Lang

#### 1. Would you be available for further questions via email or Skype?

- Yes
  - Via Skype. My username is: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Via Email. My address is: \_\_\_\_\_
  
- No, I would like to remain anonymous

**2. Are you a business or a private client?**

- Business
- Freelancer
- Private Client

**3. What is your age group?**

- Under 30
- 30 – 45
- 46 – 60
- Over 60

**4. How long have you been a client of Steuerberatung Lang?**

- Less than 1 year
- 1-3 years
- 4-5 years
- More than 5 years

**5. Do you regularly use social media websites such as Facebook or Twitter (at least 3 times per week)?**

- No
- Yes
  - Only for private reasons
  - For business
  - In private and business

**5. Which social media websites do you use regularly? (\*you can select more than one answer)**

- Facebook
- Twitter
- YouTube
- LinkedIn
- Instagram
- Others: \_\_\_\_\_



**6. How much time do you spend on social media websites on average per week?**

- Less than 5 hours per week
- 5-10 hours per week
- More than 10 hours per week

**7. In your opinion, should businesses be active on social media? Why / Why not?**

**8. In your opinion, should Steuerberatung Lang be more active on social media?**

- Yes
- No

If no, why not?

**9. In your opinion, how should Steuerberatung Lang use social media channels?**

- To give information about the company, such as opening hours or general news
- To give information about upcoming events or seminars
- To give general information about the accounting industry
- To give advice to clients and help with problems
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Would you as a client be interested in a Whatsapp service? If yes, how would you prefer to use it?**

- Not interested / Would not use it
- Interested / I would use it
  - To book appointments or ask for a call
  - To ask questions and receive an immediate reply
  - For something else: \_\_\_\_\_

**11. Do you have any ideas or wishes for Steuerberatung Lang's social media presence?**

## Appendix 2. Survey Results

<b>Client Status</b>				
<b>Private Client</b>	<b>Freelancer</b>	<b>Company</b>		
20%	40%	40%		
<b>Age</b>				
<b>Under 30</b>	<b>30-45</b>	<b>46-60</b>	<b>over 60</b>	
8%	38%	50%	4%	
<b>Client for</b>				
<b>&lt; 1 year</b>	<b>1-3 years</b>	<b>3-5 years</b>	<b>&gt; 5 years</b>	
18%	34%	28%	20%	
<b>Social Media Use</b>				
<b>&lt; 3 times/week</b>	<b>&gt; 3 times/week</b>			
48%	52%			
<b>Only private use</b>	<b>Private and business use</b>			
32%	68%			
<b>Which social media platforms are used</b>				
<b>Facebook</b>	<b>Twitter</b>	<b>LinkedIn</b>	<b>Instagram</b>	<b>Youtube</b>
58%	8%	6%	6%	68%
<b>Hours per week spent on social media</b>				
<b>1-5 hours per week</b>	<b>less than 5 hours per week</b>	<b>more than 5 hours per week</b>		
16%	8%	78%		
<b>Should companies be present on social media?</b>				
<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>It depends</b>	<b>No opinion</b>	
58%	12%	14%	16%	
<b>Should case company X be more active on social media?</b>				
<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Not sure</b>		
32%	62%	6%		
<b>It would be good to use social media for:</b>				
<b>Giving information about the company</b>	<b>Giving information about upcoming events and seminars</b>	<b>Informing people about the accounting sector in general</b>	<b>Giving people advice about accounting related matters</b>	
72%	52%	36%	34%	
<b>Would you use a Whatsapp service?</b>				
<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>			
66%	34%			
<b>Clients would use such a service to:</b>				
<b>Arrange Appointments</b>	<b>Ask for a return call</b>	<b>Ask quick questions</b>		
66%	75%	45%		

### **Appendix 3. Skype Interview Questions**

1. In the free text answer of question 11, you mentioned that Steuerberatung Lang should demonstrate its skills better when being online. Could you clarify what you mean by that or give examples?
2. You said you would be interested in a Whatsapp service. Not many companies use Whatsapp services yet. Do you think it would be something innovative?
3. In the survey you said that you would not want to receive too much useless information. What kind of information do you consider useless? And when do you think you would feel that you receive too much information?
4. Do you have anything that would be a "no go" for you? Is there something that Steuerberatung Lang should not do at all when posting online?

# Social Media Guidebook for Steuerberatung Lang

Created by: Lisa Christin Lang

PETRA UND DANIEL **LANG**  
STEUERBERATUNG



## Table of Contents

1	Introduction .....	2
2	Importance of Social Media .....	3
3	Social Media Objectives .....	5
4	Social Media Channels .....	6
5	Social Media Glossary .....	7
6	Facebook .....	10
6.1	Content and Communication .....	10
6.1.1	Visuals .....	10
6.1.2	Content .....	11
6.2	Paid Advertising .....	22
6.3	Evaluation .....	26
7	Twitter .....	27
7.1	Content and Communication .....	27
7.1.1	Visuals .....	27
7.1.2	Content .....	29
7.2	Evaluation .....	35
8	YouTube .....	36
8.1	Content and Communication .....	36
8.1.1	Visuals .....	36
8.1.2	Content .....	37
8.2	Evaluation .....	41
9	Whatsapp .....	42
9.1	Content and Communication .....	42
9.2	Evaluation .....	44
10	Blog .....	45
10.1	Content and Communication .....	45
10.2	Evaluation .....	47
11	Handling Negative Feedback on Social Media .....	48
12	Useful Tools .....	51
13	Implementation and Conclusion .....	54

## 1 Introduction

These guidelines were created in commission with Steuerberatung Lang in order to create an easy step-by-step explanation for the company's employees regarding effective use of social media.

Social media is a great tool to reach out to existing and potential clients, because it enables a two-way communication that can be done at any time and any place. It can be used for marketing purposes and can help in observing what is going on in a certain market or industry.

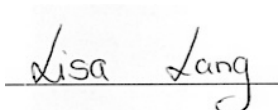
However, social media can have its risks and it is not always easy to handle negative feedback. When using social media in the wrong way, it can have influence on the company's reputation or even on the trust the clients put into the company. Therefore, it is important to know how to use social media correctly and what kind of things to avoid.

In these guidelines I will show the most efficient social media channels for the company, will give ideas for possible content and examples of how to communicate best on each platform. I will focus on organic marketing, but will also shortly demonstrate possibilities for paid advertising campaigns on Facebook to give the possibility to try out paid advertising in an environment that might be the most beneficial for Steuerberatung Lang.

In the end of these guidelines, I will show helpful tools that can be used for content creation and planning, as well as for evaluation of social media success and I will give some ideas on how to handle negative feedback online.

The goal of these guidelines is to enable every employee of the company to understand and use social media channels that are relevant for the company, while avoiding common mistakes that companies often make.

I hope these guidelines will be helpful for you in communicating online on social media and would like to thank Steuerberatung Lang for the great cooperation.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lisa Lang". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

Lisa Lang

## **2 Importance of Social Media**

Social media has many benefits for companies if they know how to utilize it correctly. Especially nowadays it is important for any kind of company to be active on social media.

One of the main benefits is that by using social media, Steuerberatung Lang can get to know its own target group better and learn about the target audience's preferences and behaviors. It can find out what kind of people follow the company's Facebook page and what kind of interests these people have. In turn, the company can then create marketing campaigns or ads that are specifically targeted to relevant customer groups. People do not have time to engage with useless information, therefore messages need to be targeted only towards those customers who will find it useful. This is what social media allows us to do.

Social media can help Steuerberatung Lang to enable a more fluent and continuous communication with its existing clients, but it can also help to reach potential clients. Through location-based search, the company can find relevant clients and can then specifically target them with its marketing activities.

Another substantial advantage is that social media allows Steuerberatung Lang to receive immediate customer feedback. Clients that are not satisfied with a service can directly contact the company via Facebook or Twitter to share their discontent, while happy customers will share their contentedness with the company itself, as well as with other existing and potential clients online. This can be a great advantage for the company, because happy customers will improve the company's image, whereas negative feedback, if it is dealt with in the right way, can be a chance for Steuerberatung Lang to improve its services according to customer needs and wishes.

In today's markets the competition is extremely high. Customers have the chance to find information everywhere and compare companies within different industries in order to find the best or cheapest one. Social media can be a competitive advantage for Steuerberatung Lang, because its competitors do not use social media yet.

Additionally, social media creates website leads. A post on social media might bring people to the firm's website, therefore it creates traffic. More traffic means a higher ranking in search engines, which in turn might lead to a bigger amount of potential clients. If

a person googles for an accounting company, it is likely that he or she chooses one of the companies that rank highest in the search results and are thus displayed on the first or second page of the result listings. Therefore, the higher Steuerberatung Lang's search engine ranking is, the better the chances of gaining new clients are.

As a matter of course, social media also makes it easier to share information, because sharing content is significantly faster and easier than through email or in paper-form. Customers will receive information instantly, can access it from their mobile devices and even share it with other people.

In today's age of digitalization, customers expect that companies use the trends that are available on the market and they are constantly looking for easy ways to find the information they need without having to search for it. There is a huge difference between a company that is not active on social media at all and offers all its services solely via personal appointments or telephone conversations during office hours, and a company that enables its customers to contact them at any given time and to receive information quickly and easily whenever it is needed.

But most important is that social media nowadays is the place where customers talk about products or services they like. They give recommendations or use it to make buying decisions. Being active on social platforms not only means talking to existing and potential clients, but it also means listening to what they have to say and using their feedback to further develop the company's services. Studies show that 71% of consumers who experience a quick and effective brand response on social media are more likely to recommend that brand to others and 85% of consumers say that they will change their shopping behavior in response to social media content.

This means that consumers do talk on social media. It is better if the company they talk about is there as well, so that it can take influence on the way it is seen as a brand. Companies that refuse to be active on social media are giving away great chances to stay in touch with their customers and to utilize new media in order to develop their business.

Especially the accounting industry is often seen as old-fashioned or boring, therefore it is all the more important for Steuerberatung Lang to show that accounting companies do not necessarily have to be that way, but can also be up-to-date and modern, specifically if it also wants to target a younger audience.



