

the
digital
handshake

seven proven strategies
to grow your business
using **social media**

PAUL CHANEY

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*To all my friends in social media.
You are the inspiration for this book and
to you it is dedicated.*

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FOREWORD

*Ann Handley, Chief Content Officer,
MarketingProfs*



I'm imagining that you have just picked this book off of the shelf in the bookstore, you noticed it in the library, or you are flipping through it on Amazon.com, and that, however you are accessing it, you are wondering, "Do I really need to read this book?"

Look, you're busy. You have a business to run, payroll to make, decisions to weigh, widgets to create, things to manage and prioritize and direct . . . and a million other demands on your time: *Can you really afford to read this book?*

But here's the reality in which you are doing business today: You are operating in a very different market these days. In other words, things have changed.

The notion of marketing your products or your services to your customers by interrupting them repeatedly through advertising isn't enough anymore—not in the current business climate. Creating awareness about your company or your brand through mass media like newspaper advertising, magazine callouts, or any sort of broadcasting medium doesn't go far enough. The same holds true for PR campaigns that beg reporters to pay attention to your products or to tell your company's story. In the end, those strategies sell your brand short.

The advent of the Internet and, more specifically, the rise of Web-based tools and technologies, have given your customers a new voice. Suddenly—thanks to blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and other social and online networking technologies—your customers are empowered to demand more of the companies they do business with. They are using their newfound voices to talk to you as well as to converse with each other. They will howl when you screw up, they will praise you when you do well, and they will create their own version of the story of your business and what it sells.

That sounds a little scary, doesn't it? Or at least daunting? And maybe it is. The customers are in control, and your customers can make a difference in ways that are unprecedented.

But the shift we are talking about also creates enormous opportunity for businesses. Rather than being afraid of the newly empowered consumer, or blocking your ears to their voices, consider the ways your business can harness this change.

How might you think of leveraging the newfound voice of the consumer to tap into new insights about your company or its market? How might you use blogs to foster new relationships with your customers? How might you draw on social networks to develop relationships with new prospects? How might you deepen your relationships with existing customers?

More questions: How might you rely on these tools and tactics to help you market more effectively, brand your products and services, develop products that really resonate, and enhance your PR strategies? All of that is, of course, the real opportunity that Paul Chaney talks about here. As Paul's editor at MarketingProfs, which provides strategic and tactical marketing know-how for 320,000 marketing and business member-professionals through a full range of online media, I assure you . . . Paul knows his stuff.

Which brings me back to my original question: *Can you really afford to read this book?*

My response to you is this: "Can you really afford *not* to?"

PREFACE

THE INSURGENT CONSUMER



The consumer today is in open rebellion.

He doesn't pay attention to advertising anymore. He no longer trusts corporate spokespeople or their messages. In fact, according to the 9th Annual Edelman Trust Barometer¹ people now say their most credible source of information about a company and its products is "a person like me"—a trust level in peers that, in the United States, has skyrocketed from only 22 percent a few years ago to 60 percent today.

This lack of trust has major bottom-line consequences. More than 80 percent of people surveyed say they would refuse to buy goods or services from a company they do not trust. And new research also shows that negative consumer comments on blogs have a direct impact on corporate brands, earnings, and share prices.

The fact is that consumers are no longer willing to put up with shoddy products, indifferent service, and lack of accountability and transparency. What's more, they are demanding a decision-making voice in shaping the products, services, and media they consume. TiVo is one example of this new take-charge attitude on the part of consumers. Another is the fact that, according to a Pew Internet & American Life Project survey,² half of all teens in this country—and 57 percent of those who use the

Internet—have created a blog or Web page, posted original artwork, photography, stories or videos online, or re-mixed content into their own creations.

Indeed, the consumer now demands more of business—and thanks to blogs and other new consumer-empowering technology and media—he can now get it. Companies that meet these new expectations are rewarded. Those that don't see their businesses punished as never before.

How should business leaders respond to this new insurgent marketplace? How can they use blogs, social networks, and other new “voice of the customer” media to develop a new and more democratic relationship with customers—one that leverages customer insight and initiative to create more effective marketing, branding, product development, and public relations strategies that materially enhance firm success? Those are questions this book hopes to examine and answer.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



First and foremost I want to thank several colleagues in social media who have been both an inspiration and an influence for a number of years: Toby Bloomberg, Wayne Hurlbert, Yvonne DiVita, Denise Wakeman, Tris Hussey, Jane Genova, Anita Campbell, Zane Safrit, John Jantsch, Lee Odden, Des Walsh, Jim Turner, Kevin O’Keefe, Debbie Weil, Andy Wibbels, Steve Rubel, and BL Ochman. We started blogging about the business of blogging back at a time when most people didn’t know what a blog was. Thank you for the opportunity to be a member of your tribe. You’ve taught me so much.

Another group I must thank are those who opened doors of opportunity for me along the way. Susannah Gardner gave me my first taste of writing. Richard Nacht not only gave me a job working in his business blogging startup, Blogging Systems, but partnered with me in co-authoring my first book, *Realty Blogging*. Other “door openers” include Steve Broback, Jason Calacanis, Peter Levinson, Ann Handley, Rick Calvert, Terri Murphy, and Kerry Murdock. Thank you all for the opportunities you afforded.

A huge number of people in the real estate industry embraced me after *Realty Blogging* was written and continue to count me as a member of their tribe to this day. I would like to thank Matt Heaton, Jonathan Washburn, Brad Andersohn, Rich Jacobson, and all the folks at Active Rain, where I was warmly received, first as “The Blog Coach,” and

now as the “Social Media Handyman”; Jeff Turner, Benn and Lani Rosales, Andy Kaufman, Todd Carpenter, Mariana Wagner, Mike Price, Morgan Brown, Derek Overbey, Stephanie Edwards-Musa, Dustin Luther, and, most especially, Ines Hegedus-Garcia round out the short list. More recent additions include Bill Lublin and Ginger Wilcox. There are many, many more who should be named. The manner in which I have been received almost makes me want to get my real estate license . . . almost!

John Munsell, CEO of Bizzuka, took a chance in letting me use the company as a laboratory to experiment with social media marketing. Much of what you will read in this book has come out of my experience there. John and all the staff at Bizzuka deserve my utmost respect and appreciation, and they have it.

I want to thank my publisher, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., for taking a chance on me as well. I could detail the course of events that led them to welcome me as a member of their family of authors. I am deeply appreciative of the opportunity to work with them, and especially with my editor Shannon Vargo and editorial assistant Beth Zipko. To say they have been patient, nurturing, and very supportive during the entire process would be an understatement.

Lastly, let me thank my wife, Amie. Her understanding, encouragement, and patience truly made the difference in this book being written. She spent many a night sitting alone while I was sequestered away in our home office laboring over the manuscript. It’s not the first time, either, and probably won’t be the last. She is an amazing woman, and I am blessed to have her as my partner in this journey through life.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Paul Chaney is internet marketing director for Bizzuka, a Web content management software company based in Lafayette, Louisiana. He also serves as President of the International Blogging and New Media Association (IBNMA), a non-profit trade association dedicated to advancing blogging, podcasting, and social media as an industry. In addition, he sits on advisory boards for the Social Media Marketing Institute, Womens Wisdom Network, and Smart-Brief on Social Media.

Paul was cofounder of Blogging Systems, a blog software company that significantly impacted the real estate industry by encouraging realtors to adopt blogging as a marketing strategy. In 2006, along with Blogging Systems CEO Richard Nacht, he co-authored *Realty Blogging: Build your Brand and Outsmart Your Competition*, which similarly impacted the industry and was the first blogging book to target a specific industry vertical.

He has been a feature writer for *Practical Ecommerce* magazine on the use of blogs and social media for marketing purposes. He has led numerous workshops and seminars on the topics of business blogging and social media, including the first seminar on business blogging ever to be held in Asia, in September 2005.

Paul has blogged professionally with Weblogs, Inc., as well as Allbusiness.com and currently blogs at marketing resource supersite MarketingProfs for their Daily Fix blog.

He has served as technical editor on a number of the “For Dummies” series books related to blogs and Internet marketing, and was contributing writer on *Buzz Marketing with Blogs for Dummies*, published in 2005 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

INTRODUCTION A NEW COMMUNICATIONS PARADIGM



Businesses large and small are being confronted with a new communications paradigm known most familiarly as Web 2.0. Individuals were once primarily consumers of information, but with the advent of new forms of media such as blogs, social networks, and Internet video, that is no longer the case.

A sea change has taken place, and now anyone with access to a computer or mobile device and the Internet can become a publisher, not just a consumer, of information. Everyone, both amateur and professional alike, has the ability to produce content and share information, opinion, and editorial commentary and make it available to the entire world with the click of a mouse. What used to be known as the information superhighway has become an interconnected maze of conversation, a global symphony of voices speaking at once. This has vast implications for business. New terminology has even evolved to describe this phenomenon—the “participatory Web,” “social media,” and, as previously mentioned, “Web 2.0.”

No longer can companies turn a deaf ear to the conversation that is taking place through these manifold channels. Businesses must develop engagement strategies to:

- Counter negative perceptions about their brands, people, products, and services
- Reward those who speak well of them
- Use the same media as consumers to generate brand awareness, create positive brand impressions, and incite customer evangelism and word of mouth.

Further, the way businesses market themselves has changed. No longer do companies merely target audiences and broadcast messages through unidirectional mass media. In this new paradigm, “markets are conversations” and “participation is marketing.” As such, businesses must learn how to operate through these new channels to engage their customers and prospects and penetrate newly developed niche markets. The tools of social media are the means by which this is done.

Not only that, but businesses are seeing less return on investment (ROI) from their advertising and marketing dollars. Marketing professionals and small businesspeople alike need to know why that is the case and what they can do to counter its effect. *The Digital Handshake* provides that information in a clearly laid-out, easy-to-understand, practical manner. It is replete with real-world examples of how companies as large as Dell and as small as a four person sign-making shop in Lincoln, New Hampshire are using the tools of social media to effectively address these changes.

PURPOSE OF THE DIGITAL HANDSHAKE

Where other books in this space are written from a largely strategic, conceptual standpoint, this one approaches the subject in a more tactical, hands-on, instructional manner. It is a complete handbook on social media marketing that fills the gap between a For Dummies style approach and books such as *Groundswell* or *Marketing to the Social Web*. It is written with the nontechnical person in mind and walks them through leveraging the tools of social media to positively affect their bottom line.

This book explains in great detail the intricacies of this new paradigm, demonstrates in a practical manner how

these tools are being used successfully, and explains how you can use them as well. It provides numerous case studies to support the proposition, and lays out a simple strategy for social media engagement.

The Digital Handshake contains:

- Strategic thinking from someone with an extensive background and years of experience dealing with this topic in day-to-day, real-world environments—someone who has learned by doing and knows what works and what doesn't.
- Practical, detailed, “how-to” application of the tools under consideration. Awareness about the use of social media for marketing is growing exponentially within the business community. Many are making attempts to use these tools, but more often than not their efforts meet with failure because they lack understanding of how to do so. Not only that, because the number and breadth of technology tools grows every day, new practitioners often do not even know where to begin. This book provides a clear path to understanding, accompanied by ample statistical and anecdotal evidence, illustrations, and case studies.
- Both a strategic and tactical focus. It serves the needs of those looking for a high-level (though non-academic) treatise on the subject, as well as those needing a practical “in the trenches” manual on how these tools can be applied.
- Provides answers to questions people are actually asking. Every day I field questions about how to put these tools to use, including everything from how to use blogs for lead generation to whether a microblogging tool like Twitter is worth the investment of time. This book provides precise and conclusive answers to these and other such questions.

Because the use of social media as a marketing approach is still very much in its nascent stage, the need for down-to-earth, understandable explanations accompanied by practicable examples and illustrations is

obvious. That is the unique value proposition this book provides.

Based on my research of the current state of the market, my thorough understanding of how the Internet has evolved as a marketing channel, and the current rate of adoption of social media tools and tactics, I believe we are at a tipping point.

WHAT IS A “DIGITAL HANDSHAKE?”

In computer language, “digital handshake” is the term used to describe the connection between two modems. I’m talking about something similar, yet quite different.

Gary Hirshberg, CEO of Stonyfield Farms, one of the first companies to hire a corporate blogger, is quoted in a May 2005 *Wall Street Journal* article as follows: “The blogs give us what we call a handshake with consumers, a bond of loyalty and mutual trust that’s different than the typical selling relationship, where it’s all about price.”¹

The book builds on the idea that relationships tend to start with a handshake and grow from there. In the virtual world, social media is a way of extending a digital handshake. There are certain unwritten, yet accepted rules of engagement. Don’t push, but pull instead. Use the power of attraction. Take a Dale Carnegie “win friends and influence people” approach by expressing interest in others first. “Seek first to understand, then be understood,” as St. Francis of Assisi said.

Author and futurist John Naisbitt, in his 1982 best-selling classic *Megatrends*, referred to a time when computers would facilitate human interaction. High tech meets high touch, he called it.

I believe Naisbitt’s vision of the future is now being realized. Social computing has given us the ability to create digital relationships. While I am not suggesting that face-to-face interaction is no longer needed (as most certainly it is), social media has added a very human, relational dimension to our use of computing technology.

Rather than merely seeing a balance between the electronic and face-to-face interaction, as Naisbitt suggested, we are seeing a melding of the two. Often, what begins as

online interactions lead to in-person meetings. Allow me to cite four such examples.

Toby Bloomberg

Early in my business blogging days, one of the bloggers I came into connection with was Toby Bloomberg, a marketing consultant based in Atlanta. (I was living in Mississippi at the time.) After a few months of interaction online we decided it was time to meet face to face. Toby invited me to attend a monthly meeting of the AiMA (Atlanta Interactive Marketing Association), and I took her up on the offer. Toby and I have been fast friends ever since.

Zane Safrit

Zane Safrit is a small business consultant and former CEO. As was the case with Toby, Zane and I met via the blogosphere. (He is an avid, prolific blogger.) Not long after, we met in-person at a blogging conference and experienced real camaraderie. So close was this relationship that Zane traveled all the way from Iowa to attend my wedding! (Keep in mind, we had only met in-person once previously.)

In fact, he showed up in jeans, running shoes and a plaid shirt! (Turns out, even though Zane arrived at the airport, his luggage didn't.) Personally, he could have shown up in his bathrobe. His willingness to travel all that way never ceases to warm my heart.

Richard Nacht

This list would not be complete without including one of the best friends I have on this earth, my former business partner and co-author of my first book, *Realty Blogging*, Richard Nacht. As with Toby and Zane, our relationship began online and evolved into a business relationship, the start-up of a new company, and a book! Oh, and Richard came to my wedding as well. Fortunately, his luggage did arrive.

My wife, Amie

The best example of the “high tech, high touch” phenomena is being lived daily by my wife, Amie, and I. You see, we met

online via eHarmony. (God bless Dr. Neil Clark Warren!) In fact, one out of every eight couples married today met online.

While I don't pretend to be a social anthropologist or understand societal trends in the way that Naisbitt does, my own experience has proved that his prediction has value, if not exactly in the same way as he intended.

Through the use of social media tools like LinkedIn and Facebook and microblogging tools like Twitter, the gap between the digital world and the real one is being bridged. Certainly, this has benefit for personal relationships. This book will prove it has value in building business relationships as well.

WHAT'S IN THE DIGITAL HANDSHAKE?

Part One begins by outlining five consumer trends turning the business world upside down:

- Consumer skepticism and resistance to advertising
- Current state of media fragmentation
- Growing trend toward consumers being in control of marketing/advertising messages
- Pressure businesses face to improve targeting of their marketing and advertising to increase relevance and minimize waste
- Companies being held to a higher level of accountability than ever before

Once these trends are identified and explained, the focus turns toward the philosophy behind the use of social media and proposes it as the antidote to these marketing maladies. Part Two explains in chapter-by-chapter detail how to make use of seven proven strategic tools of social media:

- Business blogs
- Social networks such as Facebook and LinkedIn
- Online communities
- Microblogs like Twitter
- Online video

- Podcasts
- Social media press releases

There is also a chapter on other ways to use social media for marketing: Social bookmarking, customer ratings and reviews, RSS, and more.

Part Three outlines a simple social media marketing plan of action, which can be summarized in three words: *Listen, Engage and Measure*.

Here I show you how to put the tools outlined in the previous section to good use and help you create a comprehensive yet cohesive marketing strategy uniquely tailored to your situation. The most important topics being covered in the book are:

- Five consumer trends. I illustrate these trends using a number of case studies from corporations as large as Dell and Intel and many small businesses as well. In fact, my emphasis on small business use of social media is one of the things that sets this book apart from the field.
- The fact that “markets are conversations” and “participation is marketing.” This is an explanation of the philosophy behind the use of social media as a marketing strategy. It is accompanied by quotes and case studies from leaders in the field.
- Practical explanations of how to use the tools of social media and the associative benefits that can be gleaned. Again, these are accompanied by real-world examples from both corporate and small business communities.
- Social media marketing strategy. You will take away from the book a cohesive, integrated strategy for social media marketing engagement.

WHO THIS BOOK WAS WRITTEN FOR

While anyone is welcome to read this book, it was written with two primary audiences in mind: Professional practitioners in the fields of marketing and public relations

and small business owners. However, if you fall into one of the following categories, rest assured, this book is for you:

- Chief marketing officers
- Marketing directors
- C-level executives
- Public relations professionals
- Advertising agency executives
- Small business owners
- Company/corporate bloggers
- Social media strategists
- Social media managers
- Online community managers
- Solo entrepreneurs
- Consultants
- Investors and venture capitalists

The ideal reader is a:

- Marketing executive or small business owner who understands that his or her marketing and advertising efforts are not as effective as they used to be, but who lacks understanding of why that is the case.
- The reader who is gaining awareness of the impact the Internet, especially Web 2.0, is having on marketing, and who needs direction in planning future campaigns.
- Those who have a need or would like to learn how to use the tools of this new marketing paradigm to grow their business.

The book assumes that you have at least a basic understanding of marketing principles and tactics. What is *not* needed is an understanding of technology or of social media tools like blogs and wikis, as it is the task of this book to provide such knowledge.

Social media is more than a toolset; it is a mindset as well. Before we get into a discussion of *how* to use the tools of social media, we must first lay the groundwork for understanding *why* they need to be used. Chapter 1 introduces us to the first of five consumer trends that have immediate bearing on how marketing should be done in the Web 2.0 era.

PART I

**FIVE CONSUMER
TRENDS TURNING
THE WORLD
UPSIDE DOWN**

CHAPTER ONE

Consumer Skepticism Is at an All-Time High



Trust is a commodity in short supply nowadays. We consumers are increasingly skeptical of advertising messages that promise to make our lives easier, our bodies healthier, or our wallets fatter. Ours is a cynical age tainted by war, economic downturn, political unrest, and an uncertain future. We are suspicious of hype, and we favor that which is real, even if it lacks the shiny exterior and pomp commonly associated with advertising.

This chapter seeks to lend insight into the reasons for this increasing skepticism and shed light on who consumers are turning to for advice on goods, products, and services.

THE INSURGENT CONSUMER AND THE INFLUENCE OF WORD OF MOUTH

In a February 2006 article from *Advertising Age*,¹ Editor Jonah Bloom stated, “While too many advertisers are still focused on the business of shouting one message over and over, today the most important communication is not the marketing monologue, but the dialogue that takes place among customers.”

Consumers are becoming insurgent, rising in revolt against slick, overly produced ads in favor of recommendations by fellow consumers and user-generated content such as that found in YouTube videos or customer ratings and reviews such as those at Amazon, Judy's Book, or Yelp.

For example, never do I go to the movie theater and spend \$35 for tickets, soft drink and popcorn without first checking movie reviews on sites such as Yahoo! Movies or Rotten Tomatoes. I'm not interested in reading what the professional critics have to say but glean, instead, the opinions of average Joes who spent their hard-earned cash.

Of course, nothing trumps the influence of recommendations from trusted family members and friends. In their social media manifesto "Trust Economies,"² authors Chris Brogan and Julien Smith assert, "We are suspicious of marketing. We don't trust strangers as willingly. Buzz is suspect. It can be bought. Instead, consumers and business people alike are looking towards trust. We want our friends to tell us it's good. We want someone we know to say we should look into it."

"We may be seeing the golden age of word-of-mouth and social media in its use," said small business marketing consultant Zane Safrit. "A perfect storm of early adopters, obvious metrics for its use, the over-saturation by advertising that leads to the demise of its dynamics could combine to create some sweeping changes for business and its methods."³

Public relations firm Edelman in 2006 completed a survey⁴, which concluded:

- By a 3-to-1 margin people are far more likely to trust "average people like me."
- 67 percent of consumer goods sold are as a result of word of mouth.
- Consumers trust word-of-mouth recommendations far more than traditional marketing or advertising.
- People would rather hear about real experiences and perspectives than "marketing speak."

“We have reached an important juncture, where the lack of trust in established institutions and figures of authority has motivated people to trust their peers as the best sources of information about a company,” said Richard Edelman, president and CEO. “Companies need to move away from sole reliance on top-down messages delivered to elites toward fostering peer-to-peer dialogue among consumers and employees, activating a company’s most credible advocates.”

**BOURNE, NOT BOND: CONSUMERS WANT REAL
EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES,
NOT MARKETING SPEAK**

You recall the days of classic Agent 007 James Bond (Sean Connery was my favorite, by the way). He was suave, debonair, and hardly ever got a scratch. Bond drove expensive cars, wore fabulous clothes, ate at the finest restaurants, and always, always got the girl.

There was a time when advertising was the same. Slick marketing messages conceived in Madison Avenue high-rises delivered mass-marketing style via broadcast and print were consumed and believed by the buying public, no questions asked. If manicurist Madge said a certain brand of dishwashing liquid softens hands while using it, who were we to disagree? Not so any longer. We now live in the age of Jason Bourne, not James Bond.

Unlike his counterpart, Bourne gets beaten up, shot at, and otherwise knocked around with great regularity. Rarely does he walk away from a fight unscathed. Neither does he get the girl. In fact, his girlfriend was killed. Bourne’s is a world of gritty, cold reality.

That’s the world advertisers find themselves in as well. Consumers have little trust in marketing messages, and, therefore, advertisers have to work much harder for their attention and, more importantly, their trust.

Another example of this real experience versus marketing-speak mentality can be seen in what arguably has become in recent years the most popular genre of television entertainment: Reality TV. Programs run the gamut from the sublime

to the ridiculous and cover every topic imaginable, from drug and alcohol interventions, to bounty hunting to modeling, to cooking, real estate sales, and home decorating contests. Oh, yes, let us not forget musical entertainment à la American Idol.

What is the reason for such popularity? Within all of it there is an underlying theme, that what I'm watching has some degree of realism. I can identify with the participants, imagining myself in their place as their peer. These "ordinary" people, whether placed in similarly ordinary or exotic circumstances, carry with them a level of authenticity.

I believe this phenomena is a sign of our times that carries over into advertising. Advertisers and marketing professionals who understand this will do well in making the changes necessary to re-establish trust with the consumer.

To their credit, some are doing their best to bring some level of "reality" to the 30-second spot. It is becoming much more commonplace, for example, to see the CEO of a Fortune 1000 speaking on behalf of the company. Every once in a while they even apologize for wrongdoings, as was the case with JetBlue CEO David Neeleman.

In a now-famous YouTube video, Neeleman addressed operational problems faced by his airline in 2007.⁵ You recall the incident on February 14, 2007, where thousands of JetBlue's customers were left stranded for hours in airports and on planes.

His apology was one of the first times that the CEO of a major company used social media in crisis management. The video has received more than 350,000 views. Most YouTube users who commented on the video expressed support for Neeleman, praising him for placing the apology on the site.

A little bit of honesty accompanied by a healthy dose of humility goes a long way toward restoring a company's reputation among consumers, and Neeleman's attempt was met with word-of-mouth enthusiasm.

WHY THE SKEPTICISM?

There are a number of reasons consumers are skeptical of advertising. First, advertising is interruptive. I don't know

anyone who welcomes a series of 30-second spots during a favorite TV show. This is one reason for the growing popularity of devices such as TiVo. No one picks up a magazine for the sole purpose of scanning the ads.

Seth Godin, in his 1999 book *Permission Marketing*,⁶ says, “For ninety years, marketers have relied on one form of advertising almost exclusively. I call it Interruption Marketing. Interruption, because the key to each and every ad is to interrupt what the viewers are doing in order to get them to think about something else.” Advertising is not why we watch television, listen to the radio or browse a Web page. Interruption gives way to aggravation, followed by a search for the remote.

A second reason for rising skepticism is deceptive advertising with its misleading claims, bait-and-switch techniques, false comparisons that suggest one brand is better than the others without stating that outright—we’ve all been there.

Often, it’s not that the advertiser intended to deceive us, but simply that the ads over promised while the product or service under-delivered. Once we have been fooled by claims that turn out to be exaggerated or even false, we tend to shy away the next time around.

Of course, part of this could be the consumer’s own fault. “The anticipation of a thing is always greater than the realization of it,” someone said when describing how our assumptions regarding a product’s performance can set up both it and us for failure.

Yet a third reason for this growing distrust is a company’s inability to connect with customers at a human level. Of all the reasons, that may be the most damning. The great promise offered by social media is that real, genuine, honest, human connections can be made between the company and consumer that will engender trust and build a foundation for long-term relationships.

CONCLUSION

In the end, it is not so much a matter of knowing why consumers are skeptical but simply accepting that they are. The antidote is not more mass-market messaging but radical

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transparency and a willingness to admit mistakes, much in the same way JetBlue's Neeleman did. By re-instituting the conversation, social media can help companies reconnect with consumers, rebuild the bridge of trust, renew customer loyalty, re-energize brand evangelism, and re-humanize the company.

CHAPTER TWO

The Media Is Fragmented and So Is the Audience



MEDIA IN THE SIXTIES: WHEN I WAS MY FATHER'S REMOTE CONTROL

I recall it like it was yesterday. As a child I would sit on the floor of our family room in close proximity to the television, not because I had difficulty seeing the screen, but because, invariably, my father would want the channel changed and guess who would be the one to do it. This was in the 1960s mind you, long before the invention of the remote control. I guess you could say I was the remote.

My job was relatively easy as there weren't many channels. Normally, depending on the weather, we averaged three and sometimes four—two stations in a nearby town and two a bit farther away. That was television in the sixties. Most of it was black and white, as was life back then.

What about radio? FM had not yet taken over. That left a few local AM stations that played mostly country music or a

combination of formats: country in the mornings, rock and roll in the afternoons, and gospel on Sundays. They went off the air at dusk to make room for the 100,000-watt clear-channel stations broadcasting out of Nashville, Little Rock, and even Chicago.

As for print, there was a daily newspaper published in a nearby town and our local hometown weekly. My parents subscribed to *Life*, *Time*, and *Readers Digest*. Oh, and *Progressive Farmer*, too. (I guess you can tell I grew up in a rural community.)

Advertising in this “Mad Men” era was, by comparison, much simpler than it is today. It was much easier to reach a mass audience, and companies like Procter & Gamble, Coca-Cola, and General Motors had mastered the art.

In the 1960s, for example, a single ad aired simultaneously on the big three networks (CBS, NBC, and ABC) could reach 80 percent of U.S. women. Today, that same ad would have to be run on one hundred channels multiple times to have any hope of duplicating that feat. Then, the emphasis was on reach and frequency, metrics that have less importance now.

In 1960, an advertiser could spend \$5 million a year and reach 160 million television viewers. With the right message, sustained over a period of years, 85-percent message penetration into the audience was achievable. Mass media reached a mass audience. That was then; this is now.

MEDIA FRAGMENTATION AND THE ATTENTION ECONOMY

Today, media is fragmented in a thousand different ways. Take television, for example. There is still terrestrial television received via antennas (so long as you have the digital converter box), but there are satellite television and cable as well. The average viewer has access to over eighty channels, and children no longer have to play the role of channel changers! In addition, thanks to sites like Hulu and Netflix, more viewers are consuming full-length television shows and movies via their computers and even mobile devices.

Radio has followed the exact same course in that there are terrestrial, satellite, and Internet versions. With fewer and fewer people reading the daily newspaper (a trend that has continued unabated for the past twenty years), it would appear print media is going the way of the albatross. Several major dailies ceased publication in 2009. Even the local weekly in the town where I grew up closed after being in business for over one hundred years!

The number of daily advertising messages we encounter has skyrocketed into the thousands, and some experts believe it to be as high as 3,000. Although that number may be exaggerated, the truth is we are constantly bombarded with ads.

Think about it. In the *Mad Men* days, there were fewer commercials, which reached more people with undivided attention. Today, more ads reach fewer people paying less attention.

In 1965, the number of people who could recall an ad from a television program they just watched was 35 percent. Today, that number is less than 10 percent.

In 1960, there were:

- 4,400 radio stations—today, there are nearly 14,000;
- 8,500 magazine titles—today, the number is more than 17,000;
- 5.7 television channels—today, there are 82.4 on average.

And I've not even mentioned the Internet with its millions of Web sites and billions of pages, the hundreds of social networks and online communities, e-mail inboxes overflowing with messages, and the scores of RSS feeds to which we subscribe.

To complicate matters, people are consuming content in an asynchronous, on-demand fashion. More people are using TiVo and DVRs to control what they watch and when. Automobiles, the favorite spot for radio listening, are now equipped with inputs for MP3 players, bypassing the need to listen to the radio at all. On the Internet, people suffer from banner blindness and pay little attention to display ads.

AN AGE OF INFORMATION OVERLOAD

With consumers firmly in control, this spells gloom and doom for advertisers. Media buying, given the current landscape, has to be a nightmare. With people fast-forwarding through commercials or skipping them altogether, advertisers are scurrying around to find new ways to gain consumers' attention. And precious little of that commodity exists. We are in an age of information overload!

Research firm Basex called information overload the "Problem of the Year" in 2008.¹ We have more things to attract our attention, but no more time to pay attention. (Unless things have changed, there are still only 24 hours in a day.) The result is that we pay less attention. Advertising slips through the cracks.

Wikipedia suggests a number of possible causes²:

- A rapidly increasing rate of new information being produced
- The ease of duplication and transmission of data across the Internet
- An increase in the available channels of incoming information (e.g., telephone, e-mail, instant messaging, RSS)
- Large amounts of historical information to dig through
- Contradictions and inaccuracies in available information
- A low signal-to-noise ratio
- A lack of a method for comparing and processing different kinds of information

It is estimated that scientific information doubles every five years. Seventy percent of all information in our global society has been created since the start of the Internet, and the amount of information is currently doubling every three years. This means we will have sixteen times more information by 2015 than we had in 2003. Looking back over our shoulders, the past seems like a walk in the park compared to the seemingly insurmountable mountain of knowledge and information that lies ahead.

American psychologist Herbert Simon put it this way³: “ . . . in an information-rich world, the wealth of information means a dearth of something else: a scarcity of whatever it is that information consumes. What information consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of its recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention and a need to allocate that attention efficiently among the overabundance of information sources that might consume it.”

Some would suggest that the problem is not information overload at all, but faulty filtering. On the contrary, I think we instinctively filter based on need. Most of us have so much going on in real time that we pay little if any attention to that which does not pass through the filter.

CONCLUSION

Whether the problem is information overload or an inability to adequately filter the information we encounter daily, the result is bad for interruptive advertising. There has to be a better way, and indeed there is, as we will see later in this book.

Social media offers marketers the ability to move beyond the attention economy to the participatory economy, one where companies and consumers sit down across the table from one another and engage in meaningful dialogue about their brands, products, and services.

Social media promises to spell the end of advertising as we know it and bring us to an age where the content that's being created (otherwise known as “information”) is the new advertising.

CHAPTER THREE

Who Is In Control of the Marketing Message?

(Guess What. It's Not You!)



There was a time when advertisers and marketers were the center of the marketing universe. Messages were broadcast in one-way fashion to largely passive consumers. Today, thanks to the tools of social media people are talking to each other about our companies, products, services, industries, and competitors whether we are present or not. What's worse, we may not even be aware that a conversation is taking place! That head in the sand mentality may work for the ostrich, but not for business. Who is in control of the marketing message? One thing is certain, it isn't us.

FROM COMMAND-AND-CONTROL TO OUT OF CONTROL TO COMMUNITY CONTROL

Classic command-and-control marketing and advertising involved creating a message and distributing it through every available channel. You've seen this methodology employed hundreds of times in ads like Ford's "Drive One," or Nike's "Just Do It" campaigns.

If it feels a bit militaristic, that's because command-and-control has its roots in the military. The General barks orders to the Colonel who hands them down to the Major who passes them along to the Captain, then to the Lieutenant and so on down to the lowly Private.

Not unlike that, marketing executives, working in tandem with ad agencies, carefully craft messages that get syndicated through multiple channels until they reach the consumer, who is supposed to be inspired to do just what the ads direct. Simple, really. If one campaign doesn't pan out, another comes along behind it that may. If that one fails, then a new agency is hired to replace the one that faltered, or maybe the CMO herself is the one to get the ax.

New media has disrupted that structure and put the message in the hands of the consumer who remixes it to suit his liking. The brand's message becomes whatever the community dictates, not the brand. In fact, it is no longer the sole property of the brand.

You would think that companies would respond favorably and create ways to incorporate the consumer in spreading the message. In fact, some are, and we will take a look at a few examples later in this chapter. However, many are still motivated by fear of losing control, negative feedback, legal repercussions and just plain fear of change itself. The classic "we've never done it that way before" mentality governs a lot of business owners' and executives' thinking. That may be one reason why only 15 percent of Fortune 500 companies use blogs in any meaningful way.

A 2007 McKinsey survey¹ of nearly 3,000 C-level executives revealed that:

- Just 37 percent of executives were using or planned to use social networking,
- Only 35 percent planned to use RSS, the technology used to syndicate content across the Web
- Just 32 percent of executives reported sinking dollars into blogs

A more recent survey by the CMO Council of 400 marketing executives² found that 56 percent said their companies

have no programs to track or propagate positive word-of-mouth and that only 16 percent of respondents said their companies have any routine system in place for monitoring what people are saying about them or their brands online. Again, the ostrich mentality comes to mind.

THE EMPOWERED CONSUMER

Consumers aren't just insurgent, they are also empowered. Social media has granted them the authority to speak up, and their voices are being heard loud and clear. While companies may want them to "pay," as in buy their products, these empowered consumers want those same companies to pay attention and give them a seat at the table. They no longer want to be merely passive consumers of products and services, but active participants helping to co-create them.

If the old command-and-control structure no longer works, what might serve as a suitable alternative? Fard Johnmar, founder of healthcare marketing communications firm Envision Solutions, suggests "Engage and Encourage" as the way to go.³ "In a world where social media is very influential, complete message control will be impossible," says Johnmar. Instead, he recommends reaching out to influencers in social media to solicit their help in spreading the word, then producing social media content that will help enrich and expand the dialogue. He sees it as a collaborative effort between company and consumer.

Call it a truce, healthy compromise, collaboration, or partnership, the best thing companies can do in light of this paradigm shift is to share ownership of the message. Brands assume the responsibility to create a strong message but find ways to engage the consumer and encourage its viral spread.

Social media consultant Mack Collier offers this advice:

This isn't a war with the consumer over who has control of the marketing message. Neither party has total control. Marketers have control over the marketing message that they send to their communities, and the communities have control over how they relate that message to others.

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Communities need marketers just as much as marketers need communities. The role of marketers isn't to cede control to our communities and get out of their way, our job is to JOIN our community, and clear a path for them to help them reach their destination as quickly and efficiently as possible.

A few companies are tackling this new communications paradigm head-on.

Proctor & Gamble

America's largest advertiser, Proctor & Gamble, has made a number of valiant attempts at engaging consumers via social media. Admittedly, they have had their ups and downs. For example, the company set up a Facebook Page⁴ for its laundry detergent "2X Ultra Tide." Visitors were asked to contribute photos of their, and I quote, "favorite places to enjoy stain-making moments." After eleven months, a total of 18 photos had been submitted, including two by the company itself. Apparently, consumers weren't interested in "airing their dirty laundry" (sorry, I couldn't resist) in front of everyone on Facebook!

Not every attempt by P&G has resulted in failure. Quite a number of postings, such as their Tide "Loads of Hope" campaign, as well as their niche online communities Home Made Simple, Health Expressions and The Salon, have met with great success. Certainly, P&G is to be commended for trying to embrace social media as a marketing vessel.

Dustin Meyer Photography

Not only are large corporations beginning to get social media, small businesses are as well. As a case in point, Austin, Texas, wedding and portrait photographer Dustin Meyer uses Facebook to effectively market his business.⁵

For his wedding photography services, Meyer targets brides in the 22- to 35-year age group and their mothers who have a middle- to upper-income range and a wedding budget of \$25K to \$50K. For senior portraits, he targets students whose parents have an annual income of \$200K+.

Meyer uses Facebook to market both services, as the social network is an ideal match for his demographic and it provides him an opportunity to market directly to students and young adults.

"I use the birthday feature to e-mail gift cards for portraits," says Meyer. "Once a student has their portrait done, I use Facebook to display their images as a portfolio." He also posts wedding and engagement photos in the form of video montages on his business page, along with personal comments about each couple and their wedding.

"The results have been nothing less than remarkable," says Meyer. "I would say that 75 percent of our students are introduced to us via Facebook, which in turn allows them to refer other students to us once they've done their portraits."

Meyer uses no direct mail or search advertising to market his business. "I would say that the majority of our sales are brought about by our exposure on Facebook," he says. "It allows people to instantaneously promote my business to everyone they know with barely any effort."

