eModeration
The Complete Pinterest Guide for Brands
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From weddings to dream homes to bucket lists, Pinterest’s user-created and curated mood boards are a fascinating phenomenon to the social media community. You might be wondering how to harness the power of Pinterest’s visual pinners for your brand and marketing efforts. In this guide, we’ll take a look at different aspects of Pinterest and how they relate to brands.

Part I: Just what is Pinterest, anyway? .................................................................4

Part 2: Optimizing Content For Pinterest .............................................................6
- The PinIt Button ................................................................................................6
- It’s All About the Visual ..................................................................................6
- Trust Your Bloggers .......................................................................................7
- Watermark Your Image ..................................................................................7
- Use Appealing Themes ..................................................................................7

Part 3: Participating on Pinterest as a Brand Curator .............................................8
- Getting Started ...............................................................................................8
- Show Your Lifestyle and your Brand Taste Aesthetic ....................................8
- Give Tutorials .................................................................................................8
- Use it as a Focus Group ..................................................................................9
- Show Your Core Values ..................................................................................9
- Show Your ‘Behind the Scenes’ .....................................................................9
- Campaigns and Contests ..............................................................................9
Curate Your Own Content...........................................................................................................9
Part 4: Making the Most of Pinterest - Tips and Tricks............................................................10
  Include Pricing Info..................................................................................................................10
  Use Keywords in Descriptions.................................................................................................10
  Search Your Name ..................................................................................................................10
  Search for Mentions .................................................................................................................10
  "Liking"....................................................................................................................................11
  @symbol ..................................................................................................................................11
  Reward Your Fans ....................................................................................................................12
  Connecting Platforms ...............................................................................................................12
Part 5: 100+ Brands on Pinterest ............................................................................................13
  Food and Cooking ..................................................................................................................14
  Cooking Magazines ................................................................................................................14
  Television ..................................................................................................................................14
  Journalism ...............................................................................................................................15
  Fashion and Lifestyle Magazines ..........................................................................................15
  Sports .......................................................................................................................................15
  Apparel .......................................................................................................................................16
  Retailers .....................................................................................................................................16
  Beauty and Fashion ................................................................................................................17
  Celebrities/Tastemakers ..........................................................................................................17
  Travel .......................................................................................................................................17
  Publishing ...............................................................................................................................18
  Non-Profits ..............................................................................................................................18
  Colleges and Universities ......................................................................................................19
  Miscellaneous ..........................................................................................................................19
  Pinterest Boards about Brands ..............................................................................................19
About eModeration ....................................................................................................................20
Part I: Just what is Pinterest, anyway?

Pinterest, the by-invite-only visual social sharing network, has seen impressive growth since its introduction in March 2010. The brainchild of Paul Sciarra, Evan Sharp and Ben Silbermann, Pinterest’s mission is to “connect everyone in the world through the ‘things’ they find interesting. Alexa now cites it as the 32nd most popular website in the United States. Daily, visitors spend more than 11 minutes on the site, showing up rival Twitter on this metric by more than 50%. As an aside, it looks as though Pinterest is monetizing their site early on: rumour has it that the site is quietly generating revenue by modifying user submitted pins using a service called skimlinks. If someone clicks through the picture from Pinterest and makes a purchase, Pinterest gets paid.

Whereas Twitter is focused on text via microblogging, Pinterest is fuelled by image curation. The screengrabs, infographics, cartoons, and visual inspirational quotes that sometimes make their way to Facebook find a true home with Pinterest, where members are encouraged to pin, organize, share, and sort all the individual visual pieces of internet ephemera to create a kind of collective stream of visual memes. Pinterest is a little like Tumblr, in that it starts with a photo. But instead of presenting one photo at a time in the Tumblr style, Pinterest photos or “pins” gain context from being sorted by their pinners into “boards” of similar items or concepts for presentation.

The active members of Pinterest browse, pin, and repin to experience things that are interesting and relevant, to capture visual images that surface in their web wanderings or that were surfaced because of friend curation – whiling away time in an aspirational or dreaming way. But they also are finding things that impact everyday life: crafts projects, planning birthday parties, designing a home on a budget. As their onboarding email says, “Pinterest is as much about discovering new things as it is about sharing.” Topics that are fantastical and immensely practical are equally at home on Pinterest.