### 3 Social Media Objectives



Steuerberatung Lang wants to use social media to acquire new clients by leveraging platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, enable an open two-way communication with existing clients and increase the company's visibility through regular participation on social media, as well as achieve a better and more targeted customer service by contacting its target audience through social media networks, while demonstrating a friendly attitude and professional expertise.

Social media also enables Steuerberatung Lang to gain a considerable competitive advantage over its competitors in the same industry.

## 4 Social Media Channels

These social media guidelines will focus only on the social media channels that are relevant for Steuerberatung Lang. Relevant channels have been determined by a customer survey with the company's clients and also several studies that ranked the biggest and most used social media platforms worldwide.

Thus, these guidelines will explain the usage of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, as they are the most-used networks by the company's clients and also the biggest ones on the market.

Furthermore, there will be guidelines for Whatsapp marketing and a blog on the company's website.

The guidelines will not focus on Instagram, because it is difficult for an accounting company to share relevant and compelling pictures on a regular basis.



## 5 Social Media Glossary

This chapter will explain a few common abbreviations in the digital marketing field and their meanings, as these terms might come up when using different social media platforms or relevant tools.



- B2B**      **Business to Business**  
The exchange of services or products between businesses
- B2C**      **Business to Consumer**  
The exchange of services or products between business and consumers
- CMS**      **Content Management System**  
A system that allows the planning, publishing and editing of content from one central interface
- CPC**      **Cost Per Click**  
The same as Pay Per Click. Refers to paid advertising and the cost that the company that launches an ad has every time someone clicks on their ad.
- CPL**      **Cost Per Lead**  
An online advertising model. The advertiser pays for the number of qualifying leads generated. A qualifying lead is usually a person that declares interest in the company's service or product.

<b>CR</b>	<b>Conversion Rate</b> The number of people who take a desired action, for example visit a company's website in response to a company's post on social media.
<b>CTA</b>	<b>Call To Action</b> Is an instruction to the audience that wants to provoke immediate action, such as "Call now" or "Click here".
<b>CTR</b>	<b>Click Through Rate</b> The number of people who click on a certain link and follow the link to a specific website.
<b>KPI</b>	<b>Key Performance Indicator (for digital marketing)</b> Factors that measure the success of a certain digital advertising or a company's social media presence. Examples are: Number of unique website visitors, number of new likes on Facebook, number of video views on Youtube.
<b>PM</b>	<b>Private Message</b> A private message that is sent on a social media network to a specific person that no one else can read.
<b>PPC</b>	<b>Pay Per Click</b> The Same as Cost Per Click. Refers to paid advertising and the cost that the company that launches an ad has every time someone clicks on their ad.
<b>RT</b>	<b>Retweet</b> Term that is used on Twitter. It refers to the sharing of a status update by other users.
<b>SEO</b>	<b>Search Engine Optimization</b> Maximizing the number of website visitors by making sure to rank high on search results in search engines like Google. This can be done by using specific terms in a website text or delivering good content.

- SM**            **Social Media**  
Refers to all networks online that allow people to post and share status updates and to communicate with each other either publicly or through private messages.
- SMM**          **Social Media Marketing**  
All marketing that is done on social media platforms, such as Facebook or Twitter.
- SMS**          **Short Message Service**  
Refers to short text messages that can be sent via mobile phones.
- UGC**          **User-Generated Content**  
Refers to any kind of content that is produced or shared by the users of a website or social media platform, such as status updates, comments or reviews.

## 6 Facebook

### 6.1 Content and Communication

A Facebook page is a specific page, similar to a company profile, that introduces the company's services, gives information and allows people to follow the website in order to stay updated about the company. It also enables users to leave feedback on the company's Facebook page and the company can directly reply to comments made by users.

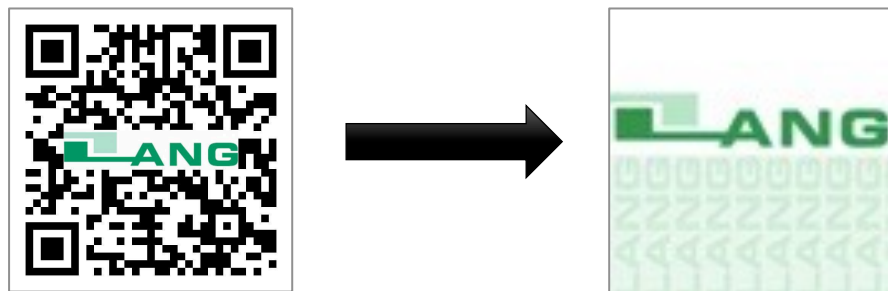
There are a few essential things to consider when handling a Facebook page, such as the overall look of the page, the content and the communication style.

#### 6.1.1 Visuals

Steuerberatung Lang's Facebook page should look professional, but modern. At the same time an appealing image for visitors who view the page for the first time should be created, and therefore the page needs to look interesting and trustworthy.

One of the things to do, is to upload a **profile picture**. When uploading a profile picture, it is okay to upload the company logo. However, the logo should be visually appealing and be done professionally.

Steuerberatung Lang uses a photo of its logo on Facebook already, but it also includes a QR Code image, that I would not recommend. Even though it enables clients to find the company easier by scanning the QR code, it does not make the logo very appealing. In addition to that, it is not really necessary to include the code, as the company page can easily be found through other means. Therefore, I would recommend to use only a clean, square photo with the company's logo, as this looks more professional.



Even more important than the profile picture is a company's **cover image**, as it dominates the Facebook page and is visible to every page visitor. It is recommended to use a cover photo that shows happy and smiling people, as this usually generates a good feeling and gives clients the impression that the company will make them happy. It also establishes trust.

The cover photo for Steuerberatung Lang's Facebook page shows all of the company's employees together with the two CEOs and all of them are cheering and smiling. The photo is modern and shows a young and dynamic team, which is a good image to project towards potential and existing clients, as it creates the feeling of success.



### 6.1.2 Content

When it comes to the content of the Facebook page, there are several kinds of status updates that can be posted, such as general information about Steuerberatung Lang, news about the accounting sector and any kind of changes and advice about tax related matters. What is most recommended though, is to engage the company's clients by asking questions and encouraging them to share their own opinions and feedback.

Possible types of posts could be:

#### 1. A link to an interesting article on the company's website or blog.

It is good to start this kind of post with a question, as this will catch the reader's attention. It is also good to use numbers (e.g. "5 handy tips to fill out your tax declaration"), as studies have proven that these kind of headlines are most successful and most interesting for the readers. It is also good to include a photo in the status update, as it will make the post more interesting than using only text. Furthermore, it is

important to keep the status update short. People do not want to read a huge amount of text and do not have time to read through a large status update. Better keep it simple but interesting. The goal is to offer the clients something that will give them value and is useful for them, while at the same time generating traffic on the company's website.

Another thing you could offer that is very useful for the clients are PDF checklists that people can download from your website, for example a checklist about what to remember when doing your tax declaration.





## 2. A general status update about Steuerberatung Lang.

These kind of updates are nice from time to time, however, they should be used sparingly. Good occasions to use these kind of updates are for example public holidays or other specific days, such as a company anniversary. Sometimes it is also nice to just share a nice photo of the office on a sunny day, if there is nothing else to post. This shows that the company is active on social media regularly.

However, keep in mind that the post should be somehow related to the company and be interesting for the reader. Again, use a photo to illustrate the status update, this way it will catch the reader's eye. Keep in mind that the photo should be related to the status update in some way.



**3. Information about changing opening hours or other organizational information.**

If the office hours change for a day or if there is a public holiday on which the office is closed, it is nice to inform the clients about it online, so that everyone will know. A short and simple post is enough.



#### 4. Information about events and seminars

Daniel Lang, the CEO of Steuerberatung Lang, is regularly participating in seminars and giving speeches about tax related subjects. This is a great way for Steuerberatung Lang to demonstrate its skills and knowledge and to show potential clients that the company knows what it is doing. If the seminar can be attended by everyone, it is recommended to post the dates and where to sign up, so that others that are interested can participate as well. But even if the seminar is just for invited guests, it makes sense to share it online, because it increases the trust that the clients have in the company, when they see that the CEO is engaged and participating in seminars.



## 5. General information about the accounting sector

If there are specific changes regarding the law or regulations of the accounting sector or just some interesting article or research, it is good to share the information in order to keep clients updated about important news.

However, even though it is okay to link to external sources, this should not be done all the time. If a company only shares status updates that someone else wrote, it can quickly seem as if the company is very inexperienced and does not have a lot of skills themselves. Therefore, in the long run it is better to share own content, but sharing external links from time to time is okay. When doing so, it is good to add a question for the audience as well, so they can voice their opinions and views.



The image shows a screenshot of a Facebook post. At the top left is the profile picture of 'Case Company X' with a green and white grid pattern. To the right of the profile picture is the name 'Case Company X' in blue, and below it, 'Just now · 🌐'. The main text of the post reads: 'Did you know that accounting and tax practices are seeing a strong growth these days? Here's an interesting article from Accounting Today. What do you think about it?'. Below the text is a link preview for an article from Accounting Today. The preview includes the Accounting Today logo (a green 'a' and a blue 'T' with 'ACCOUNTING TODAY' below it) on the left. On the right, the article title is 'Accounting and Tax Practices Seeing Strong Growth', followed by a short description: 'Accounting, tax, bookkeeping and payroll businesses have been growing sales at a healthy rate this past year, according to the latest numbers from the...'. At the bottom right of the preview is the URL 'ACCOUNTINGTODAY.COM'.

## 6. Questions

It can also be a good idea to simply ask the clients some questions to hear their opinions and gather valuable feedback. It is also possible to ask the clients directly what they would like to hear more about or which kind of status updates they are most interested in.

Asking questions will encourage the reader to participate in a conversation, while giving him or her the feeling of being valued and appreciated. This is good for Steuerberatung Lang's reputation and shows that they are customer-oriented. Furthermore, asking questions that engender a positive feedback are a very good advertising for the company, because potential clients can read the post and will see that the company offers many good services that its clients like.

