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# Find Your Fit

Maximize Your Social Media Reach at Every Level

**N**atalia Dittmer urges retailers not to forget the social aspect of social media.

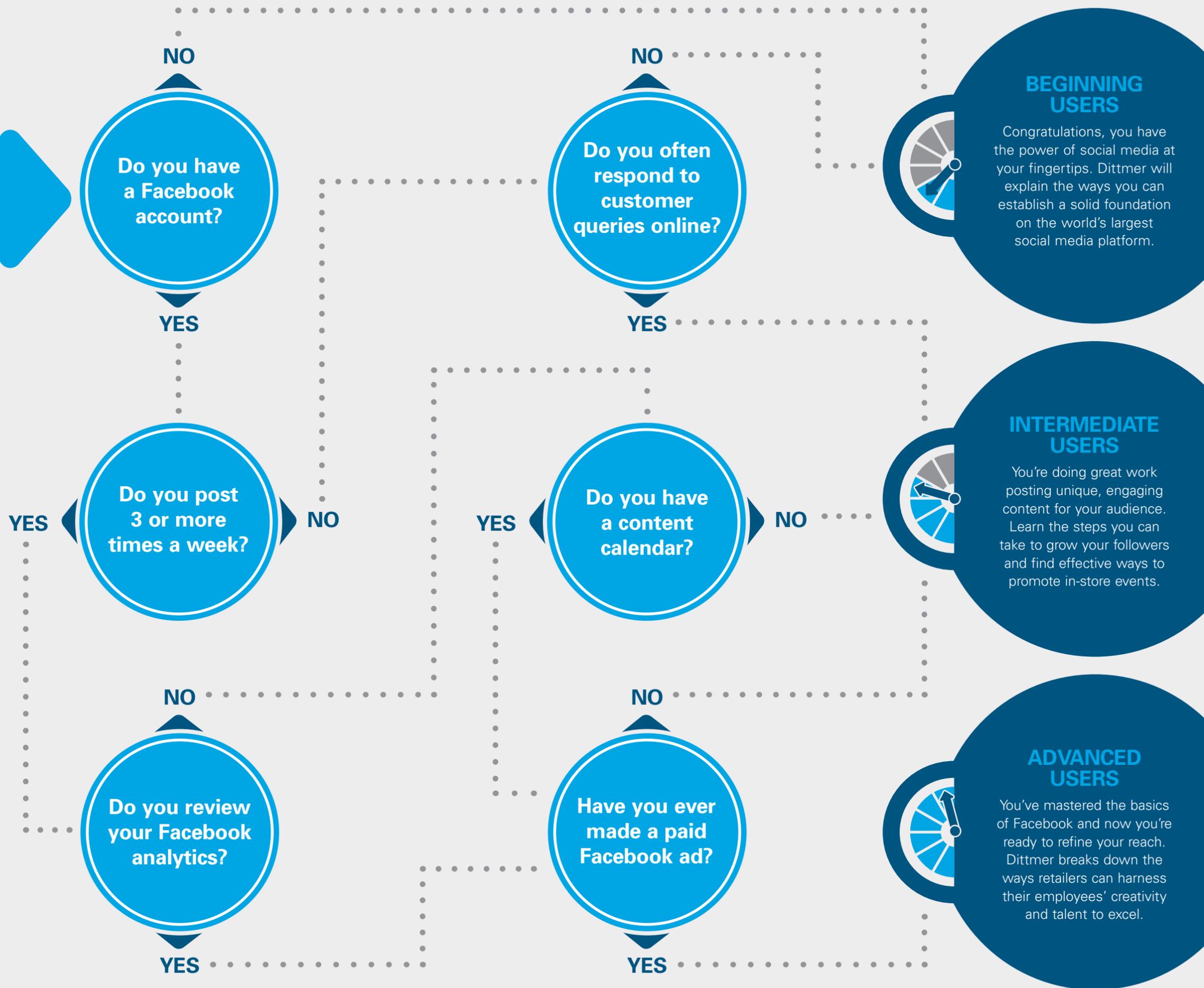
In her role as marketing director for TAL Holdings, an organization that owns eight lumberyards and hardware stores across Oregon and Washington, Dittmer specializes in social media marketing. In all she does, she always aims to tell the business's story authentically and effectively to online audiences near and far.