CONCLUSION

It takes a great deal of courage for companies to turn loose their marketing message and share ownership of the brand with consumers. Though some are entering those shark-infested waters, most have yet to dip their toe in them.

In sizing up the current state of affairs, I think small business marketing expert and pundit Wayne Hurlbert said it best:

The Madison Avenue mindset will always retreat to their default tried and true techniques of marketing. They will continue to believe that what worked in the past will work today and tomorrow, just it did in the hey-day of ads and branding. They will be disruptive with print, radio and TV advertisements as they attempt to "control" the message. The problem for them is there is no control of the message anymore. We are in an age of conversation and of grassroots bottom up marketing. The old top-down methods are already doomed, but their practitioners just haven't noticed it yet.

CHAPTER FOUR

Businesses, Improve Your Aim



In chapter two we established that the day of mass-media marketing is over, so can we hammer the last nail in the coffin now and be done with it?

Don't get me wrong; I know that companies with huge advertising budgets like GEICO, Proctor & Gamble and Nike, will always be able to cover broadcast, print, and digital media to their heart's content. But let's set them aside for a moment and concentrate on the rest of us.

Who has the budget to create pervasive, long-term campaigns across multiple channels, at least in a way that is sustainable? Even on a local level it's expensive. And why should we when the return on investment (ROI) on so much of our media spending is incalculable anyway? These days, if it can't be measured it likely won't stand.

Not everyone, especially those in the media, will agree, but that's okay. Like you, I live in the world of constrained marketing budgets. Every small business does, so it behooves us to spend money where we can (a) track the ROI and (b) see a reasonable return on our investment. More and more, that means moving the money once reserved for the Yellow Pages, TV, radio, or print to the Web.

Before we go on, let me clarify two things: First, I am not out to vilify traditional forms of marketing and advertising. For some industries, Yellow Page advertising works very well. Neither am I out to suggest that social media is a panacea destined to replace other channels. If anything, we are seeing a trend toward social media marketing becoming part of a larger, integrated marketing strategy.

Second, when I refer to ROI, I don't just mean dollar revenue. There are a number of indirect metrics that have significant bearing. For example, the number of times a video is downloaded or the number of comments left in response to a blog post are measurable, though you may not be able to tie them directly to conversions. We call these engagement metrics and discuss those in the last section of the book.

It is difficult to know how many people saw a given television commercial, heard a radio spot, or read a display ad in the newspaper. We can only guesstimate those numbers. Conversely, we can know how many visitors came to the Web site or viewed an online video. The more measurable the media, the better.

Not only that, but the more “spreadable” the media, the better as well. That's another reason the Internet trumps other forms of media. Web content is much more easily shared thanks to applications like social bookmarking and RSS syndication. (If those terms mean nothing to you, I explain them in detail in chapter 14.)

BUSINESSES ARE BEING FORCED TO IMPROVE TARGETING, INCREASE RELEVANCE, AND MINIMIZE WASTE

Not unlike the need to calculate ROI, in times when marketing budgets are tight, finding ways to (1) improve the targeting of your message so that it reaches only the audience you want to reach, (2) increase the relevance of that message so that it resonates with that audience, and (3) trim the fat on wasteful spending is of utter importance.

Target Your Audience

One amazing characteristic the Internet offers is the ability to thinly slice targeted audience segments. Data that reveal who is most likely to do business with us can be collected in a number of ways—from cookies dropped on a Web site visitor's hard drive to information collected via a survey or registration form, to behavioral targeting based on your activity on the Web to analytics using software such as Google Analytics or SiteCatalyst. In fact, it can get a bit creepy just thinking about how much marketers may know about you and your buying habits.

Please understand, it is not the aim of this book to teach you how to target your audience, not in the traditionally accepted ways at least. What I am going to suggest both now and later is that we no longer just target audiences, we participate in communities where our prospective customers already gather, or create such communities ourselves (or both).

Of course, targeting an audience requires that you know where they spend their time online. It's becoming commonplace to find them on social networking sites like Facebook and on microblogging sites like Twitter. We will go into great detail in the last section of this book on just how to do that.

Increase Relevance

Once you know where online your audience resides, you will need to fashion messages that have the greatest chance of resonating with them and scratching where they itch. The best way to understand the market is to do something marketers aren't accustomed to, and that's listen. In chapter 16, I assert that "listening is the new marketing," for it is the pathway to understanding the needs, wants, and interests of the market.

Minimize Waste

One you know where your audience lives online and what makes them tick, you will be better equipped to choose delivery mechanisms that are the most cost-effective. That is where the tools of social media can become your ally as

many of them require little or no investment of capital (time, perhaps, but not capital).

THE FUTURE OF MARKETING IS IN THE NICHEs

Given that the Internet can help you more precisely target and impact a defined market segment, let me go one step further and say I believe the future of marketing is in the niches. There is no reason a marketer or small business owner should take a blanket, shotgun approach and waste valuable marketing dollars when a rifle approach works much better. There was once a time when the number of eyeballs who saw your message was the metric of greatest importance. Now, it's about finding the right eyeballs, those most likely to do business with you. That's where niche marketing comes into play.

Wikipedia says, "Niche market ventures may become profitable even though they are by nature small in comparison to the mainstream marketplace, due to the benefits of specialization and focus on small identifiable market segments; even without the benefit of economy of scale."¹

It's a matter of going deep, not wide, and the Internet is the perfect vehicle to help you achieve that goal. In the next section of the book you will see how blogs, social networks, online communities, Internet video, and other forms of content will help you do just that, and inexpensively to boot.

Penetrate Unfilled or Partially Filled Niches:

The Wailing Wall Story

The real key to success is in finding unfilled or partially filled niches. Friend and Internet marketing mentor Dr. Ralph Wilson, a man I refer to as the "godfather of Internet marketing," likens niche marketing to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem.²

Standing at the base of the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem and looking up, the immense stone blocks laid one upon another seem to reach to sky. . . . But when you look more closely at the Wall, you see the crevices between the massive blocks.

In the first two tiers of stone these crevices are filled with papers inscribed with the prayers of the faithful. Above them the crevices are alive: Plants, rooted deeply in the cracks between the stones, abound far above the heads of the worshipers and add character and life to the Wall.

“The Wall has a lesson for us,” says Dr. Wilson. “If your company doesn’t have the mammoth clout of a Fortune 500 corporation, then you must find a niche between the immense players and adapt yourself to thrive there.”

Marketing on the Internet is not a matter of scaling the entire wall, but finding and penetrating a marketable niche—filling that yet to be filled crack, crevice, nook, or cranny.

Social Media Marketing Can Help You Penetrate Marketable Niches

Stephanie Edwards-Musa is a real estate agent in Houston, Texas. According to the Houston Association of Realtors^{®3} there are 21,000 realtors in Houston and the surrounding areas. So, how does Stephanie go about setting herself apart from the stiff competition? By finding and marketing to a particular niche, the “green” market. In fact, Stephanie has branded herself as Houston’s green Realtor.

“My niche is that of energy efficient, healthier and eco-friendly properties,” says Edwards-Musa. “These may have renewable energy such as solar or rainwater capture, or just healthier and energy efficient in general.”

“Green” means something different to everyone, Edwards-Musa states. “My clients value the fact that I understand what they are looking for during the home buying process.”

Rather than use traditional real estate marketing techniques such as direct mail, which would not be in keeping with how Edwards-Musa is trying to position herself in the marketplace, she is using digital media, specifically social media.

“I market mostly through blogging and social networking. Social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter just pull it all together allowing me to connect with everyone

more often,” says Edwards-Musa. “My blog, which focuses on sharing thoughts regarding green in the real estate industry, has been instrumental in creating my brand, and a majority of the leads I receive come through it.”

CONCLUSION

My favorite example to illustrate just how definable a niche can be is a blog published by Jay Brewer that deals with one topic, single serve coffee makers (www.singleservecoffee.com). Brewer (which is not a bad name to have if you're talking about coffee makers) started the blog in 2004 and actively maintains it to this day. That's five years' worth of blogging about nothing but single serve coffee makers and the accompanying coffee culture.

He makes money by advertising, you guessed it, single serve coffee makers and similar products. Not only that, he took what was a hobby and turned it into a business by finding other penetrable niches and exploiting them with blogs, then monetizing that content with advertising. Now, if a guy can make a living talking about single serve coffee makers, surely there is a niche out there for you!

The main lesson here is that none of us has money to waste. The Internet and social media in particular can help you find and exploit a marketable niche cost-effectively. Go for the niches!

CHAPTER FIVE

Customers Are Mad as Hell, and They're Not Going to Take It Anymore



I don't know when it started—maybe following the Enron or WorldCom scandals—but at some point consumers decided they were no longer going to put up with corporate lies, shoddy products, inept customer service, or overblown advertising, and they began to fight back using the Internet as their weapon of choice. Many a company has felt their wrath.

This chapter details case studies of three such companies. Two of these studies, the ones dealing with Kryptonite and Dell, reach back a few years into the Internet archives. The other, Motrin, serves as a more recent example. I chose these not based on recency but for the lessons that can be learned.

Each has a distinct reason for being shared. The Kryptonite example shows us how long-standing negative brand reputation can be, even when a company takes steps to change its image. The Motrin story shows us how quickly the groundswell can spread and illustrates the difference in

social media tools used today as opposed to those used in the Kryptonite and Dell examples. Lastly, the Dell study illustrates how a company can successfully change its reputation and evidences some of the steps taken to do so.

KRYPTONITE: YOU CAN TUG ON SUPERMAN'S CAPE

The story of bicycle lock manufacturer Kryptonite is probably the most classic example of how consumer-generated media can damage a brand.

In late 2004, an online video began to circulate showing how a Kryptonite lock could be compromised using an inexpensive Bic ballpoint pen. A brand new Kryptonite Evolution 2000 lock was opened in a matter of seconds using the barrel of the pen, inserting it into the lock and giving a single twist.

The story spread quickly, starting in bike enthusiast forums and then moving through the blogosphere on sites like Gizmodo and Engadget until it reached the mainstream press, being covered in such mainstays as the *New York Times*. The now defunct *Business 2.0* magazine even labeled the company the “Grand Prize Winner, Dumbest Moment of 2004” because of the incident.

The end result was that Kryptonite was forced to replace all the locks in question at an estimated cost of \$10 million. Considering the company’s annual revenue for that year was \$25 million, to say it took quite a hit would be an understatement!

Whether justified or not, the company was roundly criticized for its apparent laxity in responding to the swiftly growing groundswell. Keep in mind that this was 2004, long before online reputation management software had been created. Monitoring effects of the growing sensation over the story as it was breaking in the blogosphere was not something public relations personnel were used to doing back then either. Not only that, there had not been many prior incidents that would have served as precedent for how to respond. In many respects, these were untested waters.

Since that time, Kryptonite has taken significant steps to improve the quality and security of their locks. The

particular type of lock that started the incident has not been made in several years, and their locks continue to get high marks among cycling enthusiasts.

Why talk about an incident that happened in 2004? For two reasons. First, like an elephant, the Internet never forgets. For example, if you Googled the keyword phrase “Kryptonite lock,” at the time of this writing seven of the top ten returns referenced the incident. A search for the same term on the social bookmarking site Delicious results in 140 returns, many of which had to do with incident, including all the top results.

Second, five years after the fact, the story continues to circulate. *Burn After Reading*, a movie by the famed Coen brothers released in September 2008, included this line from Chad, the character played by Brad Pitt: “That’s just a Kryptonite lock. You can open those f***ers with a Bic pen.”

A check of the search term “Kryptonite lock” on the most real-time of all social networks, Twitter, came back with these results:

- I need to buy a bike lock; did the Kryptonite locks ever recover from that whole “pick ‘em with a Bic pen” problem? Other recommendations?
- iBood is offering a Kryptonite bike lock at half price today. Not sure if it comes with or without the ballpoint pen?
- An oldie but goodie is the Kryptonite bike lock fiasco.

On a more positive note, there were comments like these as well:

- Did the bike get stolen?! sad! get a Kryptonite lock!
- Got snapped key out of bike lock, was friends and of really poor quality - keys made of cheese. Nothing beats my Kryptonite New York
- Just got a Kryptonite NY Fahgettaboudit U-Lock. Can’t put a price on peace of mind.

Again, my point is not to make an example of this company, but to say that even when steps are taken to

rectify the problem as Kryptonite did, the residual negative effect can be long-lasting.

To imagine the type of fallout that could have occurred had the incident happened today, this next study is a case in point.

BABYWEARING MOMS GIVE MOTRIN A HEADACHE

On Saturday, November 15, 2008, makers of the pain reliever Motrin rolled out a video on the company's Web site targeting "baby wearing" moms (mothers who carry their babies in a sling worn around the torso). The ad was designed to speak to the pain such moms experience on their neck and back from carrying their child in such a manner and included the following statements: "Do moms that wear their babies cry more than those who don't? I sure do! These things put a ton of strain on your back, your neck, your shoulders. Did I mention your back? I mean, I'll put up with the pain because it's a good kind of pain; it's for my kid."

I suppose the makers of the video thought it would resonate with moms and that they would flock to stores with babies in arms (or slings) to purchase Motrin. Nothing could have been further from the truth. In fact, a severe backlash occurred almost as quickly as the video went live. "They were offended by the suggestion that they carry their babies to be 'fashionable.' They were outraged at the idea that they look 'crazy.' They vehemently disagreed with the phrasing that 'in theory' carrying your baby around is a good idea," stated a blog post on *The New York Times* Web site.¹

By Saturday evening, what came to be known as "Motrin moms" was the most talked about issue on Twitter. The next day, Sunday, a nine-minute video showing a number of the Twitter posts along with photos of moms wearing their babies was posted on YouTube, accompanied by the tune "Danny Boy." (By Tuesday the 18th, someone had created a parody of the ad and posted it to YouTube as well.)

Sunday evening, Amy Gates, one of the instigators of the backlash, received the following e-mail from Kathy Widmer, Vice President of Marketing for McNeil Consumer Healthcare:

Dear Amy—

I am the Vice President of Marketing for McNeil Consumer Healthcare. I have responsibility for the Motrin Brand, and am responding to concerns about recent advertising on our Web site. I am, myself, a mom of 3 daughters.

We certainly did not mean to offend moms through our advertising. Instead, we had intended to demonstrate genuine sympathy and appreciation for all that parents do for their babies. We believe deeply that moms know best and we sincerely apologize for disappointing you. Please know that we take your feedback seriously and will take swift action with regard to this ad. We are in process of removing it from our Web site. It will take longer, unfortunately, for it to be removed from magazine print as it is currently on newsstands and in distribution.

—Kathy

Not only that, the company quickly replaced the video with an apology on the Web site which ran for several days.

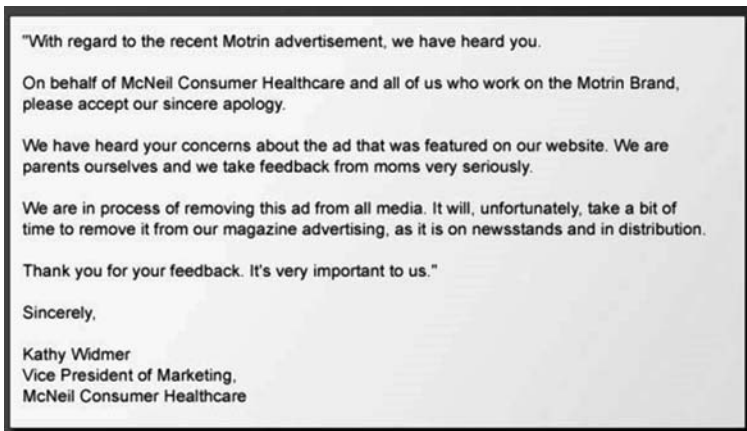


Figure 5.1 Motrin Apology

In looking back on the incident, babywearing mom Gates had this to say:

When I first viewed the Motrin ad and put that first Tweet on Twitter asking if others had seen it as well, I fully expected to get a reaction but figured it would be from just a handful of babywearing moms. What I did not expect was for moms (and others) to become as outraged as they were and for it to spread like wildfire. It seemed that many shared my feelings that the ad not only insulted and mocked moms (the very group they were trying to appeal to), it also spread misinformation about babywearing.

I also did not expect Motrin to pull the ad as quickly as they did and was surprised to receive an apology from them (McNeil Consumer Healthcare) in my inbox. I think they responded swiftly and professionally. I think the biggest lesson to be learned from the Motrin debacle is to know your audience.²

Truly, the groundswell was enormous. But the question is, did any of this have to happen? Many alleged the company should have done its due diligence in better understanding the market before posting what some considered a patronizing, somewhat snarky ad.

The incident illustrates the incredible velocity with which a message can spread. “In this case, the platform of choice for the ‘Power Moms’ is Twitter, and this puts the controversy on hyper-drive,” said social media strategist Pete Blackshaw. “Like it or not, Twitter has dramatically accelerated the delivery time of ‘feedback moments.’”³

David Alston, CMO of Radian6, a social media monitoring service, said in a blog post on the topic, “The real silver lining in the Motrin cloud comes from the opportunity now for the Motrin brand to join the conversation, starting with listening. There are other successful turnarounds that exist out there for them to follow.”⁴ But will they? At the time of this writing, Motrin had not established a footprint on Twitter, which would seem to have been a natural recourse.

DELL HELL: FROM FIRESTORM TO IDEASTORM

Media blogger Jeff Jarvis set off a firestorm in June 2005 with this short, opinionated rant on his Buzzmachine blog⁵:

Dell lies. Dell sucks.

I just got a new Dell laptop and paid a fortune for the four-year, in-home service.

The machine is a lemon and the service is a lie.

I'm having all kinds of trouble with the hardware: overheats, network doesn't work, maxes out on CPU usage. It's a lemon.

But what really irks me is that they say if they sent someone to my home—which I paid for—he wouldn't have the parts, so I might as well just send the machine in and lose it for 7-10 days—plus the time going through this crap. So I have this new machine and paid for them to F***** FIX IT IN MY HOUSE and they don't and I lose it for two weeks.

DELL SUCKS. DELL LIES. Put that in your Google and smoke it, Dell.

Hundreds, if not thousands, of other bloggers piled on to voice their concerns over the quality of Dell's products and service. It was as if Jarvis had uncorked a bottle of overly fermented wine just waiting to spew out, and spew it did!

The problem was further exacerbated in 2006 when a Dell laptop caught fire during a conference in Japan due to a faulty battery, resulting in over four million of the batteries being recalled.

Needless to say, neither of these instances helped Dell's reputation. Because both stories have been widely covered in digital and print media, I won't go into further detail about the problems themselves. Instead, I want to focus on what the computer manufacturer has done to turn its brand image around and go from a firestorm (literally) to an "ideastorm."

Realizing they had a huge problem on their hands, Dell founder and CEO Michael Dell charged the company with a directive, that they proactively find dissatisfied customers in the blogosphere and connect them with someone at Dell who could help.

Soon after, in 2006, Dell launched their first foray into the blogosphere, the Direct2Dell blog, led by Dell's Blogger-in-Chief Lionel Menchaca. But the company did

not stop there. In February 2007, they started Dell IdeaStorm, a site devoted to gathering consumer opinion on ways the company can improve its products and services.

As if that wasn't enough, in 2008, Dell established a strong presence on Twitter using a team of digital communications specialists to listen to, respond to, and join in on the conversation going on about the company. Furthermore, they employed the use of social media monitoring software to listen to the blog and social mediasphere.

To Dell's credit, using the tools of social media, the company has largely turned what was a PR nightmare into something a lot more dreamlike. For example, in 2006 at least 50 percent of the online conversation about Dell was negative, according to Dell communications strategist Richard Binhammer.⁶ Today, the company calculates negative online conversation to be at about 25 percent. Much of that change is credited to their social media engagement practices.

They have certainly created a model for other companies to follow. In a panel presentation in 2007 Menchaca outlined Dell's attitude on engaging consumers via social media⁷:

- Customers are in control. Work with them and learn from them.
- Real conversations are two-way.
- Think before you talk—but always be yourself.
- Address any form of dissatisfaction head on.
- Be aware that any conversation can become global at any time.
- Size doesn't matter—relevance does. Just as one journalist can trigger a news cycle, one blogger can do the same.
- Don't be afraid to apologize.
- Develop direct links to customer community (IdeaStorm for Dell), listen for how we can improve.
- One customer is part of many communities.
- Teamwork, transparency, and frequent, consistent communication are key in this new world.

- No shortcuts are possible. Implementing business change requires much effort across departments.

CONCLUSION

Though I have covered only three companies, a Google search of nearly any major brand will return negative sentiment mixed in with positive. For example, at the time of this writing, a search for the brand “Motrin” shows at least four negative mentions on the front page just below the link to the Motrin Web site. Similarly, a search for the brand name “Iams,” the pet food company, returns results to sites that talk about Iams’ “cruelty,” and references the use of cats and dogs in experiments. It is as if one part of the returns are saying “buy this product,” while another is saying “don’t buy!” The harsh truth is that people are speaking out using the tools of social media. You don’t have to be large brand like Dell or Motrin for them to talk about you, either. Small companies can fall prey just as easily, just on a smaller scale. One check of ratings and review sites like Yahoo! Local, MerchantCircle, Yelp, or Angie’s List may be telling and well worth the time investment.

How does a company combat negative attention and reward positive mentions? What is the antidote to this marketing malady? That’s the topic under consideration in the next chapter. The good news is, the same tools used by consumers can be used by you.

CHAPTER SIX

What's a Marketer to Do?

Start a Conversation



Considering the impact the aforementioned consumer trends are having on the marketplace, to suggest a solution as elementary as starting a conversation seems quite an oversimplification and underestimation of the severity of the problem. Certainly, something more advanced and strategic is required. (“Can we get someone with an MBA in here!?!”)

While I understand your concern, allow me to remind you of an old adage that says, “If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em.” Two can play at this game, and, in fact, businesses better be on the same playing field as their customers and prospects in using the tools of social media if they hope to thrive given the present landscape.

Part Three of this book outlines a three-step plan for social media marketing engagement, which should scratch the itch of those needing something fully developed. For now, let’s answer the question of why conversational (i.e., social media) marketing can serve as the antidote.

WHY SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING IS AN ANTIDOTE TO THIS MARKETING MALADY

Before attempting an explanation, we need to first define what is meant by the term “social media,” both what it is and what it isn’t, and explore its application where marketing is concerned.

A good way to begin is by deconstructing the term, starting with the word “media.” These are the tools—blogs, social networks, wikis, online communities, microblogs, video sharing sites—any medium through which a message can be conveyed. “Social” is anything that has to do with relationships, connections, or interactions. Put the two together and what you are talking about are tools that enable people to relate to one another in a social way.

Wikipedia defines social media as “Internet- and mobile-based tools for sharing and discussing information among human beings.”¹ It is that last part I want to camp on for just a moment.

Social Media Is Both a Toolset and a Mindset

Social media is not just about technology. In fact, the barrier to entry into the use of this technology has been set so low that anyone who can use Microsoft Word or send an e-mail can take advantage of almost every one of the applications available today, and there are a great many, as the graph on the next page reveals.

Social media is less about the tools and more about what people can and are doing with them. “First, it’s an understanding that social media is about *sociology* and less about *technology*,” said PR blogger Brian Solis. The tools simply serve to facilitate social, human interaction and do so at a scale heretofore thought impossible. Really, social media is about people.

To put it more academically, “Social media is the democratization of information transforming people from content readers into content publishers,” says Wikipedia.² “It is a shift from a one-way broadcast mechanism to a many-to-many model, rooted in conversations between authors, people, and peers.”

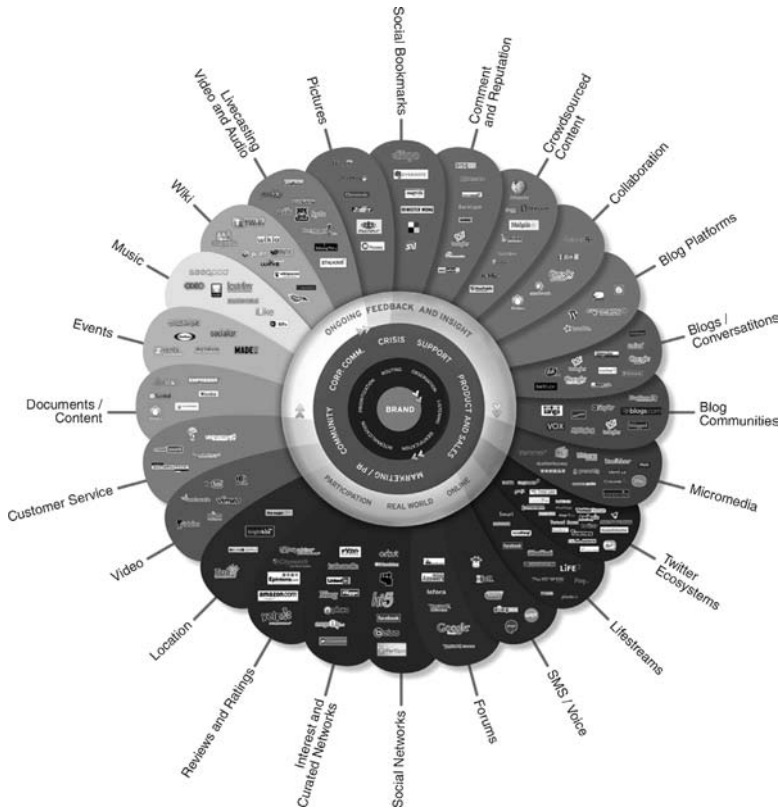


Figure 6.1 Brian Solis Conversation Prism Graph

Social media is a mindset, a milieu, an environment that, for people who choose to live in it, can lead to the development of lasting friendships, networks of professional colleagues and opportunities for business development.

Social Media Is a New Way to Think about Marketing

Does social media fit neatly into old marketing paradigms, or is it something new altogether? Perhaps, rather, the use of social media requires a new skill set, that of a conversationalist.

John Jantsch, author of *Duct Tape Marketing*, said companies should consider hiring a “Chief Conversation Officer.” I think John is onto something. Perhaps the way to

think of social media as it relates to business is not as marketing (or PR for that matter) but simply as conversations that lead to conversions.

To borrow a passage from the Bible, you “can’t put new wine in old wineskins,” and the Web 2.0 certainly qualifies as “new wine.” But we seem hell-bent on making it sync with old forms, and it’s not doing so well.

For example, conversion rates on advertising in social networks are abysmal at best. Cost per thousand impressions (CPM) rates are dropping like rocks, and it should not be a mystery as to why. No one participates in conversations at Facebook, Twitter, or any other form of social media to click on ads. In fact, they don’t view social media as a marketing channel at all, but as a way to connect with each other.

The old saying, “I know what I like,” would be more truthfully restated, “I like what I know.” We’re uncomfortable with those things with which we have no familiarity and, thus, attempt to fit them into our current frame of reference or dismiss them altogether.

An example of this comes from a survey released earlier this year by Marketing Executives Networking Group of the top marketing trends of 2009.³ The survey indicates that “twice as many marketers are ‘sick’ of hearing about Web 2.0 and related buzzwords such as ‘blogs’ and ‘social networking’ compared to last year’s survey.”

The reason may be that, according to the report, “marketers still admit they don’t know enough about it” and that “67 percent of executive marketers consider themselves beginners when it comes to using social media for marketing purposes.”

(The primary reason for writing this book was to make this stuff more palatable and put it in layman’s terms.)

Social Media Is Not Just a Marketing Channel

When it comes to social media marketing, we are apt to think of it as merely another channel through which to broadcast our marketing message. While, yes, social media is a channel marketers can use, it is so much more.

To illustrate the difference between social media and other forms of marketing, let me draw a comparison from the world of healthcare nonprofit fundraising.

Years ago I served as a regional manager for the American Cancer Society. One of my chief duties was fundraising, and the primary venue through which that was done was an event called “Relay For Life.” If you’ve never participated in Relay, you may consider it to be simply another “walkathon.” Far from it.

Relay is about a community forming over a 24-hour period to raise funds to fight cancer. Certainly, walking is involved, but that becomes almost tangential. Where the real action happens is inside the walking track.

Participating teams set up campsites, choose a theme, and go all-out to decorate their site. Often, teams will be seen in costumes that support their chosen theme, or they don T-shirts that do so at least. I have seen teams dressed up as characters from the Wizard of Oz, characters from the movie *Grease*, as punk rockers, and as superheroes!

Over a 24-hour span of time, these disparate groups representing businesses, organizations, clubs, and churches from across the community meld together to become what author Seth Godin would refer to as a “tribe.” They laugh together, cry together, share meaningful moments that leave them both tired and exhilarated at the same time—and they are ready to come back and do it all over again the next year! I have never seen anything like it. You have to experience the phenomenon to fully appreciate it and to understand the impact a Relay can have on a community.

In my view, that’s something very similar to the benefits that participation in social media provide. People gather in virtual communities and forge relationships, both personal and professional, built on affinity and trust. From a marketing standpoint, social media is a way to turn strangers into friends, friends into customers, and customers into evangelists. Not unlike Relay For Life, you have to experience it to truly understand.

Social Media Is Not an Advertising Campaign

“Forrester Research believes today’s ad agencies are not well-structured to take on tomorrow’s marketing challenges, needing to move from making messages to establishing community connections,” states an article in *Adweek*.⁴

Advertising agencies tend to look at everything as a campaign, and social media is not a campaign. To define it thus is to do a disservice.

“Once you start thinking about using social tools as campaign support, you’re thinking in terms of one-night stands with your customers, not building long-term relationships,” said Peter Kim, entrepreneur and former Forrester analyst. Marketing in this era is no longer so much about crafting messages directed at targeted audiences but about participating in relevant communities. Building relationships takes time, and you have to be in it for the long haul.

So, that’s it. Social media is not a channel, a campaign, or a one-night stand. It is about building relationships, participating in conversations, and being part of a tribe. It is an understanding that authenticity and transparency are its cornerstones. It’s recognizing that the customer has a face and a name and should be treated as a partner in co-creation. It’s business gone personal. Companies that get that will wonder how they ever got along without it.

THE CONNECTED CONSUMER

Consumers are using the Internet for just about everything these days. Consider these statistics:

- 73 percent of adults in the United States are online.
- 87 percent of those age 12–17 years are online.
- 22 percent of the world’s population is online.
- Over 200 million people use Facebook.
- MySpace receives 125 million unique visitors per month.
- More than 133 million blogs exist.
- There are over 195 million cell phone users in the United States.
- People *love video*—13 billion online video streams by over 100 million U.S. Internet users in December 2008.
- They connect with each other online—61.4 percent have visited a social networking Web site.

- 35 percent of Internet users in the United States aged 18 years or over now use an online social network.

It stands to reason that we need to be where our customers and prospects are. Today, that means having a substantial presence on the Internet. If those numbers aren't enough to convince you, consider the following.

Google Is the New Yellow Pages

I cannot recall the last time I actually picked up a copy of the Yellow Pages. In fact, I don't even know where our copy is. I think I may have thrown it away. That's because, like everyone else, I use Google to find information, and that includes local information. Whether it's to find a good Italian restaurant, get directions, find which theater where a particular movie is playing, or recommendations for a plumber, most often Google is the first place I look. And I am not alone.

Consumers are increasingly turning to the Internet to find local businesses where they can buy products or services, according to a survey conducted by WebVisible and Nielsen Online.⁵

The survey, which included almost 4,000 U.S. Internet users, reported that about half of the respondents said that search engines were the first place they looked when they needed to find a local business. Just 24 percent went to the Yellow Pages, and only 10 percent looked to the Internet Yellow Pages as a first reference. That's because Google is the new Yellow Pages.

Generation C

They have been called by many names: Generation Y, Millennials, Echo Boomers, and the iGeneration. No matter what the term, they are the offspring of Baby Boomers, born between 1982 and 1995, and they are beginning to heavily impact the marketplace.

They don't read the newspaper, don't buy CDs, and don't listen to the radio or watch television nearly as much as their forebears. In fact, their first "screen" is not the TV at all, but rather the computer, cell phone, MP3 player, or mobile device.

44 FIVE TRENDS TURNING THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

They are digital natives who are always on. I call them “Generation C” because they are connected, creative, understand the value of community, are co-creators of content, and have cash to spend. They are the new “Consumer 2.0,” and if your business or organization hopes to attract them you had better be where they are. That means having a presence on social media sites like Facebook and MySpace.

Younger adults flock to social network sites in droves; 85 percent of adults age 18–34 years use them. Case in point, I recently had the opportunity to speak to a communications class at a local university on the topic of social media. When I asked how many had Facebook profiles, every hand in the room went up.

The Internet Is Not Just for the Young

While at its core, use of online social networks is still a phenomenon of the young, it’s not just for the young but for the “young at heart” as well. (Heck, even my 77-year-old mother has an e-mail address!)

A growing share of adult Internet users who have a profile on an online social network site has more than quadrupled in the past four years, from 8 percent in 2005 to over 35 percent now, according to one report.⁶ Over 40 percent of MySpace users are between the ages of 35 and 54, according to comScore,⁷ and now that it is open to everyone, Facebook, once the sole domain of college students, is skewing older as well.

Even older technologies, such as e-mail and instant messaging, are still replacing analog communications:

- 22 percent of all American adults say they rely on instant messaging, up from 9 percent in 2007.
- 21 percent of adults age 18–34 rely on instant messaging, up from 14 percent in 2007.

Mobile media continues to become a dominant force:

- Only 41 percent of U.S. adults say they’ve never sent a text message, down 8 percent from a year ago.

- Among 18- to 34-year-olds, the proportion of those who have never sent a text message has fallen to 22 percent, a decline of 16 percent from last year.

When you consider that over 13 million iPhones were sold in 2008 alone, it's no wonder there is a mad rush to capitalize on this fast-growing market.

Self-publishing online and reading blog content also are growing:

- 10 percent of U.S. adults now publish blogs. That number was only 5 percent last year.
- Younger Americans publish blogs at twice that rate: Some 20 percent of U.S. adults age 18–34 publish a blog, up from 10 percent last year.
- 50 percent of U.S. Internet users read blogs.

What we are seeing here is a seismic shift in the way people lives their lives. More and more, they are living them online and businesses better learn how to reach them there.

ADVERTISING IN THE ERA OF THE WEB 2.0

We are seeing a shift in the way marketing dollars are being allocated as well. Newspaper revenue has dropped by as much as 18 percent, especially now that its cash cow, classified ads, have gone online at sites like Craigslist. Television and radio revenue has decreased as well, though less sizably.

The real winner in all of this is online marketing, especially where social media is concerned. Even though a viable advertising model for social media has yet to be found, “Spending on social media and conversational marketing will outpace that of traditional marketing spent by 2012,” a study conducted by TWI Surveys, Inc. reported.⁸

Think about that. If this survey is correct, in a mere three years social media will garner more advertising dollars than print, radio, and television combined! Talk about a seismic shift.

Part of the reason is that ad targeting and segmentation will continue to improve. “Advertising will get more and

more targeted until it disappears, because perfectly targeted advertising is just information,” said Internet pioneer Dave Winer.

Given this information, why then are most advertisers and marketers today *still* using 1960s “Mad Men” style, mass media approaches to reach media-fragmented, attention-deficient, hyperconnected, twenty-first-century consumers? Beats me. I believe, to coin a phrase from *Cool Hand Luke*, “What we have here is a failure to communicate.”

Broadcast media and traditional advertising was a twentieth-century diversion from more historic means of selling. Social media marketing is a return to the corner market or street bazaar. More to the point, it is a return to being human. Somehow we left that at the door of our office or cubicle when we put on the marketers hat. We forgot that the audiences we target are made up of people.

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING: MAKING A CASE FOR SMALL BUSINESS

The Internet is like a massive network of “small towns” (i.e., niches). I hold we can lend credibility to that notion, and, thus, marketing need not be a scaling of some great monolithic wall as described in an earlier chapter but a penetration of unfilled or partially filled niches that make it up.

Will It Play in Peoria?

While I applaud what giant companies like Dell, Procter & Gamble, Ford, and Comcast are doing with their use of social media, my question is, can small businesses put these same tools to work? Based on my experience, I’d say the answer is a resolute “yes!”

From Bricks to Clicks

Many small businesses are brick and mortar, and I see the Internet as a digital extension of the service they’re already providing in person. For that reason, using tools like blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn makes perfect sense. It’s a way to strengthen the connections they already have with their customers and community in the “analog” world. In

addition, it's a cost-effective channel through which they can market themselves and their services/products as well.

Ines Hegedus-Garcia is a real estate agent in Miami, Florida, who uses a number of social media tools to market her business. "I use a variety of applications to reach different groups of people," says Garcia.⁹ "Some inhabit one social network such as Facebook, for example, while others are active at Twitter. I get results in different ways from all of them."

"At first, Facebook was a way to reconnect with old friends and high school classmates," says Garcia, who, over time, recognized its potential advantage as a business development tool. "I find just having an active presence there is enough," she adds. While she uses some "soft sell" marketing techniques such as uploading photos of property listings, never is there a pitch to make a purchase.

Garcia's Web site (<http://www.Miamism.com>) incorporates both a blog and a photoblog. Though most of her posts are real estate related, she has created a series called "Miamism Fridays" that features posts that promote and showcase the area from a local point of view.

She has also set up a Miamism group on the photo sharing site Flickr, where she invites others to join, using the incentive that she may feature their photos on one of her Miamism Fridays posts. "When I do, I let them know and they share the link with friends and family," states Garcia. "It is a way to drive traffic to my site and build exposure among people who may not otherwise have ever heard of me. It is working beautifully. I am seeing leads and referrals coming as a result."

