

*"Too many people are running around nowadays calling themselves 'social media experts,' Simon doesn't call himself that. His clients do. And they're right, I'll read anything this man writes."*

—Peter Shankman

# SOCIAL LOCATION MARKETING

Outshining Your Competitors  
on Foursquare, Gowalla, Yelp &  
Other Location Sharing Sites



SIMON SALT

## Praise for *Social Location Marketing*

“Too many people are running around nowadays calling themselves ‘social media experts.’ Simon doesn’t call himself that. His clients do. And they’re right. I’ll read anything this man writes.”

Peter Shankman, Founder, Help a Reporter Out  
Entrepreneur, Social Media Investor

“Location-based services are becoming increasingly crucial to brands, marketers and their agencies. Social consumers are sharing their locations—and how they feel about them—with these applications. This book is a vital head start for marketers who are seeking to incorporate these new capabilities into their plans (and that should be everyone).”

Adam Keats, Senior Vice President, Weber Shandwick

“Have you checked-in to the new reality of business? Simon shows you how to engage the social consumer and compete for tomorrow’s future, today.”

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“This book offers a revolutionary idea: that you can win by timing your marketing to reach people who are actively sharing their location online instead of trying to blast them with irrelevant marketing at every hour of the day. Many now-defunct companies could have been saved by heeding this deceptively simple idea.”

Rohit Bhargava, Author of *Personality Not Included*  
and EVP of Strategy & Planning at Ogilvy

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# **Social Location Marketing**

Outshining Your Competitors on Foursquare,  
Gowalla, Yelp & Other Location Sharing Sites

Simon Salt

**que**<sup>®</sup>

800 East 96th Street,  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46240 USA

# Social Location Marketing: Outshining Your Competitors on Foursquare, Gowalla, Yelp & Other Location Sharing Sites

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## Dedication

*This book is dedicated to three women whose location is always known to me:  
Alicia Helen Salt—March 1931-December 2008—In Memoriam  
Gemima & Tessa Salt—two truly amazing daughters who inspire me always.*

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# Introduction



*A vision of the future:*

*Footsteps ring out on an empty street; a lone individual stalks the evening in search of a distraction. Unbidden, his hand slides into his pocket. His fingers caress the smooth edges of the weapon he is carrying. The engineers did a good job this time. Small but powerful was what he needed, small and powerful was what they delivered. Something that would pass unobtrusively in daily life. Something that would pass unnoticed and yet be very noticeable when used, that would separate him from the crowd as a connoisseur, as someone who knew what he is doing.*

*The sounds of music, voices, people enjoying themselves flood from doorways as the searcher passes them. Will they still be as happy if he chooses this location as his destination? Will this place meet his needs? He has an idea of what he is looking for, but as yet his prey is unclear. There is a certain thrill in this hunt, knowing as*

*he does that he is armed with the device he is carrying; he has already won this battle in his mind.*

*He slows as he approaches each opportunity, pausing slightly to try to decide from the sounds emanating from within whether this is the location he is seeking. Door staff eye the individual, assessing him, not knowing that he has the power in his hands to decide their fate. Half beckoning, half rejecting him as he slows outside each, allowing the lights, music, and conversation to wash over him. These sensory indicators are mere distractions. They no longer factor into his decision; he is able to reject them as such, given the power from the device he is carrying they no longer concern him.*

Searching is time consuming, but finding the right location is an essential part of his plan; it must have all the right elements and in the right mix. He is very selective, not just anywhere will do. He is confident that he will find just what he is looking for. He knows that both he and his device will find their target. After all, that is why he bought it, because with it he never need be lured to the wrong target again.

He arrives at a venue that seems, on the surface, to meet his needs: it's the right location, and the people inside seem to fit his image of what they would be like. He reaches again into his pocket, his hand finding the device. The door staff stiffens at the action. They have seen this before; they are wary, they don't want to react too quickly, but react they must.

He is armed, and fearless in his use of the weapon he carries, he will be merciless in its use. It gives him that power, and that power gives him the right to choose. Slowly withdrawing it, revealing the sleek black casing, he levels it at the front of the building. Taking careful aim, he zeros in on the sign above the door.

The screen on the weapon he has produced, only a few square inches in size, provides him with all the information he needs. Instantly he can see who he knows that is already inside, read their reviews and the reviews of critics, get the menu, the drinks list, and decide in a moment if this is where he will spend his hard-earned money. He is armed with a Smartphone, *the* weapon of the information age.

The year is 2011.

No, you are not reading a science-fiction novel, nor a wild hypothesis on what might be. Everything described in the preceding scenario is already available and already being used in its individual elements by consumers. Foursquare, Gowalla, Yelp, Layar, Google Goggles, and other tools are already empowering consumers to make more informed buying choices on a location-by-location basis. Mobile information-empowered consumers can make informed decisions as quickly as they can walk across the street. They can leave your location behind because of a lack of information and instead choose your competitor because their friends and trusted strangers have already been there and left enough data behind to enable consumers to make an informed buying decision.