If you are thinking that all of this sounds suspiciously similar to what you did as a teenager with a piece of posterboard and your favorite magazines, you are right. Pinterest taps into that same human trait of dreaming by sorting activity that already exists in real life, from brides dog-earing bridal magazines, to home cooks building bookmark files of “someday” recipes, to interior designers collecting fabric swatches and paint samples. The Pinterest platform allows all of that activity and more to happen in a collective sharing way that is intensely visual and equally as engaging.
It is possible to build a robust following and a sense of community while posting to Pinterest on behalf of a brand, as long as the brand curator participates in a genuine way. It is important to remember that Pinterest is about individual expression and sharing, not about selling or broadcasting. Pinterest’s Etiquette Guide stresses that self-promotion is frowned upon. You’ll notice as you dive into the Pinterest platform that there is no easy way to search for a brand as a voice.

In this stage of Pinterest development, Brands are expected to behave as the individual participants of Pinterest do. Pinterest is thought to have a female-skewed demographic. Consumer-facing and female-centric brands have done well on this platform. Respect for the core users of Pinterest is important. In our interviews, we discovered many active pinners refuse to engage with a brand’s pins on principle unless they find a connection to a person or point of view behind the brand name. A brand that tries to swim in the Pinterest waters without understanding the core user will find that there is not an audience for a broadcast or promotional kind of pinning. The members of Pinterest will simply ignore the brand pins and boards that they feel go against the spirit of Pinterest.

There are two main ways social media managers and internal brand advocates can harness Pinterest for brand promotion: by optimizing the brand content to be appealing to the growing network of Pinterest participants, and by joining Pinterest as a participant/brand curator. The first takes incorporating the Pinterest aesthetic into account when creating and publishing visually on the web, but is low-maintenance from a social media management standpoint. The second approach of being an active brand curator takes a great deal of energy and a regular flow of content, but has the advantage of using “push button” technology.

Whether active use of Pinterest is best left to the industries that are a natural fit with the interests of Pinterest pinners is a question only time and use can answer. In this five part series of Pinterest, we will take a look at how to optimize content for use on Pinterest, regardless of brand participation, the ins and outs of joining Pinterest as a brand curator, tips and tricks that help build a Pinterest community, and specific examples of how brands are using Pinterest today.

image courtesy of frangipanidesignssydney.blogspot.com
Part 2: Optimizing Content For Pinterest

At its core, Pinterest is a visual social bookmarking service. Its masonry style layout presents material in a pleasing way. Pinterest relies on user-created, high quality visual imagery from the web along with an addictive UX. The competitive social aspect of the service help keep the taste level of the participants elevated. But without strong content from the web, the service would not exist.

It is possible for a brand to choose to participate in Pinterest by providing and promoting its own strong, visual content via traditional social media measures and choose to not take the additional step of direct participation as a brand curator. In doing so, the brand would be trusting its savvy brand advocates to recognize and site the content that is readily available. This content can be presented along traditional channels: Facebook, Twitter pic, blog, etc. Pinterest serves as a niche network, not a global replacement. Active pinners are also savvy web surfers. If you provide it and it is beautiful, optimized, and useful, it is very likely your content will end up on Pinterest.

The PinIt Button

There are four main ways a product’s image might appear on Pinterest – by screenshot, by direct url, by PinIt bookmarklet, and by PinIt button. If a participant on Pinterest finds your product uncredited via a blogger’s screenshot or by an image search, the trackback to a direct url on an e-commerce or product information site will be lost. The simplest way to prevent this from happening is to incorporate the PinIt button on ecommerce sites, much the way Abe’s Market, Etsy, and Martha Stewart have with the PinIt button displayed along side the product information.

It’s All About the Visual

The images themselves are the main allure of pinboards, even though a url might have a great deal of text behind it. An image that has strong appeal to a Pinterest member is one that is powerful and emotive. Beautiful photography with good lighting and strong composition, quirky details highlighted, visuals with unexpected twists, quotes with powerful words and interesting typography, images of people that present a powerful or universal emotion, sophisticated color presentation - appealing and inspiring are the Pinterest themes. Without an appealing visual, a link is unlikely to be repinned, even if it contains engaging text content.
Trust Your Bloggers
Continue your current efforts in social media, blogging and blogger outreach. Pinterest participants are more likely to respond to a trusted individual’s pin about your brand than a direct overture from a brand about its own product on Pinterest. Bloggers are early adopters of Pinterest, are comfortable trusting their “eye” when it comes to personal curation, and love to share their passions with a wide audience. Pinterest is turning out to be a great driver of traffic for bloggers, so most savvy bloggers are happy to spend time on the platform.

Watermark Your Image
Before finding a home on Pinterest, images sometimes lose their source information as they travel around the web. To better help your audience locate your product information, consider discreetly watermarking photos that are used for social media promotion with the source website and/or product information.