Garcia actively uses the microblogging site Twitter as well. "When I started, it was just a place to have fun and to connect with colleagues in the real estate industry. Then, I began to connect with people locally and realized that Miami has a strong social network community built around Twitter," says Garcia.

Garcia has not limited her interactions to the online world solely. In fact, she finds that what starts out as online connections leads to real world ones. "I've been able to turn virtual connections into real ones via local 'tweetups' (in-person gatherings of Twitter users in a given locale). These

tweetups take on the character of a business networking group such as BNI,” she adds. “In one such group comprised of mostly professional people, I am the only realtor.”

USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO INFLUENCE THE MARKETPLACE

In 2006, well-known Web usability expert Jakob Nielsen developed the Community Participation Pyramid,¹⁰ otherwise known as the 90–9–1 Principle, which states the following:

- 90 percent of users are lurkers (i.e., read or observe, but don’t contribute).
- 9 percent of users contribute from time to time, but other priorities dominate their time.
- 1 percent of users participate a lot and account for most contributions. It can seem as if they don’t have lives because they often post just minutes after whatever event they’re commenting on occurs.

I fall into that one percent bracket and tend to think everyone else either does (or should) as well. They don’t and, according to Nielsen, they won’t.

Rather than be dismayed at the lack of participation, perhaps those of us who are assiduous creators of content should view this as a blessing in disguise, in that it gives us the opportunity to become all the more influential.

Personally, I did not get into blogging and social media just to have a bully pulpit. While I enjoy sharing my points of view, my chief goal has always been to start conversations.

I’ve long held the view espoused by Internet pioneer Dave Winer, who once said, in regard to blogs, that comments left by readers are often more insightful than the post itself. True conversational marketing “nirvana” is achieved when conversations within the comment thread take on a life of their own. The original post becomes nothing more than tinder to start a fire. Still, in spite of the promise social media holds for allowing everyone to be proactive contributors, the fact is, most won’t.

What are the implications of this trend as it pertains to content creators? We have the opportunity to become centers of influence. Being a member of the “one-percenter” club means there are 99 percent that we have the ability to influence.

Being a center of influence is easier now than ever. Perhaps the real promise of social media is not that everyone participates equally, but that those who choose to take up the mantle of “one percentership” have the opportunity to do so with fewer obstacles. We can become tribal leaders. Think of the ways that could benefit your business.

“There’s an explosion of new tools available to help lead the tribes we’re forming,” said Seth Godin in his book *Tribes*.¹¹ “There are literally thousands of ways to coordinate and connect groups of people that just didn’t exist a generation ago. All of it is worthless if you don’t decide to lead.”

With influence comes responsibility. We cannot take this issue of leadership lightly. We have a responsibility to use our influence not for selfish motives but to benefit the community as a whole, and those who take this responsibility seriously will be rewarded by those very same communities.

Here are some ways you can use social media to exert influence:

Express servant leadership. Lead by example and have a “do unto others” attitude. That’s the mindset I believe an influencer needs to have. In other words, be a mentor and a “*mensh*.”

Provide valuable content. Value is subjective of course. One person’s trash is another one’s treasure. Nonetheless, I think there are some commonsense principles that can be applied to content creation.

Think in terms of what will benefit the community. Face it, most people don’t really care what you or I have to say unless it benefits them in some way. You have to win the right to be heard. Think of the example of Jesus feeding the 5,000. Only when he had met his followers “felt” needs could he go on to meet their real ones (think Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs).

I don’t mean to imply that people are selfish by nature, but one thing is for sure, we are strapped for time. We only have time to consume the information that will provide the

most benefit. If your aim is to become an influencer, be the person who serves that function.

Don't take it personally. While social media is a personal medium, people will tend to value your content before they value you. For example, if I'm in the market to purchase a home, I'm probably going to search for properties before I search for a realtor.

One of the people who best exemplifies the highest and best of this leadership ethic is new media marketing consultant Chris Brogan. Even he said via a Twitter message that sometimes he feels "more like a service than a human." It goes with the territory and is one of the hazards of the job.

Research, research, research. There was a time when creating content for the Web was much easier than it is now. For example, on average a given blog post may take as much as two hours to write. (Two hours! And some take much longer than that, believe it or not.) That may be in part because I'm getting older and not as fast on my feet as I once was, but I think largely it's due to the fact I try to substantiate my commentary with appropriate documentation and cite a number of other resources. It's a far cry from the pithy, anecdotal rants and raves of days gone by.

There is more I could say, but you get the point. If Nielsen's numbers are valid, and experience tells me they are, a great opportunity lays at your feet—to become an influencer, the leader of a tribe.

NEW TOOLS REQUIRE NEW RULES

As with any tool, those associated with social media must be used in accordance with their design. You don't use a hammer to screw in a bolt, and you don't use a saw to drive a nail. (Lacking the proper tool at the time, I actually tried that once and can attest to the fact it does not work well at all!) Similarly, there are certain "rules" that govern social media engagement.

Author John Jantsch hits the nail on the head (pardon the pun) with his own new rules, new tools declaration: Don't be rude. Don't be boring. Give to get.¹²

There is a fallacy and even subtle danger in suggesting, especially to those either uninitiated or newly initiated, that

social media is just a toolset. As I suggested earlier in the chapter, it is also a mindset. I have to go back to the much heralded, though less read, “bible” of social media, *The Cluetrain Manifesto*, and reference the very first of its 95 Theses, which is, “Markets are conversations.”¹³

What I’m seeing, especially with tools like Twitter, are some disturbing trends:

- Automation—This includes the use of auto-replies and scheduled posts
- Old-school, direct marketing-oriented “pitching”

The worse-case scenario is when those two trends combine to create the perfect storm. The auto-response subverts the need for real human interaction and the upfront pitch any need to build real, human relationships (to the degree that is possible in Twitter).

Both fly in the face of what social media is all about, and I’m grieved that the most conversational and human of all social media tools, Twitter, is being turned into nothing more than a marketing machine.

“There will always be some who will flock to a new social media site in order to game it for cash,” said blogger David Risley.¹⁴ “They see it as a huge pool of eyeballs that need to be driven to their website. And, of course, Twitter is a good medium for that. But, it has to be used *properly* and with social tact. You need to be a good community member first, and marketer second.”

I don’t mean to be unreasonable or overreactive. It’s just that bad things happen to good technology when unscrupulous, irresponsible marketers get involved. Look at the evolution of blogs over the years. What was once referred to as the “last form of honest advertising” is now, according to market research firm Forrester, an “untrusted medium.”

A medium built on the stalwarts of “authenticity” and “transparency” has de-evolved to something that is, at times, even farcical. Call me a purist if you wish; the fact is old school marketing doesn’t work in social media. Dare I say it again: “Markets are conversations,” and “participation is marketing.” If you’re unwilling to adopt that mindset, you have no business trying to ply your wares using these tools.

Social media is a toolset, but it's also a mindset. If you're going to use the tools, do so in the way they were designed and intended.

In Part Two, we get into the heart of this book and take an in-depth look at seven of the most popular strategic tools in the social media tool chest: blogs, social networks, online communities, microblogs, Internet video, podcasts, and social media news releases. We include a chapter on several other forms of social media marketing as well.

PART II

SEVEN PROVEN STRATEGIES TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS

CHAPTER SEVEN

Business Blogging: Your Social Media Marketing Headquarters



Blogs are probably the most well-worn tool in the social media marketer's tool chest. They have been around longer than almost all other social media applications. Blogs readily facilitate the inclusion of many other forms of social media, such as videos, podcasts, and social bookmarking. Although no single tool will fulfill every marketing need, blogs are well suited to serve as a headquarters and the base of operations for forays into other forms of social media.

Before we go any further, we should define what a blog is. Technically speaking, a blog is an easy-to-use, Web-based content management system that allows people with little or no technical background to publish, maintain, and update content.

Wikipedia defines a blog as "a website, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order."¹

In my opinion, the Wikipedia definition leaves much to be desired. Defining a blog from merely a technological standpoint, without addressing the human element, tells only half the story. What makes a blog so unique compared to a typical Web site, message board, or e-mail application is the blog's balanced combination of *technology* and *personality*.

Blogs beg to be written in an informal, punchy, and authentic tone of voice, something Internet pioneer Doc Searls called an "e-mail to everyone."² A well-written blog reflects the passions, insights, thoughts, and judgments of the writer. It has heart as well as substance. It conveys emotion, and not merely information.

Blogs also provide the ability to do something better than all other content management media: stimulate conversation. Blog readers can interact with the blogger via the comment function, expressing their opinions and asking questions. In addition, a conversation among the blog commenters themselves is not unusual.

Most of the popular blogging platforms will e-mail reader comments to the blogger, so conversations are carried to another level: that of personal, private communications between the two parties. This process is another way in which blogs facilitate conversation.

My favorite definition for blogs is that given by Ohio Realtor David Crockett (no, he does not wear a coonskin cap!)³:

Blogs are simply living and breathing Internet sites, upscale chatrooms, constantly growing newsletters. They invite interaction and get people involved. They create energy and synergy. They live and breathe and grow and take on a life of their own.

Rebecca Blood, an early blogging adopter and author of *The Weblog Handbook*, characterized blogs as native to the Web.⁴

"Everything about them—their format, their reliance on links, their immediacy, their connections to each other—is derived from the medium in which they were born. They are of the Web itself."

Although blogging has changed dramatically since the early days, Blood's statement still rings true: blogs have

a uniqueness that almost defies explanation. Blogs are a unique and effective form of Internet communication, not only because of the technology used to create them but because of the personality used in writing them. Blogs are truly an amalgam of technology and personality, and most often they are best understood when they are experienced.

BLOGS ARE PART OF OUR DAILY LIVES

Each year, Technorati publishes its State of the Blogosphere report. The 2008 version of the report began by stating the impact of blogging as follows: “[B]logs are a global phenomenon that has hit the mainstream.”⁵

A March 2008 report from Universal McCann supports that conjecture.⁶ According to the report, 184 million people worldwide started blogs, and 357 million people read them, which is 77 percent of active Internet users. I’d have to say Technorati is correct: blogs have hit the mainstream!

TEN THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE YOU BLOG

The worst thing you could do is read what I just said, get excited about the possibilities a blog has to offer, go to one of the many platforms available, and launch a blog without giving real forethought as to why you should (or should not, as the case may be).

I have seen this happen many times. Blogs lay dormant after only a few weeks or months and never reach their full potential. Even worse, the writers tell their business colleagues that they tried blogging but that blogging didn’t work.

This section outlines ten things marketers should consider before they enter the blogosphere.

I. Determine Why You Want to Use a Blog

You should have a specific purpose in mind before you start a blog. Will the blog be used as a marketing channel, to share company news and updates and express thought leadership and industry analysis, or will the blog be used more as a public relations tool? There are many reasons to use a blog,

but before you start one, you should determine those that are most applicable to you.

2. Consider Your Blog's Core Message and Tone

You should ask yourself some questions regarding the blog's content. What are you going to write about? What topics will you cover? What "tone" will your blog have? Should the blog be warm and humorous, or straightforward and informational? The audience you are attempting to reach will largely determine the approach you take.

Your primary consideration must be your readers. Social media marketing consultant Mack Collier advises that companies not make their blogs self-promotional; rather, the blogs should provide content that has value to readers. "Don't view your blog as a direct sales channel, or your content will reflect that mindset," says Collier. "Instead, rather think in terms of the blog being a value-add."⁷

3. Identify Who Will Write the Blog

In its nascent period, blogging was extemporaneous, off the cuff, often pithy, and anecdotal. I called blogging a "shoot from the hip, speak from the heart" style of communicating. Today, blogging has less of that free style. In order to provide real business and marketing value, a blog requires research, time, and forethought.

Brian Clark, entrepreneur and author of the Copyblogger blog, says that, thanks to the advent of other forms of social media, "much of the migration of pure social chatter off of blogs and onto social networking applications is a good thing for the rest of us who are looking to build businesses powered in whole or in part by blogs."⁸

Even so, a blog requires a writer who understands "blog style," and a marketer is not always the most qualified. Because the responsibility for blogging is often given to the marketing or PR department, it is incumbent upon the marketing or PR person to find a writer who understands what makes the company tick and who can accurately reflect the company's persona. Invariably, the blogger will inject her own style and personality, and that's a good thing. The

blogger needs to speak with a “human” voice, and not in marketing language.

4. Determine Whether Your Company Is Prepared to Engage in the Conversation without Attempting to Control the Communication

Historically, the blogosphere has been a no-holds-barred, free-for-all means of communication. It is a two-way street in that readers can respond to what you have written via their comments. Their responses may not always be kind. Not all organizations are prepared to have raw, unedited content show up on their public Web sites (blogs).

Several options are available. For example, you can leave the comments feature turned off. In my view, this is the least favorable course of action. Blogs were built with interaction in mind. They are about engendering conversations between blogger and reader. To turn off comments is to say to readers, “We don’t value your input.”

A second option is to prevent negative comments from being shown. This, too, is not a favorable course of action because it attempts to control communication, purging the blog of what might prove to be valuable commentary. Readers will view the move as disingenuous, and most likely they won’t be back.

The best and most authentic way to approach this issue is to take each comment at face value. If the criticism is unwarranted, then by all means don’t let it live on the site. If, however, the comment is a serious attempt to address an issue of real concern, then it would reflect well on your company if you allowed criticism to appear and then responded accordingly with a comment of your own. Doing so will open a channel for dialogue that may turn a critic into a friend.

5. Establish a Company Blogging Policy with Posting Guidelines

Many sample company blogging policies are available on the Web, ranging from Microsoft’s simple “Be Smart” directive to elaborate documents conceived by legal departments.

Susannah Gardner's 2005 book, *Buzz Marketing with Blogs for Dummies*,⁹ contains an entire section on this subject, and I recommend her book to you. (Disclaimer: I served as technical editor and contributing writer of the book.)

The acronym CYRWP (cover your rear with paper) certainly applies in this area. It is in your company's best interests to have in place a legally binding document that protects the integrity of your company and armors it against liability.

6. Monitor What Is Being Said About Your Company and Your Industry

Later in the book I dedicate an entire chapter to online reputation monitoring. There are many reasons to do so, but the most obvious is to find out what people are saying about your company and how they view it.

You may find that no one is talking about you. In that case, a blog can help kick-start the conversation. If you are being talked about but in a less than congratulatory manner, a blog can state the facts correctly or, should the need arise, apologize for mistakes made.

The Web content management software company Bizzuka experienced just such a situation. A blogger misrepresented the company's products and posted his opinion for all the world to see. A Google search of "Bizzuka" returned that blogger's post on the front page. Fortunately, Bizzuka CEO John Munsell was monitoring what was being said online about the company. He saw the post and responded by leaving a comment with the correct information that helped balance the conversation.

Since that time, the company has started its own blog. That, along with other social media marketing initiatives have driven the original post off the search's front page. In fact, you have to scroll through several pages before you find the original blog post.

Monitoring your industry lets you see what is being said about you and your competitors. Observing industry trends may help you to find a marketable niche overlooked by the competition. Many online tools can assist with this process, and we will cover some of them in Chapter 16 on listening.

7. Decide on a Blog Platform

Many excellent blog platforms are available, including WordPress, Movable Type, and Compendium Blogware. Each has advantages and disadvantages.

The main consideration is whether the blog will live on your existing company Web site or apart from it. In trying to make a determination, consider point number 1 in the list: your purpose. A good litmus test is whether the blog will be representative of the company itself or of an individual member of the company.

If the blog will be used to post news updates, then it should reside on your Web site as part of a social media newsroom (see Chapter 13). However, if the blog will be a thought-leadership platform used by your CEO, consider following the example set by Michael Hyatt, president and CEO of Thomas Nelson Publishing. Hyatt maintains a blog called “From Where I Sit.” The blog reflects his personal and professional views on the publishing industry, leadership, and life. Although the blog is linked from the Thomas Nelson Web site, it resides on its own site.

Another consideration is whether the blog will be hosted on your server or on a service like TypePad or Compendium Blogware.

8. Identify Ways to Market Your Blog

Although a blog can be your social media marketing headquarters, it is not an island unto itself. The good news is that you can use other forms of social media to market your blog. If your blog is suitably equipped, it will have its own built-in viral marketing engine, with features such as RSS feeds, social bookmarking, forward to a friend, e-mail subscription, and other sharing options. In addition, you should be able to submit your blog to various search engines and blog directories.

Perhaps the best way to market your blog is by following the “markets are conversations” mantra of *The Cluetrain Manifesto* and joining the conversation taking place about you, your company, and your industry.¹⁰ Find other bloggers who write on the same or similar topics, and comment on their blogs. Engage others via Twitter, Facebook, and

other social networks. Occasionally, share a link to one of your posts via these networks. Don't overdo it though, lest you be considered too self-promotional.

The process takes time. But if you write extraordinary content with a view toward providing value to your readers, if you are not afraid to occasionally express a strong opinion, and if you participate in the greater conversation about your topic or industry, you should find a willing and growing audience.

9. Develop a Plan to Track Statistics

Measuring the return on investment (ROI) of social media is a topic on the minds of nearly all business leaders and marketers. In this day and age, if social media doesn't provide measurable results and doesn't show a positive ROI, then no matter how cool or trendy its technology or how many books like this one espouse its use, social media will not be taken seriously.

The good news is that, just as with Web sites, activity on blogs (which, if I have not yet mentioned, are Web sites) can be measured. Many blog platforms come with their own internal metrics, but I advise using Google Analytics, Site Meter, or StatCounter to supplement the internal data. Each of these analyzers is free at the base level and provides high-quality data.

Which metrics should be measured? Traditional metrics are the number of unique visitors, number of page views, amount of referral traffic, time spent on the site, and percentage of traffic from search engines. The number of comments received, the number of subscriptions to your RSS feed, and the number of e-mail subscriptions are valid measurements. If you will be using the blog as a source to generate leads, consider measuring the conversion rates as well.

10. Be Sure to Know Your Keywords

Without a doubt, blogs are search engine magnets! Blogs offer Google and other search engines everything they are looking for in Web sites. As a result, blogs usually rank high in search engine returns.

It is vitally important that you know which keywords your customers are using that ultimately lead them to your blog as well as which words on your competitors' or your industry blogs are giving them a high ranking.

BLOGGING IS ALIVE AND WELL, IN SPITE OF PREDICTIONS TO THE CONTRARY

Critics may tell you that, with the advent of more conversational forms of social media, blogs are in a state of demise. Some even predict that blogging is dead or dying.

A survey conducted by Burson-Marsteller in May 2009 concluded that only 15 percent of Fortune 500 corporations use blogs in a meaningful way.¹¹ The survey found that only seventy-four companies, many of them technology-related corporations, actively maintain blogs.

If you also consider the results of a Forrester survey on corporate blogging, you might begin to believe the rhetoric. The Forrester survey concluded that “[n]ot only do blogs rank below newspapers and portals, they rank below wikis, direct mail, company e-mail, and message board posts,” and “only 16 percent of online consumers who read corporate blogs say they trust them.”¹²

To counter that survey, a report from eMarketer stated that “blogs have more impact on purchasing decisions than social networks. One-quarter of readers said they trust ads on a blog, as opposed to 19 percent who trust ads on social networks.”¹³ Who should we believe?

I have heard that “blogging is dead” many times over the years, and I’m sick of it. Blogging is no more dead than is e-mail, which has also had its share of doomsayers. In fact, e-mail is still the number one Internet activity. Marketers are spending more on e-mail marketing than on any other form, and the expenditures continue to rise. No, blogging is not dead. It has merely found its place in the grand scheme of all things related to marketing and social media.

I started blogging in 2003, and at that time blogging was the only arena that spoke of social media, at least in terms of business. It wasn’t until 2005 when *Business Week* did a cover story on blogging that the business world took note. Up to that point, blogging was a curiosity that only early

adopters made use of. You have only to read the books on blogging published around that time to see what I mean. (Note: Until 2005, no books dealt strictly with business applications.)

So, tell me how, only four years later, does anyone have the temerity to say that the future of blogging is dismal, and that rather than start a blog you should invest your time on Facebook, Twitter, and other social applications? Balderdash!

Blogs may be old (relatively speaking), but they are new again. Blogs have morphed into lightweight content management systems. They serve as vehicles for content marketing, they are great niche market penetration tools, and they are magnets for search engines. Let's take a closer look at some of these features.

Lightweight Content Management Systems

Look at what's happening with what is arguably the most popular blogging platform: WordPress. The latest WordPress themes extend the reach of the platform well beyond what we typically think of as a blog and into more of what we'd consider a traditional Web site. Unless you are really a student of the WordPress environment, you'd be hard-pressed to identify some of the new sites as belonging to the platform.

Bill Austin, a member of the LinkedIn Bloggers group, said, "If I use a free, easy to configure, open source content management system for developing client Web sites with integrated blogs, I can turn the entire site over to them and they can write, copy, paste, publish, edit, delete, and otherwise manage their content to their heart's content."¹⁴

For many small businesses, blogs make excellent Web sites, and they obviate the need for more complicated and more expensive content management systems.

Social Media Headquarters

With applications such as Facebook Connect, Google Friend Connect, and many other socially oriented widgets and plugins, blogs are beginning to function more like online communities. At the beginning of this chapter, I made the point that blogs cut across the social media landscape better than any other single tool.

Content Marketing

Though perhaps now framed within the context of community, content is still king. Brian Clark, in his polemic on the so-called death of blogging, says, “In truth, the real opportunities for building authority and buzz through social media have only just begun. You simply have to look and see where things are going instead of where they’ve been. . . . Value will always be key.”¹⁵

Author David Meerman Scott said that companies should consider hiring people with the skills of a journalist to churn out content, which comes in many forms: videos, photos, podcasts, blog posts, articles, press releases, etc. Your blog can serve as a repository or portal to aggregate, curate, and archive all that data.

That’s not to say that all content has to live on a blog. Content on third-party sites will be given value through link love and Google juice. Now that all major search engines use blended or “universal” searches in their algorithms, use of third-party tools can gain your company a much stronger presence. Search queries now commonly gather returns from Flickr, LinkedIn, Facebook, PRWeb, Twitter, podcast aggregation sites, and blogs.

Niche Market Penetration

Blogs are great for penetrating partially filled or unfilled niches. You can discuss a topic over and over again on your blog until you become the de facto authority on the subject. I know because I’ve seen it happen and have experienced it myself.

The more tightly defined the niche, the better. In Chapter 4, I mentioned Jay Brewer, who blogs about single-serve coffee makers. His topic is about as tight a niche as a person can have.

Search Engine Magnets

I believe blogs are their own form of search engine optimization. Someone once remarked that the word “blog” stands for “Better Listings On Google.” I believe that!

Chris Baggott, cofounder and CEO of Compendium Blogware, a state-of-the-art business blogging platform,

stated that as much as 80 percent of all web-related activities begins with a search.¹⁶

Search engine optimization is one area where blogs can really make their mark. Blogs provide everything search engines look for to give the blogs a high ranking: text, lean code, post titles as title tags, and permalinks. Add a blogger who understands the need to write frequently updated, keyword-optimized, thematically relevant posts, and the blog is a force to be reckoned with.

Google does not know a blog when it sees one. However, blogs contain all the elements that make a search engine such as Google salivate, including:

- Titles
- Keywords
- Recent content
- Lots of content
- Links
- Relevance

Titles

Something magical happens when a blogger completes the blog post title field. Most blog platforms turn it into a title tag unique to the post. That's pure gold as far as Google is concerned.

Keywords

Bloggers who understand the power of the medium enrich their posts with niche-specific keywords, which help Google better comprehend the topic being discussed.

Getting your blog to rank highly for a general term like "real estate" will be extremely difficult. Remember what I said about defining a niche and filling it. Try the more specific term "real estate, Tucker, GA," and your blog will much more likely land on front-page SERPs (search engine results pages).

Recent Content

Search engines love sites that are routinely updated and will return repeatedly to index those sites. Blogs are particularly suited to frequent updates due to their ease of use.

Lots of Content

Google doesn't understand Flash animation or graphics, at least not yet. However, Google does see and understand words, and blogs contain lots of them.

Links

Links serve two purposes in search engine optimization. First, the Google algorithm understands the purpose of a Web site by looking at both inbound and outbound links. Therefore, links to topically relevant sites provide immense search engine optimization value. Second, Google sees every person's link to a Web site as a "vote" for that site. Bloggers are rabid linkers, and the practice of linking is at the very heart of the medium. Therefore, links serve to popularize Web sites.

Relevance

Have you ever heard the term "latent semantic indexing" (LSI)? Google is now using it. LSI is more than indexing keywords; it takes a more holistic approach. According to SeoBook.com¹⁷:

Latent semantic indexing adds an important step to the document indexing process. In addition to recording which keywords a document contains, the method examines the document collection as a whole, to see which other documents contain some of those same words. LSI considers documents that have many words in common to be semantically close, and ones with few words in common to be semantically distant.

It's like the "forest for the trees" analogy. Indexing keywords to determine relevance looks at individual trees, whereas LSI looks at the whole of the situation: the forest.

I have often said that a frequently updated, keyword-optimized, thematically relevant blog will rank well in search engines. I've seen it happen again and again.

While attracting lots of traffic to your blog is well and good, something more needs to happen in order for your blog to achieve ultimate effectiveness. Traffic to the blog needs to be converted into traffic to the Web site and more. For

example, Baggott's platform (Compendium Blogware) is designed with conversion in mind, including an opt-in e-mail newsletter sign-up form among other options.

Many More Reasons

Blogs are relevant for many reasons. Your blog is the one place where you can truly set yourself apart from the competition and establish yourself as a thought-leader, knowledgeable expert, influencer, or pundit. Through your blog you can establish a beachhead and gain ground that you probably never could have otherwise, at least not as easily.

A blog can:

- Help you reach new audiences and build a loyal Web following
- Give your company its own unique voice on the Web
- Provide a place to collect and share ideas
- Engage your customer in conversation
- Provide customer feedback
- Enable a dialogue between you and your customer

"It's become an expectation that if you have a business, you have a blog. Consumers are looking to find a community around your service," said author John Jantsch.¹⁸ "They're looking to have conversation with you about the products they're using."

Even if none of the above reasons existed, blogs still serve a good and useful purpose. Blogs used to be the entire medium, but now they are part of a much richer environment called the social Web. Either way, blogs are useful.

THE MODEL SMALL-BUSINESS BLOGGER: J.D. ILES AND SIGNS NEVER SLEEP

J.D. Iles is the owner of a four-person custom sign shop in Lincoln, New Hampshire, and is a small-business owner whom I consider a model for others.

Iles started his blog, Signs Never Sleep (<http://www.signsneversleep.com>), in 2004 because he needed an

easy way to update his otherwise static Web site, and a blog fit the bill.

In the beginning, Iles confessed he didn't know what he was doing. He posted about his work, but he mixed in posts about both his family and the local area. (Not a bad idea, in my opinion.)

One strategy that he began to use and that proved to be highly effective was showing photos of signs in the process of being made. Not only did the photos demonstrate his artisanship, but they served as good PR for his clients as well. When you saw photos of his signs being made, you had no question that Iles completely understood his craft.

He later experimented with the use of video, but quickly returned to a combination of photos and text. "While I could shoot the video in a few minutes, editing proved to be a time-consuming process. I determined it wasn't the best possible use of my time," said Iles. "I backed away from video pretty quickly."

Iles has some advice for anyone considering the use of video on a blog. He suggests that the video be short, shot in one scene, and uncut. He also says the only video sharing site you should consider using is YouTube, because it is the number one such site on the Internet and is the second largest search engine. He advises that using any other platform is "a waste of time."

When asked what role his blog played in his overall marketing plan, his response was straightforward and concise: "The blog has been my only form of marketing. I even pulled my Yellow Page ads!"

Based on his extensive experience, Iles sees a number of benefits to using a blog, and search engine optimization is chief among them. He has found the medium as a way to generate leads and close sales. "People will call me who have seen the blog and say 'You're doing our sign, no questions asked,'" says Iles.

When asked what advice he would give to small-business owners considering the use of a blog, Iles says it's certainly worth a try. "Many industries are not using blogs at all and being in a first mover position will give you great advantage. Not only that, many of those who are using them aren't doing so effectively," states Iles. One caution he does give is to

be patient and understand that the process will take time, but that blogging will pay off. “If you blog for a year, no one will be able to catch up with you on Google.”

Iles has become a mentor to others in his industry and has turned his blog into an online community for custom sign-making. “It is another step in my blogging evolution,” he says. Iles’s influence now extends far beyond his industry. I’ll close this case study as I opened it. Because of his experience and success using blogs, Iles serves as a model for any small business, and I highly recommend him to you.

INTEL’S INSIDE SCOOP: HOW LARGE CORPORATIONS ARE USING BLOGS

I admit I have a propensity for small businesses, but they certainly are not the only companies using blogs. Corporate America is as well (at least 15 percent of large businesses, anyway). One such company is Intel, with its blog Inside Scoop (<http://scoop.intel.com>).

“Inside Scoop is a consumer-facing, multi-author blog, the goal of which is to authentically promote Intel’s products, services and brands,” says Intel social media strategist Michael Brito, who oversees the blog.¹⁹ “The challenge, however, is to make sure the blog is not overtly promotional,” says Brito. One way he ensures that is by finding bloggers (all Intel employees from across a number of different business units) who are passionate both about the company and about talking to consumers.

The blog deals with a variety of topics, including wireless and mobile technology and gadgets, consumer electronics, gaming, and general computing. At first glance, you might liken the blog to the popular technology blog Engadget. “While Engadget focuses on the technology itself, Inside Scoop talks more about what consumers can do with it,” states Brito in explaining the difference between the two blogs.

Integration with Facebook, YouTube, and Flickr makes Inside Scoop operate more like a social network hub than merely a blog. “It creates a reciprocal relationship. The blog feeds content out to these other channels which, in turn, feeds traffic back to the blog,” says Brito. “We want to increase community on other sites and social networks.

The blog is the hub of that activity.” In keeping with its focus on community, Intel has built social networking features such as shared user profiles into the blog, which uses the Movable Type platform. “This serves to turn our readers into members. Readers create their own profiles so that they can connect with each other,” says Brito.

If anything, these two examples provide ample evidence that blogs can be used in similar fashion regardless of company size.

HOW TO CREATE A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS BLOG

Most of what I share about how to blog I’ve learned by doing, usually by trial and error. The same can be said of how I increased traffic to my blogs over the years. Here are seven of those lessons to help you create a successful business blog.

1. Know Your Audience, and Write with Them in Mind

Define your community. Determining the audience you’re attempting to reach is Marketing 101. In social media terms, the word “community” is a better representation because we no longer “target audiences,” but we “participate in communities.”

Defining the community you want to reach has bearing on everything you do, and the same is true for blogging. I believe it’s helpful to create a *persona*, someone who is a representative of the community in question. For me, that persona is a real person, Ines Hegedus-Garcia, the Miami Realtor I spoke about in chapter 6.

About a year ago, I had the privilege of tutoring Ines in a contest called Project Blogger, which was sponsored by the real estate social network ActiveRain. I had the opportunity to share everything I’d learned to that point, and Ines would tell you that she benefited from the interaction.

Write with that community in mind. When I blog, I try keep Ines and people like her in mind. I work under the assumption that if the content is beneficial to her, it will be beneficial to others as well. As you participate in the community, you’ll learn what their needs are and how you can

address them. If you satisfy their needs, you will surely get their attention.

Someone who keeps this principle at the forefront is Chris Brogan. Everything he writes is for the benefit of his readers, and the community has rewarded him with a huge following and credited him with a high degree of influence.

I can tell you this: if Chris links to you via his blog or Twitter, a wealth of traffic and Twitter posts will follow. I've been the grateful recipient of his kindness in this manner a number of times.

2. Write with Google (and Other Search Engines) in Mind

Let's face it. Humans make up only one of the communities reading your blog. Another community is made up of machines. We call them "spiders": little creatures that index the content on your site with a view toward understanding your site's purpose and ranking your blog accordingly on their respective search engines.

Make sure your posts are keyword optimized, frequently updated, and thematically relevant. Include keywords once in the post title and two or three times in the body content. If possible, front-load the keywords in the title, that is, put your keywords at the beginning of the post title.

With regard to frequency, you should post three to five times per week at a minimum, at least until you gain a greater degree of authority with Google.

With regard to topical or thematic relevance, if you're writing a blog about cats, then don't write about dogs, hamsters, giraffes, kangaroos, and koala bears too. Make the blog about cats, cats, and more cats! Chris Brogan says to keep at least a 10:1 ratio of on-topic to off-topic posts. That's sound advice.

3. Find, Follow, and Communicate with Influential Bloggers in Your Niche

Finding, following, and communicating with influential bloggers in your niche will garner a number of benefits. If you subscribe to their feeds, read and comment on their posts, write your own comments in response, and use trackbacks when possible, those bloggers will take notice and

may return the favor. As a result, you're likely to become the beneficiary of some of their readership and traffic.

I made this technique a common practice early on in my business blogging career, and it paid off. Although the playing field is much more crowded now, the practice is still a good one.

4. One Word About Influencers

By "influential" people I don't just mean those, like Chris Brogan, who have multiple thousands of readers and followers. In social media, it's not just the number of people who read your blog that counts, but who those people are. Don't become trapped into believing that you must have rock-star status in order to be influential. It is absolutely not the case. In fact, some of the people most influential with regard to your company are your customers or clients. They are the people who most likely will spread your message among their peers.

5. Write "Top Ten" Posts on Occasion

Rick Bruner, founder of the Business Blog Consulting blog (<http://www.businessblogconsulting.com>), is a man I credit as being one of the pioneers of business blogging. Years ago, he made a suggestion that I have remembered to this day: occasionally write "top ten" posts. People like lists. Terms like "top ten," "seven secrets," and "five principles" suggest the information contained within the post will be of a practical nature (or, in David Letterman's case, of entertainment value).

Did you note that this chapter is composed of a series of lists, including the ten things to consider before you blog? (See, I told you Rick's advice stuck with me!)

6. Write Link-Bait Posts

Link-baiting means creating content that generates backlinks. Search engine optimization expert Brian Bille gives this definition²⁰:

Link-bait is a piece of content (blog post, site content or an application) created intentionally or unintentionally

to obtain incoming links. Some link-bait is purposely created to stir up controversy or mentions high profile individuals in hopes to recognize the content with a link from a quality site. Other link-bait is simply well-written, informative content that does the same.

It is the latter part of the definition to which I refer. Personally, I never write posts strictly for the purpose of link-baiting. I do write posts that, based on past experience, I assume will become link-bait. With that intention in mind, let me rephrase the point and put it this way: write high-quality, informative editorial content.

7. Establish a Presence in the Social Mediasphere

There was a time when blogs were pretty much the core of social media. Everything hinged around them. In the old days, options were more limited than they are today. You could link to other bloggers via a blog roll in hopes they would respond in kind, reference other blogs in your posts, leave comments and trackbacks, claim your blog at Technorati, and list your blog on the few blog directories that were available. And, yes, there was Google.

Okay, so the list of old tactics isn't quite as limited as I remember. However, today social media has thrown wide open the doors to blog traffic growth.

Now, we have sites like LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook and niche online communities; an entire universe of social networking sites and applications where you need to have a presence if you're serious about using social media to communicate your message. (I will be talking about these topics in the next two chapters.)

It is vitally important that you carry the conversation contained on your blog to these other realms. As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, your blog can serve as a social media headquarters, but you should get off the base once in a while.

Reciprocity extends to other blogs as well. Writing salient comments on other blog posts is a good way to gain attention from other bloggers and readers. Conversely, when someone leaves a comment on your blog, follow up quickly with a

Here are some other ways to extend your blogging presence.

MyBlogLog ([HTTP://WWW.MYBLOGLOG.COM](http://www.mybloglog.com))

In addition to letting you see who's reading your blog, MyBlogLog lets you connect with and grow your community. I'm amazed at the number of people who find my blog specifically because I have a profile there.

SOCIAL BOOKMARKING

Social bookmarks are sites like Digg, Delicious, Stumble-Upon, Reddit, and others that allow for bookmarking and social sharing of your posts. Blogs normally contain links to these sites in the post footer.

One of my favorite applications that facilitates sharing to many social bookmarking sites with the click of a button is ShareThis, a plug-in created by Alex King. Originally, it was created as a plug-in for WordPress, but it has been redeveloped for use by virtually any blog platform (or Web site).

BLOG DIRECTORIES

The number of blog directories has grown exponentially in the past few years. The *Robin Good Top 55* list (<http://www.masternewmedia.org/rss/top55/>) includes well over 200 different directories where you can list your blog. Some directories, such as Blog Catalog, are social in nature. Don't overlook this site because it can provide you with much needed Google juice.

comment of your own, or e-mail the person if it seems appropriate to do so.

If nothing else, at least do these two things:

- Write exceptional content that's of interest to your readers. Do it every day, and keep the post keyword

optimized and topically relevant. Google will absolutely love you for it, and so will your human audience.

- Actively participate in topically relevant communities and blogs.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

I will admit that, for a time, blogging seems to have become old hat, and everyone's gaze was fixed on MySpace, Facebook, and other forms of social media. It now appears that blogging has received enough mainstream acceptance that organizations that had been waiting to see what would happen with blogging may finally decide to embrace it.

