Social Media Planning for a Small Business: Case Firehawk Forge

Hannele Östring

Abstract

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Author(s) Hannele Östring	
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Being present in social media is key to today's marketing. This research-based thesis was commissioned by an American artisan workshop start-up business with an aim to strengthen its social media presence by improving the business's existing social media profiles on Facebook and Instagram. The goal is for the results to help the business to go further and build a successful social media strategy based on the insights gathered in this study.

For the theoretical part on social media marketing and outlining the best practices to adopt on the two platforms in question, the sources used are literature and online resources re-lated to the topic and created by marketing professionals. For information on the commis-sioning business, the owner and entrepreneur himself was interviewed.

The first part of the study presents the theory of social media marketing, its benefits and challenges to businesses, before going into more depth about the process of social media planning and phases of strategy creation. Following the theory base is an introduction of the chosen platforms and a breakdown on what, according to the theory sources, are deemed the best actions to take on each of them to achieve optimal results.

Lastly, in the empirical part the commissioning business's social media channels are taken under scrutiny and analysed in reference to the insights gathered from the theory. A situa-tional analysis is conducted and suggestions for improvement and content creation are made. A main finding is that the business has no defined target audience and otherwise previously has had very minimal planning behind its marketing efforts, so with that as a starting point, there are guidelines provided on how the business owner could further plan, create, and implement a strategy in the future. In the final discussion, further points for consideration and research are presented as well.

Keywords
Social media planning, social media strategy, social media, small business

Table of contents

1 Introduction

A personalized plan and guidelines for actions specific to their own business are valuable to the small business entrepreneur who in the present has a limited understanding of social media marketing himself. This study has been commissioned to help an American startup artisan business to start on the planning and strategy creation process for its social media marketing channels.

1.1 Thesis objectives

The objective of this research-based thesis is to develop and improve the social media marketing communications of a small one-person business by creating a plan on how to best utilize a set of social media channels for business purposes, such as increasing potential sales with referral traffic from social media sites to its Etsy webstore. This will be achieved by first looking into the theory on social media marketing and then conducting a situational analysis on the commissioning business's social media profiles before forming suggestions for improvement based on the theory and the analysis.

The theoretical part outlines the benefits and challenges of using social media for marketing purposes from the perspective of a small business entrepreneur, as well as introduces recommendations by the literature on the best practices a business can adopt in working towards its goals. Included will also be a consideration on what are the key performance indicators that should be taken into account when tracking the success of the efforts taken to reach certain goals. The theoretical sources needed to be current and relevant, as social media sites are constantly evolving and information can get outdated fast when new and updated algorithms are rolled out by social media companies.

The study will serve to educate the commissioning business owner on the steps he should be taking and actions he should be engaging in as he wishes to increase his number of followers, to engage his audience, and to drive more potential customer to his recently opened online shop. The owner of Firehawk Forge, whilst otherwise excelling in his line of work, has struggled to get his marketing message out to potential target markets. He has basic knowledge and experience of social media, but no experience of marketing and of how to make use of social media for marketing and business purposes.

1.2 Delimitation

The study will focus on social media platforms Facebook and Instagram, which are the ones the commissioning business has chosen to use. In addition, the e-commerce website Etsy will be mentioned briefly in connection to optimizing the use of the social media sites for driving sales. The scope of the study will be strictly on developing the business's presence on the chosen platforms and other social media networks and forms of online or digital marketing are excluded. Due to the nature of the business as a one-man workshop start-up, the marketing efforts are limited to business to customer actions, excluding business to business marketing.

1.3 Commissioning party

This thesis was commissioned by the owner of the case company. Firehawk Forge is a one-man artisan business run by Mr. Michael J. Rodriguez and geographically located in the small town of Drums, Pennsylvania in the United States of America. The business itself is at the moment small and is not yet registered as an LLC, a limited liability company, but is expecting growth and wishes to start the process of being registered as such soon. The driving force behind the business idea is the smith's passion for forging and creating unique handmade items.

1.3.1 Products and services of Firehawk Forge

The business' focus is on bespoke items, mainly knives and period-accurate weaponry. The most popular products by Firehawk Forge are different types of swords, but also spears, daggers, axes, etc. A fairly recent addition to available forged items is a line of handmade Viking era jewelry of pure silver or 14 karat gold, including rings, bracelets, and neck rings. On the side of forged items, the owner is skilled in carpentry too, and makes his own wooden handles for his blades among other things. He has worked on wooden furniture and wooden custom items like smoking pipes before, but generally likes to be recognized more distinctively as a bladesmith.

On the side of physical items, Firehawk Forge also sells the owner's expertise, as he is available for lectures on Viking age culture, crafting, and fighting techniques, as well as live demonstrations on historical weaponry and swordsmanship.

1.3.2 Business model of Firehawk Forge

Despite Firehawk Forge's main focus being on custom pieces made according to a customer's wishes, the forge makes a big part of its sales through summer festivals dedicated to historical crafts, Viking markets, museum events, and medieval fairs, where the business owner appears in person to sell his merchandise to reenactors and others interested in authentic replicas of certain historical items. Mr. Rodriguez frequently visits festivals and events around the United States but has also traveled to sell his swords and armory at similar kinds of events in several European countries where there is an interest in Viking era history, e.g. Denmark, Norway, and Poland.

Through the contacts he has made at the events, Mr. Rodriguez has been able to reach out to hobby groups and get some word-of-mouth to go around and recommendations from people who have bought his blades. Customers who are interested in a custom piece usually contact him by messaging the forge page on Facebook or through the email address he gives out on a business card. Ordering process basically consists of the customer describing what they have in mind and asking for a price quote to that item. The smith can give additional information of the making process and make suggestions for adjustments based on the customers wishes, what the item will be used for, and historical accuracy. Price quotes are usually quite high for these kinds of handmade, one-of-a-kind items that take a lot of effort to make, which can discourage some customers. The smith will also give a tentative timeframe for the making process of an item. Custom orders are paid beforehand to avoid cancellations by customer.

By having a more successful social media presence, Mr. Rodriguez wishes to strengthen online sales and gain more inbound traffic to his Etsy store. Etsy is an international e-commerce site and online marketplace for handcrafted and vintage items, craft supplies and tools, and is favored by many sellers and small businesses similar to Firehawk Forge.

2 Social media marketing

Social media marketing is "the use of social media platforms to connect with your audience to build your brand, increase sales, and drive website traffic" (Buffer 2019). Businesses have profiles on social media channels that they use for publishing content to attract customers' interest and to interact with them. If originally social media was used to generate traffic to business websites, it has evolved to serve many different purposes. Along with advertising platforms and analytics, social media offers a direct way to communicate with the audience, listen to them and have them engage with the marketing content.

Among of the top social media platforms of the day are Facebook, Youtube, Whatsapp, Instagram, Twitter, with the up-and-coming video service TikTok quickly on the rise (Statista 2020). Several online marketing businesses offer knowledge and tools for social media management and consulting for companies.

2.1 Benefits

As mentioned above, social media marketing offers businesses more advantages than just guiding traffic to their websites. It is no doubt useful in bringing potential customers to visiting a website by sharing links and promoting offers of products and services on there (Brookins, n.d.).

Creating a presence on the key social media channels gives a business the opportunity to increase brand awareness and tell a compelling brand story. Actively engaging with a vast online audience will increase visibility and brand recognition, which will bring a number of potential customers quickly and easily within reach. Brand recognition is essential for businesses, as consumers are more inclined to buy from brands they recognize (Dukart, 2018).

Social media offers a very direct way to be in contact with customers. This creates an excellent channel for customer service and feedback, which in turn has an impact on customer satisfaction. In addition to customers, it also enables interactions and conversation between businesses, entrepreneurs, and industry leaders (Brookins n.d.). This network can offer valuable information and opportunities, as well as serve as inspiration for new ideas. Insights gained from listening and interacting with the audience are wisely put to use in developing and improving further marketing efforts.

Improved brand recognition together with better customer satisfaction lead in turn to improved brand loyalty. Customers who feel their opinions and problems are listened to and get answers to their questions are likely to become loyal to a brand. It pays to build ongoing relationships with the acquired audience through social media engagement (Brookins n.d.). Interactive brands on social media appear more personified and therefore more attractive to customers, as people are prone to prefer doing business with other people rather than companies (Blue Fountain Media 2020).