Use Appealing Themes
Be seasonal. Pinterest reflects life. The week of January 22, the most popular pins included homemade valentine treats in with strawberry and chocolate in preparation for Valentine’s Day, exercise and health inspiration as part of New Year resolution behavior (bathing suit, healthy food recipes,) and gardening prep photos. Include human truths. Recognize human truths and find the humor in them. Themes that resonate on Pinterest: total looks, food, beauty, love, family, inspiration, organization, crafts, how-to, design, aspirational/dreams.
Part 3: Participating on Pinterest as a Brand Curator

Pinterest’s current population is made up of an interesting mix of designers, bloggers, moms, fashionistas, and early tech adopters. As the site grows, so does the userbase. Some brands are using currently using Pinterest, but with a new medium, there is a level of experimentation to even the most polished effort. Below are tips on getting started with Pinterest as a brand curator.

Getting Started

On Pinterest, full, rich content boards to better than sparse ones. For brands, a steady feed of newly pinned or repinned content is better than one mad set-up dash and then a dusty account. The one exception to the above is in claiming a brand address. It is far better to claim an account for your brand’s name now, even if you have yet to identify if your brand is a good candidate for Pinterest participation, than to leave your brand’s name unclaimed and available for a potential or accidental brand-jacking. (On Pinterest, “Time” and “Time_Magazine” produce decidedly different results.)

Show Your Lifestyle and your Brand Taste Aesthetic

Getting started on Pinterest can be a daunting task. Pinterest designer and co-founder Evan Sharp sums it up: “For most consumer brands, the idea behind your brand makes sense on Pinterest.” Whole Foods follows this advice particularly well. Boards focused on gardening, recycling, and world charities add value and context to their brand. West Elm is another company that makes use of this strategy, repinning user-sourced content to their own inspirational boards with titles like “Globalist” and “Chevron Stripes.” Other Pinterest users “follow” West Elm once they discover they have been repinned and/or followed by the taste making brand.

Give Tutorials

Hobbyists, bakers, crafters, designers, and other “hands-on” driven people love to use Pinterest as a source book for making visually appealing projects. Brands can leverage this desire by making short tutorials on the use of a product and presenting it either through a photo tutorial that is easily understandable when in pin form, a photo plus content that give clear how-to instructions (do-it-yourself, recipes, crafts,) or by making use of the ability to pin YouTube videos.
Use it as a Focus Group

Pinterest can be used as a focus group by watching what your followers pin, as well as watching what popular pins in your category or industry reflect about current trends. Chobani watches repinned recipes as a source for possible test kitchen candidates. Nordstrom watches for surges in popularity measured by direct engagement (pins and likes) for trends and styles.

Show Your Core Values

For a brand curator, creating different boards on Pinterest can help show the different sides of its personality and its core values. Chobani uses this strategy effectively in its Pinterest boards, championing Chobani Moms on one board and inspiring fitness on another. Cabot Cheese displays its core values in the subjects it curates – Farmer Pride, Vermont, and Cow themed boards receive equal attention to the food recipe and photography boards.

Show Your ‘Behind the Scenes’

Not all content needs to be repinnable to be worthwhile. Some brands are finding value in using Pinterest as a visual diary, showing behind the scene photos and pictures of staff in a format that is personal and appealing. Time Magazine uses a static board to show off a visually cohesive set of staff profile photos with short attached bios. Tarte Cosmetics shows off staff photos and industry snaps on its “Tartelette Takes” pinboard.

Campaigns and Contests

Marketers are beginning to explore how Pinterest can be leveraged for limited-time campaigns and contests. It is a slippery slope to navigate, as participants of Pinterest are suspicious of brands that engage for self-promotion. Early adopter Land’s End saw success with its “Pin It to Win It” holiday campaign, as did Tarte Cosmetics with its “Pinning on the Glitz” sweepstakes.

Curate Your Own Content

While Pinterest frowns on self-promotion, some massive scale e-commerce retailers are natural fits for self-curation. Using their e-commerce urls, both Nordstrom and Bergdorf Goodman curate their own content, taking their vast inventories and linking individual products into smaller themes like “Seventies” and “Glam” look books that put content together visually in away that is not possible on their shopping sites.
Part 4: Making the Most of Pinterest - Tips and Tricks

A relatively young network, some features and tools are a little creaky. Pinterest’s search feature is less than powerful. Nothing about Pinterest is optimized for brand or marketing use. Other features could also use improvement.

The site changes often, so be sure to keep an eye on the Pinterest blog for updates and new features. Below are a series of tips to help you make the most of your time with Pinterest.