Blogging is still a young medium, yet it has reached a level of maturity in a comparatively short period of time. As far as I can see, blogging has a bright future, though a changing one. For many marketers, blogs will continue to serve as a social media base of operations for a long time to come.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Social Networks Strengthen Your Social Graph



Social networks have existed as long as humans have inhabited the planet. However, the Internet has made the practice of creating connections and building relationships much more virulent. It is mind-boggling how large social networks can grow. For example, I'm directly connected to only a few hundred people via LinkedIn, but my network is a gateway to literally millions of others (8.5 million, according to LinkedIn).

People have become more accustomed to participating with each other online. The collaboration between CNN and the social network Facebook during President Obama's inauguration is a example of this shift. Not only did CNN live-stream the event over the Internet, but CNN accompanied the coverage with interaction from Facebook. Nearly 19 million people watched the inauguration via the online channel, while hundreds of thousands of Facebook users posted status updates on the sidebar. At the height of the event, 8,500 updates were being posted every minute.

The aim of this chapter is not to chronicle the history of social networking but to discuss practical, actionable ways businesspeople can use social networks to promote their companies, brands, and products.

A few months ago, the software company for which I serve as the marketing director was contacted by an advertising agency in a distant part of the country. The ad agency was interested in becoming a reseller of our products. When the agency was asked how they found us, I assumed they would say they came across us via search. I was hoping so, because we had spent quite a bit of time and effort trying to generate favorable search returns. However, their reply came as an unexpected surprise: they found us via a social network site where I had created a profile.

I can't recall what prompted me to set up a profile on that particular site. Still, the 10 or 15 minutes spent doing so profile led to a business partnership that has resulted in thousands of dollars of income for our company! What lessons can we learn from this?

You Never Know Where Leads Might Come From

I maintain profiles on several marketing-related social networks and online communities. Because you never know where leads might come from, having a presence on as many social network sites as possible makes sense.

Profiles Lend a Sense of Ubiquity

Regarding my presence in social media, a friend recently said, "You're everywhere!" And perhaps being everywhere implies credibility. Social network profiles give you the ability to be everywhere at once.

Search Engines Include Profiles in Blended Search Returns

The best reason for using profiles is that search engines include social network profiles on search engine results pages (SERPs). A search of the term "Bizzuka," my company's name, includes results from the social networks Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, as well as from business

directories on sites like BusinessWeek, Practical Ecommerce, and AboutUs.

Profiles Are the Starting Point on Social Networks

Your personal or business profile is the basis of any interaction on social networks. It is the “node” or point of connection through which others will build relationships with you, and you with them. Therefore, you should create a personal profile on social networks where you are likely to find your target audience. Again, you never know where business may come from.

You should create a business profile on other social networks, directories, and wikis, including Business.com, AboutUs.org, Best of the Web, Wikipedia (good luck), and Google Knol (Google’s version of Wikipedia). Find vertically related networks and directories and create profiles there as well. The absolute best case scenario is creating a profile on sites where you can be an active participant. At the least, you will have a presence via your profile. Showing up is half the battle, after all.

Warning: many people make the mistake of joining a social network and then sending messages to fellow members without first completing their profile. This is a crucial social media faux pas, and one guaranteed to ruin your credibility. Creating a profile takes only a few minutes, but, as in my case, it can provide ample returns. In social media, people would rather do business with other people than with “brands”; they especially want to deal with people they know and trust. Your user profile is the first step toward building that bridge.

SOCIAL NETWORKING BEST PRACTICES

Networking via social media is really no different than any other type of business networking. The same principles apply.

Come Dressed for the Occasion

In most cases, you would not attend a real-world networking event dressed in a T-shirt and shorts; rather, you would wear

a business suit or business casual. The same is true for online social networking. In this case, your profile and photo (also known as an “avatar”) are your presentation.

Work the Room

An effective networker in face-to-face events learns to work the room: shaking hands, introducing herself, listening and participating in conversations, and handing out business cards. You know the drill. You’ve done it a hundred times.

Things are not so different in the online world. Participation is the price of entry and is expected. Remember the mantra of *The Cluetrain Manifesto*: “markets are conversations,” and “participation is marketing.” You should leave comments on blog or forum posts, and write a few posts yourself. Share videos and photos, where allowed. In other words, make yourself a visible and vital member of the community.

The one thing you don’t want to do is “pitch,” at least not until people have gotten to know you. Hype and social media don’t work well together. In fact, pitching may be unnecessary. Just your presence may be enough. Your profile serves as your pitch and as your business card, and if people are interested in learning more about you and what you do, they will look at your profile.

Ask for a Business Card

Speaking of business cards, just as conventional wisdom dictates the exchange of business cards at traditional networking events, the act of friending someone (asking someone to become part of your friend network) in the online world serves the same purpose as business cards. Normally, the other person will return the courtesy, and the “courtship” can begin.

Use Social Networks to Win Friends and Influence People

Dale Carnegie’s timeless classic, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, is a book about building winning relationships, both business and personal.¹ Carnegie’s advice about how to make people like you is as follows:

- Be genuinely interested in other people.
- Smile (i.e., have a sense of humor)
- Remember that a person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language.
- Be a good listener. Encourage others to talk about themselves.
- Talk in terms of the other person's interests.
- Make the other person feel important, and do it sincerely.

This attitude of beneficence truly puts the “social” in social media and should be the standard to which we adhere. The trouble is that many of us (me included) tend to focus largely on ourselves and our own interests than on others and their interests. That focus on ourselves is a strategy for social media failure, if ever there was one.

Amber Naslund, Director of Community Management for the social media monitoring company Radian6, understands and employs this “how to win friends” ethos. “I wish I could tell more people to be real, and quit trying to be everything to everyone,” says Naslund.² “There will always be critics, detractors, and folks you don’t click with. But you’ll reap far more rewards by investing your time and energy in those that you DO connect with and figuring out how you can be helpful to them. Give first, and often. Getting happens naturally.”

Although he does not state it explicitly, Naslund pays homage to Carnegie’s philosophy. “The funny thing to me is that these social media tenets aren’t new. They’re basic, common sense fundamentals of communication and customer service,” shares Naslund. “I think we’re remembering them more than we’re inventing them. It can be as simple as treating others the way you’d want to be treated yourself.”

Marketing consultant Beth Harte, community manager for MarketingProfs, is another person who exemplifies proper social media etiquette. In keeping with the theme of focusing on others, Beth shares these ten guidelines:

1. Be real, honest, authentic, transparent (it’s what customers/prospects/the community wants).

2. Provide valuable content, conversation, help, and information, and your community will raise you up.
3. Be accessible. Members of your community (customers, prospects) want to know that they can have a conversation with you and that you will talk back and answer questions.
4. Generate conversations that others can join, and invite others to participate.
5. Listen to other people and their opinions (you just might learn something).
6. Ask questions. Usually you are asking what others have been thinking.
7. Help other people, including your competition (perceived or not), and have conversations with them. Most customer problems/challenges are industry problems/challenges.
8. Put other people first.
9. Listen to your community and learn.
10. Surround yourself with people who are smarter than you.

The “do unto others,” “give and it shall be given” ethic of reciprocity may sound trite or cliché, but it is universal. The tenets of every religion from Buddhism to Zoroastrianism contain some version of that ethic, and Carnegie certainly understood its implications for business.

THE THREE MOST POPULAR SOCIAL NETWORKS FOR BUSINESS, AND WHY YOU SHOULD USE THEM (A CORD OF THREE STRANDS IS NOT EASILY BROKEN)

According to the Bible, a cord of three strands is not easily broken. By analogy, I hypothesize that the more individual connections to a particular person you have, the stronger your overall relationship with him or her will be.

In constructing my social graph (my network of connections), I tend to build relationships at three sites: LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter. In some cases, I have connections with individuals on all three networks. The connectivity

usually begins on one or the other network and gradually extends to two or three networks and sometimes more as we get to know each other. It seems logical and natural to continue the cycle of relationship, building to sites where we both have a presence.

Keep in mind that my focus here is on creating threefold connections to individuals. It's not enough that you have a presence on each of these sites, but that you leverage your presence to connect with others who also have a presence on these sites. Social media is about being "social." Each platform offers distinct advantages, but you need all three to build the strongest connection.

If the "cord of three strands" philosophy is true, what are the three top social networks for business? Based on my experience, I recommend the following:

- **LinkedIn.** This is your business suit. LinkedIn is not very conversational in its orientation, but people expect you to have a profile there. The network lends a degree of professional credibility. This site requires the least amount of upkeep.
- **Facebook.** This is your business casual look. Facebook allows more of a 360-degree view of you by combining both your professional and your personal sides. Facebook is a more conversational platform than LinkedIn.
- **Twitter.** This is your cocktail hour. Think of after-hours social networking events, and you've got Twitter. It's the most informal of the three networks, and allows for the greatest degree of conversation.

Let's look at each of these networks in greater detail to see what advantages and benefits they have to offer.

LINKEDIN IS YOUR BUSINESS SUIT

According to the LinkedIn Web site, LinkedIn is an inter-connected network of more than 35 million business professionals from around the world, representing 170 industries and 200 countries. It is designed to be a place where you can find, be introduced to, and collaborate with

qualified professionals with whom you need to work in order to accomplish your goals.

When you join LinkedIn, the first thing you should do is create a detailed profile that summarizes your professional expertise and accomplishments. From there, you can connect with others and begin the process of building relationships. LinkedIn views your network as an ever-expanding universe, starting with your first-tier connections, then the people they know, and so on. As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, I have comparatively few direct connections, but in LinkedIn's eyes I'm ultimately connected to millions.

For the longest time, I thought of LinkedIn as nothing more than a place to find jobs or employees. My profile there was complete and detailed, but it was nothing more than an online resume. I kept it updated, thinking that one day a prospective employer might come along and offer me that "dream job."

However, I have come to realize that LinkedIn is much more than just a place to hunt for a job. It's a social network that offers you the opportunity to connect with others in your field, find vendors and consultants, develop your business, and generate leads.

Charles Lauller's LinkedIn Strategy

Charles Lauller is a sales executive and avid LinkedIn member who proactively uses the network to connect with others on a daily basis. His first attempts proved fruitless, however, because, according to Charles, he focused on "pimping [my company] and its products."³ He quickly learned that no one was interested, and he changed his tactic to one that was a much more comfortable fit given his generous nature, that of expressing sincere interest in learning about others and offering his help.

That altruism turned things around for Charles. "Eventually they run out of things to say about themselves, and start asking me about my business," he says. As a result, he gets between two and five warm leads per week, which he says is about the equivalent benefit of making 200 cold calls. "And no one slams the phone in your ear either," he quips.

I asked Charles to outline his approach to building business on LinkedIn, and he said the following:

- Drop the bogus “I’m pimping me and my company” tactic.
- Be yourself. Be honest, sincere, and authentic (assuming that’s you). But remember: whoever you are, you likely will attract to your network individuals who are similar to you.
- It’s a cliché, but “seek first to understand, then be understood.” When seeking to expand my network and connect with people, I always learn about them from their profile, and I ask how I can help them. I’ve found that when I continually ask others how I can help with recommendations, referrals, and/or introductions, they usually want to reciprocate.

There are many smart ways to use LinkedIn for networking. Linked Intelligence, a blog dedicated to LinkedIn, contains an exhaustive list, including entries on business development and sales, career management and personal branding, job search and employment, and growing your personal network of trusted colleagues and friends. If your goal is to become a LinkedIn maven, this list is a good place to start (<http://www.linkedintelligence.com/smart-ways-to-use-linkedin/>).

FACEBOOK IS BUSINESS CASUAL

A little over four years ago, I was visiting my son who, at the time, was a junior in college. He wanted to show me some photos he had taken and posted online to a site called Facebook. I had heard of the site, but I really had no conception of what it was other than a social network for college students. (Back then, you couldn’t get in unless you had a .edu e-mail address.)

I remember querying him about the site. I was interested in its unique features, such as the now infamous “Wall,” photo galleries, and status messages. I thought to myself: how nice would it be if Facebook could be made available to users other than the college crowd? Lo and behold, not

long after, in the fall of 2006, Facebook's young CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, did precisely that, opening the platform to anyone over the age of 13 years.

Since that time, the age of Facebook users has become progressively older. In February 2009, statistics revealed that one of the fastest growing demographic segments in the network was females, 55 years of age and older.⁴ However, the number of Facebook users in all age/gender demographic groups is growing, with use among women growing faster than among men in nearly all age groups. The fastest growing age group by total users is 26 to 34 years, with 45 percent of Facebook's U.S. audience now 26 years of age or older.

With more than 200 million users worldwide at the time of this writing and over five million new users joining every week (yes, you read that correctly, five million per week!), Facebook is the largest social network on the planet. These numbers are strong evidence that social media is in the mainstream, and businesses need to pay attention and consider establishing a presence there.

Facebook Is a Social Utility

Much the same way a power company connects homes and businesses with electricity, Facebook is a "social utility" designed to facilitate connections between people. Facebook wants to be a virtual mirror of the real-world social graph and prefers that relationships online be extensions of those you have in real life. (Though that's what Facebook prefers, that's not what is happening.)

Not only that, but Facebook wants to become the operating system of the social Web and serve as the central source from which all of your social interactions occur. In a moment, we will discuss Facebook Connect, which is one facet through which the company is realizing that dream.

Why "Business Casual?"

If LinkedIn is your business suit, then Facebook is business casual because it allows more of a 360-degree view of you, combining both your professional and your personal sides. It is a platform that presents both parts of your life as a more

unified whole, which is why I refer to it as “business casual.” Facebook offers a deeper, potentially richer level of engagement that enables us to build stronger bridges of trust with others.

Businesses can use Facebook for marketing in numerous ways.

Facebook Public Profile

A Facebook Public Profile (also known and most commonly referred to as Facebook Page) is an ideal place for businesses to establish a beachhead within the social network. It also is one of the most overlooked places. I’ve noticed that many companies use other parts of the platform (Groups and personal profiles, in particular) to set up a presence, but they never bother to create a Public Profile. One possible reason for this oversight is that Facebook lists Public Profiles under the advertising category, which may lead people to believe it is a premium feature. It’s not. Businesses can set up a Public Profile at no cost.

Facebook Public Profiles, which mimic user profiles in terms of design and function, allow users to express their support of your business by adding themselves as fans. They can write on your Wall, upload photos and videos, and join other fans in expressing opinions on topics introduced in discussion groups. You can send regular updates to fans, and, unlike personal profiles, which are limited to no more than 5,000 members, you are not limited as to the number of fans you can have. In addition, you can set up a business page without having to provide a personal profile.

One of the best reasons to use this feature is that Facebook Public Profile is one part of the Facebook platform that can be indexed by search engines. This is no small consideration, given that Facebook is one of the most highly trafficked sites on the Internet. If getting noticed on Google and other engines is an important part of your online marketing strategy, then using Facebook Public Profile makes perfect sense. For all these reasons, I highly recommend that you set up a Facebook Public Profile for your business, then make it your base of operations from which all other forays into the network extend.

Facebook Events

Another useful feature and one that can be launched directly from your Facebook Public Profile is Facebook Events. Using this feature, you can let fans and others know about upcoming events and activities your business will be hosting. A restaurant can use Facebook Events to promote appearances by musical acts. A B2B company can promote upcoming Webinars or workshops. Nonprofit and civic groups can enlist support for fundraising activities. Keep in mind that activities engaged in by Facebook members are reported in the newsfeed, so word about the events can spread quickly and virally.

Facebook Groups

Facebook Groups allow you to create or participate in as many as 200 affinity or geographically based groups. They can serve as an extremely viral channel through which to extend your presence within Facebook, and they can be used as “fishing pools” to help you find prospects and build relationships. Before you set up your own group, I recommend that you participate in two or three groups to get a feel for how they operate. As with Facebook Events, I recommend that you use Facebook Groups to supplement your business page, not act as a substitute for it.

Facebook Ads

Facebook Ads are another way to market your business within the community. They resemble Google AdSense ads in that they are primarily text based, but they do allow inclusion of a small graphic. You can opt to include Social Actions, which are stories about a user’s friends that are related to and displayed alongside your advertisement. In other words, whenever a user takes an action associated with the ad, his or her avatar and screen name will appear along with the ad on the friend’s profile pages. This result implies endorsement, so I suggest you use the component wisely.

The problem with using ads on Facebook Ads or other social networks is that members rarely click on the ads. The

average click-through rate for Facebook Ads is estimated to be an abysmal 0.008 percent. That means for every 10,000 times a particular ad appears, it is clicked on only 80 times. People don't visit social network sites to view advertising; they visit to be social. Still, Facebook Ads provide another way to extend your presence on the site, so they may be worth considering.

Facebook Apps

One of the first things you'll notice when you begin participating in Facebook is the bevy of widgets (what Facebook refers to as "applications," or "apps" for short). These apps, created by third-party developers, number into the scores of thousands and cover every conceivable category from games to music to travel to just plain fun (and many that are just plain stupid).

It's easy to get caught up in the hype, but sooner or later "app fatigue" sets in. My son, the veteran Facebooker, told me to forget all those extras and concentrate on the basics: the Wall, photo galleries, and status updates. Good advice, if you ask me.

Some applications can be used to promote your business inside Facebook. One way to promote your business is by developing branded applications, or "appVERTISEments," that connect your company and the people you wish to reach in a more useful, meaningful way. For example, Buddy Media, a company that develops branded applications, has launched dozens of campaigns for leading brands. Their data show measurable success in engaging users. "In particular, users spent an average of 2 minutes and 35 seconds engaged with our branded applications per visit, or 75 times greater than the time consumers spend interacting with traditional banner ads and five times greater than the time spent watching a typical TV commercial," said Buddy Media CEO, Mike Lazerow.⁵

You are not limited to building applications in order to use them. You can incorporate many of the business-oriented applications already available in the directory to help promote your business, such as business cards, networked blogs, and testimonials. It's worth looking through

the business category to see which applications might be useful for your business.

Facebook Lexicon

Lexicon is Facebook's answer to Google's Zeitgeist. It is a tool you can use to spot and compare trends inside the network. In Lexicon, you input single words or two-word combinations and compare as many as five strings per query to mine and analyze millions of Facebook Wall posts. The results are returned as a variety of graphs and charts. For marketing professionals, the results gleaned can provide valuable insight into what's on the minds of Facebookers on a daily basis. Lexicon pulls only aggregate information, and the privacy of its members is never violated.

Facebook Share

Facebook Share is a small button or hyperlink you can add to your Web site that lets visitors share the site with their friends on Facebook. Essentially, it's a way to drive traffic. Facebook Share is easy to install, but it does require a minimal knowledge of HTML.

Facebook Connect

Facebook Connect is the next evolution of the Facebook platform. It provides a way for members to log in to other Web sites using their Facebook account and "connect" their Facebook identity, friends, and privacy settings to those sites. For sites that use it, Facebook Connect means never having to create another online profile. (Can I get an "amen?") You take your online identity with you wherever you go. By the time this book is published, hundreds if not thousands of sites will have incorporated the feature.

To better explain how Facebook Connect works, let me cite as an example Kudzu.com, a Web site that aggregates user reviews and ratings on local businesses. You can log in to Kudzu using your Facebook account, and from there you can interact with all of your Facebook friends. When you write a review for a restaurant, for example, you'll have the option to publish that story back to Facebook, where your friends can see it, too.

For business owners and marketing professionals, two aspects of Facebook Connect are important. First, Facebook, once a walled garden, is now opening itself to the entire Web via third-party sites. And when we're talking about third-party sites, we could be talking about the one(s) you own, too. Second (and this could be the most important factor for you), Facebook Connect is not just a registration system, but a marketing channel that comes complete with a built-in audience of multiplied millions, some of whom may find their way to your door.

Facebook Connect does require a slightly more extensive knowledge of HTML and programming, but implementing Connect should not be difficult with the assistance of the many Facebook application developers available.

Personal Profile

Though your company can create a Facebook Public Profile or ad without creating a personal profile, let me make my best pitch for having one. In social media, people relate better to other people than to brands. Face(book) it: we like to do business with people we know and trust.

An ideal scenario is to have a brand or company presence via the means outlined above, but to supplement and extend that business presence with a personal one. There are many good reasons to have a personal presence: to network with colleagues and peers, to find business contacts, to build business relationships, to grow your personal brand, to target your niche audience, to increase traffic to your Web site, to enhance your Google rankings, and so much more! It's a way to extend that digital handshake and get to know people in a more casual, nurturing environment where you can make friends. By all means, once you've set up your Facebook business page, set up a personal profile as well.

TWITTER IS THE SOCIAL NETWORKING COCKTAIL PARTY

I have devoted an entire chapter to Twitter, so I'll spare the details here. Let me simply say: if LinkedIn is your business suit and Facebook is business casual, then Twitter is your

business social networking cocktail hour, the place where you go to casually and informally interact with potentially thousands of others. Whereas LinkedIn tends to be a more latent form of engagement, Twitter is (or can be) very much in real time. Much more on that in chapter 10.

OTHER BUSINESS-ORIENTED SOCIAL NETWORKS

Plaxo

Plaxo started out as a tool to enable people to automatically update their address books, but it has morphed into a social network that's a cross between LinkedIn and Facebook. Like LinkedIn, Plaxo maintains a more strictly business focus. Like Facebook, Plaxo has a newsfeed that enables users to add information about what they are doing on other social networks, including Twitter, Flickr, Facebook, MySpace, Digg, and YouTube.

Even with groups, a job board, and photo galleries, Plaxo is a streamlined version of the other two networks and is devoid of the clutter that tends to build up, especially as it does on Facebook. I like it for that reason alone.

The problem with Plaxo is that it lacks the same following as the other two networks, so it seems to be less of a factor. I'm not suggesting you shouldn't create a profile there (I have one), but I believe Plaxo is a second-tier network. If you have limited time to invest in online social networking, Plaxo may not be worthwhile for you. Also, Plaxo had a reputation for being a spammer (a reputation they have worked hard to change), so many people avoid the service for that reason. Still, with a user base numbering in the tens of millions, the worth of the Plaxo site should not be underestimated.

Ecademy

Founded in 1998, Ecademy is one of the oldest business social networks. Some people say it is better than LinkedIn. Ecademy includes features similar to those offered by LinkedIn, but Ecademy goes a step further by incorporating a face-to-face networking element. Ecademy is most popular in Europe. It has failed to establish itself in the United States.

Biznik

Biznik calls itself “business networking that doesn’t suck.” Where Ecademy includes a face-to-face element, Biznik puts local, real-world networking at its center. The online component is designed to serve as a supplement. Biznik does not see itself as a LinkedIn clone, but, in its own words, as a “community for real people who are building real businesses, not a place for job seekers.”

MySpace

You might have wondered why I’ve said nothing about what is the second largest of all social networks: MySpace. I do not mean to diminish its importance, but I think MySpace has more limited applicability as a business social network as compared to Facebook or LinkedIn. MySpace tends to have an entertainment orientation and shows a strong preference for music and movies. If your company targets audiences with this orientation, then MySpace might be a good place to establish a presence.

**TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR EFFECTIVE
ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKING**

I want to close the chapter by sharing a ten-step game plan for social network involvement that I think will work for you. You don’t have to think of these steps as commandments. Rather, they are practical guidelines that will make you a better member of the social networking communities in which you participate.

I. Pull, Don’t Push

One of the first lessons you will learn very quickly when engaging in social media is that old-school marketing tactics don’t work. Don’t come out of the gate pushing your products or services. New tools require new rules.

For example, don’t respond to new Twitter followers with a “Thanks for following. Visit my Web site for a free . . . [insert whatever promotional message you’ve seen].” This response is a dead giveaway that you are new to social media

and that you do not yet understand that it's a "pull" medium, not a "push" medium. If I want to review your credentials, I'll read your bio. (You did complete your bio, right?)

2. Win the Right to Be Heard

Social media engagement is a conversation, and participation in the community is required. In fact, you might say that participation is the fifth P of marketing. (The other four Ps are product, price, place, and promotion.) Your value as a participant is judged by the value you provide to the community as a whole. Be a "glory hog," and you'll garner little attention. Share freely, and you will become a respected member.

3. Content Is STILL King, but Conversation Is Queen (and Conversion Is the Prince)

Nothing beats well-written, informative, entertaining content in all its forms: blog posts, tweets, videos, podcasts, images, webinars, or white papers. Place yourself in a position of being a knowledgeable expert (assuming you are, of course). Community is the context.

In addition, keep content and commerce separate. Never the twain shall meet is a good rule of thumb. Editorial and advertorial content should be distant kin, if related at all.

4. Authenticity and Transparency Are Social Networking Cornerstones

Those words may seem trite, but I believe they remain the cornerstones of this new media marketing paradigm. Be real. Be open. Be honest. Admit mistakes when you make them.

5. You Don't Have to Be on Every Social Network

It's impossible to maintain an active presence on every social network, and you don't have to. You do have to be where your customers are, however. They expect you to be there.

6. Give, and You Shall Receive

I referred to this concept earlier when I talked about the Dale Carnegie philosophy, but it's worth reiterating. Having an

attitude of helpfulness goes a long way toward establishing a credible name for yourself in social media circles. “Seek first to understand, then to be understood,” according to St. Francis of Assisi “People don’t care that you know until they know that you care” is how I put it.

“Lose control of your marketing,” is how author David Meerman Scott puts it.⁶ Give ideas and information away freely, with no strings attached. Be willing to give up control of the marketing message (as if you could hold it close to the vest in the first place, given the current Web 2.0 landscape).

7. Don’t Throw the Marketing Baby Out with the Bath Water

The rules of marketing still apply to social media; well, most of the rules anyway. Social media is another channel to build your brand and market your message. It’s not a panacea, and it’s not a replacement for other forms of advertising and marketing.

I have learned that marketing has room for integration. E-mail and search still are the areas where most marketers spend their top dollars, and for good reason, they both perform very well. All forms of marketing are interrelated, and social media is finding its place in the spectrum.

8. Social Media Is a Mindset, Not Just a Toolset

You have to incorporate the essence of social media into your thinking. Don’t just change your toolset (tactics); change your mindset (strategy).

9. Be Yourself, Whomever That May Be

A good friend of mine, Aileen Bennett, has a mantra that she follows in every respect: “Be yourself.” (It’s even her personalized license plate.) No better advice can be given, whether or not you engage in social media. One thing is certainly true: you can’t be who you are not (see Step 4).

I recommend that you use your photo as your avatar and your name as your handle. That’s not to say you shouldn’t have an identity tied to your brand. It’s just that in social media, people would rather relate to and build trust with other people than with brands. It’s a trust economy, after all.

10. Social Media Is Not a Religion

Although it does come with a set of largely unwritten rules (sorry, I don't know of any stone tablets having been brought down from Mt. Sinai), social media is not a religion, no matter how hard guys like me try to make it one. There is room for experimentation. In fact, experimentation is the only way the medium will grow.

CONCLUSION

The more I think about it, the more I am convinced that participation in the big three social networks—LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter—is an absolute must for just about every business. I would encourage you, if you've not already done so, to establish a presence in each. It was the aim of this chapter to equip you with enough information to get started on your journey into social networking superstardom. The rest is up to you.

In the next chapter, we will explore the differences between large, aggregate social networks such as Facebook and niche online communities such as Ning. We will discuss how the two can work in concert, and what actions you need to take to build a strong community around your brand, product, or service.

CHAPTER NINE

Niche Online Communities Can Benefit Your Business



At first blush, you may wonder why I differentiate between social networks and online communities. After all, they seem to be the same, and in many respects they are. However, when I refer to social networks I'm talking about the large aggregated communities like those mentioned in the previous chapter. Online communities, on the other hand, are more niche-specific. You might think of the difference as similar to that between a large city and a small town, or even a private reserve. One focuses on breadth, the other on depth.

One primary difference between social networks and online communities has to do with the way the profiles are rendered. Veteran business blogger Lee LeFever explains it this way:

In most traditional online communities, members have profiles that may display a picture, location, recent posts and membership tenure. These profiles can provide valuable context to the community, but they are often

peripheral to the discussions and remain somewhat hidden.

In contrast, social networking communities have elevated the user profile to become more like a user home-page that displays a very rich and contextual set of information. The member home pages are not peripheral to the discussions or a subset of the community; they are at the very core of the system.

Suffice it to say that social networks connect people across many niches; online communities focus primarily on one. Social networks are more about who you are, while online communities are more about the value you provide. (LeFever outlines a number of differences in his blog post, *Comparing social networks to online communities*, <http://www.commoncraft.com/archives/000834.html>. I recommend reading his observations if further explanation is needed.)

In this chapter we talk about different types of online communities, take a look at several specific ones, discuss what is required to keep a community vibrant and growing, and examine a few of the various platforms used to build communities.

THREE TYPES OF ONLINE COMMUNITIES: WHICH ONE IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

There are any number of reasons why a company should consider creating a niche online community:

- It's a way to strengthen the relationship with your customer.
- It's searchable by Google and other engines.
- It's a useful feedback mechanism.
- It's a tool customer evangelists can use to spread positive word of mouth.
- It's a way to give customers and employees a sense of ownership of your company, products, and services.

Similarly, there are any number of different types of communities. Let me outline three:

Customer Communities

Customer-facing communities can take two forms: support and engagement.

Customer Support: VerticalResponse Marketing Lounge

Direct marketing company VerticalResponse (www.verticalresponse.com) created the VR Lounge as a “resource for small business owners and marketing professionals to share experiences, ask questions and assist one another in marketing their businesses.” The primary reasons for its existence are to provide training and support for its customers and to serve as a platform to enable them to help one another.

VR Lounge is built on the Ning platform (discussed later in the chapter), which provides members with the opportunity to create forum posts, upload video, join groups or add articles. VR supplements this activity with content of their own in the form of articles and business tools.

Another company that invests heavily in online communities for customer support is Sage, makers of business management software for small- to medium-sized companies. It runs more than a dozen product-related communities designed to enable members to interact with their peers, discover new ways of doing business, and learn ways to use the software more efficiently and effectively.

The community designed to support its ACT! CRM software product saw over 8.9 million page views and 266,000 searches in the first year following its launch, far surpassing the company’s expectations.

Customer Engagement: Abbot Laboratories’ Diabetes Control for Life and Strong Moms Communities

Healthcare and pharmaceuticals company Abbot Laboratories has created two very similar, branded niche communities to address the needs of two very different customer groups: diabetics and pregnant or nursing mothers.

Diabetes Control for Life (www.diabetescontrolforlife.com) is a Web site designed to help diabetics control their blood sugar levels and manage their weight, while Strong Moms (www.strongmoms.com) provides educational resources for

new mothers. Both sites function similarly in that they provide a mix of educational content, articles from experts, and discussion forums to allow for member interaction. A subtle emphasis is placed on products made by Abbot targeted to each community, but that never gets in the way of the main goals of the site—education, information, and community.

“An effective messaging campaign will make its way into the lives of their customers through engaging experiences, conversation and referrals. The Web 2.0 environment has provided a powerful platform not just for consumers to take control, but for brands to be relevant and accessible,” said Ana Dan, Director of Marketing Systems and Services for Abbot Nutrition, explaining the reasons for creating such branded communities.¹ “In most surveys and studies, consumers who engaged in online forums and tools specific to a lifestyle or health category are much more likely to consume products in the related category,” Dan added.

Dan lists several key factors to consider when creating branded customer engagement communities:

- Research and understand your target segments’ interest in other noncompeting categories and products.
- Form a coalition with related but non-competing products.
- Create non-branded, dynamic content and tools to drive consumer engagement and returning customers to your site.
- Use experts to lend your site credibility.
- Use social engagement tools to foster sharing and conversation with consumers on your site.
- Infuse the site with the coalition products in passive ways and more assertively through banners.
- Market to those consumers who come to your site and to those that don’t by syndicating out content to other relevant destinations.

Employee Communities

Another reason for creating online communities has nothing whatsoever to do with customers (at least not directly) but

everything to do with employees, as a way to give them a voice and an ownership stake in the company.

Best Buy's Blue Shirt Nation (www.blueshirtnation.com), a reference to the employee uniforms, is probably the premiere example of such a community. It was started as a way for employees to stay connected with one another using SMS, chat, e-mail and the Web. Members can set up personal profiles and interact via topical forums.

Best Buy's goal in creating the site was to tap into employee insights as a way to improve customer service and marketing within the stores. The results speak for themselves. Over 20,000 employees signed up in the first year. Sixty-five percent of members are active on the site, and Blue Shirt Nation experiences a very low turnover rate (8.5 percent) in comparison to the high turnover rate of employees within the company itself, estimated at 60 percent.

Vendor/Partner Communities

Online communities are not limited to customer or employee engagement. For many companies, especially those with a large number of vendor partners, this format can facilitate communications between the business and its partners, provide for the sharing of best practices, strengthen partner relationships, and provide a channel for customer service and support.

Vendor/partner communities are also being leveraged at the industry level. For example, Fohboh (www.fohboh.com), an industry acronym which stands for Front of the House and Back of the House, is a large professional community serving the restaurant industry. With more than 10,000 members, it offers a way for those in the food and beverage industry to connect, collaborate, and communicate with colleagues and service providers.

COMMON COMMUNITY-CREATION MISTAKES

In 2008, Deloitte completed a research project called the Tribalization of Business Study² with over 100 businesses that had developed online communities. Many of these sites failed to achieve the goals the companies had set for them. In fact, more than a few were virtual ghost towns.

Ed Moran, a Deloitte consultant who participated in the study, told the *Wall Street Journal*³ that 35 percent of the communities had fewer than 100 members and less than 25 percent had more than 1,000. That included companies that had spent more than a million dollars building their communities, too!

From this and other research done on the topic I've determined that there are five primary reasons online communities fail.

Mistake #1: Lack of Adequate Planning and Research

With the many easy-to-use technology platforms, starting a community is easy. One company even promotes the fact that you can do so in as little as five minutes using their platform.

Online communities may be easy to start, but they are difficult to maintain and require sufficient research and planning. As with the *Ten Things to Consider Before You Blog* list I outlined in chapter 7, the same degree of consideration needs to be given to community creation. In fact, I encourage you to take that list and apply it to this setting.

Decisions need to be made about:

- Why the group should be started
- Who will constitute its membership
- The purpose it will serve
- The platform upon which it will be built
- The resources required, both personnel and monetary
- The ethical standards for group behavior
- What the group will be called

As you can see, while it may only take five minutes in some cases to set up a group, hours of planning need to go into its creation beforehand.

Mistake #2: Putting an Undue Focus on Technology

One of the biggest mistakes made by these companies was a propensity to focus on technology rather than the

community itself. Community strategist Connie Bensen says putting such an undue emphasis on technology is a misplaced priority. “More important than the technology is the people factor,” says Bensen. “While it’s true technology platforms are getting richer in terms of features, even something as simple as forums can be used effectively. The issue is not the technology, but the people who make up the community.” Earlier in this book I said social media is less about technology and more about the people using it, a statement that is particularly true in this respect.

Mistake #3: Not Putting Resources Where They Are Best Utilized

Ed Moran told the *Wall Street Journal* that companies should spend resources identifying and reaching out to potential community members instead of investing heavily in software. “Put someone who has experience running an online community in charge of the project,” he said. Many of the companies included in the study had only a part-time staff member running the community.

Bensen says the role of community manager is an especially crucial one. “Community management is a broad, overarching, cross-functional position that involves not only managing the community itself, but serving as a representative for it in other places such as Facebook and Twitter,” she states. “Not only that, but the person may be responsible for training internal staff and serving as a ‘traffic cop’ filtering and routing information and ideas gathered from the community to other departments in the company such as public relations, marketing, product development, quality assurance and customer service. It is a big job and not one to be taken lightly.”⁴

Mistake #4: Making the Community Fit the Company, Not the Other Way Around

Trying to make the community align with its own business goals and processes is another mistake companies often make. If I’ve learned anything about social media it’s that, once other people are involved, priorities change. Bensen says the problem is that companies “try and make the

community what it wants, not what the members themselves want. It's like putting a square peg into a round hole and expecting it to fit.⁵

Despite the best efforts of companies to conform communities to their molds, ultimately conformity has to give way to the wisdom of crowds. Gary Koelling, one of the founders of Best Buy's Blue Shirt Nation, said that in an online community, everyone shares equal status: "When the user tells me, 'This is how I want to use it,' I have to do whatever I can to accommodate that."⁶

Mistake #5: Measuring the Wrong Things

Moran said some of the companies they studied set up communities to generate word of mouth and increase customer loyalty, but focused their ROI on more traditional metrics such as number of visits and pageviews.

KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY CREATION AND MANAGEMENT—ONLINE COMMUNITIES NEED A PERSONAL (EVEN "PASTORAL") TOUCH

Earlier in my career, I was an ordained minister and served a number of churches in a pastoral role. A great deal of my time was spent trying to develop a sense of community among the members. In building online communities, I have found that many of the principles used in a church setting apply.

First, there has to be some unifying factor, some "glue" that holds the members together. Let's even call it a vision. My favorite definition of community is "Come Into Unity." If you aim to build a vibrant, growing online community, it's imperative that you have a clearly stated goal that members can identify with and rally around, and of which they can take some degree of ownership.

Second, you have to keep recasting the vision. I find it useful to remind members as often as once a month of the reason for the group. The old adage, "Tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them, tell them again, then tell them what you told them" really does have merit. A monthly e-mail newsletter is a great communication device for this purpose.

It's easy for people to get distracted and lose sight of why they joined the community in the first place. That's why regular communication is important: to keep the community and its vision top of mind with members.

