

SocialMedia 101

For Home Performance Professionals.

by Peter Troast, Energy Circle



Web and Marketing Solutions
for the Efficiency Community

Social media is all the rage when it comes to the world of small business marketing. This is because social media is where the people are — Facebook now boasts over 1.1 billion users, with the fastest growing demographic segment being women over 55. This isn't kids' stuff. This is your market.

Whether it's just a passing fad, or a tool that can radically transform the way that you market your business, really depends on 1) how you use it, and 2) what type of business you're trying to market.

We think that because of the unique position of the home performance and residential energy efficiency industry — fast growing, and increasingly standardized under the whole-house approach championed by RESNET and The Building Performance Institute (BPI), and largely information-based (an energy audit, after all, is fundamentally about providing building owners with useful information) — social media can be a particularly useful tool for home performance businesses small and large.

Why?

- There's a large, vibrant, nationwide community of your peers, and they're all on social media.
- People have questions, you have answers. The questions are being asked via social media.
- Home performance business is driven largely by referrals. Social media gives your happy customers a platform from which to refer your business to friends.
- It's fun. (Really.)

This white paper focuses on the social media platforms that we feel are most valuable for home performance professionals — Twitter, Facebook, Google+, and online communities like Home Energy Pros (created by the Department of Energy's Home Energy Saver PRO program in collaboration with Lawrence Berkeley National Labs and Home Energy Magazine) and LinkedIn — and discuss why you should participate, how to get started participating, and advanced techniques for driving your business through these channels.

Part 1: Twitter

Why Twitter Makes Sense for HP Businesses:

Building Your Brand & Reputation Locally: Connecting with your local community on Twitter is a huge perk for companies, like those in the home performance field, whose business is inherently local. And strange as it may seem to a non-Twitter-user, Twitter users tend to be thought leaders and movers in shakers in their communities, so connecting with them can have a potentially huge return on investment.

Connecting with the Home Performance Community Nationally: The community of home performance contractors, energy auditors and building science professionals is vast, and it's growing daily. Twitter is a great place to stay in touch, and to discuss anything from the content at this year's ACI conference to the best way to insulate a cathedral ceiling. (And, by and large, it's a cool group of people.)



Lists are a great way to keep in touch with a specific community on Twitter. This is a screenshot from our list of Home Performance professionals using the platform to promote their businesses, and to stay in touch with other home performance professionals nationwide.

Driving Traffic/Building Links for your Website (SEO): Your Twitter profile will have a link to your website, so each person that looks at your profile has the opportunity to click that link and to check you out. Additionally, each time you share a link through Twitter (e.g. "Check out my new blog post about energy efficiency rebates in TX"), that link has the potential to be "re-tweeted" an infinite number of times; so you could potentially get thousands of page views from a single tweet. Social media links are also gaining more prominence in traditional search engines, which means that having links on Twitter can improve your position in organic (non-paid) search results.

Connecting with the Press: Twitter is full of local journalists and press outlets, and the nature of the platform — which encourages conversation and dialogue — makes it a great place to connect with them. Just be aware that many journalists have one-way Twitter streams (meaning they don't tend to converse with other users, but mainly use Twitter to broadcast links), so look for the journalists in your region that

interact with other users more frequently. Making friends with journalists on Twitter gives you a hand up when you release your next press release, or when said journalists are looking for a good local story.

News and Learning: Another reason to use Twitter is simply to stay on top of news and events, and to find interesting articles and blog posts that you may not have otherwise found. The network of peers you create on Twitter — each of whom is likely to have interests similar to your own — essentially curate the web for you, picking out the best and most relevant blog posts, newspaper articles, videos, etc, for you and your business.

For Fun: Yes, really, Twitter can be fun. Check out this tweet from Energy Vanguard. (For the record, Energy Circle CEO Peter Troast was the first one to respond, for which he was awarded “an imaginary adult beverage.”)



Twitter is a fun way to stay in touch with professional peers across the country.

Have a Strategy:

Who will do your company's tweeting? You, or an employee? Who will be your target audience? How formal or informal should your tweets be? What kind of links should you share? How much time should you put into finding new followers, vs. engaging with your current followers? Should you offer specials or discounts to your followers?

These are all questions that you should ask yourself before diving in, the answers of which will comprise your Twitter strategy. After all, while it's not terribly difficult, engaging in social media does require some time commitment, and nobody likes wasting time.