Businesses actively engaging in dialogues with their customers give the impression of being more credible and thus evoke more positive associations in their customers even when handling complaints (Blue Fountain Media 2020). This will help gaining reputation and drive word-of-mouth-recommendations as a form of earned media for marketing. All mentions on social media by satisfied customers are free advertising for a business.

Finally, social media marketing is extremely cost-effective compared to traditional mean of marketing (Brookins n.d.). Businesses can join social media networks for free and create their own organic content to promote their products and services. There is not necessarily a need to resort to paid advertising to reach wide audiences, although that is also a considerable opportunity for obtaining new leads by tailoring their advertisement to appear to a selected audience and have them become familiarized with a brand even when they are not actively looking for it. Furthermore, even the paid promotions on social media are relatively low-cost when compared to traditional marketing outlets, which brings a greater return on investment and spares resources to be spent on other activities (Blue Fountain Media 2020).

2.2 Challenges

Gilliland (2016) gives the major challenges for social media strategy for companies as choosing whether to have a global or local strategy, maintaining brand reputation by responsible communication and engaging in dialogues with customers, and producing relevant content for the audience. The first of these, the balance between a global or a local strategy, is more of a challenge for larger companies. A small business with only one person in charge of the communications will have it easier to maintain consistency across social media than a large one with multiple channels and different teams handling the accounts. It might also be easier for only one person overseeing the voice and style the brand is represented by in social media, but said person still needs to be someone who has an understanding of the guidelines of respectful communication to avoid making dangerous faux pas and hurting the brand.

Social media is not wisely used just for broadcasting a marketing message but requires businesses to come up with content that matches and promotes its brand values and personality, but also encourages conversation (Gilliland 2016). It can be challenging to constantly create valuable new content that keeps the customers engaged, while also preserving a unique, personal style and tone.

In addition, keeping a consistent posting schedule can be a challenge for a small business that is not likely to have a full team of personnel dedicated to managing its social media. More often one or two people will take on the different roles of managing the accounts. Herman, Butow & Walker (2018, 36-37) specify five different roles with different focuses for running a successful account on Instagram, but these can also be generalized to apply to other social media platforms as well. Firstly, a social media manager's tasks include creating the profile and managing passwords, and planning and overseeing the strategy of the account, whereas a content creator obviously is in charge of creating and organizing relevant content, and possibly also of posting, scheduling, and archiving posts. A community manager role entails taking care of following, liking, and commenting on other accounts, i.e. engagement with other users. As in public relations in general, networking within the community creates exposure and reputation, but also gives the opportunity to spot problematic issues and take note of feedback from the audience. Campaign manager skills are needed to arrange promotions, contests, and giveaways. Such special events are used to attract new followers through increased exposure and engagement. Some examples of promotions would be paid advertising and collaborations with influencer accounts. Finally, the account analytics need to be monitored to keep track of data on the account's performance. On this information, the business's social media plan and actions can be reviewed and updated. (Herman & al. 2018, 38). All this can prove to be a lot of work for a business that does not have human resources dedicated to social media alone.

2.3   Social media planning and strategy

A successful social media approach is a combination of planning and strategy, engagement, and metrics. Planning is needed to build a strategy that guides all efforts towards relevant goals. Engagement is essential for social media, without it there is little use to making the efforts. Metrics measure the successfulness of all social media efforts.

Social media planning is a continuous cycle of eight stages: listening, setting goals, defining strategy, identifying target audience, selecting tools, implementing, monitoring, and tuning. Social media trends are constantly evolving and changing and staying on top of

the game requires attentiveness and adaptability. (Barker, Barker, Bormann & Neher 2013, 26.)

Social media marketing strategy is a summary of everything a business or an organization plans to do and hopes to achieve on social media (LePage & Newberry 2019). All actions such as posts, replies, comments, and likes should be planned and serve the objectives outlined in the strategy. The success or failure of a business's activities can be measured against the strategy plan. The strategy should be as specific as possible to enable the most effective execution, yet concise and attainable (LePage & Newberry 2019). Neidlinger (2018) claims that creating a documented social media strategy focused on processes and goals will improve expected results remarkably.

2.3.1   Goals and objectives

LePage & Newberry (2019) recommend reviewing a business's strategy against the S.M.A.R.T. goal framework: each of their goals should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time bound. Well-planned and documented goals give purpose and direction, chart a course for improvement and success, and are easier to communicate to others (Newberry 2019).

Considering the cruciality of clear, relevant goals for a base of actions and for measuring the success and results of a social media strategy, it would make sense to start the creation of a one by first setting those social media marketing goals that align with business's objectives and will be guiding all of its efforts on social media (LePage & Newberry 2019).

Examples of social media goals include building or positioning a brand, increasing brand awareness, improving brand perception, expanding brand loyalty, increasing customer satisfaction, driving word-of-mouth-recommendations, generating leads, producing new product ideas, crisis reputation management, and search engine optimization. (Barker & al. 2013, 34.)

2.3.2   Analytics and metrics

Nothing a business does online will not really matter if it cannot track the success of its efforts. Key performance indicators are performance measures that are essential to keeping track of results and evaluating the usefulness of actions taken against the big picture. They are the most important metrics and closest to business objectives (Neudlinger

2019). Many social media channels offer a set of analytics tools that give an overall view of meaningful metrics for businesses, although with some a more thorough ones might only come as paid features.

Instead of focusing on easily-trackable vanity metrics such as likes and retweets, for businesses it can be more valuable to pay attention to targets like leads generated, web referrals, and conversion rate, i.e. the percentage of subscribers who become customers (LePage & Newberry 2019). It may also make sense to track different goals depending on the channel used.

Table 1. Examples of social media goals with aligning business objectives and metrics (adapted from LePage and Newberry 2019)

Business objective	Social media goal	Metrics
Grow the brand	Awareness (current and potential audience)	Followers, shares, etc.
Turn customers into advocates	Engagement (audience interaction with content)	Comments, likes, mentions, etc.
Drive leads and sales	Conversions (effectiveness of social engagement)	Website clicks, email signups, etc.
Improve customer retention	Consumer (customers impression of the brand)	Testimonials, social media sentiment, etc.

2.3.3 Target audience

A successful social media strategy links together with the business's general marketing objectives and goals instead of being an isolated part set apart from its other marketing efforts (Barker & al. 2013, 35). After setting the social media goals and objectives and finding the key metrics for charting the path towards those goals, the next step in strategy creation is finding out who the business's audience are and where to find them. Instead of going through the trouble of producing content for a vast number of different channels or ones that are inactive, it makes sense to focus on the ones that are already popular with the intended target audience (Neidlinger 2018).

Social media analytics will give valuable insights to getting to know the business's followers, which are their most active networks, as well as help figuring out what kind of content the audience is most likely to engage with, like, comment on, and share. It is important to study actual data rather than make assumptions, as such can easily go wrong (LePage &

Newberry 2019). An initial experimentation with paid promotion can also help with finding the relevant audiences (Neidlinger 2019).

2.3.4 Competitive analysis

A good way to find out about the intended audience's interests is by looking into the followings of a business's most significant competitors in their field (LePage & Newberry 2019; Neidlinger 2019). They share the same audience, and a competitive analysis on their actions on social media will reveal what kind of content it is that has proven successful for them and what not as much. Examples on what to pay attention to according to Neidlinger (2019) are how well do different types of media like videos and images perform in catching the audience's attention, what kind of voice or tone work best, and what types of messages, e.g. questions, jokes, slogans, or motivational quotes, attract customer engagement.

Seeing who the competition is and what are their strong points will also be helpful in honing one's own targets for social media and will a chance to spot yet untapped opportunities. There might still be something that has failed to be noticed by the competition, and it will be more fruitful to build on where their service falls short than try to compete for the exact same audience with a company that has already established their fanbase. (LePage & Newberry 2019.)

As social media is always evolving, different social networks might serve different demographics of people, and different demographic audiences may have varying interest in what their interests in social media include. The target audience of a business can consist of several demographic segments, but nonetheless it serves to identify each audience's specific interests and adjust the content accordingly, so it aligns with those interests on each social media channel. (Neidlinger 2019.)

2.3.5 Situational analysis

A business that already has existing social media channels should take a look on their current situation by conducting a social media audit. Examining and analyzing their efforts so far will provide information what has been done already and how it has been working out, what efforts have paid off and what it is that has been accomplished by those efforts. Other things to look into are the existing network of followers: who they are, and which

channels do they prefer, as well as comparing the business's current social media presence with its competitors. The gathered information will offer a starting point for further development and improvement. (LePage & Newberry 2019.)