"Most retailers are selling the same products," she says. "Retailers need to ask themselves what they can do to differentiate. They need to tell customers why they should buy those products from their business and not a competitor."

With 2 billion users and approximately 70 million business accounts, Facebook is a critical small business marketing tool, Dittmer says.

All retailers should consider their Facebook skill level and analyze how they can best use the platform to reach customers. She breaks down three levels of Facebook users and offers tips to help retailers succeed at every stage.

Take a moment to find your own social media fit using the flowchart to the right. Answer the questions and see where you land. No matter your current social media skill level, Dittmer emphasizes that all retailers can sharpen their social media prowess and discover new ways to connect with customers and the community.





# Beginning Social Media User

Dittmer describes beginning Facebook users as people who have a basic knowledge of Facebook's potential, log on infrequently and usually only post information on products.

She advises you to commit to posting regularly as a way to tell your authentic story online in order to connect with customers in a meaningful, organic way.

"Ask yourself what's special about your store," Dittmer says. "What makes you stand out? Focus on those aspects to help guide what you're posting as a beginning user."

Dittmer says she often sees beginning Facebook users posting product information almost exclusively. She warns against relying too heavily on product promotions for Facebook content.

"It's a beginner's mentality to think that one post a week featuring a photo of a product or an endcap is all people want to see," she says. "You have to find a balance between blending your products and your people into your content."

In her role, Dittmer is constantly researching how independent hardware stores are using social media. She says she often finds hardware and lumberyard social media accounts that haven't posted for weeks—or even years.

In Dittmer's opinion, that's a missed opportunity to dig deep into your community and position your business as a valuable community resource.

"Beginning Facebook users have to start somewhere. Even if you only post once a week, stop relying so much on products and start focusing on your team. The big boxes can take a better photo of the same products, but what they don't have are employees who have worked at the same store for 30 years and truly know their customers," she says.

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—*Natalia Dittmer, TAL Holdings*

Dittmer recommends thinking of unique ways to highlight employees on Facebook.

One option is to post updates on employees' work anniversaries. Ask their teammates for a few words about working with the highlighted employee, snap their photo and then you have all you need to create a unique post that breaks out of the rut of posting only product information.

Dittmer says highlighting work anniversaries is a surefire way to add a personal touch to your Facebook posts. It's also a chance to reaffirm your operation's expertise and knowledgeable staff by reminding your Facebook followers that you have many long-term employees.

It's important to remember that any retailer with a smartphone has a high-powered video recording and editing device in their hands. In just a few minutes, you can capture all the audio, video and text notes you need to build a Facebook post that's rich in content.

Above all, Dittmer stresses that users who are thinking of taking the plunge into posting regular Facebook updates and marketing their business to their community at large should know their business's unique story and understand the advantage their employees give them.

"Thinking about your story, your employees and what you love about your community can help you create a plan for how to use Facebook to promote your business to the public," she says. "If a retailer thinks about their company and what makes them proud to be a part of it, that's a great start for a beginning user."

## The Next Steps

- Respond to all customer reviews and comments.
- Find community events you support and highlight those.
- Start using your smartphone to capture video of your employees and store.



## Intermediate Social Media User

If you have established a social media strategy and are exploring analytics and editing tools to enrich your online presence, Dittmer says you're an intermediate user. You should begin exploring analytics and editing tools to enrich their online content.

"At this level, it's about quality, not quantity, of posts," she says. "Intermediate users begin to understand that it's not about posting at specific times on a set schedule; it's about posting quality content."

To post this rich content, Dittmer recommends exploring various professional tools to help turn smartphone-captured photos and videos into eye-catching videos ready to be posted at a moment's notice.

"I use an online video tool called Animoto because it allows even a novice user to make a high-quality video," she says.

The tool includes templates and music to help add extra flair to your videos. Dittmer says she was surprised by how easy it was for her to transform a few snapshots on her phone into a

video she felt proud to post, and that resulted in a flurry of customer engagement.

Another tactic retailers at this skill level should utilize is reviewing their Facebook analytics.