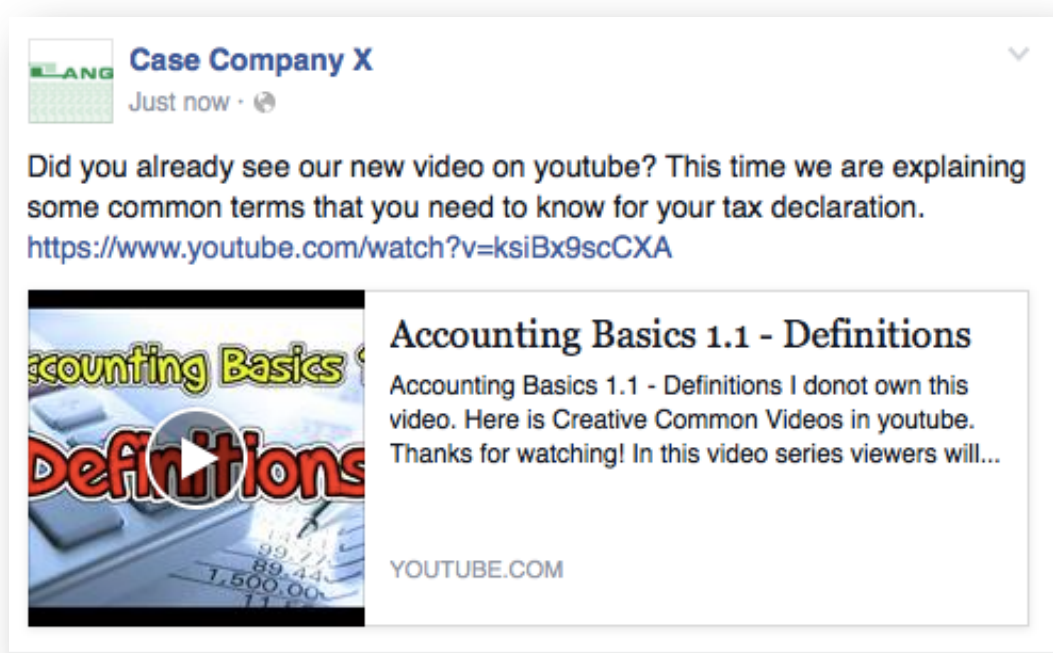




## 7. Links to other social media channels

Last but not least, don't forget to share links to your other social media channels. If you have uploaded an interesting video on YouTube, it is good to share the link also on Facebook so that clients that do not follow you on YouTube yet can find your account and watch your videos.

It is also good to include the link to your Twitter account in the info section of the Facebook page, as well as the number for contacting you on Whatsapp.



When creating updates on social media, it is important to regularly be active while at the same time not flooding your followers with too much information or too many posts. It might be enough to share one status update every day or even every second day. This way you will stay in the mind of your clients, but will not annoy them with an overload of information.

It is recommended to make a clear plan, a so-called content calendar, where you decide in advance which status update you will post at which specific time. You will hear more about this in chapter 13.

However, there are some things that you should not share on social media if you want to maintain a good reputation and be perceived as a professional company.

Remember that the company's Facebook page is solely meant to inform clients, enable a way of communicating and to demonstrate your skills and expertise. It is not the same as your private Facebook profile where you can share any kind of status updates or photos. Therefore, do not:

**Share photos online that show the employees or CEOs partying or drinking.**



The pictures above have been shared on the company's Facebook page, and one of the comments under the photos even said "It was early in the morning when we started drinking."

It is understandable that a company wants to show that it offers a great working atmosphere for its employees and that everyone is happy working for the company. However, these kind of photos do not, under any circumstances, belong on a professional company page.

Clients do not care how often the employees go for trips outside the office, how they look in a Dirndl or how much fun they had on the Oktoberfest. Clients care about the company's skills and ability to help them professionally with their tax issues. Infact, posting these kind of pictures can damage the company's reputation, especially if potential clients look at the company's Facebook page and see only these kind of status updates. They might even ask themselves if the employees are working at all or just partying. The question is: What does the company want to achieve with its social media presence? Is it looking for a platform to share funny, private pictures, or does it want to demonstrate its skills? These kind of photos belong on a private profile, not on a company website.

When being unsure about what to post on Facebook, it can be useful to ask yourself: If I was looking for a dentist or lawyer and would check their Facebook page, would I be happy to see these kind of updates or would I rather see something more professional?

Additionally, the company should be clear towards its employees and friends that comments like the one above are not appropriate on a company page and should rather be shared in private.



## Have relatives review and rate your Facebook page



Another thing that can easily be seen as nepotism is to have close relatives rate your Facebook page. While it may be done with good intentions, it distorts the actual feedback your clients give you.

If clients rate your company on Facebook, it gives you a direct feedback on how they like your services. While it is desirable for a company to receive only 5-star ratings, it is better to wait for organic and actual feedback than have relatives rate the company just for the sake of having a good review, especially when it can be seen by others that the person leaving a review is actually a relative.

And while it is also understandable that you would like to rate your own company, it is better to leave that to the actual customers in order to gain real customer success stories.

Therefore, in order to encourage reviews on Facebook, it is better to ask actual customers to leave some feedback or for example to offer a free 15 minutes of consultation in exchange for an honest review.

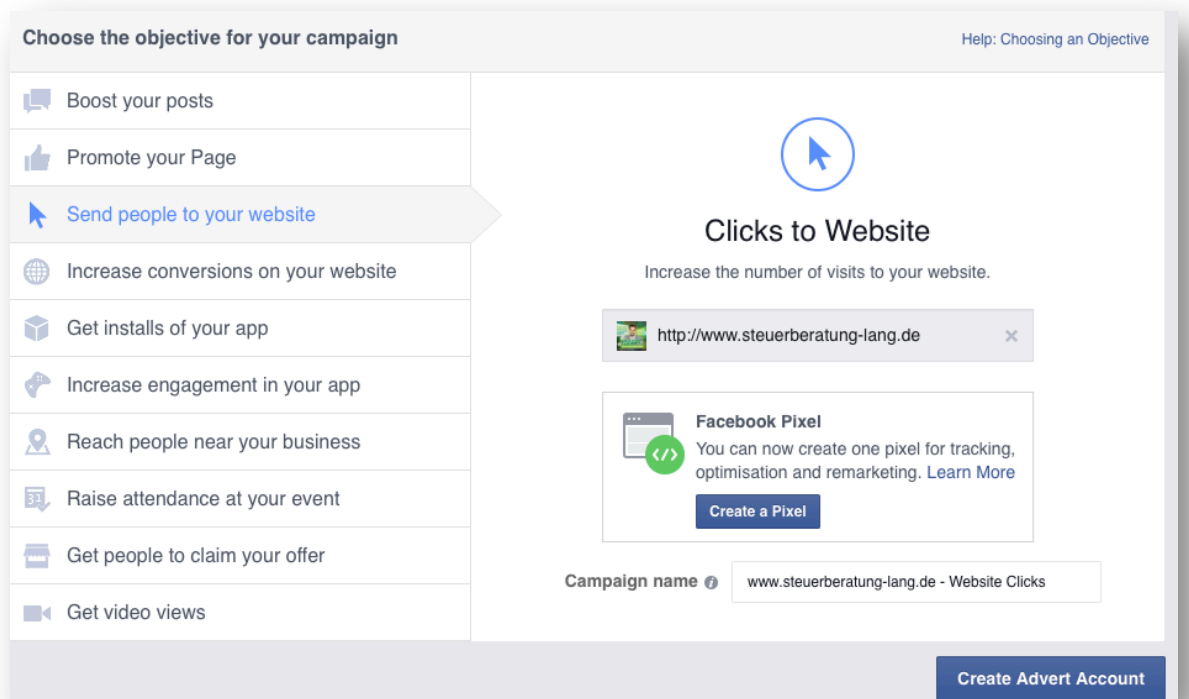


## 6.4 Paid Advertising

Facebook can also be used for paid advertising campaigns and it is possible to advertise even with a small budget. This chapter will quickly show how to do that step-by-step.

1. Go to <https://www.facebook.com/ads/> and select "Create an ad".

2. Choose the objective of your advertising campaign. Here it is most useful to choose "send people to your website". Then enter your website URL and click "Create Advert Account". Facebook also offers to create a Facebook pixel so that you can track the visitors on your website that come through the ad that you posted. To do this, you simply need to copy the pixel URL that Facebook gives you and include it in the HTML code of your website. This way it is easier to evaluate the success of your ad. However, it is not compulsory to do that, as there are other ways of evaluation.



The screenshot shows the Facebook Ads interface for selecting a campaign objective. The title is "Choose the objective for your campaign" with a help link "Help: Choosing an Objective". On the left, a list of objectives is shown, with "Send people to your website" selected and highlighted. The main area displays the selected objective "Clicks to Website" with the description "Increase the number of visits to your website." Below this, a text input field contains the URL "http://www.steuerberatung-lang.de". A "Facebook Pixel" section offers to create a pixel for tracking, with a "Create a Pixel" button. At the bottom, a "Campaign name" field contains "www.steuerberatung-lang.de - Website Clicks". A "Create Advert Account" button is located at the bottom right.

2. Enter your account information. Simply select your country and currency.

The screenshot shows a web form titled "Enter your account info" with a "Help: Advert Account Overview" link in the top right. The form contains three dropdown menus: "Account country" set to "Germany", "Currency" set to "Euro", and "Time zone" set to "Europe/Berlin". Below these is a table comparing "UTC TIME" (12/02/2016 09:35) and "LOCAL TIME" (12/02/2016 10:35). A "Show advanced options" link is positioned below the table. On the right side, a section titled "Currency and time zone" contains a warning: "All of your advertising billing and reporting data will be recorded in this currency and time zone. To change these in the future, you'll have to create a new advert account." At the bottom, there are two buttons: "Back" on the left and "Set Audience & Budget" on the right.