Each channel should serve a purpose. If there is no audience or it does not serve any current business goals, pouring effort into keeping up many separate channels is useless. This will help to make decisions on how many social networks to be active on. LePage and Newberry (2019) recommend an exercise of creating mission statements, i.e. one-sentence declarations that set a specific goal for each account, to help pin down the focus of each social network.

A handful of main social media channels, namely for example and most notably Facebook, can be considered key and requiring a level of presence nonetheless, regardless whether they are the business's favorites or not. Fortunately, in relation to the largest social media sites, they usually have scheduling tools that connect them together to help reduce the workload that comes from operating several active channels at the same time.

2.3.6 Executing a social media strategy

Executing a strategy starts with setting up social media accounts or improving already existing ones. The outlook of the accounts should work towards the strategic goals, but great starting points are also the very basics, such as making sure all the profile fields are filled out correctly, all profile images appear as intended and are the right size and resolution, and the business has a set of keywords to help potential customers search for it. (LePage & Newberry 2019.)

Consistency is a key element in creating a clear and defined brand image that customers will recognize and expect valuable content from as they decide whether to opt in and follow it. A brand's voice, tone, and style should remain consistent even when there is social media team of several people handling its messages across different channels. Regardless, as much it is necessary for a business to build its own unique style, inspiration and ideas can of course come from following other successful and skilled actors on social media and figuring out what it is that makes them so popular and attention-grabbing in what they do. (LePage & Newberry 2019.)

2.3.6.1 Content creation

A formidable challenge in keeping up a successful and relevant social media feed is being able to continuously create valuable and engaging content. A business should plan ahead what type of content they are going create and share, how often and when to post, in addition to having decided who they are aiming their material for and how they are going to promote it to that audience. There is also the question of who will be responsible for producing the content (provided that there is a staff of more than one), what are their strengths and competencies, and what equipment is available for access.

To start planning and find ideas, both LePage and Newberry (2019) and Neudlinger (2019) suggest asking the existing followers what they want and like about the business's social media channels. Examining what their expectations and wishes are gives an understanding of what they find interesting or valuable about the business and what they would like to see more of in future content.

A business should decide on a consistent, distinctive voice and tone for their posts. As mentioned before, a more personable style may make the audience feel more connected to a brand, yet making a separation between a branded social presence and a personal one should be taken into consideration, as there are advantages and disadvantages depending on the type of the business. A smaller, one person-led business may benefit from the audience's interest in the owner's personal updates and a casual approach more than maybe a larger, product-based brand whose customers expect on-topic content. Yet it is important for personal businesses too to keep in mind that each post on social media should serve a business purpose and it does not pay off to stray too far from the actual topics the audience is expecting. Something that should be kept in mind while evaluating the relevancy of content to be published, is that outside of their audience niche, what interests the content creator personally might not necessarily cater to their followers' interests at all. (Neudlinger 2019.)

2.3.6.2 Content calendar

In addition to thinking up various types of great content, it is recommendable to make a social media content calendar and commit to a posting schedule with all essential aspects planned out and written down – i.e. the types of posts, dates, times, and channels to use. Different social media platforms have their own norms and practices to take into account for optimizing and maximizing the impact the published content will have on the audience.

Posting times and frequency have an effect on the amount of attention the posts will get. (LePage & Newberry 2019; Neudlinger 2019.)

Together with daily and longer-term plans for posts, an editorial publishing calendar is a place to include plans for campaigns on social media. Campaigns can be inspired by different events, holidays, special promotions, or anything that sparks the idea (Neudlinger 2019). LePage and Newberry (2019) also suggest including in the calendar accounts for time dedicated to engaging with the audience, even though some of that interaction is best happening spontaneously. Essentially, even with great planning, the changing and unexpected nature of social media requires preparedness to change, adapt, and refine any plan or strategy.

3   Best practices per social media platform

As the two social media platforms specifically chosen for this thesis are Facebook and Instagram, this following chapter will focus on them in more detail while keeping the focus on the point of view of a small business. Both platforms are given a short basic introduction before going into demonstrating what, according to social media professionals, are the recommended practices to adopt for each platform to optimize their potential in reaching the strategic goals.

3.1   Facebook

Facebook, the largest social media platform in the world with its 2.45 billion users (Statista 2020), can be considered a must-have media for businesses. Founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg as a networking service for college students, it has grown into a network for connecting with friends and family, a platform for expression of thoughts and for opinionated debates, sharing news, promoting businesses, and an online marketplace at the very least. It stated its mission to making the world more connected and can maybe be said to have redefined the way people are digitally connected in the world of today. (Facebook 2020)

There are several reasons people choose to follow a business, and that is seldom that they initially intend to buy something. Zimmermann and Ng (2018) list the following reasons: seeking discount, looking for updates and news, wanting to interact with likeminded people, seeing their friends do it, following a recommendation, wanting to express loyalty and support, seeking entertainment, having questions about something regarding the brand, and wanting to give feedback on products, services, or experiences.

From the business's point of view, they are interested in promoting their brand by maximizing the number of people liking their page to have their message reach as many potential customers as possible. Having people like the page and comment on or share public posts it will bring exposure when their friends can see the action. A major part of marketing on Facebook is building a community of followers advocating for the brand and spreading good word-of-mouth. (Zimmerman & Ng 2018.) The advertising tools on Facebook enable a business to be very specific in their reach and targeting their audience. Advertising on the platform is rather affordable even for smaller businesses.

3.1.1 Facebook business page

Key elements to a professional-looking business page are choosing and uploading profile graphics that represent the brand and are recognizable to the audience, not to mention of good quality and high enough resolution to appear right. There are two main visual elements to a Facebook profile page, the profile picture, which is usually a brand logo, and a cover photo. A cover photo is the first thing people arriving on the page will lay their eyes on, and therefore should be more than just any picture, but something that stands out and leaves an impression (Zimmermann & Ng, 2018).

A brand page should have a recognizable customized URL address instead of an automatically created series of numbers and letters. This will make it easier for people to remember and find the page, as well as optimizes it for search engines. (Zimmermann & Ng, 2018.)

Another essential element to include in a business profile and put some thought in is the About section. This section is where the business can state their mission statement and introduce themselves and what they do by telling their story in a brief but compelling form. It does not pay off to go too much in detail here but give a prompt and engaging introduction that will pique the readers' interest and have them want to learn more by looking at the business's sales page. However, it should not be too much of a sales pitch, but something that feels more organic and community focused. Links to other social media profiles and a business website should also be placed in the About section. From a customer's point of view, it is essential to know how to contact the business. There is a subsection on the About page for this, whether it be an email address or a physical address that customers can visit. (Zimmermann & Ng 2018.)

Facebook also has its own platform for contacting businesses with its Messenger feature. Through there, customers can reach out privately and get personalized service for their problems and questions. It is possible but not advisable to turn off this option, as it can be a valuable channel for feedback. It is a very customer-friendly solution for a member of the community to make use of, and even offers them automatic conversation starters with the most common questions to initiate contact.

The profile's Settings page displays an administrator panel that can give valuable insights to the community, e.g. how they are using the page, where they are coming from and how many new interactions there are per week. It also holds the tools so updating the content and design of the page. (Zimmerman & Ng 2018.)

Business pages have the option to show a star rating system that lets customers rate and share a short review about their experience with a brand's products or services. These can prove useful as transparency contributes to a brand image of credibility and integrity, but the shared user experiences can also be negative and reflect poorly on the business. Some users are known also give fake ratings out of spite. In case of a poor customer experience, a prompt, professional response is needed for reputation management. Linwright (2014) recommends first contacting the customer privately to try and solve the problem transaction outside of Facebook. Only after the initial attempts to privately handle the issue, a public response is needed as a comment to the poor rating. This too should be in accordance with brand values and voice yet show empathy and provide closure. In case they are more trouble than worth, the ratings can be turned off from page settings. This however requires removing user check-ins feature and business map location as well. (Linwright 2014.)

Facebook is constantly evolving and updating its algorithms, which can have an effect on a brand's reach of their community. Zimmerman and Ng (2018) advise businesses to keep up with these changes by following technology news to not end up penalized for not following rules and not understanding to adapt to changes.

3.1.2 Content on Facebook

As for all social media, all content should be planned with keeping the business goals and objectives in mind. For most companies, their goals with Facebook have to do with customer engagement, sales, and increased brand awareness. The most successful strategy for the platform is to engage in conversations with the brand community (Zimmermann & Ng 2018). The published content should be interesting and worthy of sharing; being too focused on products and sales can backfire, for it will probably not engage the audience much.