This is the reality facing marketers in the modern age. You no longer get to control the message, the content, or the information that buyers see about your product, service, or location. This applies equally to the family owned corner store as it does to the multinational chain. Each location is seen as a separate and disparate entity by the consumer. The information being shared is not just about your brand but about the individual experience encountered by a users' network of trusted informants. People buying from people has always been the reality, especially in the small business space. In the information-powered age, it is even more so, because the people that users are buying from might not be your people but their own network, based on the information that network provides them. Long before they see your messaging they have received the messaging about your organization from their network and have already started to form an opinion as to whether you are a fit for their needs.

Influencing the buyer is not enough. Now you must influence the potential buyer's network; the organization must expand its vision beyond simple messaging to potential customers or users to be inclusive of those who are already users or customers and persuade them to make recommendations, to become advocates for your organization. The organization must be prepared to provide incentives and rewards for these advocates, whether they are active or passive advocates and be able to differentiate between the two.

Social location marketing is bringing businesses closer to their customers and potential customers than any other marketing tool in recent history. It is more powerful than any other form of social media and has higher rewards for a lower cost than any other form of digital marketing. Ignoring it will bring equally higher risks. Social location sharing is happening to your product, service, venue, and location whether you are active or not. This is not something you have the choice to opt in or out of. Unlike Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn, you don't get to decide your point of entry, no launch dates, no collateral marketing around it. Users have already decided whether you should join in.

By reading this book, you are taking the first steps in ensuring that your organization is a part of that new future and not losing customers to more information enabled environments. This future has already arrived and is accelerating in its empowerment of consumers daily as new applications and tools are launched to the market, all of which are free to use.

## What's in This Book

This book is designed to be a how to book for marketers interested incorporating social location sharing platforms such as Foursquare and Gowalla into their marketing mix. In addition it includes real world case studies of companies that have already achieved success by doing so.

The book will take you through the following stages:

### Chapter 1

Why Should I Bother?—Why people want to share their location with others and what is in it for them when they do. What is in it for businesses both large and small.

### Chapter 2

Square Pegs and Round Holes: Where Does This All Fit?—Where does social location marketing fit into the broader scope of social media and how does it benefit the organization that is using it.

### Chapter 3

Games People Play—Understanding the motivations of users through game theory. Why game play fits with sharers and how to design marketing campaigns that take advantage of this.

### Chapter 4

Introduction to Location Sharing Tools—What are the platforms, what do they do, who uses them and which one should you use.

### Chapter 5

Industries Making it Work—Which industries are already making social location marketing an active part of their marketing plans and what successes are they experiencing in doing so.

### Chapter 6

Get Set, Go—Walk through setting up accounts on the major platforms, tips and tricks for getting the most out of them as a user and as a marketer.

**Chapter 7**

Marketing to Social Location Sharers—How different venues/locations can utilize social location sharing platforms as part of their marketing strategy, including single venue organizations, multiple venue organizations, organizations without a venue and business to business organizations.

**Chapter 8**

We're Here All Week—Event marketing with social location sharing platforms.

**Chapter 9**

Socially Speaking: The Social Business—Integrating all the pieces into one plan. Incorporating customer service into the plan and how it impacts social location marketing.

**Chapter 10**

Plan, Plan, Plan—What does a social business really look like, how to align an existing business and how to create one from scratch.







# Square Pegs and Round Holes: Where Does This All Fit?

*Social media has become the next greatest business savior in the past 3–5 years. In actuality, the technology has been around for more than a decade, but like so many technology stories it takes a while for the business applications to finally appear and be adopted on a broad enough scale that they are taken seriously. Of course, its real ability to save a company is highly suspect. Social media is not a silver bullet (I will repeat that mantra throughout this book).*

This might seem strange coming from someone who makes a living from selling social media consultancy to organizations. But I am nothing if not honest about the capability of social media to save a company. If your products, services, or your organization generally faces major issues, social media is unlikely to be able to save it on its own, although it can be a part of communicating the solutions that you have found. An example that was very relevant at the time this book was written was with the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Although BP could have used social media as one part of a much larger strategy to regain public trust, it would not have been able to change public opinion about the damage from the spill via social media alone. While a formidable tool, social media doesn't have that kind of massive impact. Real-world action has to accompany it. Social media is a communication channel, not a magic wand.

While many companies are still pondering the pros and cons of blogs, others are wondering if they can really achieve sales via Twitter. However, other companies have successfully incorporated these technologies (and more) into what they do and how they do it to the point where it no longer needs a special status.

## What is Social Media?

Social media can be described as services, tools and platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and others that allow users to share information with each other.

Often the term social networking is used interchangeably with social media. I tend to disagree with this usage. Social networking is something that is enabled by social media platforms. However, social networking is not the only use of social media.

Social media lends itself well to the marketing world and in fact social media marketing is what has led to the increase in use of social media. Social media has created a new world of content creators. This content can come in the form of simple status updates, such as "I'm walking the dog", or via pictures, videos, blog posts, or even product reviews.

Social media has also created a new currency, often referred to as social capital. Social capital is the ability to perform tasks for others in the hope of some form of reciprocity. This might be introducing one person in your network to another person in your network to aid them in job hunting. You are expending social capital on behalf of the first person.

Alongside this is the concept of influence, which is the ability to get other people to perform tasks on your behalf. In its simplest form this is often the ability to get

people to click on a link and go to a particular website. At its more complex, influence becomes part of a marketing campaign and the influencer is promoting a product, service or company to increase usage, adoption or awareness.