4. Enter the details for your campaign. This is the most important part. First, select a location in which you want your ad to be shown. As Steuerberatung Lang only operates regionally, it makes sense to choose Pfullingen as the main location and select a radius of around 40 km around Pfullingen in order to reach also other clients in the region.

Then select the age of your target group. Here it makes sense to select an age range between 25 and 64, because these people are most likely active in the working life and might need an accountant. Also select the gender and language of your target group. Additionally you can select a more defined target audience and select specific interests that you would like your target group to have. For Steuerberatung Lang it might make sense to choose "business" or "entrepreneurship" as interests. This way, people who might be entrepreneurs or decision-makers will be reached.


On the right hand side you can see the audience definition. This is a very helpful tool to see how far the reach of your advertising will go. It is recommended to keep the needle in the green area and have an audience that is not too big. In our case the audience would be 180.000 people, which is a good number, as it is neither too big nor too small.

**Locations** ? Everyone in this location ▾

Germany

📍 Pfullingen, Baden-Württemberg + 40 km ▾

📍 Include ▾ | Add a country, county/region, city, DMA, postcode or address



📍 Drop Pin

[Add Bulk Locations...](#)


**Age** ? 25 ▾ - 64 ▾

**Gender** ? All Men Women

**Languages** ? German ×

Enter a language...

**Audience definition**

 Your audience is defined.

Specific Broad

**Audience Details:**

- Location:
  - Germany: Pfullingen (+40 km)
  - Baden-Württemberg
- Age:
  - 25–64
- Language:
  - German
- People who match:
  - Interests: Business, Entrepreneurship or Management

Potential reach: 180,000 people

**Detailed targeting** ? **INCLUDE** people who match at least ONE of the following ?

Interests > Business and industry

**Business**


**Entrepreneurship**

**Management**

Add demographics, interests or behaviours | [Suggestions](#) | [Browse](#)

[Exclude people or Narrow audience](#)

**Connections** ? Add a connection type ▾

 Your audience is defined.

Specific Broad

**Audience Details:**

- Location:
  - Germany: Pfullingen (+40 km)
  - Baden-Württemberg
- Age:
  - 25–64
- Language:
  - German
- People who match:
  - Interests: Business, Entrepreneurship or Management

Potential reach: 180,000 people

5. Select the budget for your campaign and its duration. You can choose any budget and duration you like. However, when using Facebook Ads for the first time, it might be good to choose a lower budget and to select a shorter period for the ad to run, as this way you get a chance to try out which ad works best for you without losing too much money in case the ad is not as successful as you were hoping. After some time of trying different kinds of target groups and ads, you will know which one works best for you and can then increase your budget or duration.

**How much do you want to spend?** Help: Budgeting & pricing

**Budget** ? **Daily Budget**   
€5.00 EUR

**Schedule** ?  Run my advert set continuously starting today  
 Set a start and end date

**Start**

**End**    
(Berlin Time)

Your advert will run until **Tuesday, 15 March 2016**.  
 You'll spend up to **€160.00** in total.

**Estimated daily reach**

**2,400-6,400 people on Facebook**  
0 of 150,000

**380-990 people on Instagram**  
0 of 18,000

This is only an estimate. Numbers shown are based on the average performance of adverts targeted to your selected audience.  
 Advert set duration: 32 days

You can also see the estimated daily reach of your ad, this means how many people will see your ad per day. In this case, the daily budget is 5 Euros and the daily reach is between 2.400 and 6.400 people.

6. Create your ad. Choose a picture or a video that you want to use for your ad. Both, the picture and the video need to have a specific size to work for Facebook. Then enter your headline and text. It is good to use a question in the headline and to include a call to action in the text (e.g. "Visit our website"). As you can see in the photo, you need to be very careful with the length of your text though, as Facebook only allows a certain amount of characters. So try to keep your headline as short as possible.

**Connect Facebook Page**  
 Choose a Facebook Page to represent your business in News Feed. Your advert will link to your site, but it will show as coming from your Facebook Page.

or **Turn off News Feed Adverts**

---

**Headline** ?

Need help with your tax declaration? ⚠

---

**Text** ?

We can help you! Visit our website to learn more.

---

**Call-to-action Button (optional)** ?


**Advert preview**  
 1 of 1

**Desktop News Feed** Remove

ELANG **Case Company X**

Sponsored ·

We can help you! Visit our website to learn more.



**Mobile News Feed** Add

## **6.2 Evaluation**

In the end, we also want to evaluate how successful our marketing efforts on Facebook were. To do so, we can use Facebook Insights, which is a tool that shows us exactly which of our posts were the most liked or shared. It can be accessed from the top of your page.

Additionally you can keep track of the number of people who follow your page or observe how many people clicked on your ads by using the Facebook pixel on your website.

## 7 Twitter

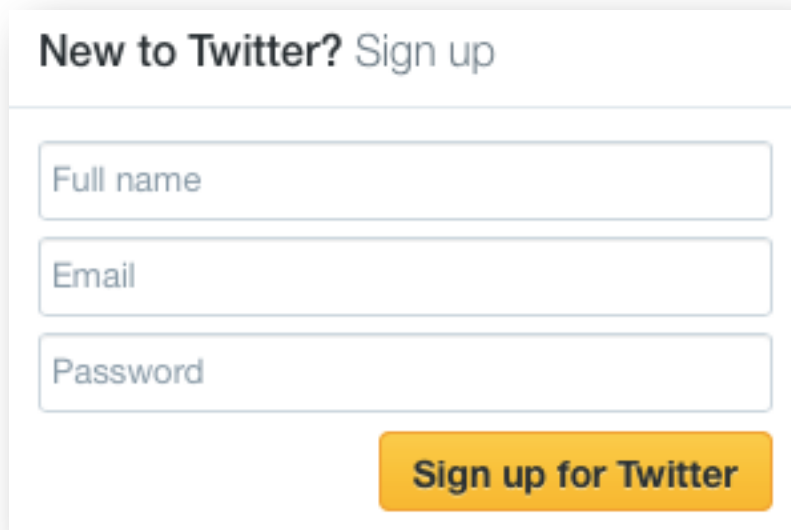
### 7.1 Content and Communication

Twitter is a platform used to post messages with no more than 140 characters, therefore it is also called microblogging site. It allows its users to follow other people and see their status updates or so-called Tweets.

Companies can use Twitter in several ways, all of which are explained in this chapter.

#### 7.1.1 Visuals

The first step is to create a profile on Twitter, which is relatively easy and can be done very quickly by simply filling in name, email and a password and clicking "sign up for Twitter".

A screenshot of the Twitter sign-up form. The form is titled "New to Twitter? Sign up" and contains three input fields: "Full name", "Email", and "Password". Below the fields is a yellow button labeled "Sign up for Twitter".

New to Twitter? Sign up

Full name

Email

Password

Sign up for Twitter

In the next step, a username is chosen. For a company's Twitter account it is recommended to use the name of the business. In this case that would be Steuerberatung Lang.

## Choose a username.

Don't worry, you can always change it later.



Then Twitter asks for areas of interest. For Steuerberatung Lang it makes sense to select interests such as business or media, or even financial accounting, in order to get suggestions relevant to its own area of business. After choosing the specific interests, Twitter offers several accounts that might be interesting and worth to follow. When starting totally new on Twitter, it is good to follow all the recommendations in order to grow your network and get in touch with some people already.

## Add a photo.

Show your unique personality and style



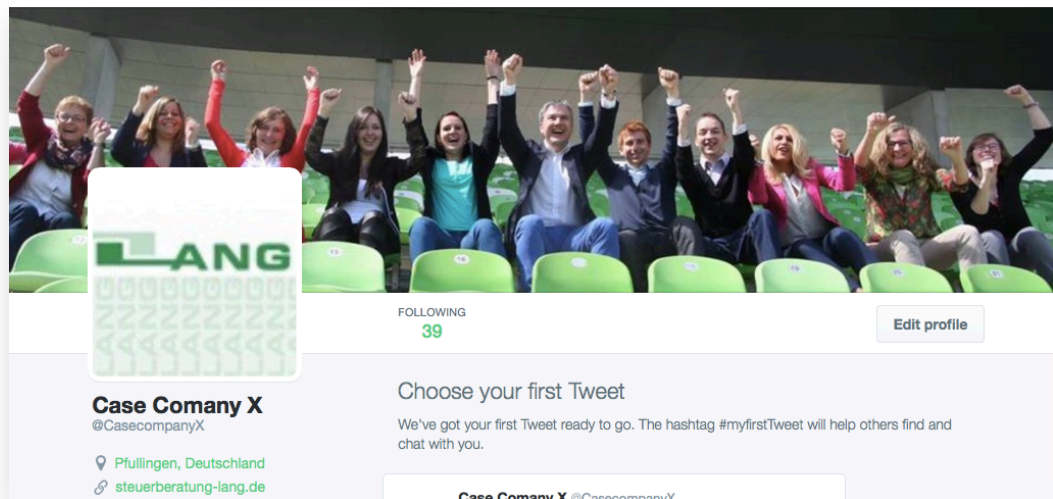
**Upload your photo**  
or simply drag it here

In the end, you need to set up your profile. Here, similar to Facebook, you need to choose a header image, a profile picture and add some information about yourself, such as the name of your business, the website and the location. If you want, you can also write one or two sentences about your business and explain what you do.

It is a good idea to use the same pictures that were used for your Facebook profile. This



way you will maintain some kind of corporate design and your clients will immediately recognize you when they see your profile, because they are familiar with your logo and photos.



After you have created your profile, you can search for similar accounts in your area of business and follow them to see what they are doing. Twitter is also a great way for yourself to stay up-to-date and to receive the most recent news about the accounting sector.

### 7.2.2 Content

When it comes to adding new content to Twitter, the most important thing to remember is that it needs to be short and to the point and cannot exceed 140 characters. However, Twitter is a great way of sharing quick news and links to your other social media channels.

#### 1. Share your account

Before you start posting anything on Twitter, you need to advertise your account to your already existing clients in order to gain them as followers. It is important to do this actively and not just wait until people discover you accidentally.

