



JASON FALLS
ERIK DECKERS

**NO
BULLSHIT**
**SOCIAL
MEDIA**

The All-Business, No-Hype Guide
to Social Media Marketing

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FREE SAMPLE CHAPTER



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Praise for *No Bullshit Social Media*

“A book like this deserves a no bullshit testimonial: The social media world is so full of it, I really didn’t think anybody had the guts to put out a book like this on it. If someone tells you social media is crap, throw this book at them and demand they read it.”

—**Scott Stratten**, international bestselling author of *UnMarketing: Stop Marketing. Start Engaging*

“Jason and Erik don’t screw around with wishy-washy theories or starry-eyed notions. If you’re looking for sound advice on how to use social media to grow your business (and who isn’t?), this book is your guide.”

—**David Meerman Scott**, bestselling author of *Real-Time Marketing and PR: How to Instantly Engage Your Market, Connect with Customers, and Create Products that Grow Your Business Now*

“I’ve been famously quoted as saying, ‘99.5% of social media experts are clowns,’ but watching Jason over the course of the last five years makes me feel pretty confident that he’s in the other .5%.”

—**Gary Vaynerchuk**, cofounder, VaynerMedia; author of *The Thank You Economy*

“Jason and Erik are the real deal. They blend heartfelt sincerity with technical know-how and experience. This book gives you a lot to chew on, and if you let it, gives you a serious step up on your competition.”

—**Chris Brogan**, coauthor of *Trust Agents: Using the Web to Build Influence, Improve Reputation, and Earn Trust*

“Finally, a book that hits the topic of social media in a way that makes it real, practical, and important.”

—**John Jantsch**, author of *Duct Tape Marketing and the Referral Engine*

“Social media marketing can drive real business results and *No Bullshit Social Media* delivers straight-talking guidance to help brands succeed.”

—**Peter Kim**, chief strategy officer, Dachis Group

“Forget everything you thought you already knew about social media marketing. Chuck it. Start over. Then, turn to page 1 of Falls and Deckers’s *No Bullshit Social Media* guide and learn from the masters.”

—**Todd Defren**, principal, SHIFT Communications; blogger, PR-Squared

“Deckers and Falls crystallize the relevant aspects of social media marketing in an exciting and informal way. Not just for marketing types, *No Bullshit Social Media* is a must-read for anyone who has a passion to grow their business by learning how to listen and dialog with their customers.”

—**Scott Applebee**, vice president marketing, Travelpro International, Inc.

“Finally! A no-nonsense marketing book from guys deep within the social media trenches. This book is a must-read for any business that’s struggling with social media marketing.”

—**Michael A. Stelzner**, CEO, SocialMediaExaminer.com; author of *Launch: How to Quickly Propel Your Business Beyond the Competition*

“I punched the wall with enthusiasm after reading this book! No joke. This is the best bare-knuckled approach to social media marketing I have ever read. Erik and Jason tell it to you straight. Every CEO, entrepreneur, and business professional should read this book and spit out the BS!”

—**Kyle Lacy**, author of *Branding Yourself* and *Twitter Marketing for Dummies*

“Pop! Finally a book that bursts the hype balloon around social media and delivers a real recipe for how to use it to actually build your business. Falls and Deckers call out the fools and phonies and pull no punches while doing so. This book delivers clear-headed, no-nonsense, proven advice that you’ll gobble up like candy—especially if you’re a doubter about the whole social media craze.”

—**Jay Baer**, coauthor of *The Now Revolution: 7 Shifts to Make Your Business Faster, Smarter, and More Social*

“Jason Falls and Erik Deckers waste no words getting right to what works and what doesn’t. You couldn’t find two more qualified people to deliver the clear story on how social media can grow your business—using the speed and reach of the Internet to make real relationships. Buy this book now!”

—**Liz Strauss**, brand strategist, community builder, founder of SOBCon

“Ripping off a Band-Aid never feels good, but that is exactly what Falls and Deckers do as they cut right to the point and tell you exactly how your company needs to approach social media if it wants to be successful. No kissing your boo-boo in this book!”