### Note

Want to learn more about social media marketing in particular? If so, I recommend that you pick up a copy of *Social Location Marketing: Strategies for Engaging in Facebook, Twitter and Other Social Media*, by Liana Evans (published by Que).

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## Who Is in Charge?

Social media is a part—or should be a part—of normal marketing communications operations. So what does that look like within a strategy? First, companies need to decide where social media resides. If PR is the normal channel for communicating with the outside world, then that is where social media sits. If the online marketing department handles communications, it should handle social media. The problem for most organizations is that communication can be and is often handled by differing parts of the company. PR handles the media and so seems a natural fit for social media. Marketing handles customer and prospect communication, so again that seems like a natural fit. When organizations divide marketing into offline and online activities, the online organization seems a natural fit. These types of turf wars are often resolved in a way that fits more with the internal politics of the organization than with a real understanding of the channels. One solution is to create a new organization made up of the differing disciplines. However, this can lead to even greater segmentation within an organization and also lead to the trap of social media being sidelined—or worse, being given an overly high profile within an organization. Although it is an important element in any organization's toolkit, social media is not a silver bullet. It should not be given a status that starves other marketing communication methods of attention or creativity. Rather, it should operate in unison with these channels.

Placing social media within the online marketing organization makes sense to a lot of companies because they see social media as another online channel through which to direct their customer acquisition activities. Certainly, online marketers will generally understand the behavior of people engaging in social media and are well placed to establish some of the metrics that can and should be used to measure social media activity. However, PR has an important role to play as well, especially in the more complex types of engagements that include elements such as blogger outreach. Leveraging the PR department's experience with mass media will certainly benefit any organization thinking through a social media plan.

It is important for organizations to realize, however, that social media is different from other forms of marketing communication in that it has a two-way flow to it. For example, sending an email blast might get the response you want, but most recipients won't reply via email to your original blast. In fact, most email blasts are set up so that the recipients can't reply directly. Social media isn't like that—users have the expectation that they are in fact invited to respond and to communicate with the organization that has a presence on a social media platform. This is where choosing where exactly social media will reside within an organization becomes critical.

For the most part, PR and online marketing departments are used to operating in a vacuum. They do not usually engage directly with customers or prospects, which leads some organizations to place social media in the customer support or even sales functions, because these have more direct customer contact experience. Although this meets the needs of the customer or prospect, it often fails to meet the operational and strategic needs of the organization, especially those who are trying to use social media to communicate brand messaging. In fact, by placing social media solely in the hands of your customer support department, social media is considered by some companies to be a “precious” resource—something that should never be abused or sullied with something as gauche as a marketing message. This “touchy feely” theme has gained ground among some proponents of social media as a method to “listen,” “engage” and “get closer” to the customer. Although these certainly play a part of any good social media strategy, they have to be balanced with objectives that produce results. It is hard to convince the C-Suite that increases in “likes” on the company Facebook page is actually a measure of success if they see no corresponding bottom-line improvement. I know of no business that has achieved growth, increased market share, or improved revenue based on the number of “followers” or “likes” that they have received.

In addition, social media users do not care how your company is organized. This often comes as a shock to large organizations that have spent time, money, and resources on deciding exactly how to divide the operating expense, revenue, marketing budgets, and other costs into neat compartments that make tracking activity and results so much easier. For example, a customer might figure out that she can get a better deal from the Small Office/Home Office division of a company rather than buying as a consumer. If so, that customer isn't going to be concerned about what impact choosing one over the other has on the business metrics. The customer just wants the best deal.

Likewise in social media, if a company has an account that is specifically created to promote new offers, it is likely it can expect that account to receive customer support questions. If the company has a customer support account, it should expect that account to receive sales inquiries. Social media users are looking for information that is helpful to them; they don't want to do the extra work involved in accurately identifying what an account's internal purpose is. For evidence of this, take a look at

the number of questions that are asked on Twitter that the user could easily have used a search engine to find the answer. Many users would rather type the question and wait for the answers to come to them. Understanding this type of approach to information gathering can ensure that organizations plan their use of social media accordingly. Look at it from the audience's perspective and the possibility exists that the company will achieve a lot more than looking at it from an internal perspective.

This means that whatever department is given the task of operating social media accounts must be aware of the other relevant divisions within the same organization. For a small business, this might be one or maybe two people who are also multitasking on other fronts. So the issue is never really a problem, or it shouldn't be. However, in larger organizations, this can be a real issue, especially where sales commission and other incentives attached to performance are affected.

This impact needs to be factored into a strategy that hopes to achieve widespread adoption across an organization. Does a marketer operating a Twitter account who answers a sales lead share in the commission for that sale? Does a salesperson who answers a customer service question get part of the customer service operator's bonus? Clearly, these things have to be thought through when defining a social media strategy. It is as much about internal alignment as it is about communicating with customers and potential customers. Often setting up a social media strategy will highlight internal communication friction points, and it is important to address these before launching a serious social media effort. A potential customer is unlikely to be very impressed by a response to a question on Facebook that says, "I don't know the answer to that, I only do marketing."

Although it would be impossible for any one person to know all the answers to questions for any particular large organization, what *is* important is the following:

- The person running your social media efforts knows where to find answers.
- The person running your social media efforts knows how to route customer inquiries to the right person or department.
- The person running your social media efforts must be empowered to conduct the necessary interdepartmental follow-ups to ensure that the customer is responded to in a timely fashion.