A good mix of content types can include informative and more light-hearted facts and tips, links to current events and topics to create discussion around, videos, photographs, articles, and blog posts. A brand can even reach out to their followers and ask them questions, create polls, and have them share opinions and experiences with their products or services; anything that invites a response from the audience and encourages engagement. Although there is value to serious discussion, more often than not conversational, fun updates attract followers and help build community - social media is before everything social.

Sometimes posting controversial content is an interesting way to invite discussion on a topic. This approach should be used with caution and in moderation though, because too much of negativity and drama can also easily put people off or attract the wrong kind of audience. A positive approach will more likely bring in positive results. (Zimmermann & Ng 2018.)

Although hashtags are more often associated with other platforms such as Twitter and Instagram, they can be useful for businesses on Facebook too, as they will come up in searches people make. Hashtags should not be used in excess to make posts seem more visually pleasing, a maximum of three is enough. With such a limited number, the ones used should be chosen carefully to reflect the content. It is also advisable to check first if the hashtag has been used before for something the brand might not want to become associated with, even by accident. A brand might want to launch a specific, unique hashtag to set themselves apart from competition.

Facebook has been rather strict on selling and running contests on its platform and those activities must adhere to their guidelines, lest posts deemed unsuitable get removed or a business have their whole account locked (Zimmermann & Ng 2018). Inappropriate behaviors include for example like-bating, i.e. asking the audience to like certain posts and company pages in exchange for something, and contests where it is required the participants share a specific post on their own feed, which will maximize its exposure to their followers as well. Asking followers to share something they like of their own accord is accepted. A business should familiarize themselves with Facebooks Terms of Use and especially the part on promotions policy to avoid blunders.

An often-overlooked way of gaining visibility and building credibility is taking part in discussion on other businesses' brand pages. Quality comments written by a business account may attract followers of other brands to check out and find out more about this new brand and start to follow it too, as well as it will familiarize them with seeing that name and logo. An active and participating business account will give the brand authority, as they appear as a, accessible and knowledgeable expert of their field. What is more, it can also draw other businesses' interest and thus provide future possibilities for collaborations or recommendations from them. (Zimmermann & Ng 2018.)

3.1.3 Optimal posting times and frequency

While a business's posts should remain frequent and consistent, the optimal number of posts on Facebook is only one per day (Ellering 2017), and at least 5 but no more than 10 times per week (Hughes 2016). Zimmermann & Ng (2018) also emphasize that "sporadic and haphazard" posting schedule will not bring in the likes.

Thursdays and Fridays are best for post engagement (Hughes 2016), but Ellering (2017) also encourages a business to post on weekends, as Facebook users tend to be active on the weekends and in the evenings. Both Ellering (2017) and Hughes (2016) recommend 1 pm to 3 or 4 pm as the best times to post for optimal user engagement.

3.1.4 Facebook Insights

Facebook has its own analytics platform that tracks several key metrics on page and post performances with tools available to the page administrator. The platform includes data on accumulation of likes over time, advertising insights, and user engagement with content items, to name a few. Advertising insights include data gathered on promotions campaigns, how much attention and interactions did promoted ads gather i.e. how well were they received by the targeted audience.

The Insights tools offer a breakdown of the page audience, including demographic information of their age, sex, geographic location, visiting times, etc., all which can prove useful in developing and refining a business's social media strategy to better reach their target audience. Based on detailed information on their audience's interests, it will be easier to make decisions on what type of content is contributing towards certain goals and what times and days of the week are optimal for results.

3.2 Instagram

Instagram is a mainly mobile-based application for sharing pictures and videos. It was acquired by Facebook in 2012 and has since been introduced new features such as the ability to stream live video and the option for businesses to advertise through the Facebook Advertising platform. The base idea is for users to upload their content and share it with their followers. The pictures and videos can then be liked, shared, and commented by other users.

Notably popular among people in their twenties, but gaining more and more users in older audiences too, Instagram has over one billion monthly active user accounts (Mohsin 2019) and ranks as the sixth most popular social media in the world, therefore indubitably being a lucrative platform for businesses, especially with 80% of those user accounts following at least one business (Bullock 2019). Instagram is extremely popular among celebrities, media personalities, and fashion influencers who have massive followings on the platform.

A business needs to plan their goals and approaches to create a consistent image and build a following on Instagram as well. Herman & al. (2018, 36) list the top reasons for businesses to use Instagram as:

– Increasing brand awareness: Making a brand recognized by potential customers.
– Creating engagement: Meeting and interacting with a potential customer.
– Increasing web traffic: Driving traffic to a website or blog.
– Content distribution: Disseminating useful information about a product.
– Lead generation: Collecting data for list building and sales prospecting.
– Community building: Gathering a community of people who love and engage with a brand.
– Customer support: Answering questions, receiving field complaints, and accepting compliments.

Bullock (2019) also emphasizes the importance of deciding on certain goals for the account, whether it be increasing sales, engagement the number of followers, because the business's goals determine what kind of content it makes sense for it to publish.

3.2.1 Instagram profile

The essential components of an Instagram profile are a username, profile photo, name, biography, website URL, and an optional business address. Business accounts also have additional contact buttons. The username and the name (appears on the profile under the profile photo) of a profile are the two main searchable criteria, so those should be well thought-out for a professional look but also for maximizing keywords and search performance (Herman & al. 2018, 21-25). For a business that is actively using several social media platforms, it is recommendable to use the same profile picture on Instagram as on other platforms to create cohesion and help customers recognize the legitimate account (Herman & al. 2018, 26).

An Instagram bio is a short description of a maximum of 150 characters that informs other users about the profile owner. It gives the first impression to potential new followers and

should therefore be crafted carefully to represent the business in a nutshell and be of interest to the wanted target audience. Herman & al. (2018, 26) recommend choosing a few key aspects of a business to highlight in the bio, such ones that connect emotionally with the target audience in mind.

Instagram allows only one clickable URL on the platform, a link in a user's bio. This is most effectively used to guide traffic to the business's website and should preferably be a customized short-form URL (Herman & al. 2018, 30). Additionally, as the last line of a bio, it is recommended to include a clear and specific call to action to direct potential customers to click on the link that is listed right below (Herman & al. 2018, 29).

3.2.2   Instagram business profile

Upgrading from a personal account to a business profile allows additional features that set a business account apart from the regular user profiles. A business profile gets an industry listing informing visitors about what it does, and easy-to-access contact buttons that enable customers to email, call, or get directions to the business's location with one click. A business user will also gain access to the analytics tool Instagram Insights, more of which will be discussed later in part 3.2.5. Instagram Insights.

A Facebook business page is required to create a business profile on Instagram by connecting the two. Advertising on the platform is managed through Facebook Business Manager, and business accounts have the option to manage Instagram comments and engagement through their Facebook business page. (Herman & al. 2018, 31-32.)

3.2.3   Content on Instagram

The first element of a successful Instagram account is, of course, content that is optimized for this essentially visual platform. Being able to run a successful and visually pleasing Instagram account first of all requires at least some skill in visual design and maybe photography. However, good pictures and fun graphics are not enough by themselves. As with all marketing, a business should know its target audience's preferences, interests, and what it is that creates value to them.

To make it even possible to create a post, there always has to be at least one visual element incorporated. It may be wise for a business to start with the very basics, such as creating a recognizable, unified look and feel, by the use of colors, filters, and type of content

that reflect the brand (Bullock 2019). The content, even though having a uniform style, should otherwise vary in type to keep it interesting: instead of only posting simple product pictures on the feed, there could be a mix of photos, videos, stories, promotion events, etc. Bullock (2019) recommends using a specific filter on all content as one of the easiest ways to develop a signature style.

Suggested types of content for building trust with the audience are educational tips and advice, but maybe even more than with Facebook, it is recommendable to keep the content from being too serious and thought-provoking in the long run. Posts with animals, especially pets, funny images, and viral memes are known to catch people's eye and generate engagement. Holidays and current events can also offer great ideas for themes for posts. (Bullock, 2019.)

A business should thrive to establish a recognizable brand voice in visuals but also in the style they do their captions (Herman & al. 2018, 43). Images can also have tastefully placed text overlays, but the caption space is where most of the texts should go, especially if they are longer and would make the image look crowded. It is noteworthy that links are not wisely included in captions, as the platform does not handle them as URLs and will not make them accessible. Instead the link can be placed in the biography section of the profile and the caption include directions to find out more from there.