Third, every group needs a "shepherd" to help guide the community. Rather than spending all your resources on the technology platform, dedicate a portion to hiring someone to oversee and provide leadership to the community. The commonly accepted title for this role is "community manager." I have to confess that it is not one I favor because I think the role extends far beyond mere management. It really is, in a manner of speaking, a pastoral role. Call this person a "host," "sherpa," or "swami" if you want to, but find someone who can commit time, attention, and "TLC" to building the community. I'm not talking about a dictatorial leader either, but rather an equipper, exhorter, encourager, and ardent evangelist. To stretch my analogy even further, this person needs to be a "true believer" in your company and its products, services, and mission.

Fourth, you need to have plenty of content for group members to consume. In my role as pastor, two times each week I was expected to have a sermon prepared. And while the sermon was not the reason most people attended, if I had failed in that duty the likelihood of them returning would be nil. It's a given that most people who join online communities are lurkers who don't contribute content or even comment on what is contributed by others. They are, in the truest sense of the word, consumers. In the church world we called them "pew sitters." As such, it is imperative that they have something to consume, or else you're unlikely to see them again.

Fifth, it's important that you encourage active engagement by members. If you will provide the initial leadership, you should expect a core group to form who will take a more active role. In my church, for example, we had small group leaders, Bible study teachers, youth leaders, music teams, nursery workers, and so forth. Online communities are no different. Some members will be more oriented toward content creation in the form of blog or forum posts, video, and podcasts. Others will form groups, and still others will contribute via comments.

That's why it's important to use a technology platform that can facilitate as many forms of communication and interaction as possible. Later in the chapter I will discuss a few I recommend.

It is this core group that will provide a majority of the community-generated content, at least at first, and their involvement will pay great dividends going forward. It's in your best interest to "pay" them with time, attention and other nonmonetary rewards. Even something as simple as a sincere, heartfelt "thank you" will go a long way toward securing their ongoing, active involvement.

THE SOCIETY OF WORD OF MOUTH

One community that exemplifies these practices very well is The SWOM, which stands for The Society of Word of Mouth (www.theswom.com). Members are called "swomies," a catchy moniker that serves not only to reinforce the purpose of the group, as a gathering place to share insight, expertise and experience about word of mouth marketing, but also as a social object to help in the spread of the group's message.

The SWOM co-founders, Jackie Huba and Ben McConnell, communicate with the community on a regular basis via e-mail newsletters and blog posts, keeping members updated on group activities, new content, and topics of interest. They encourage active participation among members and have even brought on a community manager to help in the day-to-day operations. Not only that, they held their first face-to-face meeting in Austin, Texas, in 2008, called SWOMFest. The one-day event brought together nearly 200 SWOM community members from all across the country.

As a result of these efforts, the group has grown to more than 2,000 members, a number of sub-groups have been formed, and content continues to be created regularly, making it very likely that The SWOM will be a valuable resource for marketing professionals and small businesspeople for a long time to come.

McConnell suggests the following guidelines for anyone interested in establishing a niche community:

- **Ensure there's already a community that's underserved and itching to meet.** There were a number of online communities that supported small and medium businesses, but most of them covered a broad range of topics, from accounting to marketing to HR. Our purpose with SWOM is to stake out a niche.
- **Have an annual meeting.** This is true of any vibrant community, whether it's the two major political parties, eBay power sellers, Maker's Mark Ambassadors, or resellers of Sage software. People love to meet their online peers in person.
- **Keeping the online community juices flowing requires a tremendous amount of content.** Have a solid, ready source of content if members don't provide it themselves. And remember the 1 percent Rule: You're lucky if more than 1 percent of the members create content for everyone else.
- **Think education.** Some of the best momentum we've had is from offering how-to Webinars. Word of them spreads quickly, helping improve membership growth.
- **Kick out the polluters quickly.** Easy-to-join online communities are vulnerable to the broken windows theory, which states that criminals tend to gather in neglected areas of cities. If your community is beset by spam or nasty, mean people, boot it and them quickly. Nothing connotes irrelevance like seeing scads of spammish posts or videos, and trolls do more damage than they're worth.⁷

TWITTERMOMS: KITCHEN EXPERIMENT TURNED FULL-TIME BUSINESS

Twittermoms (www.twittermoms.com) is a site for Internet-savvy (or at least Twitter-savvy) younger women that started out as a "kitchen experiment," according to its founder Megan Calhoun, but has quickly become a full-time business.

The site launched in September of 2008, and within six months it had grown to over 12,000 members, all without

a dime being spent on marketing or PR. “I was a stay-at-home mom and wanted to connect with other moms online,” says Calhoun. “I Joined Twitter to do so, but found it hard just to connect with moms, so I started this community. The site literally exploded within the first couple of weeks of it going live.”⁸

The community is comprised of very smart, highly-networked moms actively involved in social media, Calhoun said. A poll of the community revealed that 80 percent of the members had blogs and over 90 percent were involved in other social networks.

Based on the rapid growth and desirable demographic, it wasn’t long until Calhoun began getting calls from PR firms and advertising agencies who wanted to tap into the community. “It was then I knew I had a business,” Calhoun exclaimed. The site has even received coverage in mainstream publications like *Redbook*.

Calhoun suggests the following guidelines when considering creating an online community:

- **When starting a social network, you set the tone.** Make it a warm, welcoming place. Welcome every member who joins and encourage others to do the same. (Calhoun even formed a “welcome wagon” group just for that purpose.) “You will not have control of the group once it begins to grow. So, it’s important to set the proper tone and then let go,” Calhoun recommends.
- **Take time to find those who have common interests and connect with them.**
- **Have guidelines in place to deal with the spammers**—and you will have spammers.
- **Make sure you offer members high-quality content.** Calhoun recruited 15 featured contributors—experts in their respective fields—to provide professionally written content. “You want people to return and having good content is primary,” says Calhoun. “When starting a network, bring in experts to be featured contributors who can provide it.”

INEXPENSIVE TOOLS TO USE IN CREATING YOUR OWN COMMUNITY

Ning: The Most Popular Hosted Community Platform

The technology used to host The SWOM and Twittermoms is a platform called Ning (which means “peace” in Chinese). Founded by Marc Andreessen (who also created Netscape) and Gina Bianchini in October, 2004, Ning was developed to give people freedom to create communities for anything they choose, and believe you me, you can find a Ning community for just about every topic known to man! (By the way, Ning refers to these as “social networks.”) The last time I checked, there were well in excess of 300,000 Ning communities and the number was growing, making it the largest such community-creation platform on the planet.

According to Ning CEO Bianchini, Ning offers a proven feature set including shared user profiles, blogs, forums, photo gallery, support for video and podcasts, a Facebook-like activity stream (newsfeed), event calendar and groups, to name just a few of the fourteen that are available. If you’re savvy with programming, you can use Ning’s APIs to create your own applications. However, it is not a “one-size-fits-all” system. You can choose to use as many of these features or as few as you want, á la carte as it were. From a design perspective, Bianchini says the idea is to give you full control over the look and feel.

The best part about Ning is that, if you don’t mind Google Adsense ads running on your site, it’s free to use. Actually, it is a “freemium” model in that you can upgrade to premium features that enable you to customize the look and branding, even to the point of matching your existing Web site. (Oh, and you can remove those ads and replace them with your own if you want to.)

Though a number of larger companies are using Ning, I believe that its low-cost and ease-of-use make it best suited to the needs of small business, especially those that are B2C. (I’ll talk about another platform I recommend for B2B use in just a moment.)

Other Ning sites that I’d recommend visiting are:

- **Women's Wisdom Network** (www.womenswisdomnetwork.com), a site targeting older professional businesswomen that combines professionally written content along with that generated by the community. (Note: I serve on WWN's advisory board.)
- **Sta.rtup.biz** (<http://sta.rtup.biz/>), a site for entrepreneurs and small business owners.

Each of these use varying degrees of customization of the platform, with Sta.rtup.biz being the most customized, and I list them specifically for that reason. I've already mentioned Vertical Response, The Swom, Twittermoms, and Fohboh, all of which are Ning communities. You can visit the Ning blog (<http://blog.ning.com>) to see many of the newer sites as well.

KickApps: Put the Community on Your Web Site

KickApps is another popular community-creation platform for small business. Like Ning, KickApps is also a hosted solution with one difference: You can embed its widgets and applications directly into your own Web site, effectively turning it an online community. KickApps brands itself as a white-label solution and offers as many as 13 different such applications, including blogs, message boards, video, photo galleries, and user profiles.

The best example of this is The Workbench, which is part of the Duct Tape Marketing Web site (www.ducttapemarketing.com), run by well-known small business coach John Jantsch. When asked why he chose KickApps, he said that it was the platform that provided the greatest ability to retain his branding, keeping it front-and-center. Regarding his decision, Jantsch says KickApps "really shines when it comes to media, but it is not as intuitive on member connecting," and "could use more community building tools."⁹

Jantsch does suggest that online communities are not for the faint of heart. He says you have to have the passion for it and be someone who can nurture it every day until you have an audience large enough to build momentum.

KickApps is free to use as the base level, but offers premium features. Unlike Ning, which has a fixed pricing structure, KickApps works on a cost per thousand (CPM)

basis. In other words, the more you use it the more it costs. But it remains very affordable for small business, which is why I include it on this list.

CollectiveX Groupsites

One other low-cost solution worth mentioning is CollectiveX Groupsites. This, too, is a hosted solution, and one that uses the freemium model and has many of the same features as the other two. The platform lends itself especially well to use by associations and professional networking groups.

Open Source Options

I would be remiss if I didn't mention that there are a number of open-source community-building platforms on the market, including Drupal and Joomla. However, unless you are a developer or can afford to hire one, these take quite a bit of time and effort to create. I'm not disparaging them in any way, but merely suggesting that they are not for everyone. However, if you are willing to commit the resources, they can be the most customizable.

WHITE-LABEL COMMUNITY PLATFORMS

If you are the CMO or marketing executive for a large company, platforms like Ning, KickApps, or CollectiveX probably aren't for you. As mentioned, they are ideally suited for small business. If that's your situation, let me recommend a number of white-label solutions designed for use by enterprises.

WordFrame

WordFrame is a combination content management system/social network that I consider best suited to the B2B space. It is also a software-as-a-service (SaaS) solution, though an enterprise version is available for deployment on your servers.

The platform is very blog-centric, which gives it less of a community feel. Member profiles are less obvious and it could use more community-building functions in my opinion. Still, for a company that seeks to promote its thought-leaders or knowledge experts, WordFrame is an excellent choice.

One of the more prominent users of WordFrame is Social Media Today LLC, founded by Jerry Bowles and Robin Carey. The duo has used the platform to create a number of highly successful niche B2B sites, including Social Media Today, MyVenturePad, and The Customer Collective. The company monetizes these sites via sponsorships from companies like SAP and Oracle.

I believe WordFrame is an underappreciated platform that deserves attention for those targeting B2B.

Mzinga

Mzinga, which means “beehive” in Swahili, brings white-label social networks to consumer research. Their focus is on the creation of communities for learning, marketing, and customer support. It offers a menu of social modules that companies can add to their sites, including blogs, wikis, surveys, polls, calendars, forums, individual profile pages, groups, and tools for idea management.

Awareness Networks

Awareness, formerly known as iUpload, helps companies build branded online communities for both internal and external use. Some of the companies that use or have used the platform include McDonald’s, Kodak, the New York Times Company, Northwestern Mutual, and Procter & Gamble.

Jive

Jive Software makes web collaboration software products for businesses and enterprises. Their products include Clearspace, their flagship team collaboration software; Openfire, an open-source server; and Jive Forums, their premium forum software with clients like EA, ESPN, and Nike.

Lithium

Lithium Technologies is an online customer-support and brand-loyalty company based in Emeryville, California. Some of the company’s services include forums, live chat, instant messaging, and a wide range of online customer-interaction tools. Lithium’s products are delivered on a

hosted basis rather than as traditional packaged software. Sage, the software company mentioned earlier in the chapter, uses Lithium to power its communities.

ONLINE COMMUNITIES FOR LEAD GENERATION

I may be playing with a lit stick of dynamite here, but I think online communities can be used as vehicles for lead generation. Having come from the “purist” days of business blogging, I really don’t want to use online communities for such “prurient” motives as driving marketing and sales agendas. Yet I can’t help but believe there can be a healthy balance between community and commerce, especially when it’s possible the reason the community exists is for the sake of commerce.

Jerry Bowles, who runs a number of business-oriented communities, including MyVenturePad and The Customer Collective (mentioned earlier), navigates these rocky shoals quite well. He suggests maintaining a focus on creating quality content and building relations with members as the way to grow the community. Site sponsors (SAP, *Businessweek*, Oracle) get the benefit of the good will and traffic engendered by the members.

Bowles has his finger on the pulse of B2B communities. They do not exist for “branding or reputation, but to sell the sponsor’s product,” he says. “It may be conversational marketing, but it’s still marketing, just a nicer and more effective way of doing it.”¹⁰

CONCLUSION

Let me conclude this chapter by sharing a quote from Forrester analyst Jeremiah Owyang, who summed up the advantages to using online communities in his 2009 report, *Online Community Best Practices*¹¹:

An online community is an interactive group of people joined together by a common interest. It’s also one of the most powerful tools a marketer can deploy for customer retention, word of mouth, and customer insight. To host a successful community, think of it as you would

product development: Start by focusing on objectives, chart a road map, assemble the right team, and plan to be flexible. Then build your success by launching the community with the backing of your most enthusiastic customers and staying engaged as the community grows. Above all, remember that control is in the hands of the members, so put their needs first, build trust, and become an active part of the community.

CHAPTER TEN

Microblogging: Social Media Marketing in 140 Characters or Less



According to Wikipedia¹, microblogging is a form of multimedia blogging that allows users to send brief text updates, usually in 140 characters or less. These messages can be submitted by a variety of means, including text messaging, instant messaging, e-mail, MP3, or the web. Of all the applications in this genre, the most popular by far is Twitter. In fact, though I use the term “microblogging” in the title of the chapter, my intent is to focus mainly on Twitter, as it is the first of the genre and the service used by the greatest number of participants.

TWITTER: A LITTLE BIRD THAT STARTED A REVOLUTION

A question I am often asked is, “What is Twitter?” Often this is followed by, “How do I use Twitter for business?” I plan to answer both questions in this chapter.

Let me say at the outset that Twitter is an amazing application with manifold uses. Companies as large as

Dell and Zappos have created business models around it. (We will talk about their success later in the chapter when we get to case studies.) Small business owners and solo entrepreneurs are also proving its value as a channel for business development.

In fact, a recent survey said that most users (89 percent) of Twitter agree that companies should engage their customers there. Over 80 percent indicated they also have a better impression of companies that use Twitter for customer service (81 percent).²

Businesses are using Twitter to:

- Network with others in their industry or community
- Stay connected to customers and prospects
- Monitor what is being said about their company, products, services, industry, and competition
- Gather valuable feedback about products or services
- Raise awareness about the company, product, or service
- Find answers and get advice
- Offer proactive customer service
- Promote events, products, and services
- Drive traffic to the company Web site or blog
- Incite word of mouth among customers and others
- Share helpful content such as articles or blog posts
- Generate leads

As you can see, the list is extensive and limited only by your imagination. In fact, due to its amazing simplicity, Twitter can be used in just about any manner you see fit. It is malleable. You don't have to adapt yourself to Twitter's use. Instead, it adapts to you.

WHAT IS TWITTER AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

Wikipedia defines Twitter this way:

Twitter is a free social networking and microblogging service that allows its users to send and read other users'

updates (otherwise known as tweets), which are text-based posts of up to 140 characters in length.

While I don't know who cooked up the term microblogging, it's a suggestion that Twitter is a blogging tool, one limited to 140 characters. Hence, "micro" blogging.

Why 140 characters? Because the guys who dreamed up Twitter—Biz Stone and Evan Williams, the same guys who created Blogger, one of the first blogging platforms—envisioned it as an SMS (text messaging) tool. In other words, it was first conceived as an application for mobile devices, but one with a Web-based interface.

Even though it started that way, Twitter's user base largely ignored the SMS side of things in favor of the Web-based version. At one point, due to bandwidth and throughput demands on Twitter's servers, SMS capabilities were actually shut off. Essentially, Twitter started out as one thing and became something else. (More on that in a moment.)

High Latency Instant Messenger

A better explanation was one given to me by a gentleman (whose name I don't recall) whom I met at a social media conference some time back. He referred to Twitter as a "high latency instant messaging application." Huh?

Twitter works like other instant messaging applications, Yahoo! Messenger or AIM for example, only, unlike those, you aren't compelled to respond immediately, if at all; hence the term, "high latency."

Presence Application

Twitter has also been defined as a "presence application." In instant messaging parlance "presence" is defined as knowing when someone on the user's buddy list is online. Usually, a little icon pops up to indicate their status.

Twitter does not notify you when someone you are "following" in your Twitterstream is online. Presence, as it applies to Twitter, simply answers the question: "What are you doing?" (As in, what are you doing *right now at this very moment?*) In fact, once you establish a Twitter account, you will see that very question above the text entry field!

Trouble is, only Twitter neophytes pay attention to that question. It's not that others don't care what you are doing at a given moment; it's just that Twitter's usefulness extends much beyond that information.

Best Definition (my opinion)

So far, we've said that Twitter is a "microblogging, high latency instant messaging presence application." (Glad we got that straight.)

While Twitter is all of those things, in my opinion Twitter is best defined as an *open social instant messaging application*. "Social" in the sense that Twitter is a social network where you friend others who then see your posts and follow them, and "instant messaging" in the sense that it has that feel to it. (The term Twitter uses for friending someone is "follow.")

What Twitter really *is* is a conversation stream that you jump into at any given moment. Tony Hsieh, CEO of Zappos, says one good way to think of Twitter is as a "CB radio, but for text messaging."³ Yet another way to think of Twitter is as a 24/7/365 ongoing cocktail party where the conversation never stops.

More from Wikipedia

"Updates are displayed on the user's profile page and delivered to other users who have signed up to receive them," says Wikipedia. "The sender can restrict delivery to those in his or her circle of friends (delivery to everyone being the default). Users can receive updates via the Twitter Web site, SMS, RSS, e-mail or through an application such as Twitterrific or Facebook."

Twitter's Evolution

As mentioned above, Twitter started out as a mobile application but morphed to something that was largely Web-based, thanks to its users. Let's face it: If you're following a few hundred people, do you really want to get text messages from every one of them? You can pick and choose who to receive such messages from, of course, but even when

limited to a handful, if they're avid Twitter users, your phone will still be dingling all the time. In my view, it's overkill. If you like the SMS component, that's fine, but I'd limit it to a select few.

Back to the evolution . . .

Speaking of the user-base, Twitter's founders have been fairly receptive to the way Twits (one term for Twitter users) are using the application. For example, at some point people started using the "@" symbol to address a single individual via their Twitter handle (e.g., @pchaney). It was a way to indicate that the message wasn't for everyone, but for that specific person, even though the message appeared in the public timeline.

It wasn't long until Twitter incorporated the activity as part of its functionality. Not only that, they added a direct messaging capability enabling users to send private messages to individual users. Additionally, thanks to Twitter's API (Application Programming Interface), many other sites have developed and incorporated some element of Twitter's functionality. In fact, the API may be the reason Twitter has gained such popularity.

TWITTER RULES OF THE ROAD

Twitter is part of the larger spectrum of applications referred to as "social media." Think of it like biological classification with social media being the "kingdom" and Twitter the "genus." (Or would Twitter be better classified as "phylum?" Science was not my strong suit! Anyway, you get the picture.)

However, social media is not merely a set of "tools" to be used any old way we see fit. It is also a mindset—a culture—and, as such, certain rules apply. Unfortunately, most of these rules are unwritten and many an unwary traveler to the social media sphere has run afoul of them.

In an effort to keep you on the right side of the law, here are some that apply not only to Twitter, but universally:

Rule #1: You Must Earn the Right to Be Heard

As mentioned previously, originally Twitter was viewed as a "presence" application where you simply answered the

question, “What are you doing?” In addition, many considered it a “broadcast application,” simply a place to make announcements, share information and links, and so on.

While there is nothing wrong with using Twitter in either of those respects, it really is the 24/7/365 ongoing cocktail party—and who goes to a cocktail party, stands up on a table and starts shouting broadcast-style announcements to everyone? No one; you go to interact, converse, and network.

That, to me, is the primary role Twitter serves. And to gain any traction whatsoever you have to “win the right to be heard.” How do you go about doing that?

Follow others. Don’t do it indiscriminately. Find people that it makes sense for you to follow. Others in your industry, people in your local community, those who fit your demographic profile, and so on. Think about who should qualify to make the grade, and follow them.

That is not to suggest you refuse to follow those who first follow you, but that you be intentional in connecting to people where it makes the most sense from a business perspective. Perhaps you’re connected to others via LinkedIn, Facebook, Plaxo, or Active Rain. Strengthen your social graph by connecting via Twitter as well.

Should you thank others for following you?

Thanking someone is a matter of common courtesy and an evidence of respect. Emily Post would like it, but is it really a necessary practice for Twitter users? In a perfect world, perhaps. In this one, following someone is thanks enough.

That’s not to suggest you shouldn’t thank those who make a more meaningful impression. For the main, reciprocating with a follow will suffice.

Don’t use automated functions. This is a pet-peeve of mine. Many Twitterers use auto-reply and auto-follow functions. Remember what I said: Social media is a mindset, not merely a set of tools to be used indiscriminately.

It is my studied opinion that the use of auto-response devices fly in the face of what this medium is all about: human beings relating to one another humanly. Robots and auto-responders have no place here.

Interact. Converse. Those who just broadcast announcements will never garner the same degree of respect

or depth of relationships as someone who takes time to interact with others. Participation is the true price of admission into the Twitterverse.

Rule #2: Don't Follow if Only to Pitch

I'm seeing a very distasteful trend developing among newer Twitter users. People are following me, and if I respond in kind, their first tweet is to thank me for following (which I do encourage), then immediately pitch a Web site they want me to visit or explain how they can provide a service.

This is the typical *modus operandi* of the auto-response/auto-follow crowd. One bad deed leads to another. Sorry, folks, that is not how it's done in Twiterville!

Like I said, the rules of social media engagement may be unwritten, but they are real nonetheless. Don't follow or friend someone if all you want to do is pitch your Web site, product or service to them. Don't! Get to know the person first and let them get to know you.

If you want a formula for how this should work, it's this:

**Stranger > Connect > Converse > Friend > Client/
Customer**

Connect with those you don't know (strangers) and get to know them. Then and only then is it permissible to make a pitch. It is a matter of building trust. In fact, you may find that no pitching is needed whatsoever. They may seek you out.

Bottom Line: Don't pitch me if you don't know me. Am I stating this clearly enough?

Rule #3: Provide Value to the Community

Give people a reason to follow you by becoming a valuable member of the community. One way to do this is by providing good information in the form of links, quotes, advice, and answers to questions. People will see you as a resource, thought-leader and knowledgeable expert. They will come to appreciate your generosity of spirit. Just make sure that not every link you send them is to your own site, of course.

Rule #4: Mix Business with Pleasure

It's okay to share both from your business side and your personal side. In fact, it's preferable. That's the best way for others to get to know you.

YOUR TWITTER BIO AND AVATAR

Two items of extreme importance are your Twitter bio and avatar (photo).

Talk about brevity—Twitter stays true to form and only allows 160 characters worth of information. “Pithy” is the order of the day, but “cutesy” is not. Get across the essentials of who you are and what you do. Be sure and include a link to your Web site, blog, or LinkedIn profile too. One person I know even created a biography site and links to it.

One thing you don't want to do is protect your updates, an option in the account information section. In my opinion, taking such action goes against the very reason for participating in Twitter in the first place. I'm sure those who choose this option are well intended, but I don't see the rationale where business use is concerned.

TIPS ON USING TWITTER

Here are some tips for sending messages to others:

Reply. When you want to communicate with an individual, use this: @username (whatever their username is). Twitter will hyperlink the username and, if the user has @reply notifications turned on, he or she will more than likely see it. @reply messages appear in the public timeline.

D username. When you want to send a message to an individual privately (what's known as a direct message), use this: d username. (And remember to include a space after the “d.”) Twitter will know to hide it from public view.

RT. Sometimes a tweet is too juicy, informative, or entertaining to keep to one's self. In those cases, you can “retweet” it by copying the message into the field, placing

RT before it. Another practice becoming more popular is one that stems from blogging. Rather than use RT, you say (*via @username*) instead.

#. You know this as the symbol for pound. Twitter knows it as something called a hashtag. If you hang around very long, you'll begin to see Twitterers using this symbol, placing it in front of a keyword or acronym. The purpose of this activity is to make it easy for others to follow a conversation thread, something done by using Twitter search. By placing the hashtag in the search field you can view the entirety of a given conversation.

HOW TO GET STARTED USING TWITTER FOR BUSINESS

I'm going to begin by outlining a simple, workable marketing strategy that applies to any form of social media engagement, including Twitter. It's so simple, in fact, that it consists of only three words: Listen, Follow, and Engage.

Listen

My mother always told me, "Paul, God gave you two ears and one mouth. He did that for a reason. Listen twice as much as you speak." (Bet your mom told you the same thing, right?) You cannot become an effective social media marketer if you don't first listen to what's being said about you, your company, brand, service, industry, and competition, a practice known as online reputation monitoring (ORM). Listening is the new marketing, but it's not something we're prone to do. Still, that's where it begins.

Monitoring your online reputation is one of the most significant ways Twitter can be used for marketing purposes, and one way to do it is to search Twitter. In fact, there are at least three applications you can use. (There are others, but these should suffice.)

- Twitter's own search engine (<http://search.twitter.com>)
- Tweetscan (<http://www.tweetscan.com>)
- Twemes (<http://www.twemes.com>)

Keywords are another way to use Twitter search. You can input your most desirable keywords, then create an RSS feed to stay updated when the words are used. (There are also a couple of nifty applications that will send you daily updates on these terms via e-mail.)

You can listen by just keeping your ear to the ongoing stream of conversation of course, but the use of search tools like the ones just mentioned will help you cut through the clutter.

One more word about listening . . .

I think it's a good thing, before you ever start conversing, to spend a few days just reading what others are saying. It's a way to give yourself a better understanding of Twitter folkways and mores, figure out some of the nomenclature, and understand how best to interact. But once you've spent a few days, dive in! The water's fine.

Follow

The way you build your network in Twitter is by following others, then engaging them in conversation. But, whom should you follow? Keeping in mind that Twitter is another marketing channel, go back to the basics and ask yourself the same questions you'd ask when considering any other form of marketing: "Who is my market?" "Whom am I attempting to reach?" "What niche am I seeking to penetrate?"

Think in terms of demographics and geography. Is it a certain demographic? The average Twitter user is 35 and older, is likely male (60 percent of users are) who has between 100–500 followers. Is it a certain geographic area? Find those people and start following them. Many will return the favor.

Follow those you already know. One group it makes sense to follow are those you already know, some of whom might already be using Twitter. If you use a Web-based mail program such as Gmail, the platform will search your list of contacts to find them. You can also send invitations to those in your database not currently using Twitter. In addition, if you're connected to colleagues and prospects via Facebook or LinkedIn, connecting on Twitter will only serve to strengthen and personalize your relationships even more.

Follow influentials. A great strategy for building a network is to find the most influential people on Twitter in your

industry and start following them. A second step is to see who they follow and follow those people as well. By “influential” I am not necessarily talking about those people with thousands of followers, but rather those who have the respect of the community and add value to the relationships being built via Twitter. (Of course, if they happen to have thousands of followers, that’s not a bad thing either.)

Follow keyword users. Do you remember all that keyword research you did at the outset? It makes good sense to follow those who use your keywords.

Follow hashtag users. Hashtags are a way that Twitter users keep track of a given topic of conversation. They start with the “#” sign followed by an acronym or keyword. They can then go to Twitter search, input the particular hashtag and see every bit of conversation about the topic from anyone who used the hashtag in their tweet.

For example, while writing this book I asked those who contributed ideas via Twitter to add the hashtag “#twitter-book.” I went to Twitter search and saw each person’s entry.

The key here is that if you’re using a certain hashtag to follow a conversation thread, anyone else who is doing so might be a good candidate for you to follow. Make sense? If not, don’t worry. It will.

Follow those who follow you. Finally, don’t forget to follow those who follow you first. While you don’t necessarily have to do that in every case, it’s a common courtesy. (Sometimes those who follow you are spammers—yes, Twitter has its share of them too—and you want to avoid them like the plague.)

For a more extensive list of tips on whom to follow, see my blog post, *Fifteen Twitter Follow Dos and Don’ts* (<http://tinyurl.com/fifteenfollowtips>).

Twellow: Twitter App Made For Business

Of the many Twitter applications that crowd the landscape, one has particular usefulness for business, Twellow (<http://www.twellow.com>). It is a topical directory of practically everyone who uses Twitter. Think of it as the
(continued)

(continued)



Figure 10.1 Twellow Screenshot

Yellow Pages of Twitter users. (Why do you think they called it Twellow?)

Twellow can be used in at least two key ways:

- You can search the directory by category or geographic region to find others to follow.
- You can claim your profile so others can find you. (Twellow automatically adds Twitter users to its database, but you have to verify your listing in order to edit your profile.)

FINDING OTHERS TO FOLLOW

Twellow has over forty categories and scores of subcategories from which to choose, ranging from aerospace to Web development. When categories or subcategories are clicked on, a list of Twits contained in them appears and can be sorted by number of followers, latest activity, or Twitter verification ranking. Using a new feature called Twellowhood users can drill down to specific geographic locations.

Twellow bills itself as a way to “cut through the clutter” and find “real people who really matter.” I have to concur that it’s potentially a highly useful tool which will only get more so over time.

Engage

Once you (1) see what people are saying relative to the keyword searches, (2) give yourself some time to gain perspective by reading other’s Tweets, and (3) have started following a few folks, the next step is to jump into the Twitterstream and engage them in conversation. But how do you go about doing so?

Years ago, my father took a rather direct approach at teaching me to swim. One summer’s day we boarded our small boat and paddled out to the middle of the pond on our property. Dad grabbed me, threw me in the water and stated matter-of-factly, “swim or drown.”

Looking back, I’m sure he would not have allowed the latter. At the time, however, I determined the best course of action was to make for the shore, which I did with all haste. And, guess what? In the process I learned to swim.

I’m a bit like dad when it comes to Twitter in that I think the best approach to joining or starting conversations is “swim or drown.” Just jump in and start conversing.

OK, for the faint of heart, here are some “rules of engagement”:

- Respond to what others are saying by adding your two cents. Remember to use the “@” symbol when addressing an individual. This is an especially useful

approach to those you've followed based on keyword searches.

- Provide information that those in your target market would consider valuable. It could be links to other sites, answers to questions, advice, or opinion. Position yourself as a trusted resource. You're already doing that on your Web site and/or blog. Do it via Twitter as well.
- Engage in casual conversation with your followers. There are some who would suggest that for business purposes you shouldn't share the minutiae of your daily life or engage in casual conversation. To that I say, "Phooey." Social media marketing is as much about getting to know someone on a personal as well as a professional level. Not only that, how are you going to get to know others if you don't converse with them? The mix of personal and business content is a matter of balance.
- One thing you don't want to do is solicit business or "pitch" to people. You know the type: "Thanks for the follow. Check out my blog at _____." It's okay to let people know what you do, but Twitter is a medium for conversation, not solicitation. Include a link to your Web site in your Twitter bio. Those who have an interest will check you out.

TWITTER CASE STUDIES

How Dell Uses Twitter

Dell started using Twitter to promote items for sale via its Dell Outlet store. Ricardo Guerrero, Global Project Manager for Dell, began experimenting with the application as a means to connect to customers looking for deals on Dell's refurbished equipment. The result has been nothing less than phenomenal. Over two million dollars worth of products have been sold with no marketing costs incurred.

To deepen the company's involvement, several members of Dell's digital communications team set up accounts using their first name with "atdell" as their Twitter handles. Chief blogger Lionel Menchaca (@lionelatdell) was the first, using

it as a way to encourage interaction with the Direct2Dell blog.

Another Dell staff member, Richard Binhammer (@richardatdell), began testing it as a way to help manage Dell's corporate reputation. "I started by watching what people were saying about things that were happening on the Web," said Binhammer. "I then took a more active role participating in those conversations. I did not use Twitter as a way to shill Dell, but participated in communities of interest."

That early involvement morphed into a full-blown marketing and corporate communications strategy that has become a hallmark of the company. "Twitter has become an outworking of Dell's business model, direct. It's a way for us to connect directly with consumers to answer questions, address concerns and interact with those who mention Dell in their tweets. This, along with other avenues for social media outreach, has helped stem the tide on negative sentiment which, at one time, was as high as 49 percent," he stated.

Binhammer outlines a number of reasons companies should use Twitter as a way to:

1. Gather sentiment and information about your company
2. Begin a dialogue with customers
3. Address concerns and solve problems
4. Share information about the company and its products

Binhammer urges businesses to refrain from practicing reason 4 early on, but establish yourself as an active community participant by first engaging in the other behaviors.⁴

Zappos CEO, Tony Hsieh (@zappos)

One of the first and perhaps most notable CEOs using Twitter is Tony Hsieh (pronounced *shay*), CEO of online shoe retailer Zappos. Hsieh took time to answer some questions I posed and his responses have been included in interview form, with his permission.⁵

What prompted you to start using Twitter? How long have you been doing so? Were there other CEOs using it at that time?

I first started using Twitter in March 2007 at the SXSW Interactive Conference. While at the conference, I found it was a great way to find out what was going on during the day at the conference as well as figuring out what parties to go to at night. I wasn't aware of any other CEOs using it at the time.

After the conference, I introduced it to my friends in Vegas (where I live now) as well as my friends in San Francisco (where I used to live). I found it was a great way to find out what was going on and for meeting up with friends in Vegas. I also found that it was a great way to keep in touch and feel connected to my friends in San Francisco.

After using it with just my close friends for about a year, I realized how much Twitter had allowed me to form more personal connections with everyone, so we decided to introduce it to Zappos as a way of growing our company culture. We've found that it's been great for building more personal connections with both employees and customers.

New employees are introduced to Twitter during orientation, and we also offer Twitter classes to all employees. Employees aren't forced to use it, but when there are so many Zappos employees using it, many employees just gravitate naturally to it.

We have several hundred employees on Twitter. You can find a list of them here: <http://twitter.zappos.com/employees>. And we've aggregated all their tweets here: http://twitter.zappos.com/employee_tweets.

What benefits have you accrued personally and professionally as a result?

At Zappos, our goal is to build the brand to be about the very best customer service and the very best customer experience. However, our #1 priority is actually not customer service. Our #1 priority is company culture.

Our belief is that if you get the culture right, then most of the other stuff, like great customer service and building a great brand, will happen naturally on its own.

Twitter allows us to build and expose our company culture both internally to employees as well as to customers. Part of the Zappos brand is about forming personal connections, and for us that happens through the telephone as well as through Twitter.

As for myself, I've been able to form personal connections with many of our employees and customers through Twitter, and it helps everyone feel like they are dealing with real people, not a faceless corporation or CEO.

Also, I wrote this blog post titled "How Twitter Can Make You A Better (and Happier) Person": <http://blogs.zappos.com/blogs/ceo-and-coo-blog/2009/01/25/how-twitter-can-make-you-a-better-and-happier-person>

In what ways are you using the app? (By "you," I mean both you personally and the company.)

As I mentioned, part of the Zappos brand is about forming personal connections and Twitter is just another means like, say, the telephone. I believe everyone at Zappos, including myself, is doing just that . . . creating more personal relationships with everyone, one tweet at a time.

Along with you, many Zappos employees tweet. You've even incorporated a tweet stream into your Web site. What's been the driving force behind such integration? What benefits are you seeing?

Culture is our #1 priority and I think it's helped our culture by giving employees more of an opportunity to learn about each other personally, as well as by giving outsiders a glimpse into our culture.

Are you using Twitter in similar fashion to Dell, both as a listening post and customer service tool?

We like to interact with twitterers on a personal level while being as transparent as we can. If someone asks a customer service question on Twitter, the @zappos_service twitter account usually responds.

What advice would you give to other CEOs who may be considering using Twitter? Any cautions?

I would say first start using it with a group of around 10 friends who will all commit to doing it as well, and you'll learn naturally over time how to tweet. I would also experiment with following different people to find out what type of twittering you enjoy and what annoys you. You can find a list of the top 100 twitterers (in terms of number of followers) at: <http://www.twitterholic.com>

What other thoughts would you like to share?

Just a fun story I like to tell. An employee twittered out that she could really use a cheeseburger because she was hungry. She wasn't actually expecting a cheeseburger to magically show up, but it just so happened that another employee was on her way to work, so she decided to stop by McDonald's, and within 10 minutes the first employee had a cheeseburger on her desk. She was wowed by that experience. Since our #1 priority is company culture, moments like this just help build our company culture even more.

Amy Wood, Television News Anchor (@tvamy)

Amy Wood (@tvamy), news anchor with WSPA-TV, in Spartanburg, South Carolina, is using Twitter as a way to connect with viewers by including interactive segments into evening news shows, not unlike we have become accustomed to seeing on cable news channels such as CNN. However, Wood is quick to point out that she started using Twitter a full six months before Rick Sanchez or other CNN anchors adopted the practice. In fact, where the use of Twitter and other forms of social media at the local level is concerned, Wood is most definitely a pioneer. "In this market, I'm the only one using it," she says.

Wood has a very clear rationale for using Twitter. "In the good old days of television news, viewers were very loyal. Anchors were seen as celebrities. Now, everything is so cluttered, viewers hardly know who you are. Social media is a way to break through the clutter," Wood states.

Using social media offers a number of other benefits, Wood asserts. “For the longest time, we had trouble reaching younger viewers,” she says. “Social media has helped us resolve that.”