## WHAT'S YOUR DEFINITION OF TIMELY?

What constitutes a timely fashion in social media is not what most large organizations are used to. On Twitter, a user expects a response in a few minutes. On Facebook, a user might allow 30 minutes for a company to respond. By contrast, a company can reasonably expect to have 24-48 hours to

respond to an email. Social media is immediate, and the users of it expect immediate responses. Noticing two days later that someone reached out to one of the company's accounts to ask a sales question is too late. That person has already moved on, quite probably to a competitor. In addition, it is not enough to simply notice when someone is directly talking to one of the accounts; it is important to notice and take action when a user is talking about the organization or its brands.

## Where Is Everyone?

All this has to be taken into consideration when creating a social media strategy. A strong awareness of where the target audience spends most of its time is very important to any organization. Before committing to a particular channel, any organization should confirm that the people they want to communicate with are actually using that channel. This is true of all organizations but especially so for the smaller business. For these, the choice of social media channels can seem bewildering. "Where will I find the time?" is the most often asked question by the small business sector when thinking of social media. For already time-constrained businesses, the prospect of spending hours on Twitter or Facebook or trying to create content for a blog seems just one more task that will go on the to-do list, never to be actually crossed off. Worse still is when businesses try a shotgun approach to social media and attempt to use all the channels at once in the hope that they will reach someone, anyone, just so that they can show that it works and that they are in fact "engaging" the audience.

Whereas an element of experimentation is always good and often attractive given the relative low cost of entry of social media, it's also true that it can produce results that had not been previously considered. All this should be undertaken with an element of caution. Blunders in social media can be very high profile, and the audience has become increasingly unforgiving in its response to campaigns it considers to be disingenuous to the medium. Audience identification does not necessarily require the use of sophisticated tools. There is no shortage of social media "listening" tools, many of which are worth considering as part of the broader strategy. However, utilizing free tools to establish a basic understanding of the platforms is usually all that is required. Using the search tools built into free social media tools will be effective. In fact, you can save a lot of wasted effort and false starts by taking the simple approach first. Regardless of whether the strategy is for small or large business, a strategy that starts small and builds as competency increases is much more likely to produce results than one that proposes multiple launches across multiple platforms.

After you have identified a starting place, it is not enough to set up a Twitter account, or a Facebook business page, or any other social media presence and then

sit back and expect the people to arrive on their own. The strategy has to include the content that will attract the potential audience and the methodology for making that audience aware that the content is available. The belief that the audience will generate the content is sadly untrue. User-generated content has long been seen as the panacea to the issues of developing compelling content for organizations. Compelling content was seen as the solution to driving traffic to a website. Driving website traffic was seen as the solution to online brand awareness and brand elevation. This is the flaw that so many social media strategies are built on. User generated content is not like graffiti. Just because you build a wall, it doesn't mean someone will write on it.

Although conversations happen about brands, products, services, and organizations on social media platforms, they do not necessarily happen at the time and location of the organization's choosing. In fact, the majority don't. So the "build it and they will come" philosophy is flawed.

Instead of expecting users to generate your content, you need a strategy that places your company where the conversations are happening and positions it to listen and then respond. Early social media strategies focused a lot on the listening piece. In fact "listening" was the mantra of the social media world in 2009. Whenever a social media "guru" was heard to be giving advice, the word "listen" was always uttered. However, I disagree with this. If your social media policy stops at listening, you are neutering your organization. Responding to what is being said and preempting what might be said are the keys to a successful social media strategy. In the world of social media, actions do speak louder than words. Acting on what an organization is hearing is the key to executing a successful strategy. Many companies struggle in deciding what action to take. That is not to say listening is not a part of the strategy—it most definitely is. To reiterate, the listening isn't where it ends.

## Keeping Your Ear to the Ground

So how does an organization listen to social media? The method can be as simple as using the search function built in to free social media monitoring tools.

Certainly for the very small business or for those with a very narrow focus, this will usually suffice, at least early on. For the larger organization and especially those that intend to use social media for more than one purpose, the investment in a more robust social media monitoring tool or service is essential. There are many such tools to choose from, and ultimately budget and importance of social media to the organization will be deciding factors.

It is possible to build free listening tools fairly easily using RSS readers such as Google Reader and the output of the search function from platforms such as Twitter. What differentiates this approach and makes it unsuitable for most organizations of any size is the lack of filters and contextualization. Although the free



option is appealing because of its free nature, it can prove quite costly in the amount of time that is required to weed through all the results—especially at first, when the terms being used in the search are not as focused as they might be or if the user doesn’t understand how to utilize logic operators (AND, OR, NOT) in search terms.

This is where investing in a service or tool can pay big dividends. Also, most third-party services or tools provide some form of “sentiment” analysis, which allows for quick parsing of feedback into groups, such as good, bad, and indifferent. This sentiment analysis saves time, but does have a steeper learning curve than what you’ll find with free monitoring tools. However, after you have mastered these more advanced tools, you’ll be able to turn data into actionable information. A good strategic plan will include the use of one of these tools.