Hashtags are essential in increasing the reach of new posts, making them searchable and inviting engagement. It is recommendable to mix together hashtags that are relevant to a business and their target audience, and popular hashtags that get a lot of traffic, although they should still be somehow connected to the post itself and not just any words and phrases included for visibility (Herman & al. 2018, 113). Users have created viral hashtag themes, such as for example #TBT for Throwback Thursday, that businesses can opt to join in case they fit their style, as well as hashtags for popular holidays and events (Herman & al. 2018, 43-44).

Hashtags are included either in the image caption or in a comment right below the caption. Instagram allows up to 30 hashtags in one post, but when it comes to engagement, between 9 and 12 would be the optimal number for an account with 1000 or fewer followers (Herman & al. 2018, 116). A business can choose to pick a brand hashtag they use in their posts and that is unique to them. A unique hashtag is especially needed when launching a promotion or a contest, because with it the business can follow the activity of interactions with it (Herman & al. 2018, 126).

A feature called Instagram Stories is found in a bar on top of the newsfeed. Stories are images and video that is only available for 24 hours before it disappears. The idea behind this feature is to offers a place for more spontaneous and live content than what is posted on the more permanent feed. This is popularly used for behind-the-scenes material and short daily updates. (Herman & al, 2018, 131). Stories can be pinned as Highlights on the profile so they will not disappear but will stay there until they are later chosen to be removed.

Individual posts can be promoted to get more visibility on the application's discover page and run as ads that appear on users' feeds. (Herman & al. 2018, 31). Advertising campaigns through the platform are a paid feature for businesses only.

3.2.4   Optimal posting times and frequency

For Instagram, user activity levels vary little based on the day of the week, but similarly with Facebook, optimal posting times are during the end of the workday around 3 to 4 pm (Hughes 2016).

As a small business only has limited resources at hand in terms of content creation, they tend to publish content only when time and inspiration so allows, which rarely is every day. A more recommended approach would be to prepare new content in advance and make sure it is new and engaging. Thorough initial planning and a publishing calendar can save time and effort and will make it easier to manage content creation and reach desired objectives. (Bullock 2019.)

According to Bullock (2019), the most typical reasons for not seeing good results from Instagram are posting too little content, not posting enough relevant content to reach the intended objectives, and not reaching and engaging the target audience enough.

3.2.5   Instagram Insights

Instagram does not have as excessive of a set of tools available as Facebook Insights does, but the essential insights to boost and monitor customer engagement are there. In-app analytics help measure and monitor how the content strategy is working and what needs adjusting by providing data on impressions, reach, likes, comments, and saves (Herman & al. 2018, 185).

Posts and stories are ranked by their number of impressions. The number of impressions refers to the times the account has been viewed during the last seven days, reach is the number of unique accounts that viewed the account page, and profile views the number of views on the profile in total. There is more detailed information available per post. (Herman & al. 2018, 215-216). Detailed data can be also viewed on the engagement performance of promoted posts and stories, e.g. how many likes and comments they received as well as their total engagement results compared to average posts. (Herman & al. 2018, 186)

In addition to engagement metrics per posts, insights tool offers daily information on the best activity times of an account's followers, as well as demographic information about them, such as their gender, age, and location. Simple to track are such metrics as growth of followers and impressions, and which type of posts are scoring best for engagement. (Herman & al. 2018, 216).

Third-party applications that not only track the performance of hashtags and other engagement data but serve as content management system platforms as well, but the best of them are for a fee only. (Herman & al. 2018, 120.)

4 Social media planning for Firehawk Forge

For the empirical part of the study, this chapter will focus on planning a social media presence for Firehawk Forge on Facebook and Instagram. However, the goal of this thesis is not be able to give the business a readymade step-by-step guide from start to finish, but to provide valuable guidelines, insights, and suggestions for the business's social media manager to follow and take into consideration when finalizing his own strategy and producing content for his social media channels. Social media planning is, after all, that continuously evolving cycle of listening, goalsetting, decisions on strategy, identifying target audience, optimizing tools, implementing, monitoring, and tuning (Barker & al. 2013, 26).

Since the business already has profiles on both social media channels, the task at hand is to develop those to better serve the business objectives. A situational analysis is used as an initial starting point before moving on to discussing strategic goals and concrete suggestions for development.

4.1 Situational analysis

This subchapter will take a look at the current state of the existing profiles and how these channels are being put to use, as well as how they are contributing to the business objectives in their current form. This will provide information on what has already been done and how the accounts are set up before moving on to offer development suggestions based on these insights and the theory of social media marketing presented before.

4.1.1 Facebook

The forge's Facebook page was created in 2012 already and can be found in the address https://www.facebook.com/firehawkforge/. It has served as a business homepage and a main channel for incoming business inquiries along on the side of email. Email has still remained as the encouraged channel of communication for customers; the address is given on the owner's business card to potential buyers at hobby events and craft fairs. Contact options on the Facebook profile are Facebook Messenger and a personal email address that peculiarly is not the same as the one on the business cards. There is no physical address given.

The page has 1838 likes and 1854 followers on April 7, 2020. The numbers have had a nice increase of about 300 new subscribers in the last eight months, and 3 new likes and

4 new followers in the last week (Firehawk Forge Facebook page 2020). Uses who like the page show their support and automatically subscribe to seeing its content on their feed. The page is visible on their own profile among their liked pages. Those who follow the page can receive its updates on their feed. (Facebook Help Center 2020)

Figure 1. Firehawk Forge's profile picture on Facebook

Account images showcase products such as a sword pommel and some pieces of jewelry on the profile picture (figure 1), and a saber on a live-edge table on the banner (figure 2). The forge has its own logo design and that is present in both pictures, but not the focus. On the profile picture it appears a s a silver brooch and, on the banner, etched on the blade of the saber. The banner picture's layout is not optimal for its use because of how it gets cropped, making the sword appear in a weird angle and not centered, with parts left out (figure 2).
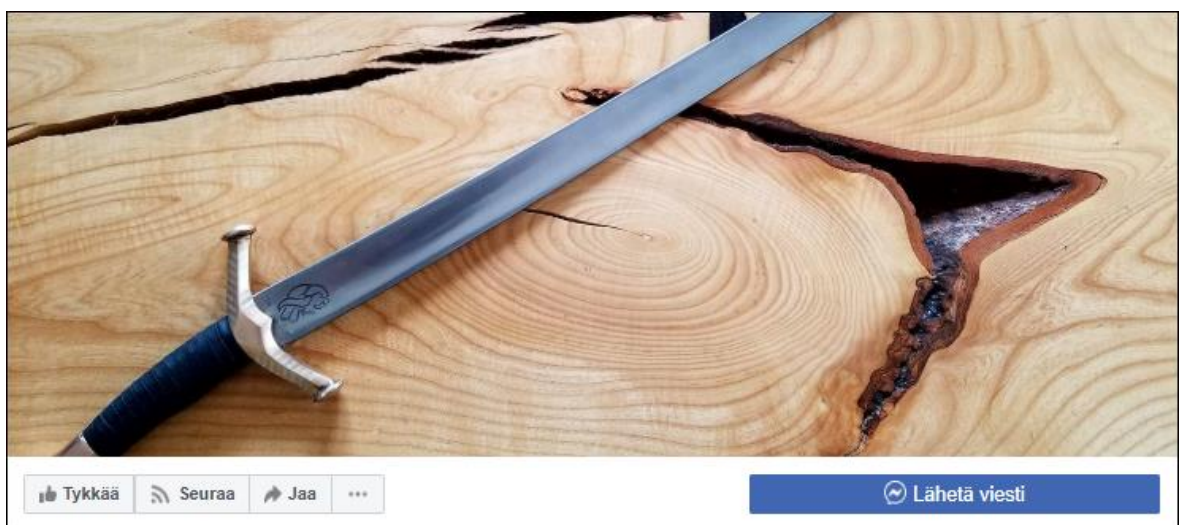

Figure 2. Firehawk Forge's banner image on Facebook

The business' description in the About section reads as:

"Viking age living historian, making artifacts from all periods. I can make all you need.

Since the dawn of the iron age, there have been men whose passion is to work with the elements, shape them, and give them life. Amazing works of art and war came from the forges of Scandinavia, and those swords were made with such passion and beauty that it will never be forgotten. They have been my inspiration, as have been my travels in many different countries and cultures.