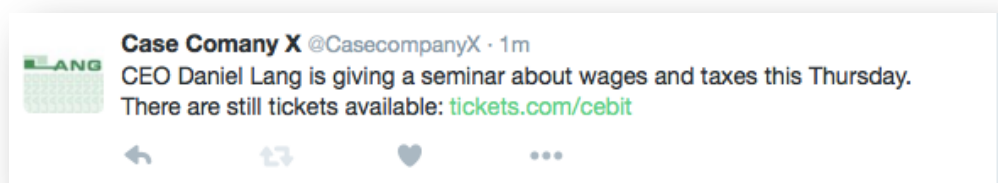
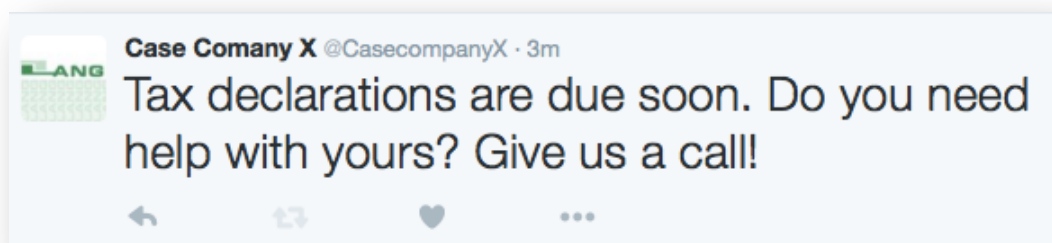
You can either share a link to your Twitter account on Facebook, include it in a newsletter or announce it on your website.

It is also a good idea to include all your social media channels in your email signatures, so that people you are in touch with via email can always find you online as well.

## 2. Sharing short status updates

Twitter makes it very easy for users to share quick news, because there is no need to write elaborate texts or create huge content. At the same time, it requires some thinking and an eye for detail to fit everything you want to say in only 140 characters. Remember that Twitter is not a way to communicate on a big scale, but more a way of sharing quick information.

Status updates that Steuerberatung Lang could share are information about opening hours, advertising your business in a subtle way, sharing important seminars or events, or simply linking to your other social media channels, such as Facebook or YouTube.

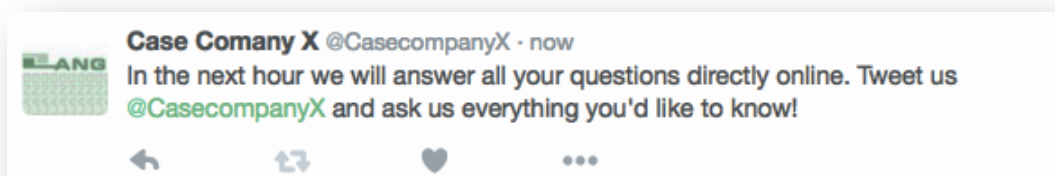




### 3. Answering questions

A big advantage of Twitter is that people can directly share your news by retweeting them and they can directly contact you by writing their own status update and adding @yourname. This way it is very easy to ask you questions or to just simply share an opinion with you.

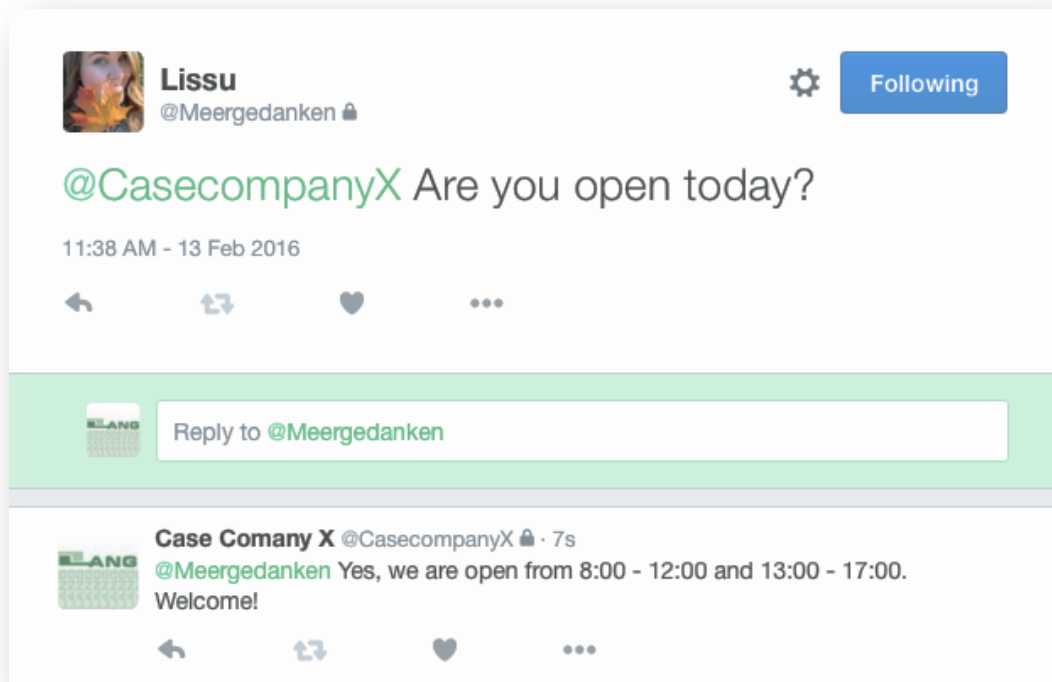
One thing that is very good to do if you have quite a lot of followers and you get a lot of questions, is to offer one hour in which you will directly reply to everything online.



Of course you cannot answer questions regarding sensitive data online, but you can answer general questions regarding your business or simply give some advice that can help your followers with their tax related problems.

It is very easy to reply to a question. Just click the arrow right under the person's question or tweet and you can directly reply. However, your answers will be visible for everyone who looks at your Twitter profile, so be careful not to mention any private information.

Some example questions and answers could be:



 **Lissu** @Meergedanken  [Following](#)

[@CasecompanyX](#) I have a problem with my tax declaration. Help?!

11:38 AM - 13 Feb 2016

 Reply to [@Meergedanken](#)

---

 **Case Comany X** @CasecompanyX  · 6s

[@Meergedanken](#) We'll gladly help you. Would you give us a call or send us your number via Whatsapp, so we can call you back?

 **Lissu** @Meergedanken  [Following](#)

[@CasecompanyX](#) Thanks for the great service!

11:39 AM - 13 Feb 2016

 Reply to [@Meergedanken](#)

---

 **Case Comany X** @CasecompanyX  · now

[@Meergedanken](#) We are happy you liked our service! Feel free to contact us any time you need help with your taxes!



In general you can say that Twitter is a great way of advertising your other social media websites and directing your followers to your website. It is also a great way of staying in touch with your existing or potential clients, because questions and feedback can be answered very quickly.

However, remember that also on Twitter you only want to share status updates that benefit your image as a business. You want to be professional and demonstrate knowledge, therefore it is best to share either technical updates related to the accounting industry or innocuous news about your business. As soon as questions go too much into sensitive areas, it is better to move the conversation from online to offline.

## 7.2 Evaluation

Your Twitter success can be evaluated in different ways. Keep an eye on your follower count so you can see how many people are interested in your account. You can also observe how many times your statuses get shared by other people and how often people engage in conversations with you. This will give you quite a good idea how appealing your account is to your clients and others.

If you notice that one specific type of status is shared very often, it is often a sign that this specific topic or area interests people the most. It then makes sense to reproduce

similar kinds of updates in the same fashion or about a similar topic.

It is important to check your metrics regularly in order to measure your Twitter success. Be clear what your objectives are and what you would like to achieve using Twitter (for example more website visitors, more new clients, more brand awareness) and then compare it with your metrics.

## 8 YouTube

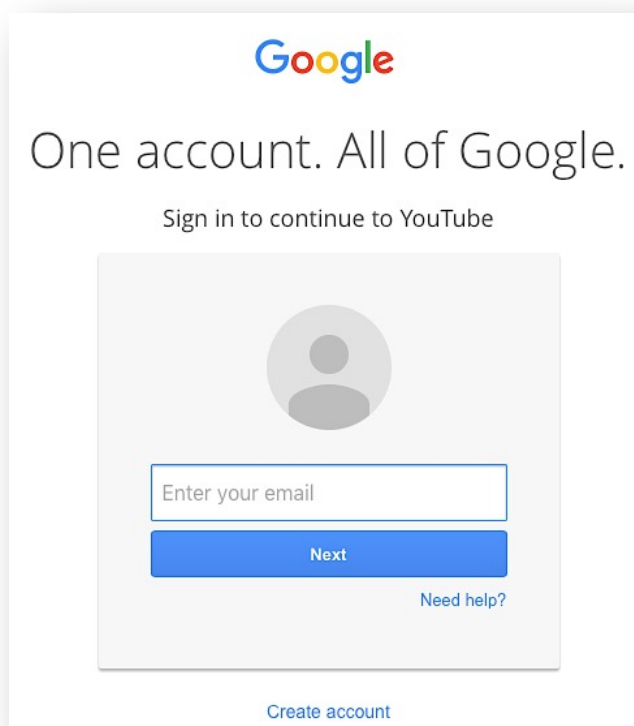
### 8.1 Content and Communication

YouTube is a social media platform that allows its users to upload videos and to share them with others. With over a billion users worldwide, it is a huge platform that is used mostly by people aged 18 to 50. Studies say that YouTube is often used as a search engine, similar to Google, in order to find out more about a specific topic, product or service.

Being active on YouTube allows Steuerberatung Lang to actively promote its business and to be visible in the market and it is also a great way of showcasing professionalism by sharing customer success stories and uploading informative videos.

#### 8.1.1 Visuals

In order to create an account on Youtube, a Google E-mail address is needed. Just enter your Gmail address, select a password and a username and you are done. If you do not have a Gmail address yet, select "Create account" to open up a new account.