## They Said *What?*

Rushing to defend a brand, product, or service just because it attracts a negative blog post is not necessarily the best course of action. Although no voice should go unheard, there are degrees of response. If the blogger’s audience is limited to perhaps only a few readers a day, then should an organization mobilize the full weight of their PR department in reaching out to them? Obviously not. It is this contextual piece that is also important in the listening. Know who you are listening to and what is the person’s angle? Who else is listening to him? Does he have a platform? Can he influence your audience? This is why the listening piece of social media is a lot more complex than many marketers realize. It is not enough to count how many times your product was mentioned or how many times your branded tweets were re-tweeted. Knowing the level of influence of those you are interacting with is crucial to being able to cope with the volume of interactions that many brands will receive.

By making these assessments, an organization can prioritize its outreach and its responses. In effect, you are carrying out social media triage. This helps to ensure that the resources you have, which might be limited, are directed where they are needed most and can achieve most. I have never encountered a marketing department that had unlimited resources. In fact, it’s usually quite the opposite—they have too much to do with too few bodies to achieve it.

Trying to counter every criticism with a well-thought-out blog post, tweet, Facebook post, or video comment would burn out most marketing departments before they ever started achieving goals in social media. By targeting their responses, organizations can achieve the same effect. Responding to those who have a large influence will often reach the other commentators on the same topic. Many of the secondary or less influential content creators will have used the topic simply to generate traffic—they are the “me too” content creators who are adding to the overall noise because they see the potential for them of posting about a trending

topic. By answering the most influential of the content creators—or if possible, the originator—the entire group of commentators are often answered. Instead of making 100 responses, a company can often quiet the crowd with one or two well-placed responses. This frees up the resources to focus on other activities and still allows the organization to be responsive.

For example, suppose an organization notices that they have some detractors in the blogosphere. If that organization takes the time to identify who they are, what their reach is, the number of visitors their blog gets, how many comments each post receives, the company can decide if it is worth doing some form of counter blog activity or outreach to the content creator. Often the creators are looking for a response from the organization, and when they get it they can turn out to be quite amenable to writing reasoned pieces.

## TURNING NEGATIVES INTO POSITIVES

Recently, a large telecom company went through a takeover. During the takeover, a website dedicated to news about the company appeared. It focused on highlighting every piece of bad news it could find about the company. The company's PR team did some strategic outreach and even passed information early to the blogger so that the blogger was viewed as part of the press corps and could break news. By creating a special relationship with the blogger, whose posts were receiving considerable traffic, the team managed to turn a critic into a more measured observer. Although the team was never going to turn the content creator into a proponent, they did limit the damage that the blogger could and was doing.

This willingness to reach out to critics is an important part of any social media strategy and requires buy in from the very top of the organization. Marketing, PR, corporate communications, and customer support all require that a plan be in place before it's needed and not after the fact. After the C-Suite starts noticing bad news, it is too late to try to convince them that outreach will help. Likely, all they want to do is make it go away, often by stemming the flow of information rather than directing it.

Fear of bad news is often the reason that the C-Suite gives for not wanting to engage in social media. The reality is not that they fear the bad news itself, but they fear their organization's ability to deal with it adequately. This is where the social media strategy comes into its own. By having contingencies in place, a marketing department, or whichever department is tasked with the creation and operation of the strategy, can show its value and the value of social media.

What about positive comments? Contrary to what the C-Suite might think, it is not all doom and gloom in the world of social media. Often customers are only too pleased to finally have a channel through which they can express their appreciation

of a job well done, a product that performs better than expected, or a service that made a difference to them. The hotel industry leaves comment cards in rooms, but no one fills them out when they have something positive to say. They are completed only when something went wrong. Social media is the place where the happy customers can leave their comments, to be seen not only by the staff but by other potential customers and, just as important, competitors. How amazing is that? Customers who want to say great things about the organization! Responding to these, even with a simple thank you is often enough to create an increased level of affinity, not only from customers making the observations but from their networks as well.

This simple act of “noticing” someone and acknowledging them is a well-documented social phenomenon. Doing so creates a pleasurable experience for the person receiving the recognition, the person doing the recognizing and observers. This is a side-effect of the public nature of social media, but one that is extremely valuable in its application and in its ability for companies to build affinity through social media channels. Although this might sound very calculated and cold, it is no more so than any of the techniques used by mass media channels to create emotional responses to images, sounds, and situations. Commercials on television tell us stories of where and how products are used, to the point that sometimes the product becomes almost invisible. The story sometimes becomes more important than the product itself. This strategy is effective because viewers have a positive emotional response and therefore associates that feeling with the commercial and the product or service being advertised. Learning the techniques for doing this is a book unto itself and certainly not something we can dive into here. However, keeping this in mind will help your company not miss opportunities to have a positive effect on your customers and, in turn, increase your bottom line.

## The Perfect Face for Social Media

Social media has been described as giving organizations the opportunity to “personalize” their brands, products, or services. When many brands first joined Twitter, they hid behind a corporate logo with no human face on the account. Although this protected them, it also created a barrier. How can you interact with a logo? For some types of accounts, this was a shrewd move—or at least a necessary one. For example, Dell’s Twitter account tweets are primarily a stream of offers from its outlet store. Putting a face to this would have been unnecessary because the account isn’t attempting to interact. Instead, it is there simply to stream information to those who are interested. By not humanizing the account, the company avoided the complications of the account being swamped with questions. However, the account does receive many inquiries, not all of which are associated with the outlet store. But the number of inquiries not associated with the outlet store is less than Dell would receive if the account had a face.