We believe that the most effective Twitter strategy for home performance pro's should consist, at least, of the following:

Connect with the thought leaders in the field. Find them at <http://twitter.com/#/list/EnergyCircle/homeenergyefficiencypros>, and at <http://twitter.com/#/HESProfessional/homeenergypros>.

Connect with the influential voices in your community. Do a location-based search at TwitterGrader.com, which ranks the influence of Twitter users on a 100-point scale. Use your discretion here, but start connecting with the thought leaders, innovators, and community leaders in your area.

Connect with energy-curious homeowners in your community. Try doing an advanced search at search.twitter.com/advanced for people near you talking about things like insulation and high heating bills. Send them a shout out, direct them to your website.

Make friends with journalists in your area. Listorious.com is a great place to connect with the press; just beware that many journalists tweet one-way, so keep an eye out for those that are willing to engage in conversation and engage them.

Engage. This means: don't just send out random tweets and expect a thousand followers instantly. Talk to people — there are a lot of good conversations going on out in the Twitterverse, and your voice is more than welcome. Join in. Ask questions. Give answers. Make jokes. You'll get the hang of it.

Content Creation Ideas for Twitter:

So the first reaction that many people have when discussing social media is "What should I say?," or "Who is going to care what I'm doing?"

This is understandable, of course, but you work in the energy field. And you work in the building field. These are interesting fields, and more people than you think would be curious to hear what you have to say. Here are a few ideas:

What you came across in a building today. Big air leaks, missing insulation, dead animals, a Civil War bugle... whatever. Anything that would pass for interesting conversation back at the office or over the dinner table would pass for interesting conversation on Facebook or Twitter. Upload a photo and toss it out there.

Links to news stories of relevance. If you find an article that you like on The Wall Street Journal Online, The New York Times, Daily5Remodel, Fine Homebuilding, Energy Circle, Cigar Weekly (again - whatever floats your boat), share it! A quick annotation is fine, and many websites are set up to automatically write a tweet for you when you hit the Twitter icon. Give it a try.



LeahThayer 3 Ways to Make Energy Efficiency Emotional
<http://energysavvy.com/blog>
about 23 hours ago via web

A simple description and link to an article of interest, or a post on your home page, is an easy way to create content on Twitter.

Links to content on your website. This one is especially important. If you're not sure how to keep the content on your website fresh, be sure to visit the Energy Circle PRO blog, and to pick up a copy of our White Paper on (EDIT: WHATEVER THIS ONE'S CALLED). If you're not ready to commit to a regular blog schedule, think about adding photo galleries, short videos, or "News" stories (which can be like blog posts, but without the psychological weight of the word "blog.") This is, after all, the ultimate goal of your

presence on each of these social media channels: to get people to your website, and then to get them to fill out your “contact” form and schedule an energy audit.

Re-Tweets. Find a trusted source of folks (again, see our list of home energy efficiency professionals on Twitter at @EnergyCircle/homeenergyefficiencypros) and see what they’re all tweeting about. Re-Tweets are a great way to get into the habit of using Twitter and finding your groove. People also appreciate it when you re-tweet one of their posts, so it’s a good way to make friends.

Opinion. Tread into opinion in a way that’s comfortable for you, but remember that efficiency is “motherhood and apple pie,” and that the purpose of using social media platforms is to make friends (who, hopefully, will turn into customers). Best to avoid airing any opinions you wouldn’t air over the kitchen table in a prospective client’s house.

Feel free to give us a shout @EnergyCircle if you have any more questions; we’d be happy to help out.

Part 2: Facebook

While we’re seeing much more discussion and engagement in the home performance and energy conservation space on Twitter than on Facebook, the simple fact remains that Facebook is far-and-away the biggest, most important social media platform in the world. Americans spend more time on Facebook than any other website, it gets more traffic than Google, and with more than billion users, if it were a country, it would be the third largest country in the world.

Why Should You Be On Facebook?

- With more than 500 million active users, if it were a country, it would be the third largest country in the world.
- With more than 150 million active users in the U.S., nearly ½ the U.S. population is on Facebook.
- The majority of Facebook users are over the age of 25, and 30% are over 35. This is the homeowner market.
- Having your business’s “NAP” (Name, Address, Phone Number) stamped on Facebook is an increasingly important “citation” from an SEO standpoint: it signals to Google and other search engines that you are a legitimate business, and helps your chances of showing up in search results.