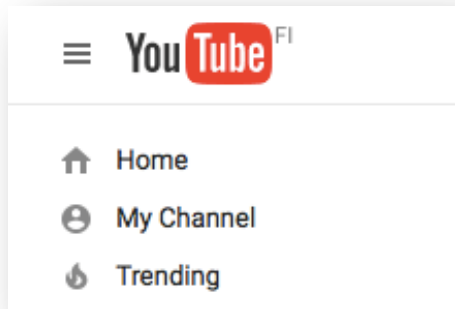


The image shows a screenshot of the Google sign-in page for YouTube. At the top, the Google logo is displayed in its multi-colored font. Below the logo, the text "One account. All of Google." is centered. Underneath, it says "Sign in to continue to YouTube". In the center, there is a large, light gray square containing a circular placeholder for a profile picture. Below the placeholder is a text input field with the placeholder text "Enter your email". Under the input field is a blue button labeled "Next". To the right of the "Next" button, there is a link that says "Need help?". At the bottom of the page, there is a link that says "Create account".



After you have opened a new account, you can start right away to customize your own channel. Your channel is the same as a company page in Facebook and it should be customized so that your viewers can immediately recognize your company and get some information about your business and what you do.

To do so, select "My Channel" from the sidebar on the left.



Then upload a header photo and profile picture. Once again, you can use the same as you already used on your Facebook page and Twitter account to maintain your corporate design and make it easier for your clients to find you quickly.



It is also recommended to add a short channel description, so that people know what you do and what your videos will be about.

### 8.1.2 Content

However, the most important asset on YouTube is your content, which means the videos you will upload. You can use videos to advertise your business, give useful advice to your clients and use them as means to deliver customer success stories, which is a very effective way of organic advertising.

It is important to remember that even though YouTube is a social media platform that is

used by many people and also very young people, the videos that you upload always need to be done professionally. It is not enough to simply start recording and telling whatever comes to your mind, but you need to make a clear plan, similar to a short film script, and plan exactly what you are going to say and how you are going to say it. Additionally, you need good equipment, enough light and excellent sound in order to create a professional video.

If you cannot film a good video, then better have no videos at all than offering videos in poor quality, as this can affect your reputation as a brand and will not leave a good impression of your company.

There are companies that offer to film these kind of videos for you and their quality is usually very good. Therefore it might be worth to use the help of someone, especially if you would like to film a short advertising film about your company. However, this is usually very expensive and there are certain types of videos that can be created without help, such as:

### **1. Sharing your seminars and interviews online**

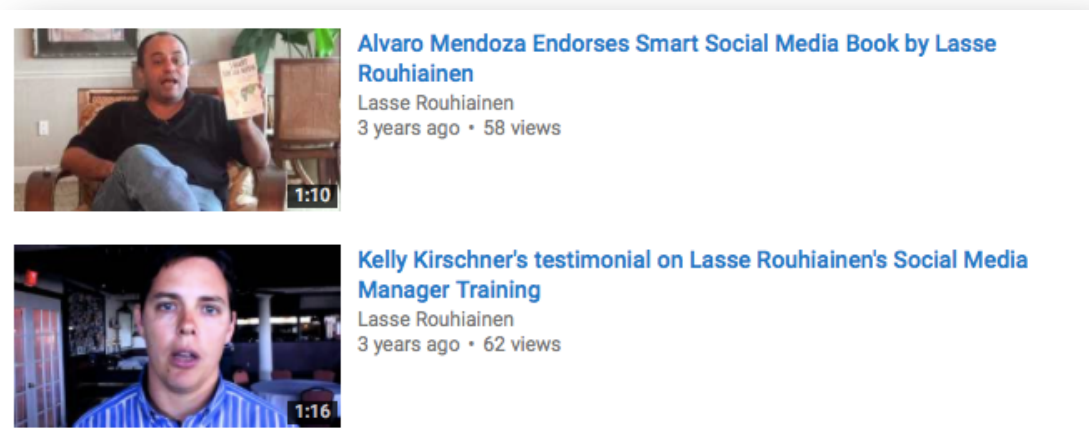


The CEO of Steuerberatung Lang often participates in trade fairs and gives seminars and interviews about accountancy related topics. Now this is a great advertising for the company as it demonstrates the skills and knowledge of the firm and shows that its

employees always stay up-to-date by visiting trade fairs and further education seminars. The next time the CEO gives a seminar or an interview, ask someone to film it for you and then upload it to YouTube. This way you will not only show your skills, but you will also enable other users to find you if they are looking for specific information about the accounting sector. This, in turn creates customer value because you are giving them useful information, and it might lead to new potential clients.

## 2. Ask some of your existing clients to record a testimonial

Another great way of showing potential clients that you are doing excellent work is to ask your existing clients to record a short testimonial, a so-called customer success story, for you and then sharing it on YouTube.



It can be a short video of about a minute's length, but these kind of testimonials can have a big effect on your reputation. Remember, many people nowadays use YouTube as a search engine to find information about specific products or services and word of mouth is very strong online. If a consumer searches for an accounting company and finds several videos in which other people praise Steuerberatung Lang, the consumer is more likely to actually buy a service from Steuerberatung Lang, because the risk of disappointment is lower if other people have already tried the service and deemed it useful.

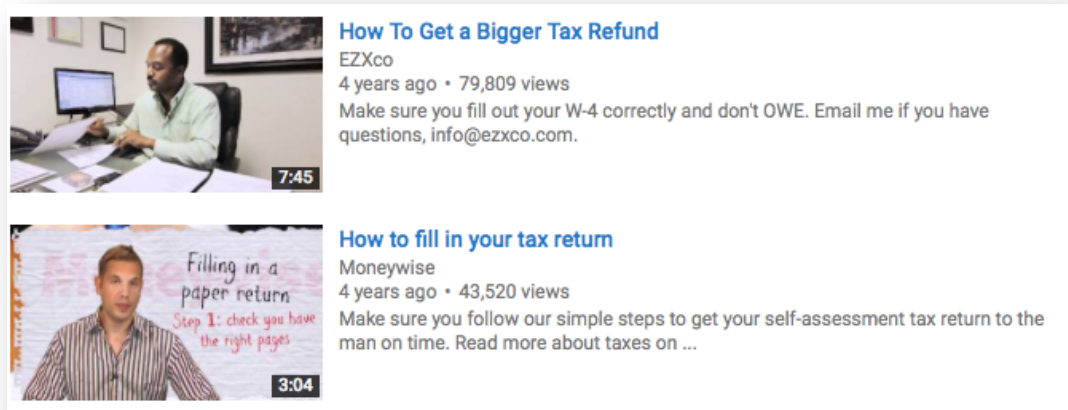
Often the easiest way to get your clients to do a small video for you is to offer a free consultancy and in return ask for a video testimonial for your company.

## 3. Giving video advice to your clients

Another great way of offering value to your clients, showing your expertise and catching

the attention of potential new clients that might need your services, is to record a video in which you offer specific advice in regard to tax related issues, such as how to fill out a tax declaration, how to get a bigger tax refund, what specific terms mean, etc.

There are many possibilities, depending on the information your clients will most likely need. Find out which topics are most confusing for people that do not know a lot about accounting and then record a video in which you explain them.



One important thing in all your videos is to always fill out the “description box” of the video. There, you should give a short summary of your video and always add your contact information, such as email address, telephone number, website and your other social media channels, so that people can contact you for further information. It is also good to remind people to subscribe to your YouTube channel. This way they will always get a notification when you upload a new video.

Additionally, your videos should always have a significant and expressive title that catches the viewer’s attention. This is even more important as the YouTube search function works similar to a search engine. That means the closer your title is to the term that was searched for, the higher your video will rank in the search results.

Similar to Facebook status updates, it is always good to use questions, “how to” sentences, or numbers in your headlines, for example:

- No idea how to fill out your tax declaration? Watch this.
- 5 great tips to make the most of your tax return
- What do these accounting terms mean?

Also remember to share your Youtube videos on your other social media channels, such as Facebook or Twitter as this will bring more viewers to your videos.

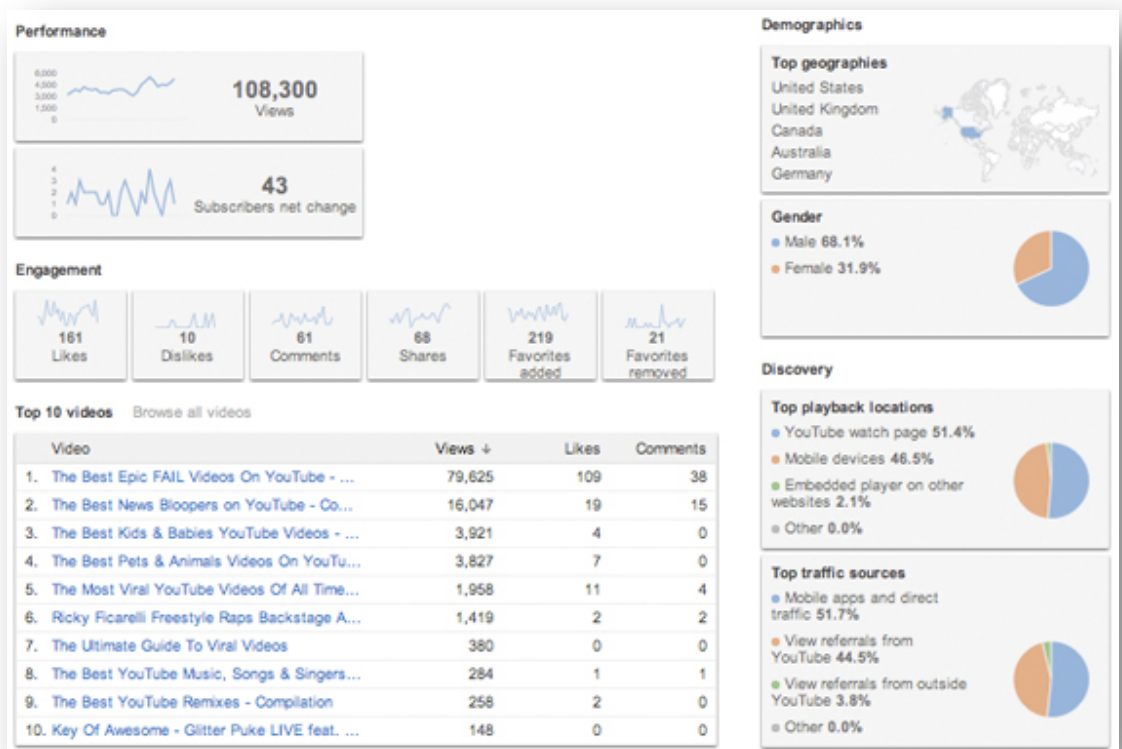
## 8.2 Evaluation

There are different ways of evaluating your YouTube success. The most obvious ones are the number of subscriptions to your channel, which means how many people follow your channel regularly, and the number of video views. The more people view your videos, the better.

