

# HOUSTON★CHRONICLE

## PIN YOUR INTERESTS AND LURE AUDIENCE



Jacqueline Taylor, Deputy Director, Strategic Operations, Texas Gulf Coast Small Business Development Center Network, shares her expert business advice in her bi-weekly column seen in the Houston Chronicle.

**Q.** My understanding of Pinterest is that it's kind of an online bulletin board that people use to display things they like. Would a business benefit from using it, perhaps to display their products?

**A.** Your understanding of Pinterest is on target. Pinterest users find images and videos online that they like, and then "pin" them on their Pinterest boards, just like they'd use a thumbtack to post pictures on a "real" bulletin board. Users can organize their boards by topic, so depending on their interests, they might have a board that displays pictures of pets, one for a collection of recipes, and one for ideas for a project such as planning a wedding.

When other users find pins they like, they can repin them to their own boards. All that repinning means that there's a good potential for hundreds of users to see an original pin, and that's where the value of Pinterest for a business comes into play.

Of course, Pinterest isn't going to be the best bet for every business. If you sell heavy duty lawn equipment you might not attract much interest, but if you deal in home décor or designer fashions, you're likely to quickly gain a following. Go to <http://business.pinterest.com> to get a feel for what other types of businesses are successfully using the site.

If you do decide to get on board, there are a host of ways to create boards that will promote your business. You can of course build a board featuring your products, but Pinterest isn't really the place for the hard sell. You'll want boards that will build your brand and drive traffic to your website.

Pinterest is all about the visual, so think about what pictures and images would appeal to your target customer and make them want to repin what you've posted, which is how word spreads about your business. You might pin behind-the-scenes pictures of your company or your employees, lifestyle tips related to your product, testimonials from your customers, or pictures of your clients using your products. Just be sure it all links back to your website so that pinners can learn more about your company or easily buy your products if they so choose. And if you're pinning customer quotes or pictures, be sure to get permission first.



The Texas Gulf Coast Small Business Development Center (TGC SBDC) Network serves 32 counties in Southeast Texas. The program is anchored by a vibrant office facility in midtown Houston and supported by fourteen centers located with or sponsored by colleges and universities and economic development organizations throughout the Gulf Coast. The TGC SBDC Network focuses on providing business training and advising to start-up entrepreneurs, emerging businesses, and firms needing strategies for high growth. Professional business advisors work with client companies to assess feasibility of ideas and business models, develop business plans, identify funding opportunities, prepare loan and financing packages, and analyze financial results. Business advising is supplemented by a wide range of training classes and seminars concentrating on growing a successful business. Workshops are taught by experienced businessmen and women who blend formal learning and real-world experiences into practical curriculum.

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