I am a blacksmith, artificer, craftsman, and luthier. I work with varied materials and specialize in made-to-order, custom knives and other products. All my products are handmade with skill and attention to detail and of quality materials. You can see my previous works on my page, but you are also welcome to ask me about anything you would like for your order, as I will be happy to provide you with a truly unique item."
(Firehawk Forge Facebook page 2020)

The focus of the description is at first on the person of the blacksmith himself, before bringing in a rather poetic tie-in to the history of forging. The end of the last paragraph brings the attention to his products and ends with a welcoming call for a customer to contact the forge for more information. In addition to this description and contact information, there is only a price range indicator given in this section. This indicator showing a symbol of "€€€€" refers to very high-priced products.

Majority of the posts on the page's feed consist of images of finished products, mainly swords and historical jewelry. The pictures are usually accompanied with detailed information on their measurements and materials used, with the exception that custom ordered items appear to have less detailed descriptions. Some are based on historical models and that is also often stated as well as country of origin for the design. The items that are for sale are clearly marked with "For sale" in the beginning of the post. Only on posts about jewelry is there a link to the Etsy store provided.

Images of finished swords have attracted most engagement, with approximately around 20-25 likes and reactions, and even a few comments by the audience. Jewelry items have not proven quite as popular with the commenters, but they too have raked in some likes. However, one single post with a Danish Viking age ring has 47 likes and that can be considered a record. Engagement by the audience can still be considered very low when compared to the actual number of followers the page has.

Posting frequency is inconsistent and varying; oftentimes there are months between new posts. Engagement numbers have dropped by about a half after a recent hiatus between October 2019 and January 2020, with the two most recent posts respectively only gaining 4 and 6 likes. During a time when the page has had more activity, there are several posts announcing upcoming events the business will be participation in, and work-in-progress videos promised to be a part of a series giving insights to a blacksmith's profession and helpful tips to certain stages of work, but either for a lack of time or interest they are not carried on further.

Among the sword posts there appears one where guns are used as props for a photoshoot of a finished custom dagger. The explanation for the style choice is the military background of the customer who ordered the item, yet it is notable that this post got way less engagement than others around the same time. There can be multiple reasons for the lack of audience engagement at one single point in time, but it might a reason to look into geographical demographics. Whereas in the American culture personal guns can be more everyday, many others can have a strong negative reaction to them.

The page currently has received six customer reviews with the average rating of 3,7 out of 5 stars. This is not a terrible rating, but unfortunately one of the recent reviews is an extremely negative one, not only dismissing the products as faulty but also attacking the business owner over personal drama, yet there is no official answer from the business, only private users squabbling in the comments. This type of unwanted negativity and drama certainly reflects badly on the business and would require crisis reputation management on the business's side.

The business held a small Valentine's Day lottery with a Viking age silver ring as the prize in February 2019. The contest was held across both social media platforms Facebook and Instagram. The announcement post linked both accounts and stated as the requirement to participate to follow either of them as well as share that specific post on the participants own feed. The goal was to attract new followers, but it only attracted less interaction than expected. Furthermore, it is against Facebook's community rules to require followers to share business posts on their timeline to gain visibility, which may have had an impact but that is up to mere speculation.

The forge has announced two partnerships. The first one is with a stand-up comedian, but since the announcement there has been no updates mentioning him. The other one is with the Etsy store, but there is no information given on who the partnering party is, albeit the different business name of the store carries. The store at the moment sells only the

forge's jewelry and carpentry items, yet the name Firehawk Forge or its owner's name is nowhere to be found.

4.1.2 Instagram

The forge's Instagram profile has also been in existence for a longer time, but previously with little attention and hardly any following. Even though chiefly showcasing the black-smith's work at the time, it had not been created with a brand account in mind, and even went under a different name. The account was completely revamped in 2017, which was also when Firehawk Forge was chosen as a collective brand name to for the business's products. All the old content from before the change was deleted.
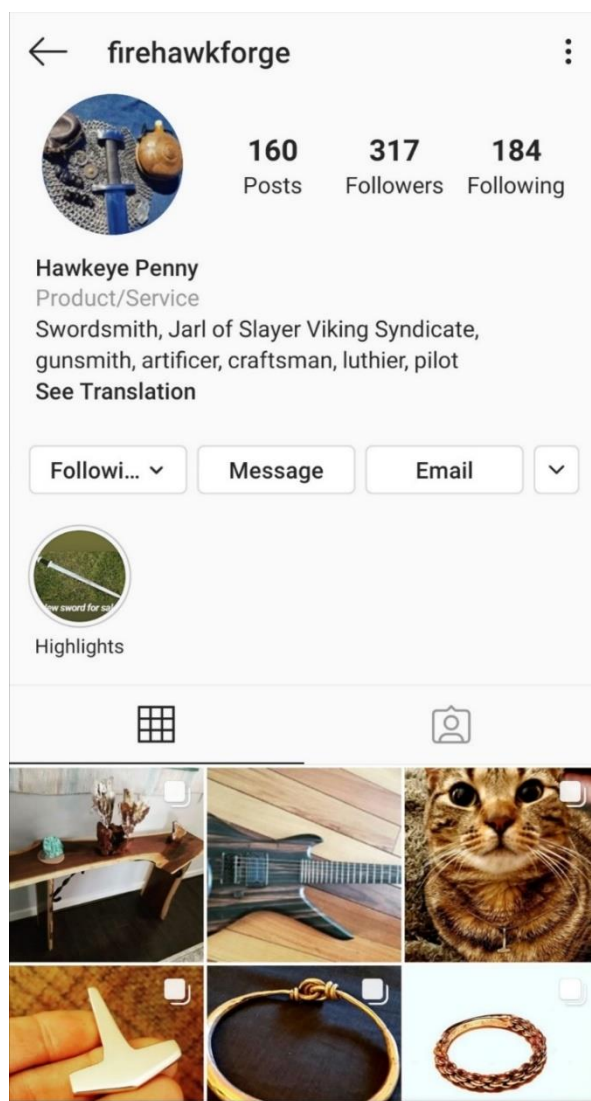
Figure 3. A screenshot of the Firehawk Forge profile on Instagram

Despite being upgraded to a business account with an industry listing for Product/Service (figure 3), the Instagram profile has remained more of a personal account than the forge's

Facebook page. As evident from figure 3, the biography section describes the business owner Mr. Rodriguez and his interests instead of specifically focusing on his forge business. The name on the profile is Hawkeye Penny, a personal pseudonym the business owner is known by this in the history reenactment hobby circles. The profile picture is not the same as the one seen on Facebook, even though it is from the same photoshoot with a sword and a selection of other Viking age styled items. Under the biography section there is a button for contacting the business by email, and the email address is the same one as on Facebook.

At the time of writing this thesis, the Firehawk Forge account on Instagram has 317 followers. There are 160 individual posts made by the account in a timeframe of about three years. The publication frequency is rather inconsistent, with long periods of inactivity. Topics of post vary from forge items for sale to behind the scenes material on works-in-progress to chattier and very casual slice-of-life updates on other things Mr. Rodriguez has had interest in or has been up to.

The first post on the account is made on April 2nd, 2017 and has only gotten 6 likes. Majority of posts from the end half of 2018 to most of 2019, when the account had increased activity with several posts per month, performed best and got an estimated average of 30-50 likes plus one or two comments at best. Post towards the end of 2019 are very similar to ones on Facebook, with the introduction of jewelry items and the Etsy store. After a couple of months break in the posting schedule the engagement numbers have seen a decrease, with the few newer posts from early 2020 all getting less than 20 likes each. Highlights feature displays one pinned announcement of a new sword for sale from almost a year ago, which means it is hardly new anymore and might not even be available.

The images on the account's feed are very colorful and detailed. Even though there are no filters used, it can be said that there certainly is thought put into the use of strong primary colors and the contrast of bright and dark, as well as the composition of how the items are placed and presented in the shots. A major difference to the Facebook feed is that the blacksmith himself makes an appearance often and other people are sometimes present too. A pet cat, named the forge's official representative, is used in staging product shots and sharing the business's story.

During an initial discussion with the business owner in order to map out the business's current situation and its future objectives, he confessed that he has had barely any business inquiries come in through Instagram and because of that he considers it mainly use-

less in that sense. Hence it is clearly not prioritized as a platform for business. The business owner also admitted that at first, he did not even understand hashtags to be useful topic identifiers, but thought they were a decorative gimmick characteristic of the platform. After starting to use them, his post started to more engagement already. He has then experimented with more hashtags to find the ones relevant to his business and clientele (figure 4).