Regarding her approach to using Twitter, Wood says, “I’m very transparent. I want to help people understand how TV works. Social media is a place where my personality can shine through and I can be very ‘human.’”

In addition to using Twitter, Wood has set up a Facebook page for the station and maintains her own blog, *The Ribbit* (www.theribbit.com). Her success with the medium has even influenced other stations in the broadcast company’s group to adopt the approach.

“The handwriting is on the wall. No longer can television stations see themselves as a one-way broadcast medium. In particular, news anchors have to be accessible again. Social media is a way to achieve that goal,” states Wood. “It may not be mainstream yet, but it’s coming and fast.”⁶

OTHER MICROBLOGGING PLATFORMS

While Twitter is the “king of the hill” where microblogging tools are concerned, I would be remiss in my duties if I didn’t at least mention some of the others.

Jaiku

Jaiku is a forerunner to Twitter, serving much the same purpose, and is owned by Google. It bills itself as an “activity stream and presence sharing service that works from the Web and mobile phones.” Jaiku (the name is a takeoff on the Japanese term “haiku”) is more of a livestreaming application in that you can incorporate feeds from other apps. Followers can comment on posts, so it has a bit more of a conversational feel. Like Twitter, Jaiku has mobile phone capabilities as well.

Plurk

A couple of things differentiate Plurk from its counterpart Twitter: the user interface and the forums-like feel to the conversations. The best way to describe the interface is to

imagine boats floating down a stream, in that it shows updates in horizontal form via a scrollable timeline.

Each of the “boats” contains a short (up to 140-character) message from either the user or one of his or her friends. Users interact by clicking on the message, thereby opening a window showing responses from the user’s friends along with a form field to input your own response. This allows the application to be very conversational, but it can be unwieldy if several people join the conversation, or if there is a bevy of interaction.

When Plurk was first introduced, the novelty resulted in great user-adoption, even spawning something called “Plurkshops,” topically-centric interactive workshops using Plurk as the conduit for discussion. However, once the novelty wore off, most users went back to Twitter.

Yammer

Think of Yammer as Twitter, but focused strictly on business use. An enterprise version of Twitter, if you will. Only individuals with the same corporate address can join a given network. Yammer is free to use, but companies can claim their networks to get administrative rights and features on a cost-per-user basis. Yammer also offers mobile applications for iPhone and BlackBerry. I have found Yammer to be extremely useful for companies that have employees in disparate locations as a way for them to immediately interact.

WHEN DOES THE “MAGIC” HAPPEN?

I was afraid you were going to ask that. You see, by participating in the conversation, the magic is happening—but you have to give it a chance.

Social media marketing does not lend itself well to formulas. “Markets are conversations” and “participation is marketing” are the only ones I know that work. Remember rule #1: You have to win the right to be heard. By participating in the ongoing conversation, you turn strangers into friends and friends into customers. But, there is no “X times Y divided by Z” equals a lead or conversion.

That's true with a lot of advertising, is it not? Can you easily factor the ROI of a billboard, newspaper ad, or TV commercial? One thing is for sure: Conversing on Twitter is a lot less expensive than a television commercial!

If you have been selective and purposeful in choosing those you follow and have concentrated your efforts on providing value to your growing network, you will become a resource others trust. And the longer you do so, the more trust you'll earn. So, go ahead, jump in the Twitterstream and see where it takes you!

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Lights! Camera! Action! Use Online Video to Market Your Business



Let me state loudly, clearly, and for the record that online video and indeed online television is *the* technology to watch (no pun intended) in the coming years. Thanks largely to the expansion of broadband, there is a seismic shift toward digital distribution of video content, including HD-quality video. We are also experiencing a small-camera revolution, which includes webcams and portends a continued rise in consumer-generated content.

YouTube was just the beginning. Now it's accompanied by sites like ooVoo, seesmic, Revver, Viddler, Kyte, Vimeo, and Fliqz, and the list just keeps growing. People are flocking to their computers to watch television programs on demand on sites like Hulu, Miro, and Joost. There is a constant stream of live video on Ustream, Stickam, and Justin.tv. And let me not forget video delivered via iTunes on portable devices like iPods and iPhones.

Video is everywhere we want it to be and available on demand when we choose to consume it. All of this points to the fact that, more than any other technology, including

social networks, online video is the next killer app of the Web. The future of the Internet is video.

THE SMALL-CAMERA REVOLUTION

In the past, if you wanted to make a video for your business, you had to hire a production company or ad agency (who, in turn, hired the production company), spend tens of thousands of dollars, and, as often as not, end up with a product much different than you expected. Edits and retakes were costly, so you often had to settle for less than what you had hoped for.

This is no longer the case. Now, with a small, inexpensive camcorder and low-cost (or even free) video-editing software, you can create your own videos at a fraction of the cost. In fact, you can purchase easy-to-use, hand-held, HD-quality camcorders for under \$200!

Bizzuka's Recession Marketing Story

The costly scenario just described was played out to the letter at the company where I serve as marketing director, Bizzuka. We spent somewhere in the neighborhood of \$20,000 to have a video professionally created to showcase our company's content management system software products. While the end result was very satisfactory, it took months to complete the project, which significantly exceeded our budget in the process.

When the recession hit in the fall of 2008, we decided to create what we referred to as a "video whitepaper" and talk about ways small businesses could save money in marketing and advertising. Needless to say, this time we didn't hire a professional videographer. Instead, we bought a \$600 HD camcorder, a \$100 wireless microphone, and a \$50 tripod and set out to make our own videos. We interviewed thought-leaders in the web development, marketing, public relations, and social media industries. We quickly edited the series using iMovie software that came loaded on our CEO's MacBook, and within a few weeks released a nine-part series titled *Nine Ways to Maximize Your Marketing Dollars During the Recession*.

We created a microsite to house the videos and uploaded the series to YouTube and our company public profile on Facebook. Then we used free social media channels like Facebook and Twitter to create buzz about the series and propagate word of mouth. The only money we spent on marketing was \$200 for a press release syndicated via PR Web.

We experienced more traffic to our Web site in two weeks than we would normally have seen in two months. The videos were viewed hundreds of times, creating exposure for the company that we never would have been able to afford using advertising. Dell even picked up the series for use on their small business blog, opening the company up to the exact audience we wanted to reach: small business owners. For less than \$1,000, we were able to generate more news and interest in our company than the \$20,000 professionally created video ever did.

I'm not suggesting that professional videos are no longer needed; just that there are less expensive ways to go about it, which, given the bent toward realism that pervades the social Web, are perfectly acceptable.

Mojitos as a Social Object

You may recall that I talked about Miami Realtor Ines Hegedus-Garcia in chapter 6. One of the most interesting outcomes of Hegedus-Garcia's involvement with social media involves, oddly enough, mojitos!¹ "In December of 2007, I was playing with SEO keywords related to my business, real estate in Miami, when I happened to notice that, at the time, 'mojitos' was the #1 keyword searched for in Google. Given that mojitos are a Cuban drink and that I am of Cuban descent living in Miami, the mention really struck a chord," stated Hegedus-Garcia. "I grabbed my video camera and my husband Rick and, together, we produced a video on how to make a mojito, which I posted to my blog. Since that time, the video has been seen 33,000 times!"

Hegedus-Garcia says that while the idea has nothing to do with real estate proper, it is something fun that helps keep her top-of-mind with friends and associates—so much so that it has become a "social object" associated with her brand. "I regularly post mojito recipes, reviews, photos, and

videos on my blog and have even gone so far as to set up a mojitos group on Facebook,” she says. “The lesson I’ve learned is that everyone has the opportunity to find their social object. Keep an eye open for what works for you. Just don’t make it mojitos. That’s mine!”

Blendtec’s “Will It Blend” Success Story

One of the best and most prominent examples to support this approach is the “Will It Blend” series of videos created by Blendtec, a little-known company that makes very high-quality commercial-grade blenders. I say “little-known” because, prior to the series, they were. That all changed, however, when George Wright became marketing director.

Soon after starting work with the company, Wright was on the factory floor and came across Blendtec CEO Tom Dickson testing a blender by blending a 2×4 piece of lumber (No, that is not a misprint. He was actually grinding up a 2×4 !). Of course, this caught Wright’s attention, though he later found out that such extreme blending was a routine way of quality testing.

Wright was smart enough to take advantage of a good marketing idea when he saw one and went out and bought a few items—a rake, a bag of marbles, a six pack of Coke, a rotisserie chicken, and a lab coat—spending a total of about \$50. He dressed Dickson up in the lab coat to make him look like an engineer, grabbed a camcorder, and made the first video, grinding the bag of marbles into powder. He released the video on YouTube, and the rest is history.

Since that time, Wright and Dickson have recorded dozens of videos, grinding up everything from a rake to an iPhone3G. This low-cost, do-it-yourself approach to video-making has paid off in spades for Blendtec. Here are the facts:

- 65 million views on YouTube
- 120 million views on WillItBlend.com
- 200,000+ subscribers
- Total blender sales up 700 percent
- Pull-through impact in commercial products—B2B and B2C

- People now know who they are—brand awareness—retail and commercial
- 34th most subscribed channel of all time on YouTube

The company experienced the kind of media coverage that would make a Fortune 500 CMO jealous:

- National coverage, including *The Today Show*, iVillage Live, the History Channel, the Discovery Channel, *The Big Idea*, the Food Network, and the *Tonight Show*
- Print magazine coverage in publications such as *Internet Retailer Magazine* and *Wired*
- Blogs: Engadget, Forbes, AdAge, NYTimes, WSJ, BusinessWeek

It is even reported that Blendtec was mentioned in the halls of Congress when a congressmen talked about taking a bill and putting it in a Blendtec blender. (I can think of several bills Congress has passed that would have been better served by grinding them into powder.)

Gary Vaynerchuk, Wine Library TV (www.winelibrary.tv)

If the preceding examples are not enough to sway you toward using video, let me cite yet one more that will most certainly inspire you to do so. It's the story of Gary Vaynerchuk and his company, the Wine Library.

An immigrant from Belarus, Vaynerchuk has expanded a small wine business from \$2 million in annual revenue to over \$50 million, and he did so in just a few short years. How? By creating an Internet television show called Wine Library TV (also known as *The Thunder Show*) that has vaulted him to celebrity status. Vaynerchuk has appeared on nearly every major talk show in the country, including *The Today Show*, the *CBS Early Show*, the *Ellen Degeneres Show*, and even *Mad Money* with Jim Kramer.

A big part of Vaynerchuk's rise to fame can be attributed to his engaging, hyperkinetic personality, coupled with his expertise in wines. He is certainly one of a kind, and it only takes one viewing of his show to understand that. When

asked why he chose Internet video as his medium, his answer was concise, "I have a charismatic personality and don't know how to write!"²

Vaynerchuk is adamant about the use of social media for business. "I spent eight years and \$4.5 million doing traditional marketing and only three years using social media," he says. "It is the only playing field that makes sense anymore. All of your time should be spent there. The ROI is far more profound in social media."

The lesson to be learned in all of these examples is that small companies can have a big impact. Let me say it again: Thanks to the Internet, social media, and online video in particular, small companies can have a big impact! No longer do you have to pay media gatekeepers to get your message to the masses or hire expensive ad agencies to produce media on your behalf. You can do it yourself, effectively and inexpensively.

Blendtec took \$50 and parlayed it into millions. You might say they just got lucky. I mean, every now and then someone does win the lottery, right? I prefer to think of companies like Bizzuka and Blendtec and entrepreneurs like Hegedus-Garcia and Vaynerchuk as models for small businesses to follow. An inexpensive camcorder combined with a little imagination can provide big benefits.

BENEFITS TO USING ONLINE VIDEO

There is no question that, thanks to sites like YouTube, Google video, Hulu, Miro, Vimeo, and many others, the use of online video is growing quickly. Over 60 percent of the U.S. population will watch an online video in 2009, according to September 2008 report from ABI Research. In case I have not provided enough evidence to convince you to jump into the fray, let me continue my attempts.

Online video improves search results. Every major search engine now uses what is known as a universal search. That means that, in addition to pulling data from traditional Web sites, and blogs, search engines index content from multimedia sites as well.

Think of the benefits your company will accrue by dominating search results. Video, along with blogs and podcasts,

can provide welcome assistance in obtaining highly-ranked search engine results.

Let me add one more salient fact. YouTube is now the second largest search engine on the Internet, having surpassed Yahoo in 2008! Had you never thought of YouTube as a search engine? While it may not have been created with that purpose in mind that is what the video-sharing site has become.³ If you don't have a presence there, why not?

Online video appeals to the way people learn. Some people are quite content to learn by reading, while others learn aurally and still others visually. Using the sight and sound that full-motion video provides increases your site's usefulness by appealing to alternative learning styles.

Online video presents a 360-degree view of your company. Using various types of content, including video, makes it easier for customers and prospects to get a feel for who you are and what you do.

GOALS FOR BUSINESS USE OF ONLINE VIDEO

Benjamin Wayne, CEO of video platform company Fliqz (www.fliqz.com), shared his thoughts on goals small businesses should focus on when considering the use of online video. "Companies should use video in ways that drive key business initiatives rather than using video for the sake of video," says Wayne, who outlined the following goals.⁴

Use Video to Drive Additional Traffic

"Search engine syndication works in such a way now that video content is more likely to show up on the front page in search returns," says Wayne. He also suggest that sites that use e-mail marketing should promote video at the top of a newsletter, where people are more apt to click on it, and include a permalink to the video as well to encourage viral propagation.

Use Video to Create a More Engaging Experience

Video is highly engaging and involves more senses than the written word or audio. "Get video on the home page to pull people into the site. 80 percent of traffic will click on video

[over] any other,” suggests Wayne. He also recommends using a video gallery. “A Realtor I know has . . . four times . . . [the] response rate when video is integrated into the property listings on his site.”

Use Video to Increase Rate of Conversions

Wayne says video can be used implicitly and explicitly to encourage conversions. “Implicit conversion is more soft sell. It includes the content of the video plus that which surrounds it on the page. Use the entire page to help drive home the sales point,” says Wayne.

Explicit conversion, on the other hand, include the video watermarks, which should include your brand on the start screen and end screen. Wayne says 50 percent of the viewers will drop out before the end of video, so it’s important to include something to promote your brand at the beginning.

Somewhat surprisingly, he also says that “if the video is longer than 90 seconds, people will begin to drop off. If you want 75 percent of audience to see the video, make it 90 seconds or less. Online video is not TV migrating online. Break the content into clips and give a title to each clip.” He also recommends making the thumbnail image link to the clip because it helps ensure a better response rate.

SIX WAYS BUSINESSES CAN USE ONLINE VIDEO

Video Blogging/Podcasting

The topic of video blogging and podcasting could take up more than an entire chapter itself—it could be an entire book! In fact, quite a number of books on the subject have been written, including *Video Blogging For Dummies*, published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Here, though, it is not my intention to do any more than put video blogging and podcasting on your radar.

Video blogs (vlogs) are a form of blogging that uses video as the medium. They may also be syndicated using a special form of RSS called an enclosure, where viewers can subscribe and receive updates as new video makes its way to the blog. That’s the podcasting aspect. (We discuss podcasting in chapter 12 and RSS in chapter 14.) One of the more

popular channels for such syndication is iTunes, although sites like Miro also syndicate video content.

If you keep in mind what was said earlier about how findable video is in the search engines, that's reason enough to consider incorporating it into your blog, even if you don't create a full-blown video blog. This becomes particularly salient if no one else in your industry is doing it. There's a lot to be said for being a first-mover.

Product Demonstrations

Halo Supply, a manufacturer of oilfield services equipment based in New Orleans, uses video created in-house to demonstrate their products. While not quite as exciting as seeing a rake or iPhone ground to powder in a blender, their videos do make a convincing case for why their products are popular in the industry. To create the videos, Halo's Webmaster, Tyrus Smith, uses a consumer-grade camcorder, edits the videos using desktop software, and uploads them to the company's YouTube channel and Web site.

Using video in this way can make material more believable because the viewer can see it in action. Product demonstrations can also be accompanied by customer testimonials to reinforce and add credibility to the marketing message.

How-to Videos

By moving product training to video, companies can save many valuable (not to mention expensive) man-hours. Customers appreciate the convenience of being able to view the videos at their leisure rather than having to schedule live training. Over time, companies can build a complete library of training and customer support videos.

Streaming Video

Set this book aside for a moment and visit Stickam.com. What you will see is live, interactive streaming video. Much of the programming lacks anything that even resembles creativity (like the webcam stuck in the corner of a radio studio, for example), but the interactive component makes it engaging nonetheless. One of the best uses for streaming video is

to livecast events and conferences. Even our president uses live streaming for many of his addresses.

Online Video Ads

Though the day of the 30-second spot may be over, thanks to companies like Turnhere and Spotrunner online video advertising is gaining a strong foothold. Turnhere can shoot, edit, and publish a one-minute video ad for about \$1,000 using one of 6,000 professional videographers located across the country. Videos are then uploaded to listing services and search sites like Yellowpages.com, Citysearch, and Kudzu.com, as well as YouTube. Turnhere says the day of slick *Mad Men* style advertising is over. Realism is the order of the day, and their videos take on a documentary style full of information.

Viral Videos

I've already gone into detail about one company, Blendtec, using viral video. It's a good gig if you can get it. The problem is that videos designed to go viral often don't. It's hard to craft a campaign that can guarantee viral and word-of-mouth spread, but if you've got a good idea up your sleeve, it's certainly worth a try.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED TO CREATE VIDEO CONTENT

Stating the obvious, you need a video camera. That being said, you don't need an expensive one. I often use the RCA Small Wonder, which cost under \$200 and is suited to most applications. It's similar to the more popular Flip video camera, which has received more buzz on the Internet. However, in my opinion, the Small Wonder is a better camcorder, offering more features at a lower price. It's just not as "sexy."

One of the signal advantages of using either the Small Wonder or Flip video camera is that you can plug it directly to your computer's USB port and easily upload video content. Both also provide for uploading to YouTube directly (more or less). Webcams are another option, and the quality

of embedded cameras is much better than in past years. In addition, many cell phones offer acceptable video features that can be easily uploaded to your computer as well. Of course, if you have the budget, nothing is as nice as having a professional-grade camcorder. Prosumer-level cameras can be purchased anywhere from \$3,000 to \$6,000.

For editing software, I recommend Camtasia Studio. At \$299, it's not expensive, and it comes with plenty of easy-to-use editing features. While it's designed more for screencasts, I've used it successfully for more general video production. Of course, Windows Moviemaker is free and comes loaded on PCs, and nothing beats iMovie and Final Cut Pro for the Mac.

One more free option specifically designed for use in screen captures is Jing. It can capture still images or video. Jing was created by Techsmith, the same company that makes Camtasia Studio.

YOUTUBE AND OTHER VIDEO SHARING SITES

Once you create your video, where do you put it? Aside from your Web site or blog, there are a number of video-sharing sites, YouTube being the most well-known. I have to be honest in saying that I have mixed feelings about using YouTube for business purposes, considering that it is extremely entertainment-oriented. One alternative I recommend is Viddler (www.viddler.com). Quite a number of small businesses use Vimeo, but they explicitly state in their terms of service that it is not for commercial use. In fact, an account I had was deleted for that very reason. (I learned it pays to read the terms of service first!)

There are a number of white-label video services available as well. I've already mentioned Fliqz, which is affordable for small business. Brightcove is a popular option, but it is better suited to enterprise or corporate use. Viddler also offers a reasonably priced premium version well-suited for business use. If you're interested in streaming live video, then Ustream or Stickam are good options to consider.

CONCLUSION

Chad Hurley, CEO and co-founder of YouTube, had this to say about the future of online video⁵:

In ten years, we believe that online video broadcasting will be the most ubiquitous and accessible form of communication. The tools for video recording will continue to become smaller and more affordable. Personal media devices will be universal and interconnected. Even more people will have the opportunity to record and share even more video with a small group of friends or everyone around the world.

Over the next decade, people will be at the center of their video and media experience. More and more consumers will become creators. We will continue to help give people unlimited options and access to information, and the world will be a smaller place.

If you have yet to give video a try, what are you waiting for? Grab your camcorder and start driving more traffic to your site, creating higher levels of engagement and converting more prospects into customers.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Podcasting

Overlooked, Underutilized Marketing Tool



Maybe you don't have a face for video. Then how about a voice for radio? If so, a podcast may be just the marketing tool for you. Podcasting, as we will see in a moment, can be either audio or video. It's not the media that makes it a podcast. Something called RSS does that. But I'm getting ahead of myself. One thing is for certain, podcasting is an underutilized, overlooked marketing tool that offers a number of benefits.

WHAT IS A PODCAST?

Apple's Web site defines podcasts as "an episodic program delivered via the Internet using an XML protocol called RSS." (Thought you'd love that.) Let's define it more in layman's terms.

Remember when you had to scour the newspaper or *TVGuide* to find your favorite television shows, then gather at the appointed time to watch? Later, TiVo and DVRs came along, allowing you to record programs for viewing as it fit your schedule. Apply that same methodology to the Internet and you have podcasting.

Podcasts are digital media (music, the spoken word, or video) distributed over the Internet and downloaded onto your computer, MP3 player, or mobile device to watch or listen at your convenience. They are “asynchronous” in that they are not time-frame dependent, and can be consumed at a different time than they were created, a function officially known as time-shifting. MP3 is the most popular file format.

The important thing to remember in what differentiates a podcast from, say, streaming audio or video is the ability to subscribe to a particular show via a special type of RSS feed. (We cover RSS in more detail in chapter 14.)

Though the same content can also be made available by direct download or streaming, a podcast is distinguished from most other digital media formats by its “ability to be syndicated, subscribed to, and downloaded automatically when new content is added,” according to Wikipedia.¹ The ability to subscribe to a show and have it downloaded when new content is posted for retrieval is the key factor. That’s what makes a podcast a podcast. Make sense?

There are a couple of explanations about how the term evolved. The most popular is that it’s a portmanteau of “iPod” and “broadcast.” Another is that “POD” is an acronym for “Personal On-Demand.” Choose whichever version most appeals to you. Also: You don’t have to have an iPod (or “i” anything) to consume podcasts. Any portable media player will do.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PODCASTING

Practically speaking, podcasting began in 2001 as a collaboration between former MTV VJ Adam Curry, early Internet entrepreneur Tristan Louis, and Dave Winer, one of the true pioneers of the Internet. Winer had created a technology known as RSS, a method for syndicating Web content. A special form of RSS, called an RSS enclosure, enabled the transfer of digital media content from one place to another, such as from a Web site to your iPod.

(I know it sounds very geeky, but think of an RSS enclosure as an envelope in which you put a letter. When your computer or MP3 player receives the envelope, it simply plucks out the media file and stores it until such time as you

choose to consume it.) Anyway, using RSS, the three created the first podcast prototype, and the genre was born.

In the early years, some technical expertise was required in order to create podcasts, as the technology had not evolved to where it is today. Now, creating a podcast is as easy as picking up the telephone and dialing a number or uploading the file to a blog. (I outline three different ways to create a podcast later in the chapter.)

Podcasting has grown in popularity, too. Research firm eMarketer projects that growth will continue at least through 2013, when there will be 37.6 million people downloading podcasts on a monthly basis, more than double the 2008 figure of 17.4 million.

Established traditional media entities such as NPR, CNN, and Fox News are repurposing content from radio or television for use as podcasts, which has aided in its growth and adoption. iTunes, the most popular podcast “catcher,” has also contributed significantly to its growth. Even retail giant Wal-Mart has jumped on the bandwagon.

BENEFITS TO USING PODCASTS

The key advantage of podcasts as marketing tools is that they are highly targetable. As with blogs, you can create podcasts about any topic. It is truly a niche-marketing tool in that respect. Convenience is another factor. People can listen or view the content when it suits them and take it with them wherever they go. Podcasting is also a way to distinguish yourself from your competition, especially if they don’t use podcasting themselves.

“The podcast medium has opened up a whole new way of doing business. Podcasting represents an extremely efficient and effective way to communicate with customers, employees, and even investors,” said professional podcaster Michael Harper, CEO of Podcast Tune-up. “Its simplicity is what makes it so powerful as a tool! Don’t be fooled though; to be successful, rules must be followed and effort must be given to organize and produce a winning show!”²

Even if you don’t have a voice for radio (audio in this case), there is no need to worry. As with all forms of social media content, the emphasis is on reality—real content with

true voices. It's a departure from the broadcast radio stereotype. That is not to say you shouldn't aspire to good production values—it's just that you don't need to sound like NPR's Carl Kasell to create a podcast.

PODCASTING RESOURCES

So you have cleared your throat, warmed up your vocal cords, and are willing to give podcasting a try. Where do you start? To help, I have pulled together a list of podcasting resources:

Podcasting Software

Audacity (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net>): Free, easy-to-use audio editor and recorder for Windows, Mac OS X, GNU/Linux, and other operating systems. Audacity is my choice for desktop editing. Don't be put off by the fact that it carries no price tag either. It's a very good entry-level digital mixer.

GarageBand: For use on Macs as part of the iLife software suite, GarageBand turns your Mac into a full-feature recording studio. Though more popularly used for recording and mixing music, it's just as useful for recording the spoken word.

Audacity or GarageBand facilitate recording of audio files, but they don't create podcasts. Remember, that's the role RSS plays. For Mac users, Apple does offer a complete, end-to-end podcast production software package called Apple Podcast Producer, which manages the process of recording content, encoding, and publishing podcasts for playback in iTunes and on iPod, iPhone, and Apple TV. Podcast Producer is only available as part of Mac OS X Server, however, which limits its use. Don't worry. You don't need that to create your podcast. In fact, you don't even need a computer. You can record a podcast using a telephone.

Podcasting Sites

Blog Talk Radio (www.blogtalkradio.com): Blog Talk Radio is a free Internet radio service that allows you to record live just by picking up the phone and calling a specified number. Once the program is recorded, it is available for on-demand download. If you have an account, you can also submit the programs to iTunes. Blog Talk Radio allows for up to five

callers in addition to the host, so it is ideal for interactive panel discussions or for those who may want to feel like Rush Limbaugh and take calls from listeners.

TalkShoe (www.talkshoe.com): Like Blog Talk Radio, TalkShoe enables users to create live Internet radio shows or interactive podcasts. It, too, turns the program into a podcast. One significant difference is that, using its Shoe-Phone application, TalkShoe can handle many more callers—up to 250, in fact. (I would hate to be the moderator for that conversation!) TalkShoe also has both Facebook and iPhone applications.

GCast (www.gcast.com): Remember that audio file you created with Audacity or Garageband? GCast is a site where it can be uploaded and encoded as a podcast. That's just one option: The other is, as with Blog Talk Radio or Talkshoe, to record a podcast using the phone. (The difference here is that it is not live Internet radio.) GCast hosts the audio and creates the RSS feed that enables listeners to subscribe to your content. The service is free to use as well.

Podomatic (www.podomatic.com): Podomatic is another podcast hosting site, also free, that allows you to upload audio recordings or record on the site via a webcam or microphone. Users get their own page where the podcasts are displayed.

Utterli (www.utterli.com): Another free podcasting site is Utterli. I have to admit, though, that Utterli is a bit hard to define. It's a hybrid, part microblogging, part-podcast site where you can upload multiple types of media, from text to images, video, and audio. Like many of the services mentioned above, you can also call in using a special number and PIN and record an “utter.” Users can subscribe to your utters via SMS or e-mail.

One of the more prolific users of Utterli is public relations professional Doug Haslem. Here he provides a thorough explanation of how he uses Utterli, a platform he refers to as a “multimedia mobile posting and social networking tool.”³

I use Utterli to create shortish blog posts to cross-post to DougHaslam.com. I can post from anywhere, using any mobile phone. This means I can do a quick blog post from a trade show, for example. More regularly, I do mini-posts in the mornings before I go to work. I mix a

photo, short text (1,000 characters) and a short audio version together. I tend to have any Utterli go through Twitter, then I manually post to my blog the “Utters” I want there.

I can also do video, photo, audio and/or text and mix them together any way I want for a post. I suppose you can do that other places, but the ability to do it here in conjunction with the mobile posting referenced above is pretty valuable.

There is a pretty active social network on Utterli, so on occasion after posting I will listen to others’ audio posts and often respond. Plus, my blog posts will also show if anyone responded via Utterli, which is nice on the blog. I would say, though, that the Utterli social network is less important to me than the ability to cross-post, post via mobile and mix media.

Links to Sites Containing an Aggregate of Podcast-related Resources

Podcasting Toolbox (<http://mashable.com/2007/07/04/podcasting-toolbox/>): This list of over seventy resources from popular social media site Mashable contains resources including podcast hosting, recording and advertising sites, podcast creation software, and podcast resource guides.

Robin Good Podcast Directory (http://www.masternewmedia.org/podcast_directory/): This is an ever-growing list of some 80 podcast search engines and directories to which you can submit your podcast.

Podcasting Equipment

If you decide that the telephone or computer’s microphone is no longer sufficient and want to take your podcast to the next level in terms of professionalism, here are some resources:

BSW (<http://www.bswusa.com/podcast.asp>): BSW is a leading supplier of podcast recording and editing equipment. They offer an inexpensive podcast starter package that comes with a studio-quality microphone, a mixer with USB output to synch it with the computer, and all the accessories.

Blue Snowball USB microphone (<http://www.bluemicro.com/products/snowball>): Not only is this microphone cool-looking, it sounds great as well. It plugs directly into your computer via USB cable. No other software is needed.

Zoom H2 and H4 portable recorders: These come highly recommended for both portable and studio use. They are available at the BSW site and on Amazon.com.

Professional Podcasting Services

If you would rather outsource the production of your podcast to true professionals, I recommend Podcast Tune-Up (www.podcast-tuneup.com), a company that provides education, training, and production services.

EASY WAYS TO CREATE A PODCAST

Blog Talk Radio—Live Internet Radio

Web content management company Bizzuka uses Blog Talk Radio to produce a weekly Internet radio program called User Friendly Thinking. The show is co-hosted by Bizzuka CEO John Munsell and me, and we interview Internet movers and shakers.

We chose BTR for a number of reasons. First, it was free to use. Second, it was easy. The host manages an online switchboard that identifies callers and has a special host number and PIN. Everyone else, up to five additional callers, dials in using a guest line. It's really that simple. Once the program starts, it is recorded for on-demand download later. Listeners can also subscribe using an embedded RSS feed or iTunes. Third, we found it to be the most convenient way to facilitate conversations with guests from across the country and even the world. The program is broadcast live at a scheduled time, but we find most of our listeners download the archived version.

Audacity—Easy to Use Desktop Recording/Editing

If having guests call in is not an issue, or if everyone involved with the podcast is on the premises, and you don't intend to broadcast the show to a live audience, I highly recommend Audacity for its ease of use. Recording is facilitated with one click, and you can layer multiple tracks to include music or

other pre-recorded audio. You can export to a number of formats, including MP3. Your audio files can then be uploaded to the podcast hosting sites mentioned above for archiving and podcast encoding.

Using Your Blog to Publish Podcasts

I would be remiss if I didn't mention that certain blog platforms are well suited to podcasting—TypePad and WordPress in particular. TypePad recognizes an audio file when it is uploaded and does the heavy lifting by adding podcasting enclosures to your blog's RSS feed.

WordPress is not so intuitive and requires the use of a plug-in (<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/podcasting/>). However, the plug-in provides several features, including full iTunes support, a dedicated podcasting feed, support for multiple file formats, and a player that can be included in any post and is easy to use.

Submitting to iTunes

Finally, unless you have a WordPress blog and are using the aforementioned plug-in, you will want to submit your podcast to iTunes for additional syndication and exposure. This resource provides instruction on how to go about it: <http://podcastingscout.com/how-to-submit-your-podcast-to-itunes-music-store>.

THREE EXAMPLES OF BUSINESS-ORIENTED PODCASTS

Paul Dunay, Buzz Marketing for Technology

Paul Dunay, global managing director of services marketing for Avaya, covers the technology marketing beat with his Buzz Marketing for Technology podcast series. He has been podcasting since 2005 after reading an article that sparked his enthusiasm.

"I remember reading a news item that Apple was going to allow MP3 files to be posted to iTunes. It didn't make a big impression until one night in bed it hit me—MP3 files +iTunes—that could be great AND I know how to do that," exclaimed Dunay. "I couldn't sleep that night at all—I had tons of ideas, literally 15 sheets of paper filled with them."

So excited was Dunay that he recorded and uploaded content to iTunes within one week. “It took iTunes about a month to get it posted. We got our first podcast up there dated August 2005 and beat our main competitor by one week. We were the first consulting firm to get there and my boss was ecstatic!”⁴

Dunay now records an average of two or three podcasts per month containing interviews with marketing and technology innovators. He broadcasts them using the podcasting application Veotag, which allows podcasts to be “tagged” with clickable labels identifying and segmenting sections of the content.

“After I did my first VeoTag I was hooked. The ability to jump to the right question and not have to listen to me drone on for 20 minutes is invaluable,” said Dunay. “You also get great SEO as a result of the labels because they are indexable by Google.”

In regard to equipment, Dunay says he has about five different systems: everything from a digital voice recorder to home studio. He highly recommends BSW, the company referenced earlier. “They know me by first name,” he says.

Dunay gives the following advice to those considering the use of podcasting as a marketing tool:

- No “shovelware”—you need to make and record for this medium.
- Have a very conversational format—think radio talkshow.
- Use a strong call to action.
- Commit to a series—I suggest weekly.
- Keep it short—five to seven minutes is good.
- Cost can be anywhere from zero dollars to a thousand—don’t let that scare you.
- Post the content on iTunes, but don’t expect a lot of traffic. iTunes doesn’t refer traffic to Web sites.

You can access Dunay’s podcasts by visiting his blog, Buzz Marketing for Technology (<http://buzzmarketingfortech.blogspot.com/>).

Wayne Hurlbert, Blog Business Success

Wayne Hurlbert, president of Blog Business World, hosts the program Blog Business Success, one of the longest-running programs on Blog Talk Radio. In the following interview, Hurlbert talks about why he started podcasting and why he chose Blog Talk Radio, and he offers some advice for others interested in using the medium.⁵

What prompted you to start podcasting?

I have been podcasting since 2006. I was intrigued by the possibility of reaching an entirely different audience through the medium of audio. At the same time, I liked the idea of deepening the conversation with my existing blog readership by adding an audio component. The opportunity to interview experts, and discuss various business-related topics, was an idea that would add value for my audience as well.

Why did you choose to use Blog Talk Radio as opposed to doing something similar to what Paul Dunay does with his Buzz Marketing for Technology podcast?

I chose Blog Talk Radio for several reasons. I discovered their new service when they reached out to me as a blogger to become involved with their vision. When I looked over their interface, it was easy to use and required no special software or downloads. All that was required to start a show was a telephone or VoIP connection.

The personal approach of the Blog Talk Radio management and staff also impressed me, as they understood customer service and engagement. I was attracted, as well, to the combination of the live streaming of the show over the Internet, and the recording of the show as a free on demand podcast download. Through my connection with Blog Talk Radio, I am able to reach a much wider and more diverse audience than I could ever achieve as an independent podcaster.

What role or purpose does your podcast serve? What goals do you hope to achieve?

My goal has always been to help others by providing valuable information for business people to grow their

companies successfully. By interviewing knowledgeable guest experts, and having them share their ideas with the listeners, I hope that business owners and managers will discover techniques for building successful organizations.

What topics do you cover? And, is it always interview-based?

My show is always interview based to provide the widest possible range of ideas for our listeners. The interview format also provides an opportunity for the guest to share knowledge with others. My guests range from small business people to C-level executives. Many of my guests are business book authors looking to share ideas. Other guests are successful businesspeople with a genuine desire to help others. Topics that have been prominent on my show are social media and blogging, sales and marketing, business management, ethical business, personal finance and investment, personnel management and training, and leadership. My show focuses on the guest, and on their sharing of ideas with the listening audience.

Other than the telephone, do you use any special equipment?

I use no other equipment besides the telephone. BlogTalk Radio provides a wonderful chat room, listener phone-in opportunities, and a connection to Twitter. The all inclusive system works very well for my requirements.

What advice might you give a small businessperson who is considering the use of podcasts for marketing?

When using podcasts, it's crucial to be authentic. Let the real you shine through the conversation. Whether the podcast is solo, or with one or more guests, it's important to share ideas and add value. The podcast should never be one long sales presentation. In fact, I believe the podcast audience is best served by sharing useful information and ignoring sales and marketing considerations.

The podcast builds a person's reputation as a thought leader on its own. To add sales and marketing messages

beyond the absolute minimum amount could negate the value of the podcast. Keep the podcast a source of valuable information and add real value for the listeners, and your podcast will be a success for everyone.

Susan Bratton, Personal Life Media

Susan Bratton is the co-founder and CEO of Personal Life Media, Inc., a multimedia lifestyle brand that produces forty weekly podcasts covering everything from alternative health to politics to technology.

In this interview, Bratton shares the Personal Life Media story along with advice for others interested in using podcasts.⁶

What is your vision for Personal Life Media? What is its purpose?

Personal Life Media is a podcast and blog network which currently has forty shows and growing, that focus on deep conversation and frank discussions around deeply personal subjects including business, relationships, sustainable living, spirituality, wealth-creation, careers and hobbies like digital photography and family history/genealogy.

Why did podcasting become the medium of choice? Why not video, similar to what Gary Vaynerchuk is doing?

Our target audience covers the age range of 35 to 55. They are very busy people with careers and family and are more likely to multi-task by listening to a podcast while doing other things.