In contrast, many brands that are considered to be successful in their use of social media have a high-profile spokesperson who is the face of that brand's social media. Some have achieved almost celebrity status from this level of exposure, and not without cause. Some company members are celebrated for their innovative use of social media and for being extremely approachable, choosing not to hide behind their corporate logos. These people agree to face the public for the good and the bad that it brings.

## PUTTING A FACE ON A COMPANY

Scott Monty at Ford, Chris Barger at General Motors, and Jeffrey Hayzlett previously of Kodak are well-known examples of people who are approachable and do not hide behind corporate logos. All three are key members of their respective company's social media efforts. The benefit of having a personality attached to a brand is that it can bring instant brand recognition in the real world. It can also help position the brand in ways it was not seen before. Who would have thought of Ford as a leading organization in the realm of social media before Scott Monty? Now Ford is cited constantly as an organization that really understands social media, and rightly so. However, if Ford had kept its team anonymous, would it have achieved the same level of affinity with the social media using public? Some would argue that it would not. However, downsides exist to having a personality as the social media face of an organizational brand—such as what happens when that person leaves the company?

When the social media “face” leaves the organization, does she take with her all the brand equity that she has built up? Does the brand start to lose credibility because the brand no longer has that well-known social media “face?” There is a definite risk involved in investing heavily in a single point of contact for social media. Whereas smaller organizations tend to lack the resources to do anything else, larger organizations can do well to develop multiple team members who are equally empowered to become “the” face as situations call for it. In effect, what a social media strategy needs is a strong succession plan for whoever is the organizational face in social media. Planning for the inevitable departure will alleviate many of the issues associated with this type of transition. In the same way as most organizations plan for succession in the C-Suite, so it should be in the social media team.

So how do all these elements come together in a cohesive social media plan? The key to a successful social media plan—as with any planning in business—is to know the objectives first. Understand what it is that you are hoping to achieve, what the organization is going to do with social media, and then form a plan around that

goal or set of goals. To the extent possible, the goals should be very well defined. The clearer they are, the easier it becomes to define the plan that will lead to achieving those goals. Clearly defined plans also make for clearer metrics. Yes, metrics exist in social media just as they do in any other business activity. Not only is it possible to measure elements of a social media program, but they most definitely should be measured.

It is also essential to ensure that the organization has assessed its own capabilities to actually carry out the plan. A plan that requires more resources than are actually available is never going to work.

## Measure Twice, Execute Once

What goals are appropriate in social media for a business to set? That is a broad question and in some cases only individual businesses can set them. However, some generic goals for social media activity can be set. The first and most obvious (but for some reason the most commonly missed) is revenue. Why would you engage in a business activity without having some way to tie it back to a revenue goal? That is just bad business practice. Anything you do should ultimately be tied to revenue. However, this is not the first measure that will be applied, nor is it the easiest. Simple metrics can be the number of page views of a specific web page, the number of clicks on a specific link, or the number of requests for information generated by a specific campaign. In fact, most companies are already measuring these same metrics in their other online marketing efforts. The complexity of these metrics can gradually be increased as the social media activity gains complexity (as it moves from simply having a presence through active conversations to running campaigns that are specific to social media).

It is essential that pre-social-media activity in terms of website visits, email addresses acquired, customer conversations, support queue times, free offers accepted, and so on are all base-lined before a social media effort is launched. It's hard to point to success if you don't know where you were as an organization before you started. After the effort is underway, it is likely that the resources won't be available to go back and capture the prior state data, so it is very important to ensure this happens before committing to the social media presence.

One reason that I often hear for "doing" social media is "our competitors are doing it." This is not a reason, unless you have real visibility into your competitors' cost structure, resourcing, and goal setting. It's very easy to confuse real success with what appears to be success. Sometimes this pressure will come from the C-Suite. They will point to the number of "fans" or "likes" a competitor's page has on Facebook, or the number of followers a competitor's Twitter account has and use these as indicators that the competitor has gained a serious advantage. But these

numbers can be very misleading. These types of numbers can be “gamed” in many ways, and this is why they are unreliable as indicators of social media success and why they should not be included in the metric set for assessing the efficacy of a social media program.

Words such as “engagement, listening, and conversation” are used a lot in social media, but what do they really mean for a business? Where do they fit into a social media strategy? How do they impact goals?

The answer to these questions is that without them as a basis, it is hard to define a social media strategy that isn’t just advertising on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and so on. What these phrases—which have recently become hackneyed and diminished in value because of overuse—mean for any organization is that they have to be prepared for their messaging to be interacted with in a way that has not happened previously. This knowledge will aid the organization in creating a strategy that really demonstrates an understanding of social media. This knowledge also helps better prepare those who are charged with managing a company’s social media efforts. It becomes especially valuable as companies start to create content that will ultimately be interacted with by customers, potential customers, competitors, and others in ways that they had not imagined when they created the content. Remember that ownership of content is something that becomes a very gray area in social media. Even though an organization might delete a tweet after someone else has retweeted it, ownership has transferred. The company that made the original tweet no longer owns that content and cannot delete it.