#blacksmith #bladesmith #warrior #saber #polish
#rus #livinghistory #reenactment #swords
#vikinglife #bling #swordsman #viking #vikingmetal
#blingbling #vikings #vikingstyle #vikingtattoo
#sword #ringbling #historyvikings #jomsborg
#forsale #custom #handmade

Figure 4. An example of hashtags used by the business. This particular post was of a saber sword for sale and had gained 47 likes and 4 comments.

Hashtags are placed in the end of each caption usually separated from the actual caption text by a sequence of commas and line breaks. Good relevant hashtags seem to be many that have to do with Vikings and Viking age history hobby as they attract history reenactors who show interest in the historical piece replica blades, but a closer look on the analytics on the performance of the many different hashtags the should be made to make further speculations.

The business's Facebook page is not mentioned anywhere, let alone linked. A link to the Etsy store is posted in the caption on some more recent jewelry item posts, but due to Instagram formatting is not a hyperlink. A few posts encourage to message the account to ask about pricing and questions about custom-order items.

4.1.3   Summary of situational analysis

A major flaw that draws attention is it that **each account on the two different platforms is operated and kept separate from each other, so they are not working together towards any consistent goals**. This means there cannot be any referral traffic between the two. Referral traffic to the Etsy store is not optimized from either platform, even though the store is occasionally mentioned and linked on some posts. An email address for business inquiries is aptly available for potential customers on both channel's profiles.

The Facebook page has a rather professional outlook and is more of a business account for the forge, whereas **the Instagram profile looks more like a personal account despite being upgraded to a business one** and the idea behind it being to contribute to

business goals. As the business owner's person and personal style are notably present, **it would presumably contribute to transparency of his business if he represented it with his own name** and not a pseudonym, unless it is his deliberate wish to remain anonymous and only known by his products.

There is very little consistency in the posting schedule, which is infrequent and based largely on passing inspiration rather than any committed long-term plans. However, the accounts have a good number of followers to start with, yet **the audience engagement numbers are low and recently on decline**, nonetheless. Especially the Facebook account has had some good ideas for new and varying content, such as questions posed to the audience of what they would like to see more of, a video series on working methods, or the partnerships with other actors, which unfortunately have not been followed through with further.

The image content created for both platforms, and especially on Instagram, has a very good visual style. This is certainly a strength that the product images are interesting to look at and well planned. A signature look and feel in the content contributes to a consistent brand image and voice. Sometimes text content could have benefitted from spell-checking before posting.

4.2   Goals and objectives for social media marketing

Social media planning essentially requires setting the goals the business wants to achieve and then detailing out what needs to be done in order to achieve them. Ultimately, by having a more successful social media presence, Mr. Rodriguez wishes to strengthen online sales and drive more inbound traffic to his Etsy store. So far, he has been updating his social media accounts haphazardly and with little commitment or planning. They are treated more like something that is nice to have and sometimes useful, but not taken seriously as valuable platforms for growing his business. He has wished for better conversion numbers from leads to buying customers but has not had the drive or the inspiration to commit to better utilizing his social media channels for business.

The number one social media goal for Firehawk Forge would be to increase brand awareness to gain visibility, build credibility and establish its brand in its target market. Increased number of interested followers from the right target audience will not only potentially turn into more sales but may also bring in valuable word-of-mouth recommendations in the relevant circles, such as inside and between historical reenactment hobby groups.

As noted, there is already a rather decent following, but it needs to be engaged more with more consistent, planned, and targeted content keeping.

Focus on high customer satisfaction will help build reputation and credibility as a business. Providing good and personalized customer service has already been among the business owner's goals, but he likes to rely more on the technical performance of his products, such as superb product quality, proficiency, and providing life-time warranty, to speak for themselves. Communication with potential buyers has not always gone so smoothly as desired, especially when they are non-committed and averse to the high price range of handmade artisan products.

The forge, being a small one-person business, cannot optimally compete with bigger players in the same field in terms of resources available and production volume, so it may be more profitable to focus on building a reputation and an engaging brand story, and positioning itself in its niche market wisely.

Following the recommendation of LePage & Newberry (2019) presented earlier in sub-chapter 2.2.5., it would be useful for Firehawk Forge to create specific mission statements for each of its social media accounts. This would give focus and motivation to how those channels are used and what their purpose in the bigger picture is.

4.3   Firehawk Forge's target audience

The next step is to have a look at who the followers of Firehawk Forge are and what are their preferred channels. They are the ones the content is catered to and who it should engage and motivate to find out more.

Firehawk Forge does not exactly have a previously designated target audience, since the business owner's understanding of it is only an extremely vague definition of "anyone who is willing to buy these kinds of products and has the money for it". Respectively, he has been creating and posting content mainly based on the idea of what he likes himself and would like to see. As evident from the theory of social media marketing, this might not be a significantly fruitful approach in the long run when trying to reach business goals. The starting point from a business mindset should be in a customer journey beyond one's personal interests and more about who the actual and potential customers are and what it is that they interest themselves in. Especially when this is a business that provides customized products made according to its customers wishes.

The forge carries several different product lines, so determining only one specific target audience is rather complicated. Carpentry items such as wooden coffee tables, pipes and cutting boards are more everyday and universal, as are kitchen knives and hunting knives. Yet there is no obvious large-scale demand, as items like this, in addition to products by other similar type small businesses, have to compete with your typical store-bought mass market products, which are more affordable and easily available anywhere. This product category probably has more success with a group of customers that values traditional arts and unique, handmade items, and maybe usually goes to local arts and crafts markets for those.

Historically accurate weaponry though is quite a specific niche market with a slightly to completely different customer profile. Majority of the people who have shown interest in the swords and other types of blades seem to be people who have an interest in exact replicas of actual historical weapons and who are often very knowledgeable on the topic already. These are usually history reenactors and "living history" hobbyists who like to rec-reate historical lifestyles and gather at festivals and local hobby groups to experience what it would have been like to live in the past. They are often interested in purchasing an exact type of product that is based on real ancient findings with proven evidence of its au-thenticity, though some are less demanding and just want something that looks the part and is nice.

Historically accurate replicas are, however, usually not particularly durable, and therefore are not necessarily do so well suited for real heavy combat, so there is different kind of demand for another type of weaponry. These are meant for such activities as sword fighting or mediaeval combat sports. In many of these, the weapons used still have to ad-here to certain characteristics and guidelines to be considered acceptable. They are also often made to measure to specifically fit their user's physique.

The forge's jewelry items are also made in historical style with the history enthusiast groups in mind, although Thor's hammers and Viking age symbols appeal to an audience interested in New Age paganism and such as well. Forged jewelry is not as delicate and polished as machine-made products of professional high-end jewelers but has a very dif-ferent kind of charm. Small jewelry pieces are more affordable than the forge's other, more strenuous lines of products, and can be more so bought on a whim. They are also great souvenirs to pick up at fairs and festivals.

Because the owner of Firehawk Forge has travelled a lot himself touring craft fairs and festivals in the United States and in Europe gaining many contacts all over, he hopes his

crafts to have an international reach. The high cost of shipping items overseas is a hindrance though. It would be advisable for him to look into the actual geographical demographics of his followers and customers and consider whether to keep his scope international or local, and how that affects his social media marketing content. Facebook and Instagram might also have some differences in their user demographics to take into consideration – where the followers are from, what age group they are and what they are interested in seeing, and adjust the content based on that information.

4.4 Suggestions for the next steps for Firehawk Forge's social media

Recommendations for development for Firehawk Forge's social media channels are presented in this subchapter starting with a general look before moving on to channel specific suggestions. Lastly, the main steps to improvement are highlighted in a summary.

As the business's social media presence has so far had minimal planning and strategy, it might be wise for it to start out with the very basics such as mapping out its mission, vision, and values for the business's social media channels and deciphering how they contribute and serve those each in their own roles.

The brand image and communications of Firehawk Forge's social media channels could arguably use a more unified, business-like look and purpose. The channels should strategically work together as a whole instead of being all mostly separate individual pages without much interaction. A clear, consistent brand image is recognizable to customers and generates trust. An active business that engages in conversations with the community appears more trustworthy, knowledgeable, and gains recognition that makes customers more willing to buy its products. Tangible business cards that the business owner is handing out at events and have his contact details could have links to all social media accounts as well. Additionally, if the idea is to drive customers to the Etsy store, it should be promoted on the profiles.