The social media platform makes it easy to quickly review the number of likes, comments and shares individual posts garner. Over time, Dittmer says, you'll start to notice when your followers are most active and what kind of content resonates with them and encourages comments, likes and shares.

Above all, Dittmer says you should begin creating an event page for every in-store event they host. You can create events directly on the website, but Facebook has an app that promotes events to users within a specific radius. Dittmer says that by creating an event page, people who use Facebook Local can find your next Pinewood Derby or Ladies' Night even if they don't follow your business page.

Though larger businesses might have a team of people who post to Facebook and other social media platforms, Dittmer says that at the

intermediate skill level, usually just one person handles posting content. However, it's important to collaborate with your team to get an inside scoop on fun, interesting things that happen within a store.

Dittmer started a policy where any employee can text her photos of in-store events and employees hard at work. All she asks is for a quick prompt on who's in the photo, what's happening and where it took place. After that, she takes care of the rest and posts the content to Facebook. It's one easy-to-follow strategy to get unique content from a network of employees.

Along with using professional tools to help craft rich content, Dittmer says you should interact with customers as often as possible. Whether that's responding to questions, negative reviews or fun comments, acknowledging followers is critical.

"As a business owner, you need to be responsive. If your Facebook page is growing and people are leaving comments, and you don't respond, that's a big problem. Imagine someone coming into your store, asking a question, and not getting any response from an employee," Dittmer says.

She says that you should begin creating an overarching schedule that includes key events for your business and community. This will allow you to plan well in advance of how you'll cover and naturally incorporate your business into some of your community's biggest events.

### The Next Steps

- Check post analytics to gauge what content resonates with followers.
- Establish a budget to promote posts and make paid advertisements.
- Incorporate social media into all your ongoing marketing plans.



## Advanced Social Media User

Advanced users are ready to fully integrate Facebook into their business's marketing plans and establish a budget for promoting key posts throughout the year.

The most advanced Facebook users can also use their rich online presence as a valuable recruiting tool, Dittmer says.

"If someone is researching our company, I want them to visit our social media and see we're a company they want to work for. We're fun, we're active in the community and we highlight our team and our customers," she says. "That activity alone is a great way to attract new talent to your business."

Earlier this year, Facebook revisited how it displays posts to users and began to prioritize posts that included video.

To help your business break through the chatter and reach as large an audience as possible, Dittmer suggests retailers experiment with Facebook Live, the platform's real-time video streaming feature to promote upcoming events, special sales, or just share a peek at a business in action.

Dittmer says retailers shouldn't feel intimidated by live streaming; it's a chance to highlight their business, employees and the events they work hard to host.

She says it's a common misconception that retailers should stream for 20 or 30 minutes. Even streaming for a few minutes in the days leading up to a big event can be an opportunity to promote key details to the community and boost overall turnout.

"Facebook Live lets you build excitement for your events," she says. "By adding video content to your posts, you can boost your message and reach more people organically."

Dittmer also recommends including a charismatic employee or two in the videos. It's a great way to highlight talented staff and instill new skills and confidence in employees.

At this stage, Dittmer says it's important for retailers to establish a budget to begin promoting posts and events on Facebook. Luckily, retailers can reach hundreds of people for pennies on the dollar.

But retailers should think strategically about which posts they promote. Because Facebook advertising is so inexpensive, it can be tempting to promote every post, but Dittmer says inundating your followers can be costly.

"People get tired of seeing paid ads again and again," she says. "Pretty soon you'll be the sponsored ad king and people will tune out. Being wise and intentional about what you post and promote is critical."

Dittmer recommends promoting events, key products and employees who are celebrating special milestones to reinforce your business's expertise.

For retailers who reach the summit of social media success, Dittmer suggests seeking out Facebook groups devoted to discussing the latest social media news and trends.

Dittmer herself belongs to one and says it's an invaluable way to troubleshoot and get advice from experts in the field.

"These groups are like continuing education for social media and I really encourage people to get involved in one," she says. "Ultimately, social media will change. If you join a group and follow that information, you and your business can stay on top." ➔

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### The Next Steps

- Stay up-to-date with Facebook changes by joining a specialized group.
- Brainstorm new ways to highlight your business.
- Pay to promote posts that perform well to broaden your reach and share your best content.