Realizing that this type of activity is measurable will impact the types of goals that an organization decides to measure. For example, a social media strategy might focus on the reduction of phone calls to a support line. The focus might be to empower customers with information that already exists on the Web, and provide that information in a more manageable, accessible, and digestible way.

Knowing that customers will interact with an account or page that has a clearly stated objective—to assist, for example—will allow an organization to measure success very clearly and very quickly. Did the number of phone calls go down? Do customer satisfaction surveys show improvement? Has the number of customer contacts via social media increased? Ultimately, these metrics can be tied back to cost savings, operating expense reduction, and therefore bottom-line improvement.

## Future Proofing

Although direct selling through social media has yet to be achieved in any real sense (and for the most part the attempts at it remain in the domain of spam and hard sell), new technologies are appearing that will increasingly make this possible.

Shopping cart and payment systems are already being rolled out for Facebook, so that companies with business pages (formerly known as “Fan” pages) are now able to offer items for sale directly from Facebook, replicating their existing website-based catalog or creating specific offers available only to “fans” of their page.

Creating a unique, Facebook-only shopping experience will definitely be a way for many retailers to create increased affinity for their fans and to differentiate themselves from their competitors. Given the already low cost of entry to this space and the equally low cost of implementing these systems, it will also make it possible for smaller organizations to take advantage of this type of storefront. This is yet another example of how some social media platforms are enabling smaller outlets to compete with their larger competitors.

Also, systems are being established that will eventually enable payments to be made via Twitter in the same way that they can be made via SMS (text messaging). The recent rise in charity fundraising via SMS (for example, the HAITI campaign) has brought this opportunity to the forefront for mobile marketers and developers of mobile systems who want to leverage platforms such as Twitter for direct revenue generation. The capability to send a tweet to a specific account and make a payment has a lot of attractions for many, and it may be that the charity fundraising path will be the first to realize real success in that field. It is likely, as with the SMS-based systems, that these will focus around micropayments (\$10 or less) and be of a fixed-price nature, just as with donations made via SMS.

Because of their low cost of entry nature, these systems are likely to lend themselves to adoption by organizations of all sizes, which in turn will increase their adoption rate among users. It is not unimaginable that the microblog of the near future will include the capability to place orders with a post. For example, a pizza company might set up an orders account that can be messaged to place a delivery order, a pre-agreed price being a part of the data that is transmitted via the message. Another use of these systems might lead to a microblog version of eBay, allowing real-time auction bidding via a messaging system that would allow all parties to see the bids as they happen. Using the current Twitter terminology, building a stream around certain hashtags to allow for ease of monitoring would make this type of auction environment not only possible but very engaging. Combine it with a payment system and you have a very compelling environment for both sellers and buyers.

At the time of this writing, these systems are purely speculation. However, anyone putting together a social media strategy needs, at the very least, to be aware of the potential uses of social media platforms that might exist in the near future and the directions that some of the existing platforms might take so that they can build their organizations responses into the strategy. This type of “future proofing” is what separates the agile companies from those who appear to be social media observers who move with the speed of a glacier.

To all this strategy for the overall use of social media, we add social location marketing as a specific use within it. As if Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, and so on weren't enough to cope with, social location marketing has arrived with the importance of any zeitgeist movement and demands attention like a screaming four-year old. So just where in this grand plan is a marketer to fit this in?

The bulk of this book is dedicated to leveraging each of the key social location sharing platforms. However, working without a plan for how to use each of these platforms as part of a larger social media strategy would be pointless.

## The Plan

Before you try to insert social location marketing into your overall online marketing strategy, it's helpful to map out your strategy. Following is a sample plan that shows how social location sharing fits into the bigger picture. An effective social media plan is going to include all the following elements we have been discussing:

- Organizational fit
  - Decide which department or departments are going to control the channel.
  - How integrated is each department and how will they pass information between them?
  - What resources already exist in house to use social media?
  - What resources will require training/need hiring?
- Goals and objectives
  - What is the vision for social media use?
  - What does the organization want to achieve and when?
- Team structure or Individual personality
  - Will there be an individual face or a group that customers relate to?
- Location of the intended audience
  - Where is the target audience now?
  - Where are they likely to be?
- Metrics
  - What results are important to the organization?
  - How will they be measured?
  - How is success defined?
- Financial return
  - How much will it cost to achieve the goals?
  - How much will they return if they are achieved?
  - Tools and services
  - Free versus paid
  - In-house or consultancy



- Future proofing
  - Where will potential customers go next?
  - What changes to existing platforms will impact the plan?

## Location, Location, Location

So where in this plan is there room for social location marketing? How much effort will it take? The answer to these questions can be summed up in the usually vague response favored by consultants: “It depends.” However, I am going to avoid the usual vague responses in this book and try my best to give tangible answers.

As Mary Kay Ash is quoted as saying, “Life is short, order dessert first.” So I am going to provide the good news first. Of all the social media channels, social location marketing is perhaps the easiest point of entry for any business. At the very basic level there is little to do in the way of setup, there is little content to be created, and at this stage only a small amount of moderation to be done. All this sounds too good to be true, right? Well, as I said, this is at the basic entry level. Get your venue set up correctly, claim it (at least with Foursquare), and you are good to go.