Include Pricing Info

Pinterest’s site includes a section for users to browse for gifts (for others, for themselves) by price. To appear in this section, a pin must include pricing information in the description so that the pins will repopulate in the gift selection. If pinning your own content, add a “$” or a “£” to the Pin’s description and make sure the url is a direct link to the product. Be sure to make use of Pinterest’s search feature so that when your content is shared and is discussed on Pinterest, your community manager can organically join the conversation. Often times, consumer goods are pinned and then pinned again, and the purchasing information or url link is lost. In Pinterest etiquette, it isn’t just ok to comment to provide sourcing information, it is welcomed.

Use Keywords in Descriptions

Pinterest’s search feature is a literal beast. If a searcher inputs a term like "blue dress," the results that will display for the individual pin search will contain only pins that include that term in the pin description. Help your would-be followers discover your content by including apt descriptions. Descriptions also act as a “title” for an individual pin, so making the description pleasing to the eye and ear is also important.

Search Your Name

Use the creaky Pinterest search feature to find mentions of your brand on other boards. You’ll find new people to follow this way and sources of inspiration for your own curation. A search for Brooks Brothers finds products being highlighted in a board called “Preppy Cool,” while Sephora products find new life in pinboards being used for color stories.

Search for Mentions

You can also find content people have pinned directly from your website by adding, “/source/” and your website address to the Pinterest
homepage URL. For example, if we want to look at what content people have shared from Mashable, we can enter http://pinterest.com/source/mashable.com. Searching for people who already are sharing your product is a good way to find followers who might be interested in following your brand curated boards back.

"Liking"

Unlike repinning, the “liking” action is a low profile way for a brand to engage with the larger Pinterest community. Liking is a viewable list by other members. If there are tangential subjects to your brand that you do not wish to curate as a whole board, you may wish to “like” another members content on the subject instead of repinning. Examples of this might be: a children’s clothing brand that curates content for children’s play activities “liking” a creative child bento box lunch, a cooking/epicurean brand that curates kitchen equipment and dishes “liking” kitchen remodels. Making use of the like feature is a good way to build a following.

@symbol

You can directly engage with anyone for whom you are already following at least one board. Tag descriptions of pins/repins and comments with the @ symbol followed by username and a notification will be sent directly to the user. Direct mentions are great ways to reinforce relationships and build your community.
Reward Your Fans

Repinning and Liking take very little time/bandwidth compared to custom curating and commenting on other users’ pins. Notifications of your activity will appear to the others in their activity feeds and notification emails. By taking time to explore your follower’s boards, it would be possible to create a “brand” board of lifestyle inspiration completely filled with “What Brand X Fans Love” and repins.

Connecting Platforms

When creating a Pinterest account, you can choose to connect your Twitter and Facebook accounts, along with your website. Indeed, this step is mandatory in creating an account, although the social network display can be toggled off after registration. If enabled, social account widgets appear below your profile bio to your followers.

It is important to note that currently, brand pages cannot be selected via the Facebook integration. When registering a brand Pinterest account, the safest choice is to choose to integrate your brand Twitter account. Once social network sharing is enabled, you can choose to share your Pins across the networks (although this sharing works on the personal profile level, not the brand page level,) or to embed them onto your website. (Currently, only pins can be embedded, but the Pinterest designers have plans to make boards embeddable in Q1 of this year.) Driving traffic by posting links to your Pinterest profile and pins via an update on Twitter, Facebook, Google+ or wherever your audience is actively discussing your brand will benefit your presence on Pinterest.
Part 5: 100+ Brands on Pinterest

You might be wondering if your brand is a fit with Pinterest. There is no harm in registering your brand’s name, and that will help stake your claim against brandjackers. Some industries have obvious curation tie-ins that make joining Pinterest a natural fit (retail, design, beauty.) Other industries will need to be creative to find a way to make use of Pinterest’s visual curation emphasis to benefit their overall community efforts.

Pinterest has identified the following “best practices” for brands:

- Pinning from various sources rather than one specific site.
- Repinning from within the site to engage with others – repinning is one of the most social activities on Pinterest and it’s how any user really builds his/her network of followers.
- Creating at least a few boards that cover a broad range of interests, rather than maintaining a single board devoted to one topic.

In working with Pinterest, it is evident that the platform in its current state has been built with individuals in mind, not brand curators. It takes some creativity to bend a profile to suit a brand’s needs. Likewise, Pinterest’s internal search delivers nebulous results. It can be difficult to find examples of how brands are currently using Pinterest, as Pinterest’s search will not always surface relevant content and many of the current articles on the web rehash the same case studies (West Elm, Whole Foods, Mashable, etc.) In thinking about your brand’s direction on Pinterest, you may find helpful the following index and loose categorization of 100+ brands currently participating on Pinterest.