Audio is a medium that lends itself to deep discussions and frank conversations. You can “work on yourself” while you are multi-tasking, making it perfect for our busy fans.

You intended to start with a single podcast, but instead, turned it into an entire network. Was it your intention for it to become a business?

It was my intention to create a publishing business. I launched a series of sixteen shows in 2007, and we’ve been adding to our roster ever since. Some of our relationship experts have amassed thousands of avid fans and had over a million downloads of their show!

What are some of the benefits to using this medium, especially from a business perspective? What would be some advice you would give to a small businessperson or marketer considering the use of podcasting?

Corporate podcasts can be excellent for reaching out to a new audience, telling your story, deeply explaining some of the more complex aspects of your business and creating an ongoing connection to your customers and prospects.

If you prefer talking to writing, podcasting can be a better medium for you than blogging. One thing I've noticed is that the hosts of our show do love to talk, even when they are not in front of a mic. If that's you, consider podcasting. It's free, except for some initial equipment purchases, it's episodic and it gets you into an entirely new distribution channel—iTunes. Often, you can own your vertical in podcasting as it's still not a very crowded space.

If you can't produce your own audio show, there are excellent resources like Blog Talk Radio, National Podcasting Systems, and others who provide tools or can produce your show for you.

In your view, how important is it that programs maintain a degree of professionalism? What might be some standards you would want to see enforced?

I vehemently disagree with anyone who suggests a podcast or vidcast can be done with less than professional conduct, but do agree that the aforementioned tools, many of which are less than "broadcast quality" are perfectly acceptable today.

You as the host must be buttoned up. Get your intros and outros down pat. Stick to your show format, don't do something different every week. It's confusing to the audience. Be reliable, professional and personable. And be the advocate for your audience. Always keep them #1 in your mind. Be in service to them, not to your brand or corporate message. That's what will make your messages stand out.

Any other thoughts on the use of podcasting for business communications and marketing?

I like integrating the content into a blog or Web site and creating an RSS feed to which people can subscribe from that blog or site or find in iTunes. To me, that's critical. Being everywhere your prospect might like you to be. Make it easy for them to find you.

CONCLUSION

Podcasting may be a neglected medium, but it is one that offers significant advantages to both the professional marketer and small businessperson alike. It is easy to record and produce, affords listeners the benefit of being able to multi-task while they consume the content and, for those who prefer talking to writing, is a preferable alternative to blogging. It is worth your while to add a podcast as part of your overall social media marketing strategy.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

PR 2.0

Introducing the Social Media News Release



Allow me to make a confession. I hate writing press releases. Most often this is because the news I'm writing about isn't really news at all, except to my own company. Plus, there are the obligatory third-party quotes, such as "We're very excited to have so-and-so join us. . . ." (There are lots of excited people in press releases, I've noticed.) Add to that lots of spin, and you have the makings of a traditional press release.

Journalist Tom Foremski said in his now legendary blog post *Die! Press Release! Die! Die! Die!*¹ that, "Press releases are nearly useless. They typically start with a tremendous amount of top-spin, they contain pat-on-the-back phrases and meaningless quotes. Often they will contain quotes from C-level executives praising their customer focus. They often contain praise from analysts, (who are almost always paid or have a customer relationship.)"

Not only that, but some 3,000 press releases are syndicated daily via wire services. Unless you've got a PR firm following up, making calls or sending e-mails to journalists

and bloggers, it is an insurmountable task to even get your release read! Hardly seems worth the effort, doesn't it?

So, if not to inform the press, what is the real value of a press release today? In my view, the value is three-fold: as a tool for search engine optimization (SEO), direct marketing, and social media engagement.

Press Releases as SEO

When it comes to online marketing, practically everything revolves around being findable via Google and other such engines, and there is no reason press releases can't serve that role as well.

"A press release written with SEO in mind can do much more than the author originally intended if the right keywords are used, and links are included that point to the corresponding page(s) on your site along with an image or video for universal search results," said search marketing expert Brian Bille. "You'll not only share news to make your PR department happy, but accrue even more value via inbound links to your site."²

Press Releases and Direct Marketing

As author David Meerman Scott explains so well in his bestselling book, *New Rules of Marketing and PR*, we are no longer beholden to the media gatekeepers.³ Thanks to syndication via Google and Yahoo! News, blogs, and RSS feeds, we can now go directly to the audience we want to reach with our message.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not suggesting that mainstream and trade press channels are irrelevant. After all, getting a story picked up and published in a trade publication is still valuable. It's just not as valuable as it used to be. Why not take the shortcut and go directly to the consumer rather than the long way around with the media? After all, now "we" are the media. We are publishers and our Web sites are media properties. It's best that you start looking at things that way.

Press Releases and Social Media

I want you to forget everything you have ever learned about writing press releases and introduce you to a new concept called the Social Media Release (SMR).

The traditional press release was born over one hundred years ago at a time when “all the news that’s fit to print,” as the *New York Times* put it, was published in newspapers. As I’ve established, those days are gone. The social media release (and notice I did not use the term “press”) is born of the time in which we now live, an era in which newspapers, radio, and TV are faltering, and the Web is predominant.

This new format enables users to incorporate video, audio, images, PowerPoint slides, and any other form of multimedia content that can easily be shared via the social Web into blogs, social networks, microblogs, RSS, and more. SMR’s don’t completely do away with the traditional release format, as that is included as well. It’s just much more findable, flexible, sharable, and conversational than the old text-based release ever could be. It was born from social media and is native to it.

“The days of creating and pushing one press release are over. These are the days of reaching diversified and equally pivotal communities when, where, and how they choose to be reached,”⁴ says public relations pundit Brian Solis, a man globally recognized for his views and insights on the convergence of PR, traditional, and social media.

In 2006, inspired by Foremski’s rallying cry calling for the death of press releases as we’ve known them, Todd Defren, principal at public relations agency Shift Communications, introduced the concept of social media releases, which incorporated multimedia, social bookmarking, RSS feeds, Twitter, and more into the format. He created a template in the form of a PDF and circulated it across the Web.

The first time I looked at Defren’s SMR template I recall being impressed with how novel it was and, at the same time, how difficult it would be to pull it off. This wasn’t your grandmother’s press release. There were lots of bells, whistles, and moving parts—video, audio, images, links, RSS feeds, social media bookmarking, and much more.

It seemed like a daunting task that I was not ready to tackle. Social media consultant Jason Baer agrees. “The hang-up with social media releases has been actually getting them built,” said Baer. “Most PR folks are not Web programmers, and the very nature of what makes a social media release useful (tags, links, multimedia) makes it tricky to

SHIFT
communications

SOCIAL MEDIA NEWS RELEASE TEMPLATE, VERSION 1.5

<http://www.company.com/socialmedianewsroom/todaysnews>

CONTACT INFORMATION:	Client Contact Phone #/skype Email Blog Website	Spokesperson Phone #/skype Email Blog	Agency Contact Phone #/skype Email
-----------------------------	---	--	--

NEWS RELEASE HEADLINE [icon]
Subhead

CORE NEWS FACTS
• Bullet-points or narrative

LINK & RSS FEED TO PURPOSE-BUILT DELICIOUS PAGE
The delicious page offers hyperlinks (and annotation in "Notes" field) to relevant content sources, providing context and on-going updates. [icon]

PRE-APPROVED QUOTES FROM CORPORATE EXECUTIVES, ANALYSTS, CUSTOMERS AND/OR PARTNERS
Recommendation: up to 2 quotes per contact. Be prepared to offer additional quotes to content publishers who desire exclusive info.

"3 LINKS THAT MATTER" (OPTIONAL)
Provide more info without overwhelming the reader. Links should highlight relevant data that add context to the news (e.g., blog posts, white papers). A URL "snipping" service like TinyURL is recommended.

BOILERPLATE STATEMENTS

[icon] RSS Feed to Corporate News Releases	[icon] "SHARE THIS" Universal bookmark widget	[icon] TECHNORATI TAGS
[icon] OPML Feed to Corporate Blogs	[icon] "SPHERE IT" Context related web search	

PHOTO
e.g., product picture, executive headshot, etc.
[icon]

MP3 FILE OR PODCAST LINK
e.g., sound bytes by various stakeholders
[icon]

GRAPHIC
e.g., product schematics, market size graphs, logos
[icon]

VIDEO
e.g., CEO's view of the news, brief product demo
[icon]

MODERATED COMMENTS
Offer RSS and email update options

Type your comment here...

TRACKBACKS/ BLOGS THAT LINK TO THIS NEWS

Figure 13.1 Todd Defren SMR Template

execute if your definition of high tech is inserting a footer in Microsoft Word.”⁵

PITCH ENGINE MAKES SMR CREATION SIMPLE

In August 2008, public relations professional Jason Kintzler did all the hard work for me by creating a social media release platform called Pitch Engine (www.pitchengine.com). For the first time, creating a new media release was so easy that even the most non-tech savvy of us could do it.

Essentially, Pitch Engine is a social media release building application that enables users to embed video from YouTube, Blip.tv, Flickr, and Seesmic, display PowerPoint slides using Slideshare, and upload images from your computer's hard drive.

The application is as easy to use as completing a form. In fact, that is how the interface is styled, and it includes fields for 140-character Twitter pitches (it even has a link built in that allows users to automatically add the content in a tweet), summary information, bullet-point news facts, and the full release. Links can be added to related Web sites, PDFs, or



Figure 13.2 Pitch Engine Screenshot

other files. There is also a field for keyword tags as well as a shortened URL. Company boilerplate information is included in the right-hand column.

Pitch Engine uses the “freemium” model: Releases are free, though they are only housed on the site for 30 days. Premium services like the archiving of releases and the creation of a branded newsroom are available at rates easily affordable by small businesses.

Functionally speaking, since Pitch Engine is the literal incarnation of what Todd Defren envisioned in his template, it would be logical to conclude that it served as Kintzler's inspiration for the platform. However, that was not the case. In fact, Kintzler wasn't thinking in terms of social media at all. “Pitch Engine was born out of frustration,” he said. “In addition to the release itself, journalists would want high-resolution photos, video, or other materials, and I found it very difficult to pull all that together in an e-mail.”⁶ Instead, Kintzler would upload all the material to a USB drive and

send it to the media, a practice that could be both time-consuming and expensive, depending on how many media outlets he was trying to reach. Kintzler's initial goal was to create something that was simple to use and gave journalists all the information they needed.

It wasn't long, however, before social media entered the picture. Kintzler was introduced to Defren's template and even started an online community for PR professionals and others to discuss how to bring PR and social media together. "The community was a way for me to crowd source development and gather feedback," says Kintzler.⁷

Thousands of companies large and small have now used Pitch Engine, which now has quite a fan following, including the aforementioned Solis, who joined the company as a strategic advisor.

Though Pitch Engine does syndicate releases to Google News, it is not a wire service in the traditional sense of the word. Instead it relies on social networks and word of mouth for viral spread of the message. There is also a real-time "pitchfeed" on the home page of the Web site that is searchable by industry and keyword that journalists and bloggers will find helpful.

PRWEB COMBINES TRADITIONAL, SOCIAL, AND SEARCH

Another tool I've found to be very helpful that is a bit more mainstream is PRWeb (www.prweb.com). While it contains some of the same features as Pitch Engine, its emphasis is on the release itself, which takes on a more traditional look and feel. You can upload images and video, though at the time of this writing you cannot embed content from third-party sites.

PRWeb is less of a social media tool and more of an SEO tool, and that's precisely why I advocate its use. Part of the user interface incorporates keywords, and keyword-optimization is built in as well. Plus, it is a wire service in that it syndicates releases to news media and online news sources like Google and Yahoo!.

According to the PRWeb Direct Web site (<http://www.prwebdirect.com/about.php>): "We are heavily invested in

search technologies. Search engine traffic plays a vital role in the success of your news release. Journalists increasingly rely on major search engines for their research. Consequently, every press release distributed through our network is optimized for maximum organic search engine inclusion. Search engines can then crawl naturally and efficiently to index your press release. Our exclusive technology and unmatched infrastructure provide the best available search traffic directed to your news items.” PRWeb is so confident of its service that it guarantees inclusion of press releases in major search engines.

Because PRWeb has such authority with Google, the chances are good that a keyword-optimized, thematically relevant press release would do well in terms of ranking highly in search engine returns. I’ve seen it happen over and over again.

Unlike Pitch Engine, PRWeb does not offer a free option. Prices range from \$80 to \$360, with service offerings scaling the higher the price point. I settle for the \$200 SEO release, which I find meets most of my own needs. If you create a large number of releases, you may wish to reserve PRWeb for those which merit the greatest exposure due to the cost. However, if getting Google’s attention is of importance to you, I can think of no better tool for the money than PRWeb.

USE PITCH ENGINE AND PRWEB IN TANDEM

When possible, I suggest using both Pitch Engine and PRWeb in concert. Since the Pitch Engine version of the release provides the most flexibility and interaction, I would link to it from the PRWeb version in order to generate greater exposure. You could even style the Pitch Engine SMR to be more conversational in tone and reserve the PRWeb version for the more formal language expected from a traditional release.

Regardless, using them together is the best of both worlds. You get all the benefits—social media engagement, search engine optimization, and direct marketing. It’s a powerful combination. And who knows, maybe mainstream media will read it too!



Figure 13.3 AB-EXTRAS Screen Shot

CREATE A SOCIAL MEDIA NEWSROOM

A logical extension of the social media release is the social media newsroom. Pitch Engine offers this as a premium option, but it is conceivable to create one on your own Web site.

One company that did this was Anheuser-Busch, which, with the help of Brian Solis, created a site called AB-Extras (www.ab-extras.com), a social media destination for fans of Budweiser that was designed to tell the backstory behind the ads shown during the 2009 Super Bowl.

You may say, “But I’m not Anheuser-Busch. I’m a small business and can’t afford a high-powered PR firm to create something like this for me.” Don’t fret. The wonderful thing about this and all the social media tools I’ve discussed in this book is that they are easy and inexpensive to create.

Even Anheuser-Busch, with all their millions, used the free WordPress.org blog platform to build their newsroom. There is no reason you couldn’t do the same thing using that or another popular blog platform. For example, the PR firm

wolfstar
public relations • social media • word of mouth

social media news room
resources for journalists and online reporters

Media Coverage

www.rivier.com

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- New drinks company recruits Wolfstar to handle UK launch
Valpi, a new drinks company based in Yorkshire, has hired the public relations and social media specialists, wolfstar, to...
January 23, 2009
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Student party goers in Huddersfield are in for a real treat when world-renowned dance music producer and DJ, Chris...
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Leeds based public relations, social media and word of mouth consultancy, Wolfstar, has been named the national Outstanding Small...
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- NHS Kirklees and Kirklees Council appoint Wolfstar for student obesity campaign
NHS Kirklees and Kirklees Council have appointed public relations and social media specialist Wolfstar to help deliver a social...
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Danish health food company Fuerza Vital has hired the online PR and social media specialists Wolfstar to manage the...
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- Sony Ericsson launches global blog partnership programme for World View 2008
Sony Ericsson has launched phase two of its global blog partnership programme for its mobile camera phone competition World...
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UK consumers, who send or receive foreign payments, could be paying well over the odds for their currency due...
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Chris Lake performs at the Top of the Pops
Chris Lake performs at the Top of the Pops
Chris Lake performs at the Top of the Pops

Figure 13.4 Wolfstar Newsroom

Wolfstar uses the TypePad platform for its newsroom (www.wolfstarnewsroom.com).

Pitch Engine also offers its own social media newsroom function that archives releases created there.

Since the main criteria for these newsrooms are that they be capable of archiving all forms of media, allow for user-interaction, and be imminently shareable, blogs serve the purpose very well.

CONCLUSION

Think with me for a moment. Over the course of the last six chapters I've talked at length about how you can use blogs, social networks, online communities, microblogs, videos, and podcasts to build a strong presence on the Internet

and in social media. The social media release and newsroom are where all of those components can come together to even further maximize your exposure.

Allow me to once again reference Brian Solis: “What lies ahead is nothing less than remarkable. The social media release is no longer an ‘if’ or ‘when.’ Thousands of SMRs are live and wild in the social mediasphere thanks to the inventive, resourceful, inspired champions who’ve helped ensure their vibrancy, effectiveness, and residence as a permanent fixture in the day-to-day toolbox of communications professionals.”⁸

The path to meaningful PR communications has been cleared. I trust the next press release you write will be in the form of an SMR.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Other Social Media Marketing Tools



In the last several chapters I have outlined seven proven, strategic tools to grow your business using social media. I could just as easily have included seven more, each deserving a chapter of its own. In lieu of that, I want to reference several of the other popular categories of tools. While you retain your focus on those previously mentioned, I would suggest that these not be overlooked, for each has its own set of features and benefits.

SOCIAL MEDIA TAGGING AND BOOKMARKING

Instead of bookmarking sites via your browser's bookmark function, why not share the fun and go social, using sites like Delicious and StumbleUpon. These belong to a category known as social bookmarking and are a way to organize, collate, and categorize the Web using a classification structure called "tags." You are then able to share these bookmarks with others, which is where the social part comes in.

Tags are nothing more than labels applied to a given bookmarked resource. Tagging is a bottom-up, user-generated form of categorization that allows people to use whatever



Figure 14.1 Tag Cloud

vocabulary is helpful to them. While this may seem a bit chaotic and messy, it has become the de facto standard for annotating and classifying content on the Web. Practically every form of social media site, from photo-sharing to bookmarking to blogs, uses tagging. You might even notice some sites have what is referred to as a “tag cloud” to visualize this structure.

While tags are useful as a means of classification, they also provide value for searches. For Google and other search engines, those tags are nothing more than keywords indexable by the engines. Not only that, sites such as Technorati (www.technorati.com) use tags as the sole method for categorizing content indexed on the site. Further, most blog platforms have a field just for tags in the posting interface.

A few moments ago I referenced two social bookmarking sites: Delicious and StumbleUpon. I would like to briefly describe the purpose each serves, along with the benefits of using each from a business perspective.

Delicious (www.delicious.com)

I use Delicious religiously as my default bookmarking service whenever I want to gather resources for use in writing blog posts or articles, or for any other reason. In fact, the site proved to be extremely valuable in doing research for this book; it enabled me to quickly and easily save posts, Web sites, and articles that I could come back and refer to later. There is even a plug-in for the Firefox browser that makes the job as simple as right-clicking the mouse and picking Delicious from the sub-menu that appears. Because Delicious is Web-based, I can access the information from any computer,

wherever I happen to be at the time. That's just one of the advantages to using the site.

Another is the ability to share bookmarks with others. That's why it's called social bookmarking, after all. Delicious is a useful tool for project teams, workgroups, or entire departments that need to collect, store, manage and share information collaboratively. Imagine how much better that is than using e-mail to send resources back and forth.

StumbleUpon (www.stumbleupon.com)

StumbleUpon is a bookmarking service that uses a browser toolbar (it only works with Firefox) that allows you to bookmark sites you like and share them with other "stumblers," as users are known. Once you find a site you would like to share, you click the thumbs-up icon in the toolbar, and a dialog box appears that asks for a description of the site's content and provides a field for tags.

I am a real fan of StumbleUpon for one very good reason: It can be a source of tons of traffic to your Web site. I recall the first time I checked the traffic statistics on my blog and noticed that referrer after referrer came from StumbleUpon. If increased traffic is of benefit to you, then I would encourage you to ask friends to bookmark your content.

These are only two of the many social bookmarking sites on the Internet. Others include Magnolia, Reddit, Digg, and Furl, to name just a few.

Make Your Content Sharable

You may be wondering how to go about making sure your content gets bookmarked by others. Let me suggest two options. One is an application called ShareThis (www.sharethis.com), which allows content on any site to become sharable. ShareThis includes links not only to all the sites mentioned above, but to a bevy of others as well, including MySpace, Facebook, Yahoo Bookmarks, and Windows Live (over 20 in all).

ShareThis also enables posting of content to blogs and includes a forward to a friend feature. You simply place the ShareThis button on any Web page that you wish to make sharable. There are options for automatically embedding it

in blogs—Wordpress, TypePad, and Blogger specifically—so that every post becomes sharable. Another similar service is AddThis (www.addthis.com). I have used both and find them very easy to set up and install.

CUSTOMER REVIEWS AND RATINGS

While the most influential word-of-mouth recommendations come from those you know personally, online ratings and reviews can have significant influence as well. A study by the University of Michigan's Ross School of Business¹ examined the relationship between the number of online reviews and sales.

Reviews Increase Sales

"Using data collected from a large online retailer of electronic products over a six-year period, the researchers found that the number of reviews has a significant positive effect on sales of products that are perceived favorably by consumers, while volume has a significant negative impact on sales of products with poor consumer ratings," the study said.

I personally experienced this benefit regarding a book I co-authored in 2006, titled *Realty Blogging*. A number of positive ratings and reviews (and one negative one) were posted on the book's page at Amazon.com, and I can testify that they served to elevate book sales. Not only that, the book was favorably reviewed on real estate social network ActiveRain.com, and a number of the site's members made purchases as a result.

Other Benefits of Ratings and Reviews

Groundswell, the phenomenal new book by Forrester Research analysts Charlene Li and Josh Bernoff, suggests that ratings and reviews allow you to "tap into customers' enthusiasm."² The authors cite eBags.com, a company that has experienced 30 percent annual growth year after year for the eight years it has been selling handbags and luggage online. The company "turned customers into a powerful asset," said the authors, and it now places their ratings and reviews "front and center" on the site.

The authors listed two significant benefits to using ratings and reviews:

- **Reviews increase the buy rate:** Seventy-six percent of customers use online reviews when making purchases.
- **Leverage with suppliers:** eBags knows more about the products it sells than the people who manufacture them.

There are a number of benefits in addition to those mentioned in *Groundswell*:

- **Search engine optimization:** Reviews increase the amount of original content on the site. If that content is topically relevant, it stands to reason that it will help increase search engine returns.
- **Increased user engagement:** Visitors will return more often to read recently updated reviews. It is even better if RSS feeds can be tied to product reviews so that updated information is delivered to subscribers.
- **Increased traffic from return visits:** If your Web site offers a rating/review system and your competitors' do not, the customer will visit you and not them. You gain competitive advantage.
- **Increased trust:** If word of mouth is a highly trusted source (and it is), the fact you offer a rating/review system will lend itself to increased trust in your site.
- **Word-of-mouth marketing:** Some rating/review systems also include a recommendation component, which allows site visitors to notify a friend about a product via e-mail.

CUSTOMER SERVICE APPLICATIONS

The social Web has given birth to a number of new customer service applications known as idea aggregators. Basically, a customer can submit an idea, suggestion, question, or complaint, and those are voted up or down by other customers and commented on. It is a way for companies and customers to interact, engage, and learn from each other well beyond

the level facilitated through the typical customer relationship management system or FAQ engine. Two examples of this type of application are Get Satisfaction and Salesforce Idea Exchange.

Get Satisfaction (www.getsatisfaction.com) is an objective third-party site where consumers can submit ideas, questions, and complaints about any business. Companies get access to this data for a premium and can “claim” their page and assign employees as moderators.

Salesforce Ideas (www.salesforce.com) is implemented by the sponsoring company and is reminiscent of the way Digg works in that it allows users to submit ideas that are voted and commented on. Ideas that rise through the ranks gain consideration from the company and may be implemented.

Dell uses this application with a site they call Ideastorm. The site was started in 2007 as a way to gauge which ideas were most relevant and important. To date, approximately 12,000 ideas have been submitted by Dell Users. If you own a Dell that has a backlit keyboard, you can thank fellow Dell customers who used Ideastorm to submit, vote on, and promote the idea. That’s the reason the improvement was implemented.

RSS: THE PLUMBING SYSTEM OF THE INTERNET

If there was a Web 2.0 tool that deserved of its own chapter, RSS is it, and I should probably be ashamed for not making one. RSS was created by Netscape, and its origins can be traced as far back as 1997. Do not let that fact escape you. RSS predates virtually every form of social media technology, yet it gets little credit for the service it provides.

RSS, which stands for Really Simple Syndication among other things (Really Stupid Sounding is another interpretation) is essentially the plumbing system of the new Internet. Let’s put it this way: If it weren’t for RSS, there would be no Web 2.0, at least not from a systems development standpoint. Yet, it is one of the most ignored and misunderstood technologies in use today. If anything, I want this chapter to pay homage to this humble yet vital application.

The best way I know to explain how RSS works is to use the analogy of the paperboy. Not that you read your daily newspaper, but if you did, how would you prefer to get it?

I'd like mine delivered, sitting on my doorstep every morning. That way, I don't have to go to the newspaper office or make a trip to the local convenience store. Instead, it's delivered to me.

That's exactly how RSS works. Instead of having to remember to visit a particular Web site, the content of that site can be delivered to you via RSS. Two things are required for that to happen:

- The content must have what's known as an RSS feed attached to it.
- You must have what's known as an RSS reader to receive it.

More and more content is being "RSSified." In the early days, blogs were almost the only sites you would find that had feeds associated with them. Now, any site that has frequently updated content, including major mainstream news sites such as CNN, have feeds attached.

How do you determine which ones do and which don't? Usually, you will notice in Figure 14.2, which has become the standard for all sites carrying feeds.

That solves the first problem. What about the second, the RSS reader? Those are available in abundance, and you probably use one without even realizing it. For example, if you use iGoogle or have MyYahoo as your home page when you log onto the net, it's a safe bet that you have some type of RSS feed to which you've subscribed.

If that's not the case, you can use these as your reader. Google also offers a stand-alone reader called Google Reader (fancy that). Bloglines (www.bloglines.com) is another popular reader, as is Newsgator (www.newsgator.com). Firefox and the latest Internet Explorer browsers have them, as does the most recent edition of Microsoft Office Outlook, which allows you to have your e-mail and RSS feeds together in one application.

You gain access to these feeds by subscribing, which is usually as simple as clicking the RSS feed icon. In the rare event that you do that and a page of cryptic HTML-like code appears, go back to the original page, right-click the icon, and copy the URL associated with it. Then go to your reader



Figure 14.2 RSS Icon

and paste it into the required field. Your reader will find it and all will be well. Once you've subscribed, content will be dropped into your reader any time the site is updated, almost in real time.

There are a number of advantages to using RSS. Unlike e-mail, it is not subject to spam. In fact, it's one of the only forms of online communication that spammers have yet to figure out how to infiltrate. You receive information only from sites to which you have subscribed. No more, no less. It's a beautiful thing, really.

Its value from a publishing standpoint should not be taken lightly. If you have a blog, then RSS is most likely already enabled. However, that may not be the case if your site is built using some other platform, like a content management system or Dreamweaver. If you have frequently updated content in any form—blog posts, news releases, online calendars, or e-mail newsletters (anything that moves, frankly), make sure it is RSS-enabled. Not to do so is to turn away a guaranteed source of traffic. One resource to help you with that is Feed for All (www.feedforall.com), which is software designed to make any site RSS-enabled.

I should make mention of a very popular application known as Feedburner (www.feedburner.com), an RSS feed management and syndication service that makes your feed more portable so that it is formatted for all major directories. Feedburner even provides statistics on feed subscription and other valuable metrics. It also has an ad network bloggers can use to monetize their feeds with advertising.

If you still require a bit more explanation, the best resource I know of on the net is “RSS in Plain English,” a short video which can be found by going to CommonCraft .com. You can find it on YouTube as well. Just search for the phrase in quotes. I promise, once you’ve seen the video, you’ll know everything you need to about RSS.

PHOTO-SHARING

Sharing images uploaded to the Web on sites like Flickr (www.flickr.com) and Photobucket (www.photobucket.com) is another very popular activity that has implications for business use. For example, one Web design company I know uploads images of new sites as they are developed. It’s a way to show off their expertise. Another company shares product images as well as behind the scenes photos of employees and company activities such as picnics. It’s a way for prospective customers to gain better insight into the company.

Of course, photos are tagged with keywords that are searchable by Google and other engines, so these sites become a source of traffic to your Web site and provide real SEO value.

A WORD ABOUT WIKIS

A wiki is software that lets users work collaboratively to create and edit content. The word is Hawaiian for “quick,” but I have no clue as to why it garnered that name. (Maybe the same person that coined the term “blog” created this one as well.) The most popular wiki in existence is the online encyclopedia Wikipedia, which contains more than nine million entries made by 85,000 contributors.

I'm not suggesting you need anything on the scale of Wikipedia, but the software is very useful for project teams or workgroups. Like the social bookmarking site Delicious that I mentioned earlier, a wiki is a one-stop resource for collaboration. Depending on the platform chosen, users can upload and edit documents, video, photos, and text.

Wikis serve a number of uses, from planning a meeting or corporate event, to archiving internal documents, to working on a business plan or proposal. I've even seen some TV networks creating fan sites for popular shows where fans of the show can update or edit information.

You might suggest that this sounds like a formula for trouble. After all, who knows what kind of content could be uploaded? However, quite the opposite is true, as communities tend to police themselves. That's certainly proven true of Wikipedia, which has thousands of volunteers who fact check and edit data submitted to the site.

Earlier versions of wiki software tended to be a bit "geeky," requiring a certain scripting language to format information. If you've ever added or edited anything in Wikipedia you know what I'm talking about. However, over the years newer versions of wiki software have gotten about as easy to use as Microsoft Word. One wiki platform I really like is Web Paint (www.wetpaint.com). It is truly easy to use and requires little if any technical expertise, thanks to the WYSIWYG editing capabilities.

MOBILE MARKETING: THE AGE OF THE iPhone HAS ARRIVED

I could not end this chapter without talking about a technology that is very much in the news these days but which has yet to peak: mobile marketing. The iPhone, to put it mildly, was a game changer. It's the all-in-one device that, despite the small screen, provides powerful access to the Web

From a marketing perspective, the most important aspects of iPhone technology are the applications, of which there are hundreds. Think about it. Let's say an iPhone owner downloads a branded application that offers some type of utility. If the application is deemed useful, it could literally become anchored on the device for life.

Not only that, according to TNS Global, 74 percent of the world's digital messages were sent through a mobile device in January 2009, a 15 percent increase over the previous year.³ In emerging markets, the number is even higher.

Even though I don't cover this topic extensively, it would pay to keep an eye on the mobile technology space. It will only grow. There will come a day, and that may not be long, when we will bypass fixed devices altogether in favor of mobile communications. When this happens, you can be sure marketers will not lag far behind.

CONCLUSION

Now that you've been introduced to quite a number of social media marketing tools in this section of the book, we move on to the really strategic part: developing a social media engagement plan of action.

PART III

**PUTTING THE
TOOLS TO
GOOD USE**

**A SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING
PLAN OF ACTION**

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

A Brief Word About Web Sites, E-mail Marketing, and Search Engines



This section outlines a simple, three-step process for social media engagement: Listen, Engage, and Measure. Before we get to that, we need to take a step back and think about other forms of online marketing that play equally important roles. In fact, I will go so far as to say that before you begin using social media, three elements need to be in place: You need to have an engaging Web site, you should at least consider using e-mail as a form of marketing, and you should keep search engine marketing in the forefront of your mind.

CREATE AN ENGAGING WEB SITE

The Day of the Online Brochure is Over

Remember the early days of the Internet when Web sites were little more than electronic brochures, static relics of the days when most companies barely noticed the Web? Because content never changed, visitors weren't inclined to return. Neither were search engines.

Thankfully, those days are long gone, and now Web sites provide value to both groups of visitors, human and machine. Even with all this talk of fancy Web 2.0 paraphernalia, I believe the company Web site still has relevance. However, because of the influence of social media, in order for it to maintain its standing in the future, changes will be required. The corporate site will have to become an aggregate of proprietary and social content and become a conduit for social interaction.

The Internet Is More About Connections and Less About Destinations

I'm going to make an assertion that some may find arguable. I believe that, in its current iteration, the Web is less about "destination silos" and more about "shared connections." In other words, it's no longer just about getting visitors to come to our Web site. In fact, that's almost an arrogant attitude that suggests the Web is about "me, myself, and I." That may have been the way the Web operated in a former time, but it is not the way it operates now. These days, it's about "we, us, and them."

A perfect example of this mindset was a campaign early in 2009 that the candy company Mars embarked upon for their Skittles brand. Instead of creating the typical brand site, Skittles.com was nothing more than a "widget" that resided in the upper left-hand corner of the browser. Rather than taking visitors to pages on its site (which would have been difficult to do given the small size), links in the site's navigation menu took them to other places on the Web where the brand had a presence.

Click on the "Friends" tab and the Skittles Facebook public profile appeared. Click "Chatter" and a Twitter search page for the word Skittles came into view. Click "Media" and you were taken to Skittles' YouTube channel. Similarly, click one of the product links and you were escorted to a Wikipedia page containing product information.

Needless to say, this campaign created quite a stir. In my view, it was a recognition that what consumers had to say about the brand was as important as what Mars itself had



Figure 15.1 Skittles

to say. If nothing else, it got people talking about Skittles, if not actually purchasing the candy.

Disregard Skittles execution of their campaign for a moment and focus on the underlying philosophy that drove it. This extreme example supports the claim that the Web has changed from a one-way broadcast medium to a multi-directional conversation. I would even recommend that sites now include, in addition to the primary navigation, a social media navigational structure linking to all the other places where a company has a presence on the Web. In so doing, the company Web site becomes a hub connecting visitors to a variety of destinations. In fact, one ad agency I know of commits fully half the real estate on their home page to aggregating content from their blog, Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr feeds.

Applications like Facebook Connect, mentioned in chapter 8, are designed to do just that—serve as conduits to connect visitors on a given Web site to members of their social graph inside Facebook, enabling both to interact with the content contained on the site.

Creating an Engaging User Experience

Think about how and why you use the Web. Chances are, you use it when you are looking for something specific, like a product, a service, information, or advice. When you are looking for that specific something, which sites annoy you, and which do you most appreciate?

Do you enjoy sites with pop-up windows, “click here to enter” pages, blinking banner ads, or flash animations that have dozens of transitions before you ever see the first bit of content? Or, do you eventually do business with sites that load quickly, are well designed, and make the path to the information you are seeking obvious and accessible?

Visitors on the Web are task-oriented. They aren’t “surfers” so much as they are on a mission. They’re following an information “scent trail.” If your site can quickly and easily facilitate that search, providing answers to their questions and the information they seek, they are likely to return. If not, access to millions of other sites is just a mouse-click away. That’s why it is important that you provide an engaging experience.

“Engagement involves creating a design that visually makes an impression consistent with the messages that brought them there. It involves creating a design that directs them efficiently to where they want to go and creating a navigation process that is logical and helps people accomplish their task quickly,” said John Munsell, CEO of Web development company Bizzuka.

“The design must make a good first impression and get the message across. The message needs to be one that says, ‘We’re professional (visually appealing), we’ve got the solution to your problems (consistent marketing messages), we’re eager to help you (obvious access to search, contact and FAQs), and here’s where you’ll find what you need (intuitive navigation),’” Munsell added. “In other words, simply creating a pretty Web site does not constitute engagement.”¹

Blogs Are the New Web Sites

Once upon a time, Web sites were Web sites and blogs were blogs. It wasn’t difficult to tell the difference. (Of course, blogs are Web sites, but you know what I mean.) That was

then; this is now. With newer, premium WordPress themes like Revolution and Thesis, for example, it's become much more difficult to distinguish one from the other. Conversely, traditional content management system (CMS) platforms are incorporating more "bloggy" types of functionality. Given that, there is no reason for any company to have a static site—not when an engaging Web presence is within easy reach.

DON'T FORSAKE THE USE OF E-MAIL

There was a time when I predicted that e-mail would go the way of the albatross in terms of its usefulness as a marketing tool. After all, with the increasing prevalence of spam, spam filters that often catch valid e-mails and send them to the junk folder if not blocking the e-mail altogether, and crowded inboxes, how could it continue to be effective as a marketing tool? Or so I thought. Despite its woes, e-mail is ingrained in the psyche of the Internet and is not going anywhere. Nor should it.

E-mail Is Still a Very Potent Form of Online Marketing

For a time it was fashionable to dismiss e-mail as a marketing tool. With the advent of blogs, RSS, and social networks like Facebook and Twitter, many predicted its demise. While it's true that people now use social networks and blogs more than personal e-mail, according to a report from Nielsen Online, e-mail is far from dead! In fact, it appears to have a very bright future.²

Consider these facts:

- According to an October, 2008, report by the Direct Marketing Association, the return on investment for e-mail was \$45.06 for every \$1 spent, as opposed to non-e-mail Internet marketing's \$19.94.³
- E-mail provided more than double the effectiveness of other online marketing methods.
- By the end of 2008, e-mail was estimated to have driven \$28 billion in sales and is projected to drive \$32.6 billion in sales in 2009.

- A survey of B2B marketers in November, 2008, noted that 68.3 percent intended to increase spending on e-mail marketing in 2009 (source: B2BOnline.com).
- The DMA estimates spending on e-mail marketing (in the United States) will increase from \$600 million in 2008 to \$700 million in 2009.²

A study from e-mail reputation-monitoring firm Habeus shows that “consumers primarily connect with one another by using e-mail” and that “E-mail is expected to remain an oft-used communication tool, despite the rise of social networks like Facebook.”³

I agree that e-mail can be a pain. We’re all plagued with overcrowded inboxes and information that often gets lost or sequestered away in some folder, becoming virtually impossible to retrieve. Still, that doesn’t change the fact that old-fashioned, opt-in e-mail marketing is an effective tool when best practices are followed. E-mail is tried and true, and it has withstood the test of time.