However, video views can be misleading as they only show how many people clicked on your video, but that doesn't automatically mean that all of them watched your video until the end. To find out more about how many people watched your video for which amount of time, you can use Youtube Analytics (<https://www.youtube.com/analytics>).

Here you can see viewer demographics (where did your viewers come from, what was their age and gender), you can see which of your videos have been the most successful, how many people commented on or shared your videos and how much time people spent watching your videos.

This way you can find out which of your videos was the most popular and then film similar videos in the future.



## **9 Whatsapp**

### **9.1 Content and Communication**

Whatsapp is a mobile phone application that allows users to send messages to each other, similar to text messaging but without any character limit. Also videos, photos and voice messages can be exchanged easily and even phone calls can be made through Whatsapp. The main advantage is that the messaging via Whatsapp is free for its users.

Whatsapp is becoming more and more of a trend nowadays with more than one billion users as of February 2016. Also companies are starting to use Whatsapp for communication with their customers because it opens up a quick and easy way to send short messages and get an immediate reply. However, not many companies in Germany are offering this service yet, therefore it is a great competitive advantage if Steuerberatung Lang is among the first to offer it to its clients.

Furthermore, existing clients of the company have expressed interest in the service and said they would like to use Whatsapp for scheduling appointments with an accountant, request a return call or to ask short questions, such as "Are you open today?". This shows that Whatsapp is one of the preferred means of communication for many people and enables a quick and easy way of communicating.

However, there are a few things to consider when using Whatsapp for business.

#### **1. Stick to the office opening hours**

The danger when using Whatsapp for business is that you are always available and clients can reach you at any time. While this is generally a considerable advantage for your clients, it can be difficult for you if you receive messages in the middle of the night or late in the evening. It can be difficult to put the phone aside and you might want to answer every message right away, but this can be very stressful, especially if many clients use this service and you receive a lot of messages every day. Therefore it is important to let your clients know that they can send messages at any time, but the Whatsapp service is only available during office hours and messages sent at night will be answered only the next morning.



## 2. Get a separate number for your business Whatsapp

In order to ensure that Whatsapp is only available during office hours and you do not get disturbed on your private phone number, it is good to get a separate number or phone for your business Whatsapp communication. This way clients will only know your office number and not your private one and you will not be disturbed at times when you are not working.

A separate number is also recommended if several of your employees will be responsible for replying to clients' Whatsapp messages.

## 3. Keep the communication professional

Whatsapp might tempt us to communicate less formal than we normally would in business. Therefore it is important to remember that you are still talking to customers who expect a professional level of communication. You can use smileys from time to time, but only if the client uses them first. Also, avoid extensive use of them as this can quickly make you seem unprofessional or might irritate your clients.



However, if your client uses them a lot, it is okay to respond with a smiley occasionally.



Nowadays it is also possible to use Whatsapp from a computer, which makes it even easier to respond to messages quickly. This can be done via <https://web.whatsapp.com>.

Remember to share your Whatsapp number on your homepage and on your other social media channels, as well as in your email signature, to ensure that people know about

the service and can use it. You can even tell clients after one of their personal appointments that you are now offering a new service and encourage them to use it if they have a quick question.

## **9.2 Evaluation**

While Whatsapp can be used also for marketing purposes, it is mostly a tool to ensure customer satisfaction. Therefore the best way to evaluate the success with Whatsapp is to observe how frequently clients are using the service. Do you get several messages per day or only a few every few weeks? This is a good indicator of how content your clients are with this service.



## 10 Blog

### 10.1 Content and Communication

A blog is a great way of demonstrating knowledge and skills, as well as a great way to optimize your ranking on search engines like Google. The more qualitative content you produce on your website, the better your homepage will rank on search results and the more people will visit your website.

A blog can also be useful for your clients because they can stay up-to-date and get useful information from your blog posts.

There are many possibilities for blog posts but all of them should be related to your business or sector. You can, for example, write an article about wages and taxes, you can share your experiences in your last seminar or workshop, or you can offer a checklist for your clients that helps them to fill out their tax declarations

But, as for other social media channels, keep the content professional. It is okay to mention once per year that you did have a nice christmas party if you want to show that you offer a great working atmosphere for your employees, but a short mention is enough. You do not want to share photos of your employees partying or drinking on your blog.

When blogging, it is important to write new articles regularly, for example every Friday of every week. This way, your clients will know that new information will come online continuously and that they can visit every week and find a new article. If you just blog once and then make a break for several months, it will be very inconsistent, clients won't know if your blog is still active at all and it may seem very negligent.

A blog post does not need to be very long, but it should always contain useful information and be clear and to the point. Photos illustrate the text well and it is more interesting for the reader to look at some photos than just reading a very long plain text. So try to include at least one photo in each of your article.

You can even include your YouTube videos in your blog so that people can directly watch it from there. And again, you can share a link to your newest blog entry on all your other social media channels as well in order to get more readers.

Furthermore, a blog encourages your clients to share their own opinions, because it

usually offers a comment function. People can leave comments to each of your blog entries and engage in discussions. It is good to answer to these comments as well, so that your clients know you have read them and listened to their views.

Additionally you can offer a "Follow" function that enables your clients to enter their email addresses so that they will get an email every time a new blog post is available.

Some more ideas for blog posts include:

### **1. Customer success stories**

Ask your customers to say a few words about your services and how you helped them and publish it on your blog. This is a great way to show other potential clients how good your work is.

### **2. Share current news**

What is changing in the accounting sector and how are these changes affecting your customers? Share these things online, as it proves to be useful information for your clients that they might not have heard before.

### **3. Answer commonly asked questions**

Create a post that includes the questions that many of your clients ask or the main points that could be confusing for someone who doesn't know a lot about accountancy. This shows that you are responsible and caring and also saves the clients' time, as they can easily find an answer to frequently asked questions.

### **4. Ask questions and encourage participation**

Write something about a topic you have heard of and ask what your clients think about it. Encourage them to leave their opinions in the comments.

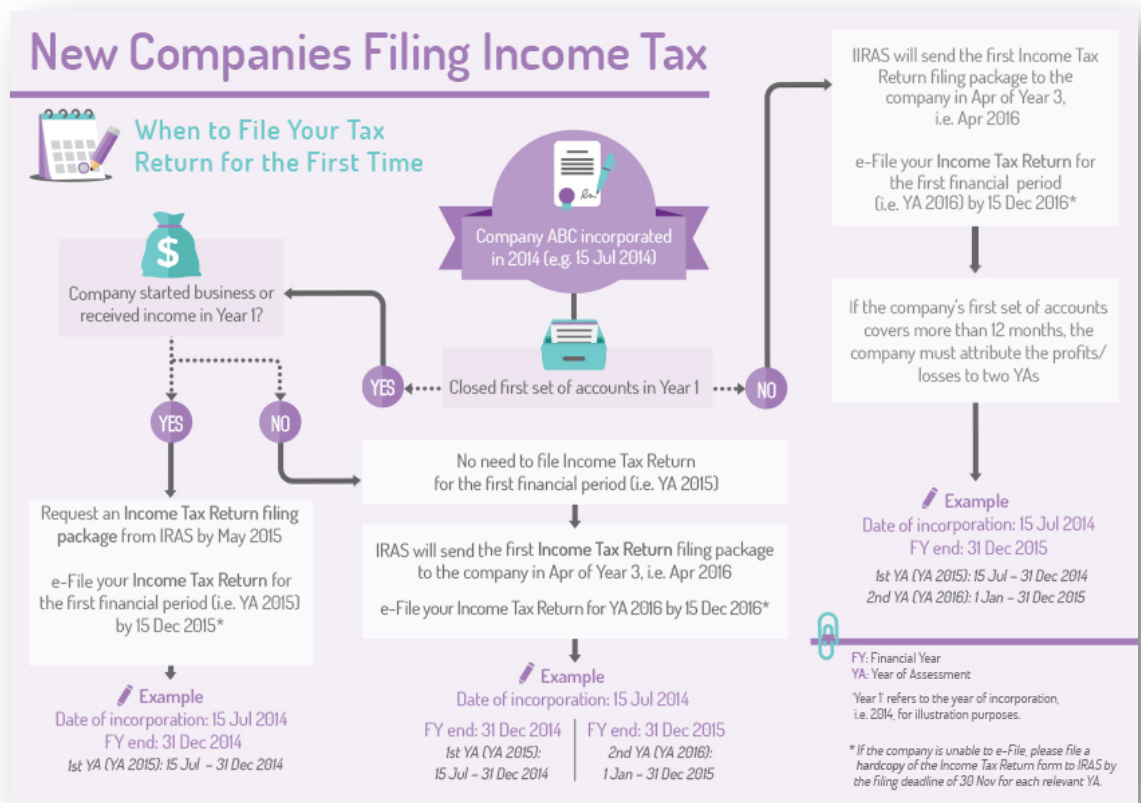
### **5. Talk about your last seminar**

Tell people what kind of seminar you were giving and summarize it shortly. Don't forget to add pictures of yourself as a speaker, as this will again create trust that you know what you are doing and improve your reputation.

## 6. Create an infographic or a checklist

Infographics are very helpful for clients as they explain a topic very easily. Checklists can be a great way for your clients to get help with specific topics, such as "what kind of things you can set off against tax liabilities" and are very useful.

Make sure to come up with new topics and do not always write about the same thing only.