Cabot Cheese’s genuine appreciation for the company’s roots makes it one of our favorite brand curator examples.
**Food and Cooking**
- Cabot Cheese
- Epicurious
- Chobani
- Lindt Chocolate
- Middle Sister Wines
- Pillsbury

- Domestica
- Food52
- Peanut Butter & Co.
- Pretzel Crisps
- Little Debbie

- Tillamook Cheese
- Hillshire Farm
- Whole Foods
- Pepperidge Farm
- Puff Pastry

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**Cooking Magazines**
- Cooking Light
- Saveur
- Clean Eating

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**Television**
- The Weather Channel
- Today Show
- Travel Channel
- HGTV
- Food Network
- Sesame Street

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*HGTV and Pinterest are a natural fit.*

*Cooking Light devotes a pinboard to Blogs they love.*
### Journalism
- Newsweek
- Time
- The Wall Street Journal
- CTV News
- CBS New York
- KOMO News
- USA Today College
- Gannett Digital
- Mashable
- PBS NewsHour

### Fashion and Lifestyle Magazines
- Real Simple Magazine
- Brides Magazine
- Shape Magazine
- In Style
- People
- Lucky Magazine
- Ladies' Home Journal
- Today’s Parent
- Rue Magazine
- Better Homes and Gardens
- Lonny Magazine
- Matchbook Magazine
- Parenting Magazine
- Sunset Magazine

### Sports
- Seattle Seahawks
- Major League Baseball

The Seattle Seahawks football team experiments with Pinterest.
**Apparel**
Barneys New York
Threadless
Sevenly

**Retailers**
Nieman Marcus
Bergdorf Goodman
Nordstrom
West Elm
Michael's
Pottery Barn Kids
Zales
Etsy
Abe's Market
Williams-Sonoma
Betsy White Stationary
LaylaGrace
Feterie
Boticca

Kate Spade NY
Allens Boots
Gilt Baby and Kids
Land's End
Club Monaco
Barkers Clothing
Zulily
Anthropologie
Lily Pulitzer

Etsy's early adoption and intense use pays off in number of followers.
Beauty and Fashion

Tarte Cosmetics shows staff photos and product picks.

Celebrities/Tastemakers

Nina Garcia
Chris March
The Backstreet Boys
Paula Deen
Michael Kors
Felicia Day
Martha Stewart
Ree Drummond
Alanis Morissette

Nina Garcia (and staff) embraces her role as tastemaker.

Travel

American Airlines
Southwest Airlines
BedandBreakfast.com
HomeAway

Blogher curates from member blog content
Publishing
Chronicle Books
Random House Books
Knopf Doubleday
Crown Publishing
High Point Market
Apartment Therapy

Scholastic Inc.
BlogHer
Heinemann Publishing
Realtor .com
Benjamin Moore Paints
Lowes

Benjamin Moore Paints curates for both the design professional and the home DIY hobblesf.

Home Goods and services
American Standard Brands
Gilt Home
High Point Market
Apartment Therapy
Realtor .com
Benjamin Moore Paints
Lowes

Non-Profits
UNICEF
Humane Society of New York
National Wildlife Federation
AARP

Go Red for Women
Rotary International
Sacramento Public Library
Colleges and Universities
Miami University
Drake University
Emory University
Yale University

Texas A&M University keeps its students and alums in mind when adding content.

Miscellaneous
Barbie
AMD
LuxeFinds
General Electric
Blockbuster
Klout
Verizon Wireless
Pinterest

Pinterest Boards about Brands
Many thanks to the Pinners who are curating boards about brands on Pinterest:

Kelly Lieberman
Kami Huyse
Erica Rei
Mariam. Shahab and Emily Spicklemire
About eModeration

eModeration Limited is an award-winning social media management agency. Based in London UK, with offices in Los Angeles and New York, eModeration provides multi-lingual moderation and community management services, consultancy and social media crisis management training to clients in the TV, entertainment and digital publishing industry and blue chip clients hosting online communities.

Committed to ethical business practices and to the promotion of child online safety, eModeration’s CEO Tamara Littleton recently worked with the UK Government department UKCCIS to produce its guidelines on how to moderate online environments for children.

eModeration contributes to the growth of knowledge in the social media world via its white papers, blogs and seminars, and has a strong roster of returning clients who appreciate the high quality of its services.

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