The Basics:

Getting set up. While there are a number of routes that a business can take to establish a presence on Facebook — including setting up a “personal page” for the business, which gives the page the same functionality as an individual user; a “group,” which people can choose to join, and which, for some time, was the preferred vehicle of choice for businesses and organizations — the best route to take today, hands down, is to set up a simple business page (these used to be called “fan pages,” but since Facebook changed the “become a fan” functionality to a simple, universal “Like” function, the fan page terminology no longer applies.) This is the route that we recommend.

Content. Content on Facebook is an ongoing task, but you’ll want to begin by populating the page itself with keyword-rich content that describes your business. Mentioning key terms like “energy audit” and “insulation” in various sections of the page will help with search engine optimization, and also help visitors quickly gather information about your business. For branding purposes, we suggest using your company logo as your profile picture: the more someone sees your logo, the more likely they are to remember it (and to think of it next time they’re considering an energy audit or insulation work). Beyond this initial, static content, you’ll want to regularly post status updates (much like the “tweets” on Twitter;

we'll discuss some content creation ideas later). These updates will show up in the News Feed (essentially the home page for each Facebook user) of everyone that has "liked" your page. Regularly updating your page will keep your business on people's radar.

Edge Rank. Well, we should say, *ideally*, your status updates will appear in the News Feed of each person that has liked your page; but it's a little more complicated than that. Content on Facebook is evaluated according to something called "Edge Rank," which is similar to Google's "Page Rank" in that it determines ... "Edge Rank" ... Top News vs. Most Recent.. ... etc etc



Cozy Home Performance, LLC shares a blog post about a case study in Amherst, Massachusetts on their Facebook page. Sharing links to your website is an easy way to keep your Facebook page active, and your community engaged.

Suggesting to friends. When you first set up your Facebook page, it's a good idea to use the "suggest to friends" function (currently located in the right sidebar) to suggest to your friends, colleagues and family that they "like" the page. How far you go with this is up to you; just be aware that it can feel intrusive for someone that doesn't know about a business to have their email inbox flooded with these suggestions, so exercise discretion. Once your page gets more well-established, you can rely largely on incoming traffic to increase your likes.



Having good, keyword-rich content in each section of your business's Facebook profile helps your page's performance in search engines, and helps visitors quickly gather information about your business.

Advanced Strategies for Improving Your “Likes”:

It's important to view your Facebook page as a means, and not an end: your goal is to improve your brand's presence in your community and gain customers, not just to get people to like your Facebook page. Still, “likes” are important, because once someone likes your page, your content will regularly be displayed in their News Feed. If they “like” your status, or comment on it, that will be displayed on their profile page, and subsequently in the News Feed of each of their friends, who will then be more likely to visit your page, “like” it, and continue the cycle.

It's really not as complicated as it sounds. Anyway, here are a few advanced strategies for getting people to like your page, beyond the simple “suggest to friends” button:

Landing pages. Landing pages are a great, creative way to turn visitors to your Facebook page into fans. They work like this: when someone visits your page, they're greeted by a custom image encouraging them to press the “like” button. Once they do, the image disappears and they get to view all the great content on the page. This “call to action,” which can be as forward as you'd like, acts as an extra kick to turn visitors into fans, and can be supplemented with special offers like “Like this page and be entered to win a free home energy evaluation.” A Google search will turn up a number of resources to help you create a custom landing page.

Linking to your Facebook page from your website. Linking to your Facebook page from your website should be a no-brainer, but there are a number of ways you can go about it. Offering incentives such as “like us on Facebook and receive a 10% discount on an energy audit” can be effective; but the simplest way to go about this is to simply insert Facebook's logo somewhere on your site — a sidebar is always a safe option — and create a live-link from the logo to your Facebook page.

Add a “Like This” button to your website content. A relatively new feature of Facebook (which caused quite a stir in the web marketing / SEO community a few months back) is the ability to incorporate

its "Like" button to any content on any web page. To do so, you simply copy and paste an HTML code into your site's content (get a customized code here: <http://developers.facebook.com/docs/reference/plugins/like/>), and each visitor to the page where it exists will have the option to click the Like button. If they do, that will be displayed in the News Feed of all of their Facebook friends, who will then, of course, be tempted to visit the page as well.