Depending on the willingness of the business owner to appear publicly under his own name, he should consider adding it to his profiles to connect it with his business and give it more transparency and credibility. Using his name would rightly make sense, since a lot of his brand seems to already be built on his personal image of an adventuring blacksmith and reenactor that gives lectures and appears in sword combat shows. While that is not a bad basis to start writing out a brand story to intrigue the audience, shifting the focus from personal interests to serving the audience and the business objectives could be in order. For someone with Mr. Rodriguez's colourful and often unconventional person, it also pays

to keep in mind that even if showing some of that personality on social media gives the business character and a unique style, there is a distinctive difference between his own voice and the brand voice. A brand voice is always more filtered and deliberate, in line with the values it strives to represent.

As the theory suggests, setting S.M.A.R.T. goals for each of the social media channels and creating a content schedule to help keep posting frequency up and relevant. Having a solid plan for both channels would make coming up with post ideas and keeping the accounts up to date easier and more streamlined. A planned out posting schedule and actively jotting down ideas for future posts could also help coming up with ways to encourage interactions with the community and increase follower engagement. After all, users are more interested in interacting with a page that they know will continuously bring them valuable content and that in turn affects their decision whether to keep following and supporting it.

Because the business owner is a part of the hobby community that is interested in what he has to offer, he can use his involvement to listen to the community to find which are the things that matter to them and they especially appreciate. A separation between personal interests and those of the audience should not be forgotten, of course.

Recommended would also be getting to know the analytics tools of both platforms and how they are best utilized to planning and achieving specific business goals. Following the success of different social media activities might also give motivation to keep up with certain practices, when there is visible evidence of how the efforts are paying off, while also being able to focus on the ones that are actually generating concrete results.

4.4.1 Suggestions specific to Facebook

The graphics on the Facebook page are good and professional looking, but the banner picture could be better suited for the format and using the actual stylized hawk logo for the profile image could be considered.

The profile information could be made more transparent and tangible and introduce the business and its values. Sharing a bit of the brand story, idea, and drive behind the business would make it more approachable to potential customers. Links to the Instagram profile and Etsy store should be added here. Adding a physical location of the business could be considered if it fits the brand image. Being more open with providing information about

the current partnerships could also benefit both parties and contribute to transparency of the business.

A thorough look into the analytics of previous content would help to make decisions on post types, what has attracted the best engagement and is favored by the existing community of followers. Since the engagement number are low, asking the audience what they would like to see more of and experimenting with content could give some insights. Planning out and posting a video series for example seemed like a good novelty idea but would need to be continued on with further to see how they would do with the followers. Videos tend to be quite popular.

Posting frequency would need committing to a more active schedule and planning content beforehand. The recommended posting schedule would be to post once day and to curate or reshare content every other day, optimally around 1 pm to 4 pm.

The customer reviews are a great asset in themselves, but the negative ones would definitely need attending to and a skilful hand in crisis reputation management. Instead of just leaving them be, there needs to be more transparent and informative communication in handling the negative feedback and drama that can deter customers.

4.4.2 Suggestions specific to Instagram

Because the Instagram profile still has more of a look and feel of a personal account, it could use more changes to achieve a credible appearance of a channel for business. The biography text that is now focused on a person and his activities could include a description of the business and what it does from a customer interest point of view. Name of the account, an important profile item that comes up in searches, should be the actual name of the business, Firehawk Forge. Contact information could be more centre and a link to the Etsy store could be placed in the section for a customized short URL on biography to drive traffic there.

Optimally, to match the recommended posting schedule, being prominent and gaining visibility on Instagram would actually require the quite an active pace of one to two posts per day, around 8-9 am and 2 pm. Keeping up with a daily routine would need the editorial content planning calendar. There is also a constant need to be on the lookout for new material for relevant content not to end up running out of ideas.

Alternating with image posts on the feed could be videos and on-the-spot updates using the Stories feature. Community content like group photographs from events and festivals seem to be popular with the followers and are a good way to build community. Here too, it is key to reflect on posts whether they seem relevant to the audience or are more suitable to a personal account. Keeping up experimenting and looking into analytics to find the best hashtags is recommendable.

4.4.3 Summary of suggestions

Keeping the goals and objectives in mind, the business owner should first **start with finding and analyzing his target audience** and their interests to pin down who they are and how to exactly cater to them, attract their attention, and encourage audience engagement. Actively listening the community of existing followers and previous customers will prove to be valuable in finding out where those audiences are and how they could be reached. An important asset is getting to know and learning to use the analytics tools on the platforms and utilizing the data they provide.

After figuring out the audience demographics and their areas of interest, the following step would be **building and positioning a brand** that appeals to this specific target audience. A clear, consistent brand image requires finding a unique brand voice, creating a compelling brand story, and a credible, unified look for the social media profiles and the Etsy store, so they all complement each other, as well as finding the relevant hashtags and key words for the business to maximize visibility. Comparisons and sourcing ideas from competitors could be in order to differentiate.

The business owner should **set S.M.A.R.T. goals for his social media channels** and then when he has formed a solid idea of what he wants his business to be and what he is conveying through its social media presence, he should be able to **start planning varying content and create a content calendar** to keep up with consistent updates. Instead of just providing product updates, there should also be an active effort to **engage with the audience** using the brand voice in comments to build community around the it.

5   Discussion

The objective of this study was to help a small business owner start planning his business's social media strategy by providing information on the theory and the best practices of social media marketing. Justification for the timing for this study is that the commissioning business is on the verge of evolving from more of an occasional hobby into an actual web shop and a profession for the owner. Evidence shows that a lot of continuous work goes into planning and executing a successful strategy.

The next steps following this study would be for the business owner to look into the results himself and start evaluating and developing his social media channels based on the insights found in this study, starting with defining the target audience for his products. He has the relevant analytics available to make decisions on what kind of content works for his business, though the background material for the study gives guidelines and recommendations to begin brainstorming for ideas. The study found many major points for improvement in how the social media channels are set up as well as tried to give insights into how to best approach content creation. It will be interesting to see how the suggestion, if adopted, will contribute to the future of the business.

The building blocks to form an active and successful social media channel for business are consistent posting schedule and engaging the audience with relevant content that encourages conversation and builds community. A lot of the future efforts depend on whether the business will decide to adapt these practices and strive for a stronger social media presence and whether it deems it worth the challenge of committing to keeping up active and lively social media profiles. Strategy planning is an evolving process that requires continuous adapting and monitoring. A major challenge for a one-man business like the Firehawk Forge is the lack of time that goes into keeping the social media channels up to date on the side of all the other work the entrepreneur does for his company. It will take quite a lot of effort to plan and execute daily updates and quality content that catches the audience's attention. At the moment, the business owner is not capable of employing another person to take care of his marketing pursuits and so has to be able to run the social media accounts with his own skill.

Since the business owner is the current social media manager, it might also be useful for him to learn more about algorithms and paid marketing as opposed to organic posts in marketing. Social media marketing is more affordable than other traditional types of marketing efforts but planning a budget for it could help to move things along for a startup business and contribute to finding the relevant target market.

Furthermore, in attempt to better define a brand voice that resonates with the audience, it would be recommendable for Mr. Rodriguez to give some thought to the positioning of his items in the market and specifying what it is that is their unique selling proposition, what makes them especially valuable to the target audience. They are inevitably highly priced items, expensive, a luxury even, but according to his knowledge, affordable in their own class of products. Narrowing down the right niche markets' interests and characteristics will help him in all marketing efforts outside of social media too.

Yet another suggestion for further research would be to take a look into who the business's main competitors are and what they are doing in their social media and how successful they are with their efforts. Conducting a benchmarking study comparing the business to its competition would give a better understanding of its position in the market as well as generate new ideas it could too take part in and benefit from. Initially, in an original outline for the empirical part of this thesis, including a benchmarking study was discussed, but in the process it turned out that the strategy planning needed to be started from the very basic level and therefore the scope of the study needed to be adjusted accordingly.

Working on this study on optimizing the social media use of a small business has provided valuable insights to managing social media for business. The thesis process moved along quickly after the initial steps of narrowing down the topic and the scope, despite the commissioning business not being able to be the most helpful in figuring out objectives and providing data for analysis due to the fact that most of its operations were quite unplanned and tools for analysis remained unfamiliar. Finding sources for the theoretical part was not too difficult, but it became clear that any source material on social media can easily become outdated in a matter of a couple of years, so the recency of the sources or whether they are updated on the regular often contribute to their relevancy. No matter which aspect of it is looked at, keeping up with social media really requires conscious effort.

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