So if it’s so simple, why isn’t everyone already doing it—and why would an organization or an individual marketer need a book to show them how to do it? The truth is, as with the other elements of social media, none of it is rocket science. However, there are easy ways to achieve things and there are hard ways. So when you are figuring out where this fits into a social media strategy, it is important to understand what can be done at the various levels of competency and then make an honest assessment of where the organization is on the scale of social media knowledge.

As discussed at the most basic level, social location marketing can be a straightforward process of ensuring that your location exists in the databases of the various tools, and then sitting back and waiting for people to interact with it on those platforms (Foursquare or Gowalla, for example). This is a very passive method of using it, which is at the zero point on the scale of interaction. The next step up is to actively engage in the various platforms by signing up for them and learning what each offers the users. Having discovered, for example, that Foursquare focuses on location check ins and awards “mayorships” for frequent check ins, a business might want to offer rewards based on that. Meanwhile, it won’t take long to find that Gowalla focuses more on “trips” and so a successful strategy might be to partner with other nearby locations to create fun and rewarding trips for users that result in some type of reward that the businesses have contributed to. MyTown, on the other hand, is more like a game of monopoly based in the real world, with the buying and selling of properties. So tying rewards into that theme might fit the business better.

As with all social media channels, finding the correct audience and matching that with the organizational business objectives is key. Simply picking Foursquare

because it is most popular (or at least seems that way this week) is not a good strategy. Find out how the platform is used most often and how it fits with the organization's existing communications strategy. For example, businesses that already have a customer loyalty program are going to find integrating with Foursquare straightforward because they are already rewarding customers based on the frequency and number of visits to a location or set of locations, which is exactly how Foursquare works.

However, a business that has one-time locations (a real estate company selling homes, for example) is more likely to find Gowalla a good fit because of their trip-based game play, which encourages users to visit more than one location (perhaps open houses) in a given time frame before being rewarded.

As you can see, fit and function is the key to discovering which of the platforms will work best and therefore fit within a social media strategy. This might imply that an organization can't use more than one platform, which isn't the case. However, as with other social media platforms, I recommend becoming at least competent with one platform before adding others. Discover what the organization can achieve with the first platform before deciding to attempt a different platform. It is worth noting that users tend to fall into two distinct camps: those who have already decided which platform best meets their needs and those who remain undecided and use more than one service at a time (or use one of the services that allows them to check in on multiple platforms simultaneously).

The reasoning behind whether a company knows which platform is right for it can be as simple as a phone preference. For example, currently Gowalla does not provide good support for Blackberry, but it has great support for iPhone and Android. Foursquare and BrightKite are available on all phones. MyTown is available only on iPhone. Gowalla has a much higher loyalty based on the design of the user interface and in game graphics than the other platforms and so tends to appeal to those users who are looking for that in a tool. Knowing even these basics about the user base can help an organization establish which platform is most likely to have users who will be likely customers for the location. Table 2.1 outlines support offered for each social location tool by the major players in the smartphone market.

**Table 2.1** Support for Social Location Sharing Tools

Platform/OS	iPhone	Android	Blackberry	WebOS	Add Comments	Add Photos	Collect Rewards
Foursquare	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Gowalla	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
SCVNGR	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y
MyTown	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y

continues

**Table 2.1** Support for Social Location Sharing Tools (Continued)

Platform/OS	iPhone	Android	Blackberry	WebOS	Add Comments	Add Photos	Collect Rewards
BrightKite	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Whrrl	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y

Having established the basics of a strategy by determining which platform to use, it becomes easier to flesh out that strategy with the type of interactions that the organization wants to utilize on that platform. For the smaller business, this is probably going to be limited to “free” offers for completing something within the tool, such as a number of check ins, a trip, purchasing the property, and so on. Without the benefit of a large marketing budget, it is hard to buy into the more elaborate offers that these platforms have. However, that shouldn’t stop smaller businesses from taking part in those types of offers. Some very effective affinity programs have been put together for these platforms by small, single location businesses, which have led to incredible returns and increased revenues.

Larger businesses with the budget to become involved at a higher level will want to explore the custom offers that all the platforms are now offering. From sponsored badges in Foursquare, to hidden game objects in Gowalla, to redeemable game tokens in MyTown, each of the platforms has found a way to partner with large organizations and events to deliver value-added promotions through their channel to users.

When tied to other social media activities, these can be relatively low-cost methods of achieving awareness for products, services, or brands, especially when compared to the mass media alternatives. A budget of \$40,000–\$60,000 will buy a Foursquare dedicated badge for two quarters, tying that to a coupon redemption campaign, or free trial offer and social media promotion of the badge, and an organization can save tens of thousands of dollars compared to a mass media campaign that might last only weeks.

Numbers like this start to make a compelling case for businesses to utilize these tools at all levels. Small, medium, and large organizations can create, with some planning, campaigns that capture the imagination of users, who are, after all, customers and potential customers.

The capability of social location marketing to fit into all elements of the social media purchase cycle—and to do so in a low-cost, ease-of-entry manner—makes its use compelling. As more organizations come to this realization and the user base increases in size, the tools will adapt to the ways in which both the users, seeking rewards, and the organizations wishing to offer them are utilizing their platforms.

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