Content Creation Ideas for Facebook:

Content creation is essential for having a vibrant Facebook page that will attract new visitors, and keep customers coming back and visiting the page regularly. But, similarly to Twitter, new users are often perturbed about how to create content that they feel will actually be of interest to visitors. (A common refrain goes: "I have no use for Facebook, I don't care what anybody is eating for lunch.")

The truth is, good content that's of interest to readers is relatively easy to come up with for home performance professionals and energy auditors. After all, it's a new field, that many people aren't aware of, and yet it's highly relevant to their lives.

A few ideas for content creation on Facebook:

Photo Galleries. Work that you've recently completed, tell-tale signs of poor energy performance (snow melting off roofs, for example), and wacky things that you've come across at job sites are all easy for you, and entertaining and informative for readers.

Educational Blurbs. Learn something neat in a recent RESNET continuing ed class? Put it on Facebook. Find a cool news article? Put a link on Facebook. Add a little commentary to give it context, and to add your personal voice.

Deals and Promotions. As we've said, Facebook is where the people are. Advertising special promotions and offers on Facebook can be equally, if not more effective than traditional advertising.

Integrate Twitter & Facebook Content. A number of tools allow you to publish simultaneously on Twitter, Facebook and other social networking platforms. The quickest and easiest for linking Twitter and Facebook is probably this one: <http://www.facebook.com/twitter/>.



Virginia Home Performance



Houses that really need VHP's help
17 new photos

 December 18, 2010 at 9:50am · Share

Part III: Google+

After All, It's Google

Google+ was released in 2011 as Google's answer to Facebook and Twitter. Very similar in functionality to Facebook,

Part IV: Online Communities & Blogs

Online Communities

Online communities are a great place to connect with like-minded individuals and fellow home performance professionals from across the country. Think of them like an ACI National Conference that's happening all the time.

Right now, there are two that are particularly vibrant for the residential energy efficiency crowd:

LinkedIn. LinkedIn is a more professionally focused social networking site than Facebook or Twitter, so it's more useful for connecting with fellow professionals than for attracting new customers. One of the great features that helps you do this is the "groups" function of the site, which lets you create or join a group around any given topic. Within each group, anyone can start a conversation, of which other group members will be notified. They're a great place for question/answers, discussing common problems and solutions, etc. The group of choice for the whole-house energy crowd right now is the RESNET BPI - Energy Audit and Home Performance group.

Home Energy Pros. Started by the Lawrence Berkeley National Lab in collaboration with the Department of Energy's Home Energy Savers PRO program and Home Energy Magazine, Home Energy Pros is a social networking site dedicated exclusively to home performance contractors, energy auditors and other residential energy professionals. It's relatively new, but growing fast (1,170 members as of this writing). Functionality includes groups, forums, photo galleries, video galleries, and more. It's a good, fun place to connect with your professional peers.

Blogs & Blog Commenting

While we encourage blogging as a way to get fresh, keyword-rich content onto your site to help with search engine optimization and to attract new visitors to your site (see our White Paper on website optimization for more information about this), you don't necessarily need to commit to an exhaustive blogging schedule to have a blog page that draws traffic and increases conversion. A simple, short post from time to time will help your website's search performance. (Consider labeling your blog page "News" rather than "Blog" if you're hesitant about committing to "blogging.")

In addition to creating a blog or news page on your own site, participating in blogs related to the home performance and energy efficiency industry is a great way to put your business's name on the map, to establish yourself in the field, to draw traffic to your site, and to increase the chance that you will be the first one to come to mind when someone asks for a recommended energy auditor or home performance contractor in your area. Just take a little time to learn the ropes before you dive in and comment on every

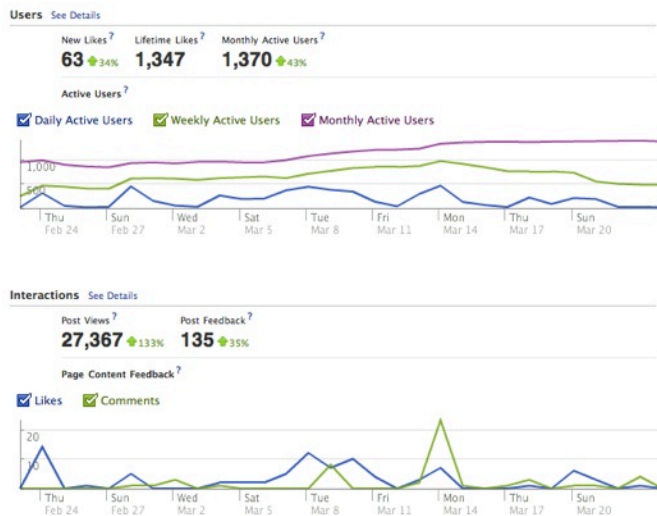
your website within your comment if you have content that's relevant to the discussion (many blog platforms will also create a live link between your name as it appears in the comment and your site's URL), but remember that just getting your name out into the blogosphere, and onto the radar of prominent bloggers in the field, has value on its own.