E-mail and Blogs: A Marketing One-Two Knockout Punch

I have long advocated using blogs and e-mail as complementary online marketing strategies. Blogs serve a customer-acquisition function, while e-mail serves a customer-retention role. In fact, there are numerous ways blogs and e-mail can play well together.

- **Build lists:** Incorporating the newsletter subscription form, as previously mentioned, is a way for the relationship first established with the blogger to progress to a relationship with the sponsoring company.
- **Use e-mail to solicit blog content:** By mentioning the company blog in the e-mail newsletter, a bridge is created between the two. In addition, asking readers to submit suggestions for blog content or even inviting readers to submit content (guest posts) will further reinforce the relationship.
- **Use old e-mail content for blog content:** Repurposing valuable content that may be languishing in the e-mail newsletter archive is one way to give it new life.

- **Use blog content for e-mail newsletters:** Blogs are good “seedbeds” for the germination of ideas that can be expanded on later or fleshed out for use in other forms, including e-mail.
- **Use blogs to fill the gaps between publication cycles:** Something else to think about in terms of the relationship between blogs and e-mail has to do with the number of times consumers are touched using either medium. For many companies, e-mail newsletters are relegated to monthly syndication. That means the prospect or customer is only contacted twelve times per year—not nearly enough to establish a “top-of-mind” relationship. Even with weekly distribution, that still leaves six days out of the week when the customer does not hear from you. Blogs are a way to fill the gap, especially for those customers who subscribe to the blog’s RSS feed. With regular posting, customers can be touched much more often.

The ideal scenario would integrate blogs and e-mail into a single platform. To my knowledge, the only company doing that at present is iContact. Barring that, one path to integration is the use of applications like FeedBlitz, Zookoda, or Feedburner, which take blog posts and turn them into e-mails that can be scheduled for daily, weekly, or monthly distribution. An opt-in form is added to the blog sidebar for readers to use in subscribing. And there is always CTRL-C and CTRL-V for copying and pasting of content from the blog to the newsletter, or vice-versa.

E-mail is without peer as a tried-and-true marketing technique. Blogs have entered mainstream awareness to the degree they are no longer considered tangential. It’s becoming commonplace to see a blog associated with a company’s Web site. Since both are content-centric, they pair very well. (I call them a digital “peanut butter and jelly sandwich.”) That’s why I feel strongly that some company should create an integrated blog/e-mail marketing platform.

The bottom line is, when used in concert, blogs and e-mail can serve up a marketing haymaker. I heartily encourage using both.

How Does E-mail Marketing Fit in with Social Media?

Some would contend that social media applications like Twitter and Yammer are replacing e-mail. I prefer to think of them as supporting it in an ancillary manner by taking some of the burden off insofar as anecdotal message sending is concerned.

But, honestly, can you name one social network platform that does not use e-mail? Don't they all default to it in some fashion, whether it is account creation, service notifications, or member-to-member communications? Though e-mail serves a more utilitarian function in this respect, it is a highly useful one nonetheless.

Some would argue that younger people don't like e-mail, opting for the use of SMS instead. However, once they enter the workforce, the rate of e-mail adoption rises. It has to. E-mail is still the standard for business communications, for the foreseeable future anyway. At least until "E-mail 2.0" takes its place.

"E-mail marketing could not be better suited to enhance your social media efforts," said Aaron Kahlow, managing partner of consulting firm Business Online. "It is the key ingredient in launching a successful social media marketing campaign. The rise of social media is pushing the evolution of e-mail marketing from blast campaigns to more personal, one-to-one engagements. So the short answer is e-mail is a perfect marriage with social media."⁴

MARKETING VIA SEARCH ENGINES

One More Time with Feeling: Google Is the New Yellow Pages

I mentioned earlier in the book that I didn't know where the Yellow Pages directory is in our house. (I still don't.) Google has become my new Yellow Pages. It is my default source for finding everything, especially since Google created its browser, Chrome, which integrates the search query and URL fields into one. It has become a magic mirror I can ask any question, and it instantly returns useful information, more or less. With the growing prevalence of local search is it any wonder the old print Yellow Pages directory has become obsolete?

The outlook for search marketing is bright. Search volume continues its upward climb, as does spending on search, both organic and paid.

AdAge, in its 2008 Search Marketing Fact Pack, said that search volume rose 20 percent over the previous year, 2007, and that search marketing spending approached \$14 billion in 2008. Search marketing, especially in hard economic times, will only continue to grow.

“During uncertain times everyone looks for the most affordable ways to drive new traffic to their site,” says search marketing expert Brian Bille.

One of the ways most often overlooked, especially by small businesses, are free listings through local search. “Listings are a win-win. Not only are you claiming your business listing and making sure no one hijacks it, but you are also giving your business a fair chance in ranking via local search,” Bille adds. “Claiming and editing your listing is quite easy. Each major search engine features simple, step-by-step directions.”⁵

Search Is Now Universal

Another reason to place continued emphasis on search marketing is because all the major engines—Google, Yahoo, MSN, and Ask—now use what is known as blended or universal search. (The latter is Google’s term.) Data is pulled from multiple databases and it’s no longer unusual for results to include video, images, product information, or news stories. Social media tends to fare well in returns, which is yet another reason to have a strong presence on sites like Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, and Wikipedia. It’s all about creating content that search engines can consume.

CONCLUSION

Now that you’ve got your Web site working for you, are using e-mail as a marketing tool, and are ensuring that every piece of content you create appeals to Google, it’s time to move on into a more intentional social media engagement action plan. The next chapter is where it all starts, by putting our ears to the ground and listening.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Listening Is the New Marketing



Marketers are known for talking, not listening. That is not to suggest we have not used tools like focus groups, user surveys or other research instruments in the past. It's just that, in the era of the participatory web, listening is not an option; it is a mandate.

Social media provides an unfiltered opportunity to learn at a grassroots level what people really think about your brand, products or services. Indeed, listening to the groundswell of consumer-generated content is the new marketing. It has even given birth to a new industry called Online Reputation Management (ORM).

MONITORING AND MANAGING YOUR ONLINE REPUTATION

Why to Listen

People are talking and they are using the social web—blogs, social networks, wikis, forums, and video—as their mouthpiece. Take, for example, what happened on Twitter following the Super Bowl. There was an outcry, even a backlash,

against domain registrar Go Daddy for its controversial advertising. More than a few people went so far as to transfer their domains to other service providers!

While this was barely a blip on Go Daddy's radar in so far as the net effect on its bottom line, the publicity cannot have been good. The effect of word of mouth in social media is not constrained to large companies, either.

Recently, I spoke at a gathering of local hospital marketing directors on the topic of social media. In preparation, I visited a couple of healthcare rating and review sites to see if any of the hospitals represented might be mentioned. Oh boy, were they! One hospital in particular was dealt a number of severe blows in terms of negative reviews. Another experienced quite the opposite effect.

Don't kid yourself. Reviews from "average people like me" are powerful. They not only influence consumer attitudes and behavior, but often show up prominently in search returns.

What to Listen For

There are three metrics involved in ORM: Share of voice, tone of voice, and trends over time.

Share of voice. This is a measurement of how much people are talking about you. For many small businesses, it is often the case that nothing is being said. That's almost as bad as if people are talking negatively. When nothing is being said, it is vital that something be done to stimulate conversation. There are a number of ways you can do so, which I will cover later in the chapter.

Tone of voice. This is a gauge of whether the conversation is largely positive or negative and is often referred to as "sentiment analysis." If the sentiment is positive, you should try to reward those who speak well of you. That will presumably encourage them to do even more. If the tone is largely negative, it is incumbent upon you to get to the root of the problem, if a problem exists. Fix the problem and the tone will likely change. If misinformation is being spread, you must engage the critics and correct their misunderstanding.

Bizzuka, the company I serve as marketing director, experienced this very issue a number of months ago. A blogger had written some factually incorrect information about the company and its content-management system. Even worse, that post was displayed prominently on Google search returns for the word “Bizzuka.”

Two actions were taken. First, Bizzuka’s CEO responded to the post with a comment which added much needed balance. Second, we engaged in a content marketing strategy using blogs, YouTube videos, Flickr photos, online press releases and a number of other online media.

While our primary intent was to provide consumers with useful content, a secondary benefit was that the critical post was driven off the front page, replaced instead by Bizzuka-generated content.

Trends over time. It is important to monitor both the above metrics over time in order to see the effects of your advertising, marketing, and PR efforts.

BENEFITS TO MONITORING YOUR ONLINE REPUTATION

There are a number of key benefits associated with listening. First, you will be made aware of a crisis long before it has an opportunity to escalate to a point where overcoming negative sentiment becomes a costly, lengthy affair. Need I remind you of what happened with bicycle lock company Kryptonite when it was discovered that one of their locks could be opened with a Bic pen?

Second, you will know where the conversations are taking place, whether on Twitter, in blogs, forums, or even in the mainstream press. If you know where the conversation is happening, you’ll know where to go to respond. For example, Dell receives thousands of mentions each day on Twitter, so they have a dedicated team whose job is to monitor that channel and respond as the need arises.

Third, you will know what topics are being discussed. You may learn that, residing within the bounds of the conversation is a marketing idea just waiting to be turned into a campaign that you never would have discovered had you

not been listening. Related to that, you will also become aware of keywords people are using with regard to you—keywords you can incorporate into your SEO, pay-per-click, or content marketing efforts.

Fourth, you will find who the influencers are. While everyone's voice matters, it must be acknowledged that some matter more than others. Once you have identified the more important influencers, you can build relationships with them that may result in their extending that influence on your behalf. Regarding influencers, I am not suggesting that the most influential are always the ones with the most fans or biggest following. In social media, it's not a matter of how many, but who. Some of the people with the smallest number of followers can easily have great influence. And, by the way, some of the tools I'm going to mention in a moment will not only show you the first-generation influencers, but those that relate to them as well.

TWO WAYS TO MONITOR YOUR ONLINE REPUTATION

The DIY Approach

One way to monitor your online reputation is to employ the DIY approach using tools like Google Reader or Bloglines to subscribe to RSS feeds from Google and Yahoo! news alerts, Technorati, Twitter search, and Google blogsearch using relevant keywords (refer to chapter 14 for detailed instructions on the use of RSS and how to subscribe to feeds). If you really want to be diligent you can add feeds from sites like BoardReader.com, a search engine for forums and discussion boards, and from Yahoo and Google groups as well.

If you don't mind spending a little money, a very affordable alternative to doing it yourself is Trackur (www.trackur.com), an inexpensive software application that performs the same functions, only better, faster, and much more comprehensively.

The key element that will make your monitoring efforts most useful is your choice of keywords. I recommend including keywords and phrases from the following categories: brand names, products, services offered, the name of the company owner, CEO and C-level executives, industry terms, and, last but not least, competitors. Online reputation

monitoring is not just for your own company; it's also a good source for gathering competitive intelligence.

Hire the Pros

While using the DIY approach is easy on your pocketbook, you are likely to miss important information. If your budget allows, a number of software applications are available from companies such as Radian6, Techrigy, and ScoutLabs to help you monitor your online reputation more comprehensively.

Unlike Trackur, these tools go beyond basic aggregation of information to provide more detailed insight, including sentiment analysis and trend tracking. They pull data from all quarters of the social media sphere, including blogs, social networks, image and video sites, chat rooms, forums and micro-blogs, and mainstream media as well. The tools range in price from a few hundred dollars per month to a few thousand. The benefit is that they do the hard work for you, saving you time and hassle.

Once the data is crunched and compiled, these applications offer nifty reporting features, including charts and graphs. They can also alert you to a pending crisis, allowing you to respond more quickly than you might otherwise, since information is gathered in more or less real-time depending on the application used.

"Customers are talking (whether you like it or not) and embedded in all that chatter is great information, if you can unlock it with the right tool," says Jennifer Land, CEO of ScoutLabs, a company that provides reputation monitoring software. "There are influencers to meet, new product ideas to develop, feedback on your marketing campaigns, net promoters to meet and help amplify their voices, or PR nightmares brewing that can be remedied if caught early."¹

Here is a list of popular online reputation monitoring tools and their price ranges. Keep in mind that prices are subject to change.

Lower Cost

Trackur (www.trackur.com): At under \$20 per month, Trackur is, by far, the least expensive. However, it lacks

the more advanced features (sentiment analysis, for example) offered by the others. Still, if basic aggregation of information is all you need, then I highly recommend Trackur.

BrandsEye (www.brandseye.com): According to their Web site, BrandsEye is the only tool that comprehensively tracks every online mention of your brand, while having the capability to generate a precise score that accurately reflects the state of your online reputation. The ORM tool scans the entire Web using a multitude of tracking tools, ultimately capturing every single relevant mention of your brand. Brandseye offers three price ranges: One dollar per month for bloggers, \$95 per month for small businesses, and \$350 per month for large companies.

Moderate Cost

BuzzGain (www.buzzgain.com): Billing itself as more than a social media monitoring solution, BuzzGain reveals particular influential voices and corresponding conversations. Pricing ranges from \$99 to \$999 per month and is based on annual company revenue.

ScoutLabs (www.scoutlabs.com): ScoutLabs' platform offers similar features to other, more advanced tools such as persistent searches, sentiment analysis, trend tracking, and real-time reporting. However, the ScoutLabs dashboard is primarily designed for use by teams of brand managers. When you sign up for the service, you're allowed to invite an unlimited number of colleagues into your workspace. Prices are based on the number of workspaces as well as the number of concurrent searches. The more workspaces needed (based on the number of teams) and the more searches, the higher the cost. Prices listed on the Web site range from \$99 to \$749, with enterprise pricing available as a custom quote.

Higher Cost

Techrigy (www.techrigy.com): Techrigy's SM2 platform offers something none of the others mentioned here currently offer: a database of more than one billion conversations dating back to 2007, a feature they term the Social Media Warehouse (SMW). Most other providers only go back

three to six months. This is especially good for establishing a baseline, though not as essential as it applies to real-time, ongoing monitoring. Technigy's pricing is based on a "freemium" model, which means they do, in fact, offer a free version. However, pricing shoots up dramatically beyond that, starting at \$500 per month for 20,000 search results.

Radian6 (www.radian6.com): Radian6 is likely the best-known of the ORM software providers. It is primarily designed for use by public relations, marketing, and customer support specialists, either agency or corporate. Their pricing is scaled, so it can be used by the startup and also the multinational, and it's affordable in both cases. It also depends on whether the company sees social media marketing/word-of-mouth as an add-on or the core of what they are doing, according to Radian6 CMO David Alston. He indicates that if it's their core business then a two-person shop would be a potential customer, but if it's only an add-on, then Radian6 is unlikely to be a good fit.²

In a manner of speaking, using these tools is still a form of DIY, but of a higher order. If you don't have the time, resources, or expertise to manage this information yourself, there are plenty of agencies that will do it for you—for a price, of course. These companies will more than likely be using the same software I have listed above, but will do the grunt work of day-in, day-out monitoring and provide professional analysis and recommendations for ways to improve your online reputation.

CONCLUSION

What if you listen and you find no one is talking? That's good information to know too, don't you think? It's imperative to jump-start the conversation using some of the tools outlined in the second section of the book. On the other hand, if a conversation already exists, then you have a place to start. I refer to this as getting a seat at someone else's table. Listen to what's being said, and respond when appropriate.

Find ways to reward those who speak well of you, and, in an honest, courteous fashion, address those who spread misinformation. You will be amazed at what you can learn

just by engaging the groundswell in either respect. It's good research.

I cannot imagine a company not wanting to listen to the conversation taking place around their brands, products, services, industry, and competition. It is less critical for small businesses of course, but as we've seen, even they are not immune to the effects of social media. For large companies, it is an imperative. With the many tools available at all price points, there is really no excuse for remaining uninformed.

This chapter outlined the first step of the three-step social media engagement strategy. Now that you've listened, what do you do? We cover that subject in chapter 17.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Now That You've Listened, It's Time to Engage



For years, I was a dedicated Star Trek fan (Trekkie). My favorite series was *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. My favorite character was the resolute, stalwart leader, Captain Jean-Luc Picard, and my favorite line was his forceful instruction, “Engage.”

It’s time to follow Captain Picard’s dictum and do just that. You’ve listened to the groundswell. You know what people are saying and whether the sentiment is positive, negative, or somewhere in-between. It’s time to make a commitment to enter the conversation and begin to put the tools we discussed in the second section of the book to good use.

I suggest two ways of doing so. One is a more passive form of engagement; that is, joining the conversation that’s already taking place. The other is more proactive and has to do with starting a conversation about your company, brands, products, and people. This chapter will delineate some of the ways you can use both tactics to “engage” the conversation.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION: GET A SEAT AT SOMEONE ELSE'S TABLE

I often use the idea of “getting a seat at someone else’s table” to describe how brands should find communities of interest wherever they may exist and join as co-participants. Imagine yourself walking into a restaurant and, while waiting to be seated, overhearing a conversation taking place at a nearby table. The participants seem to be enjoying the discussion and you note that it’s something of interest to you. So, you mosey over to the group and ask if you can join in. Maybe they will be receptive and maybe they won’t.

That’s precisely the sort of thing you are doing when you join Facebook and other social networks. You are asking for a seat at the table of those already participating there. Thankfully, it’s been my experience that most are welcoming, so long as you play by the community’s rules.

But which is better? To get a seat at someone else’s table or set a table of your own and invite them to join you? I suggest the answer is both/and, not either/or. In fact, in order for anyone to even know about your “table,” the introduction will likely take place inside a third-party site. And in order for you to win the right to even extend an invitation, you need to be actively participating in one or more of these third-party sites. A basic rule of thumb in social media—participation is the price of entry.

So rather than just insisting that people come to us, we should go to them. And where are they? On social networks, on blogs, on Twitter, and on sites like YouTube, Flickr, Ustream, and Digg—anywhere and everywhere their friends are, and that’s where you should be too. In fact, your customers expect you to be there, and they wonder why you’re not!

How do we know where to find them? The last chapter told us, remember? We start by listening, putting our ears to the ground (or rather, the groundswell). That will tell us not only where they are but also what they’re saying. Once we know that, we will have the fulcrum we need to enter the conversation.

Four Ways to Respond

Comment on Blogs. Writing a salient comment on a topically-relevant blog serves a number of purposes. First,

it makes you part of the conversation. It also helps you get the attention of the blogger, who may return the courtesy on your blog. Thirdly, because the comment form includes a field for your URL, it's a means by which you can generate traffic to your site. Unless the blogger uses what's referred to as a "no-follow tag," your comments can be indexed by Google, too. Not only that, if the blogger is widely read and if your comments are on-target, chances are you will pick up a portion of his readership as your own.

Internet technology consultant Dave Taylor once told me to leave three comments on other blogs for every one post that you write on yours. I still think that's advice worth heeding.

Participate in Forums and Message Boards. Forums date back to the earliest days of the Internet, yet remain popular. It's not unusual to see them integrated into social networks, and some communities are built with forums as the foundation. For example, Best Buy's customer community (<http://forums.bestbuy.com/bb/>) is based on forums.

One derivative of this genre are question-and-answer sites such as Yahoo! Answers. In fact, these types of forums abound both at the large-scale aggregate level and in niche verticals. An example of the latter, Trulia (www.trulia.com), a real estate search engine, has a question/answer community called Trulia Voices where agents offer advice and opinion to questions asked by home buyers and sellers. More than a few have gotten new clients using that technique.

These types of sites can be very effective in driving highly-targeted traffic to your Web site because you can select only those questions whose subjects you specialize in and where you can provide the most value. Your answers are a calling card inviting others to come knocking on your door rather than you knocking on theirs.

Join Niche Communities. I believe that becoming an active participant in a topically relevant niche community is one of the best ways to bring attention to your business offering. Usually, numbers in these groups are relatively small, from a few hundred to a few thousand, so it's much easier to receive notice, especially if you are an active contributor.

Being active is key. Contributing content will aid you in becoming a recognized community leader. (Remember the one-percenter idea we discussed earlier in the book?) Keep in mind that most members of these communities are “lurkers,” people who consume content but rarely create any, so contributing makes you a member of a significant minority. It also helps your standing with community organizers, as they love members who jump in with both feet and contribute. Make sure those contributions follow the unwritten rules of social media and add value to the community rather than merely calling attention to your own company, products, or services. That’s spam, and it will get you booted quickly by any moderator who’s paying attention. Your profile is the place where you can show your wares. Those interested will find their way there, believe me.

If you have more than one member of your staff who can participate, it’s not a bad idea to spread yourselves out over a broad spectrum of communities. Since it’s unlikely you’ll be able to afford the time to actively participate in more than a few communities, having others who can lend time and energy is certainly a tactic worth deploying.

Respond Using LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and Other Social Networks. I’ve touted the benefits to social networks like these in chapter 8, so I’ll be brief here. I can hardly conceive of having a presence in social media that does not include participation in each of these “big three” networks and others like them.

START A CONVERSATION: SET A TABLE OF YOUR OWN

Not a day that goes by that I don’t reflect on how to leverage social media, including social networks, for marketing purposes. I have tried a number of approaches, some of which have been successful and some of which have not. One idea that has genuine potential is what I referred to earlier as “setting a table of your own.”

What I mean by this is that you establish a social media presence with your company brand or product at the center. That is not to suggest the only reason people would visit the site is to talk about you. It is to suggest that you are providing

them a meeting place where your brand is undeniably present. Let me suggest four ways this could be done:

Start a Blog. Need I say more about the value blogging provides than I've already said? A blog can serve as a foundational component to any social media marketing strategy. Apparently I'm not the only one who thinks this, as it has become commonplace to see Web sites containing blogs.

Create an Online Community. As social media matures, we're going to see a proliferation of smaller, niche-targeted online communities and social networks much more suited to individual needs and interests than the massive ones we know today. Yours could be one of those.

If you have little or no budget for such, do not worry. Sites like Ning enable you to set up a branded social network at little or no cost and in only a few minutes. If you don't want Google ads to appear on the site, you can upgrade for a nominal fee. (I would suggest that you join a Ning community first and learn the ropes before creating one.)

I referenced one such community, Twittermoms, in chapter 9. The founder, Megan Calhoun, wanted to connect with other moms on Twitter, but found it impossible to relegate connections to just that group. Necessity is the mother of invention (pun intended) as they say, and Calhoun found creating a niche community to be the answer.

Set up a Facebook Public Profile (Business page). While participating in Facebook at the personal level certainly qualifies as getting a seat at other people's tables, creating a profile for your business is a way to establish a table of your own right in the middle of the most popular "restaurant" on the planet. Considering the likelihood that your customers or constituents are already there, it is an idea I heartily endorse. In fact, it is a tactic I would place second only to blogs . . . and it would be a close second, too.

Start a Weekly Podcast or Video Show. Follow in the footsteps of social media aficionados like Gary Vaynerchuk (mentioned in chapter 11) or Paul Dunay (mentioned in chapter 12) and start creating multimedia content such as a weekly-scheduled audio podcast or video show syndicated on such sites as Blog Talk Radio or YouTube. It's yet another

way for you to build a following (and by “following,” I mean back to your Web site).

While reaching out to customers and prospects at “tables” where they sit is an essential part of any social media marketing strategy, it’s even better when you can invite them to join you at a table of your own making. Whether you use one of my recommendations or something else altogether, I encourage you to create a table of your own.

CONCLUSION

You’ve listened to and engaged the groundswell by joining in ongoing conversations and starting some of your own. Now, it’s time to close the loop and measure the effectiveness of your efforts. That’s the subject of the next and final chapter.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Measuring the Effectiveness of Your Social Media Marketing Plan



The days of “touchy-feely, warm-and-fuzzy” thinking about social media marketing are over, if such days ever existed in the first place. The CEO wants to know if it has ROI potential and can positively affect the bottom line. Everyone from real estate agents to CMOs at F1000s are asking, “Does it work?” and “If so, how?” This is especially true when the economy turns sour and marketing budgets are tight.

A report released in March 2009 by the Aberdeen Group¹ stated that 68 percent of what it terms “best-in-class” companies planned to increase their spending on social media. The report also revealed, somewhat paradoxically, that “the investment in social media marketing is not always easy to justify in terms of financial outcomes.” In fact, over half of all companies indicated that it was “either somewhat difficult (39 percent) or very difficult (20 percent) to make the business case for investing in social media marketing initiatives,” said the report.

Though certainly in its nascent stages, social media marketing is still marketing, and is therefore, subject to statistical scrutiny. This chapter presents an attempt to close the loop on your three-step social media marketing action plan by providing some insight into how social media can be measured.

HOW SOCIAL MARKETING MEASUREMENT DIFFERS FROM OTHER FORMS OF ONLINE MEASUREMENT

Social media measurement is about return on investment, certainly. If it doesn't affect that metric, its usefulness, at least in the eyes of the CEO or small business owner, is marginal. The CEO has to answer to the board and the small businessperson simply does not have time to fool with things that have no bearing on profits and losses. While I hope that the many case studies and examples contained in this book have already convinced you of its efficacy, I too want to hold up a "plumb line" and determine its worth in measurable terms.

Having said that, social media measurement is not always about ROI in the sense of the monetary value it provides, but ROI in terms of return on influence or ROE, return on engagement, values which are often harder, though not impossible, to measure.

I'm going to suggest that any attempt to measure social media must contain elements of all three in order to adequately represent its full impact. Traditional metrics like page views, time spent on site, site traffic, and number of conversions apply, but that's far from the whole of it. Measurements like number of retweets, blog post comments, and number of friends on a social network are important as well. In the paragraphs that follow, I will attempt to shed light on each of these.

DON'T MEASURE EVERYTHING; DO MEASURE THE RIGHT THINGS

Which metrics apply depends on the form of social media used. Trying to associate page views with Twitter is obviously misguided, but is useful where a blog is concerned. Of course, what is measured depends on your overall marketing goals,

whether to generate leads, drive sales, or increase brand awareness. Establishing what you are trying to accomplish will determine what metrics should be collected.

As a case in point, suppose your blog is a separate entity from the main company Web site. Let's also suppose, due to the blog's ability to garner favorable returns in search engines, it serves as a "beacon," shining light on the more static site with a view toward driving traffic to it. In this case, the measurement of greatest importance is not how many people visit the blog, but how many visit the main site as a result of first coming to the blog. Your job at that point is to find more and better ways to make the blog a conduit to the main site.

While I put great emphasis on keeping editorial content pure of any overt sales message, having a strong call to action conspicuously placed on the blog's sidebar is an absolute must. Suppose your call to action is to drive e-mail newsletter subscriptions. It makes sense, then, to have the subscription form above the fold in clear view of the reader.

Alternatively, let's say you decide to use Twitter as a customer service tool much the way companies like Dell, Comcast, and Zappos do. What measurements are important? In this case, the metrics would be similar to those used by a call center, such as average speed of answer, how quickly an issue was resolved, or how many customers were engaged. Don't assume that just because a company is using Twitter instead of a traditional call center, those numbers don't matter. They do, and more and more companies are beginning to see the value. Though Twitter has that "warm and fuzzy" feel, it's a very useful customer service resource nonetheless.

When you look at the concept of social media measurement at the meta level, it seems pretty complicated. Taken on a case-by-case basis, however, it's easier to comprehend.

QUANTITATIVE VS. QUALITATIVE METRICS

Quantitative metrics are relevant in most cases. However, trying to gauge the value of social media on hard numbers alone is like trying to figure out if you have a good marriage. Numbers will only get you so far. For example, how do you

determine the level of a person's online influence? Sure, you can see how many followers they have on Twitter or friends in Facebook, but does that tell the whole story? I hardly think so. Where social media is concerned, it's not always a numbers game. For example, it's not how many eyeballs read your blog, but who those eyeballs belong to. The quality of your readership, in terms of their own influence, lends just as much credence as the quantity.

For a moment, let's look at some of both kinds of metrics to see which might be worth applying in a specific case.

Standard Measures

Which of the standard quantitative metrics apply in social media? Here's a short list:

- Unique visits
- Total visits
- Time spent on site
- Page views (this has less relevance today thanks to technologies like AJAX)
- Bounce rate (only view single page before leaving site)
- Referrers
- Click-throughs and other conversion metrics
- Keywords
- Search engine entries
- Organic search ranking

Under which circumstances do those metrics apply? I would suggest any site where content is a chief concern—blogs or wikis, for example. Also, any sites where emphasis is placed on numbers of visitors or members, such as forums or online communities. While we're at it, let's not forget the Google spider. Any site that you wish it to crawl on a regular basis qualifies. Of course, that's all of the above and more!

Social Media–Specific Measures

If social media was merely one-way communication, standard metrics alone might suffice. But, people are talking to

each other and that mandates an entirely new set of quantitative metrics. Some that apply include:

- Blog-post-to-comment ratio
- Number of RSS feed subscribers
- Twitter retweets
- Number of videos shared
- Customer sentiment gauged via ratings and reviews
- Number of times a blog post was bookmarked using Digg or Delicious

So much for quantitative analytics. What about qualitative, things like “awareness,” “engagement,” and “influence?” How are those measured? It has to be more than just a hunch or gut perception, right? As much as I would like there to be clear-cut, completely objective standards, social media measurement has yet to reach that bar. Some of it is still subjective, based on the marketer’s judgment.

Also, terms like “awareness” and “influence” mean different things to different people. To the Web metrics analyst, influence equals conversions. To the online reputation monitor it means the number of times a given individual is referenced in blog posts, while to the PR pro it may mean the number of Twitter followers, Facebook friends, or blog readers a person has.

I’m reminded of the story of the five blind men and the elephant. Each one touches a different part of the elephant, and then all five disagree over what the animal must look like. That’s an apt analogy of the state of social media measurement at this point.

Does that mean we take a wait-and-see approach until things become more standardized? I think not. Remember what I said at the outset of this chapter—social media marketing is still marketing. As a case in point, let me reference a long-standing model with which most marketing and PR people would be familiar.

The Three “Outs”

“Social media is really an online cousin of PR,” says Ali Behnam, co-founder of Web analytics software company

Tealium (www.tealium.com). “Social media measurement refers to the practice of evaluating the results of social media and public relations programs, so we need to go with PR measurement as a framework, the main elements of which are the three ‘outs’: Outputs, Outtakes and Outcomes.”²

“Outputs equate to who is talking about you, Outtakes, what they are saying about you, and Outcomes measure the impact on your business,” states Behnam. To put it terms practitioners of social media can understand, “Outputs equal Awareness, Outtakes equal Influence, and Outcomes equal Action,” he says.

Behnam suggests that most of the tools used to measure social media deal with the first two pillars, outputs and outtakes, while Web analytics tools deal with the last pillar, outcomes. He cites a particular instance where he was reading a blog post that referred to Webinar software and that listed a number of companies offering such. Rather than click from the blog to the Web sites of any of those mentioned (Behnam said there may not have even been hyperlinks to facilitate such action), he Googled a couple that interested him.

“Reputation management software would report a mention of the company name on the blog, but would never know to associate it with my click-through from Google to the company’s Web site. That’s the purview of whatever analytics package the company may be using to measure traffic on their site,” said Behnam. “Reputation monitoring software covered who was doing the talking (outputs) and what they were saying (outtakes), but would not have accounted for the resulting action taken (outcomes).”

Behnam further suggests that traffic from social media comes as either a click-through, which means the person clicked to reach their destination, or a view-through, which means they didn’t click, but typed in the URL directly or went to Google to find the site instead. “Our research has shown that as much as 80 percent of social media traffic is view-through, and only 20 percent is click-through. That’s why reliance on both forms of measurement, reputation monitoring and Web analytics, is necessary,” he added.

The difficulty in tying all three elements together—outputs, outtakes and outcomes—seems to be the nexus

of the problem where measuring the ROI of social media is concerned. In response, Behnam's company created a software application, Tealium Social Media, that provides the "missing link." It can take outputs and outtakes reported by an ORM solution such as Techrify and tie them directly to outcomes being reported in Google Analytics or other analytics software.

Does this mean the answer to the social media measurement dilemma is better software? In many respects, I believe it does. And because the need is so great, I expect we will see rapid advances in the near future. Behnam's application is certainly the first step in the right direction.

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING MEASUREMENT TOOLS

Google Analytics

I look at GA as foundational to just about every other form of measurement. I like it for a whole host of reasons. First, it's free. Second, it's easy to use. Third, it provides pretty sophisticated reporting. Fourth, it integrates into other Google tools, such as AdWords. Plus, you know it's safe to use. I would say that Google Analytics should be used by default on any site.

Online Reputation Monitoring Software

I covered a number of these applications in chapter 16, so let me just tout some of the benefits here as it applies to measurement. Not only can you gain valuable quantitative data, but these tools also enable you to tap into the qualitative stuff as well.

Website Grader (www.Websitegrader.com)

This free tool by Hubspot measures the marketing effectiveness of a Web site by providing a cumulative score that factors in things like Web site traffic, SEO, social popularity and other technical factors. It also provides basic advice on how the Web site can be improved from marketing and SEO perspectives.

Tealium Social Media (www.tealium.com)

Tealium Social Media lets marketers measure the ROI of their social media marketing and online PR initiatives using the same metrics as other digital marketing channels, such as pay-per-click, e-mail and banner advertising. The solution helps users decide which social media initiatives to invest in and which to drop, as well as which media outlets or categories drive the most traffic and conversions.

Twitter Influence Tools

Two tools (or should I say “twoools”) that measure a person’s influence on Twitter are Twinfluence (www.twinfluence.com) and Twitalyzer (www.twitzlyzer.com). Twinfluence bases its rankings on metrics such as “reach,” the number of followers a person has, and “social captial,” the number of followers each of the person’s followers have. Twitalyzer, on the other hand, considers several factors to determine influence:

- Reach: measured by the number of followers you have
- Authority: measured by the number of times you are “retweeted”
- Generosity: measured by the number of times you “retweet” others
- Clout: measured by the number of times you are referenced by others
- Velocity: measured by the number of updates you publish over a seven-day period

CONCLUSION

Measuring the effects of social media will become easier to do over time, in part because new software tools for this purpose will be made available. In the meantime, we have to use a combination approach with emphasis given to standard measurements and to those specific to social media.

I encourage you to use the same approach toward social media marketing as you would when gauging the effects of

more traditional forms of online marketing. Think first about your goals and objectives, then figure out which forms of social media would be useful to reach them and what key performance indicators would be applicable relative to that. You cannot divorce the measurement from the medium itself.

CONCLUSION



There's a line from the film *The Shawshank Redemption* that often comes to mind when contemplating the future, and that includes contemplating the future of social media marketing. It's a line Red, the character played by Morgan Freeman, says (narrates, actually) as he is on the bus heading to Mexico in search of his friend Andy. The part that comes to mind is “. . . a long journey whose conclusion is uncertain.”

That could be said of social media marketing. It is still so new, barely five years old by some folks' estimation, that no one really knows what the outcome will be as it matures over time as a marketing genre. Will it simply become part of an integrated approach that includes traditional media and other, more direct forms of online marketing? Or, will it replace some or much of what we know as marketing and advertising today?

Young though it may be, social media has crossed the chasm into the mainstream. Millions across the globe use it to entertain themselves in the company of others, gather feedback, glean information, or simply connect with friends and family. If for no other reason than our customers are using social media, our presence there is demanded as well.

For a moment, let's hit the high points of the information *The Digital Handshake* has tried to convey. The first section outlined five consumer trends that are turning the world upside down:

- Consumer skepticism and resistance to advertising
- Current state of media fragmentation
- Growing trend toward consumers' being in control of marketing/advertising messages
- Pressure businesses face to improve targeting of their marketing and advertising to increase relevance and minimize waste
- Companies being held to a higher level of accountability than ever before

People are talking and we had better be listening and then engaging in the ongoing conversation happening wherever social media is present. Like the *Cluetrain* said and I reiterated throughout this book, "Markets are conversations," and "participation is marketing."

In the second section, I explained and outlined the advantages to using seven of the most proven tools in social media today: Blogs, social networks, online communities, micro-blogging tools like Twitter, podcasts, videos, and social media news releases. (I even threw in a few more for good measure in chapter 14.) Lastly, I laid out a simple yet workable plan of engagement: Listen, engage, and measure.

However, none of that means anything if you are unwilling to put the tools of social media to work in a strategic, thoughtful fashion. It doesn't have to cost much money, though it will take a substantial amount of time. Prepare yourself for that inevitability.

The good news is that you don't have to eat the entire elephant in one bite. You can ease into it by joining a social network like Facebook, starting a blog, or interacting via Twitter. You will find that it isn't necessary to engage in every form, though being widespread has much to recommend it, not the least of which is the ubiquitous presence you will eventually gain on Google.

Referring to the "journey" idea once again, "the joy is in the journey." It really is. Along the way you will make lifelong friends, some of whom will become colleagues, business partners, and customers. You will learn a great deal about yourself in the process, what makes you tick and you will

learn about others as well. Hopefully, you will come to appreciate the unique value of every person you encounter and realize that each of us has something worthwhile to say. Ultimately, you may come to find that you are a better, more caring, generous person because of your involvement. That has much greater value than any dollar amount that could be assigned.

I challenge you to take the information gleaned from this book and put it to use for six months. If, by then, you have not seen a discernible difference in your business (and life for that matter), let me know. We will sit down together and analyze what you did (or didn't do) and focus on why you were unable to reach your desired goals and objectives.

I'm going to play the role of optimist, though, and suggest that we will never have that conversation. Instead, I believe we will have one of a very different kind, where you exclaim with enthusiasm the great assortment of benefits, both business and otherwise, that you have achieved through your involvement in social media.

With that said, let me be the first to extend a "digital handshake" and welcome you to what could very well be the most enjoyable journey you will ever embark upon in your life. I know it has been for me and for countless others as well. That is why I wrote this book.

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