## 10.2 Evaluation

A good way of evaluating your blog's performance is to keep track of how many people follow your blog and how many comments you receive. Some people might even share your blog entries on their own blogs or on social media, which is a great advertising for your company. Keep track of these numbers and if you notice that a specific type of blog entry creates a lot of traffic and shares, then try to write similar articles in the future.

## **11 Handling Negative Feedback on Social Media**

When dealing with social media it is essential to know that not all of your followers on social media will be friendly and not all feedback will always be positive. Many people use the anonymity of the internet to share their uncensored views and if something upsets them, they do not hesitate to share their discontent with you and everyone else who follows your account.

It is extremely important to react to negative feedback in the right way in order to avoid a damage of your reputation or even loss of customers. Many companies make the mistake of trying to discuss issues publicly online where everyone can follow the discussion. Especially if a customer is not satisfied with a service that was provided, it is never good to try to convince that customer otherwise, especially if other potential customers can see your reaction. Also remember that once something has been on the internet, it is very difficult to delete it again and even if you make an incautious comment and remove it right away, chances are that someone else has already taken a screenshot and shared it somewhere else. Therefore, it is important to stay calm when dealing with negative feedback and to act attentively.

Your attention should always be focused on the one client that is unhappy and even if you think the customer is wrong, it is important to solve the situation in the customer's favor.

The way company's react to a complaint very often determines if a customer will remain a customer of the company and buy other services or products, or if the company will lose the customer. Remember that especially social media is a great tool to spread information and news can travel very far very quickly. Even if it is only one unhappy customer you are dealing with, it can have a big impact on your business and the way your company is perceived as a brand.

So what are the right steps to deal with critical feedback? Depending on the type of feedback and the mood of the unhappy customer, different actions can be taken.

Generally, it is good to write a public comment first and apologize to the customer for the situation. Depending on the exact issue you can then justify yourself and offer some kind of compensation, or you can move the conversation from online to offline. Never argue or discuss sensitive issues online, as this always shines a bad light on you as a


company!

Some specific examples would be the following:

One customer is very upset about the long time it took to sort out his tax issues.

Your service is so bad! I am so angry! I had to wait 5 WEEKS until you finally took care of my tax issues! I have a business to run, do you think I can wait that long? I am paying for your service, so you should be able to do it a bit faster!

The wrong reaction to this post would be the following:

 **Case Company X** You know, we also have things to do and other customers to attend to, you are not the only one. Maybe you should ask next time how long it will take approximately before you complain online.  
Like · Reply · 1 min

This will only upset the customer more and other customers will perceive you as a company that is not willing to listen to feedback and does not care about individual clients. Therefore it is better to react like this:

 **Case Company X** Dear xy, we are very sorry for your disappointment. The last weeks have been unusually stressful at our office due to a case of illness. We usually always work fast and in accordance with the client's needs. We would like to offer you a free consultation next time to prove that we can do better. Please contact us at: dl@steuerberatung-lang.de  
Like · Reply · Just now

This answer shows that you listen to the feedback, you take it seriously and understand the client's discontent and you actively try to make up for the situation. Additionally, you ask the client to contact you via email where you can talk privately and without other people following your discussion.

If the client does not accept your apology and continues to write negative feedback, do not insist on making amends. Rather ask the client once again for his or her email address or telephone number and then contact him or her in private.

Most often, an unhappy customer just wants to be heard and understood. It makes you look professional if you listen and react attentively, instead of discussing and trying to change the customers mind.

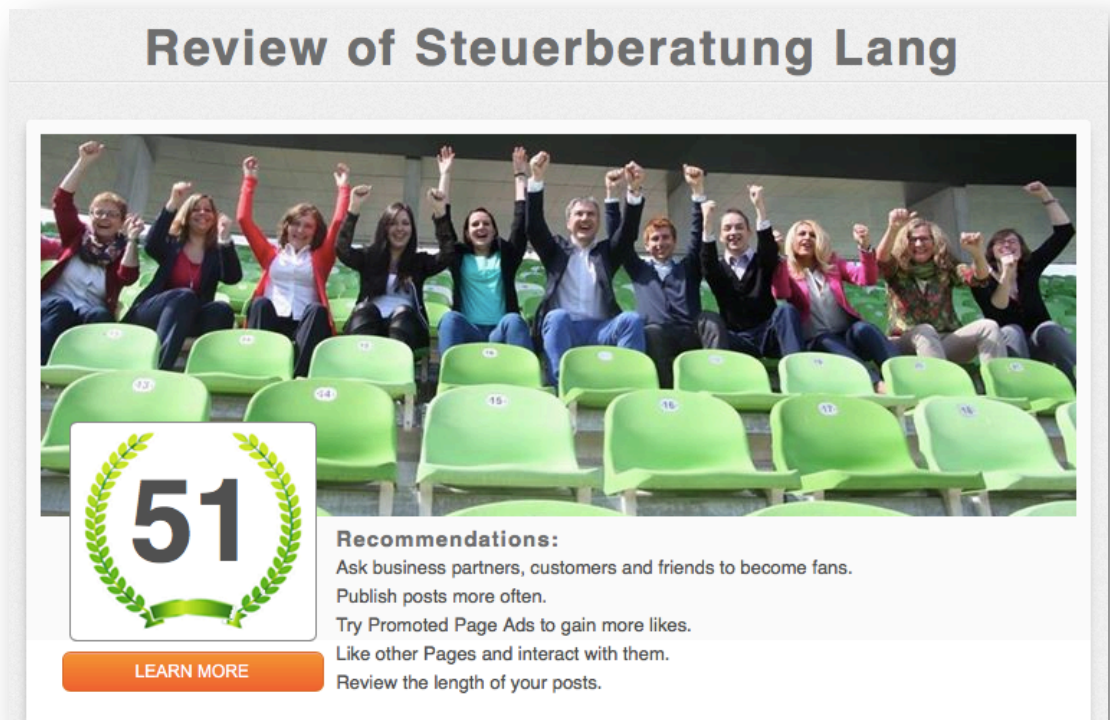
Also never ignore feedback or simply delete it! Even if some of the comments you receive might be uncomfortable, it is necessary to deal with them in the right way in order to avoid more negative situations in the future.

## 12 Useful Tools

There are several useful tools that help you to organize your activities online and to measure their success. I will introduce three of them in the following.



The first tool is **LikeAlyzer** which allows you to easily evaluate your Facebook page. If you go to [www.likealyzer.com](http://www.likealyzer.com) you can simply enter your Facebook Page URL and the tool will present you with a good evaluation of your page. It will give you a ranking between 0 and 100, depending on your page success and will then explain what you should improve in order to score better.

The screenshot shows a Facebook review for 'Steuerberatung Lang'. At the top, the title 'Review of Steuerberatung Lang' is displayed. Below the title is a photo of a group of people sitting in green stadium seats, cheering with their arms raised. In the bottom left corner of the review, there is a white box with a green laurel wreath border containing the number '51'. To the right of the score, under the heading 'Recommendations:', there are four bullet points: 'Ask business partners, customers and friends to become fans.', 'Publish posts more often.', 'Try Promoted Page Ads to gain more likes.', and 'Like other Pages and interact with them.'. At the bottom left of the review, there is an orange button with the text 'LEARN MORE'.

**Review of Steuerberatung Lang**

**51**

**Recommendations:**

- Ask business partners, customers and friends to become fans.
- Publish posts more often.
- Try Promoted Page Ads to gain more likes.
- Like other Pages and interact with them.

**LEARN MORE**

LikeAlyzer is quite a useful tool as it gives you good advice on how to improve your facebook page for free.



Another useful tool that can be used for all your social media accounts is **Hootsuite**. It allows you to schedule posts in advance and select a publishing time and then publishes them automatically. It also allows you to manage all your social media channels centrally on one website, which saves a lot of time because you only need to log into Hootsuite and not into every single social media website.

Additionally, you can not only plan posts but answer to comments directly via Hootsuite and Hootsuite offers you analyses about your success that can then be used to improve your social media presence even further.

The third, but most important tool is a **Content Calendar**.

Week of:		Theme: (if applicable)	
Day of week	Content title	Author	Plans for promotion/distribution
Monday			Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc?
Tuesday			Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc?
Wednesday			Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc?
Thursday			Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc?
Friday			Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc?
Saturday/Sunday			Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc?

A content calendar helps you to plan all your social media posts in advance. You can come up with different types of content and mark the dates on which you will publish your content. This helps you to keep track of your social media activity and of important



dates, such as public holidays where you might want to make a special post, or your company anniversary. Furthermore, a clear plan enables you to post regularly without losing track of the posts you have published before. Especially if several employees are responsible for the social media of the company, it is recommended to use a content calendar, because this way it can be easily avoided that the same post or content is posted twice.

Another advantage is that you only have to come up with content ideas once, note them down and then you won't need to think about your posts anymore. This saves a lot of time, because you can prepare your content in advance and do not need to spend several hours thinking about the next topic you would like to talk about.

The easiest way to create a content calendar is to use Excel and simply add different tabs for your different social media channels. Come up with a regular schedule for each month and add the dates and topic to the calendar. However, you can also create your content calendar on a simple sheet of paper or in a Word document, depending on which way works best for you.

## **13 Implementation and Conclusion**

I hope these guidelines help you with your social media activities and gave you a first idea of what is possible on social media.

In order to implement these guidelines and to update all employees at the same time, I offer to give a half a day training at Steuerberatung Lang's office, in which I will explain these guidelines and show practical examples, as well as answer any kind of questions that might come up.

Furthermore, as social media can evolve and change quite rapidly and it is important to always be up to date, I will regularly update these guidelines in regard to evolving trends on the market, so that the company will always have the newest information and will know how to use upcoming tools and social media platforms.

As the company's CEO, Daniel Lang, told me that they would like to try paid advertising, I have added instructions for Facebook's paid advertising in these guidelines and if this turns out to be something useful for the company that they also want to use in the future, I will then add instructions for other paid advertising options in regard to the company's wishes and needs, as well as to new market changes and trends.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me any time at  
Lisa\_Lang@gmx.de

Good luck with your new social media marketing!