Part V: Metrics & Analytics

Metrics and analytic tools may not be relevant until you've dug into any particular platform for a while, but they can be very helpful in determining where your social media efforts are succeeding, and where they could use improvement.

TwitterRater.com is a free tool that ranks your influence on Twitter on a 100-point scale; bit.ly, a URL shortening tool, provides data for each link you shorten that includes how many times that link was opened. Other popular Twitter analytics tools include Klout, Twinfluence, Tweetpsych, and TweetEffect.

Facebook's "Insights" tool provides great metrics, from week over week and month over month comparison of page "likes" to statistics about how many people viewed a given post, and the percent of viewers that responded to that post in the form of a "like" or a comment.



Facebook's "Insights" tool provides valuable information for businesses using the social media platform, including month-over-month data and information about feedback on your posts.

For More Information

For more information about advanced social media and web marketing strategies, be sure to visit the Energy Circle PRO blog at www.energycircle.com/pro.

Oh, and be sure to friend us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter (@EnergyCircle) as soon as you're up and running.

About Energy Circle Pro

What We Believe

Our belief is that the residential building energy efficiency opportunity will be led by a new breed of service providers—knowledgeable about building science, skilled in construction, exceptional at customer service, working house by house and developing custom approaches—that will succeed by building long term consultative relationships with homeowners. Our mission at Energy Circle is to use our team's deep past experience in business strategy, strategic marketing, brand creation, web and software development, design and writing to support these emerging companies. We recognize that it's very difficult to maintain a solid business development effort while spending long days diagnosing and fixing buildings. We also recognize that the energy efficiency business, while all the rage, isn't making anyone rich right now.

Our Solution

So we've built Energy Circle PRO as a smart, low cost set of tools and services that help energy auditors, home performance contractors and other energy efficiency professionals drive their businesses. Our platform enables contractors to easily manage their marketing, maintain a dynamic online presence, qualify leads, and take advantage of online inbound and outbound marketing opportunities without wasting time or learning a new and complex skill set. We aim to charge as little upfront as possible (just enough to try to recoup our development costs) and will build our business on providing cost effective, powerful modules and services charged on an affordable monthly subscription basis. Fixed prices, no surprises. We're listeners. We use Agile development as our software philosophy, and the agile mandate extends throughout our organization. We're perpetually curious--constantly probing the world and our customers for their needs, sorting out the best ideas, and acting quickly.

About the Author

Peter Troast, Founder/CEO, leads the Energy Circle team, is a passionate advocate for energy efficiency and drives innovation for both Energy Circle PRO and the growing selection of hand picked products within the Energy Circle store. He contributes to the popular Energy Circle blog for home performance professionals nationally, maintains the EnergyCircle presence on twitter, and is a frequent presenter at national conferences on topics of energy efficiency marketing and communication, use of social media and energy monitoring. He currently serves on the marketing and/or communications committees of the Maine Association of Building Efficiency Professionals (MABEP), Northeast Sustainable Energy Association (NESEA) and Efficiency First.

Angered by profligate 765KV powerlines in upstate NY, he dropped out of college at 19 to work for Friends of the Earth in Washington, where he had the amazing experience of sharing an office with Amory Lovins. It's taken a while, but thanks to mentors like Amory, David Brower and others along the way, he's ecstatic to be back working exclusively on energy issues. In prior business life he was: co-founder/ Managing Director of Moulded Fibre Technology (recycled packaging startup acquired in simultaneous IPO by UFP Technologies, Nasdaq: UFPT), Strategic Principal, VIA Group (professional services, marketing consulting), VP Marketing & Brand Strategy, American Skiing Company (a resort consortium sold at historic multiples), and a cofounder/head of internet of FetchDog.com (a VC backed e commerce site for dog products and information.) He is a graduate of the Resource Economics program at UC Berkeley where he studied in the Energy and Resources Group.