—**C.C. Chapman**, coauthor of *Content Rules: How to Create Killer Blogs, Podcasts, Videos, Ebooks, Webinars (and More) That Engage Customers and Ignite Your Business*

“Stop. Put this book down! Step away from the book. Honestly, we’d prefer that you not read this book. We’re quite happy to continue to run laps around your business, and the last thing we need is for you to start trying to satisfy your customers by applying what you’ll learn here.”

—**Joe Sorge**, entrepreneur, small business owner, burgerwhisperer, coauthor of *#TwitterWorks: Restaurant 2.0 Edition: How social media built a restaurant, a pizza truck and thousands of relationships*

“*No Bullshit Social Media* advances and distills Jason and Erik’s unique and thought-provoking insights about why, and how, we should use what they so simply demonstrate is the most powerful marketing tool available to businesses today—social media.”

—**Kevin Taylor**, aka @telecomtails; former president, Chartered Institute of Public Relations; founder, Robertson Taylor PR; European lead for Global Results Communications

“Many business leaders are still trying to understand the value of social media communication. Falls and Deckers take the key questions and challenges head on, back them up with examples, and spare you the frustrating jargon and hyperbole. If you’re an executive trying to get your arms around social or need your boss to better understand, this book is the place to start.”

—**Amber Naslund**, VP Social Strategy, Radian6; coauthor of *The Now Revolution: 7 Shifts to Make Your Business Faster, Smarter, and More Social*

“Kick-ass straight-talk about how social media has emerged core to businesses’ bottom line success. A must-read, with no holds barred.”

—**Stacy DeBroff**, CEO and founder, Mom Central Consulting

“This is a book I’m excited about. Not just because it sounds straightforward (that ‘No Bullshit’ thing!), but because it is. Social media isn’t all Rainbow Brite, snuggly puppies, and big group hugs. It’s real. It’s actionable. It works. So what are you waiting for?”

—**Ann Handley**, chief content officer, MarketingProfs; coauthor of *Content Rules: How to Create Killer Blogs, Podcasts, Videos, Ebooks, Webinars (and More) That Engage Customers and Ignite Your Business*

“Jason and Erik offer something often in painfully short supply in the social media world: business sense. No kumbaya, no fluffy talk about engagement or conversation, just real advice crafted with business needs and a bottom line in mind.”

—**Christopher Barger**, senior vice president of global programs, Voce Connect

“Yes you can!,” President Obama’s slogan from his first presidential election campaign, is an apt label to apply to Jason Falls and Erik Deckers’s treatment of social media and its dynamic place in business and marketing. Falls and Deckers pepper their book with credible case studies to illustrate the compelling differences social media marketing can make to any business, large or small. *No Bullshit Social Media* offers you actionable insights that will help you believe that you, too, can realize benefits that social media marketing can bring to your business.”

—**Neville Hobson**, ABC (Accredited Business Communicator), communication consultant, digital media entrepreneur, blogger, copresenter of the *For Immediate Release* podcast series, founding senior research fellow and advisory board member of the Society for New Communications Research, volunteerism leader with the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC)

“Jason Falls and Erik Deckers continue to deliver ‘Pristine and Straight Arrow Insights’ into social media marketing. Their book *No Bullshit Social Media* is just that: no B.S. This book is common sense from cover to cover!”

—**Ramon De Leon**, social media visionary and international speaker, Domino’s Pizza Chicago

“In an era when everyone from kids to grandparents has mastered social media, too many business people are still asking, ‘Do I dare?’ This no-B.S. read says loudly and clearly, ‘Hell, yes!’ It’s a smart, succinct combo of why to and how that persuasively pounds home its social-media premise: ‘You better play, or you’re gonna pay.’”

—**Bruce Hetrick**, president and CEO, Hetrick Communications

“Enough of the excuses! No more saying that you don’t ‘get’ social media or that you’re too old/out of date/not geeky enough to use today’s tools to market your business. Get off your butt, buy this book, and start growing! ’Nuff said.”

—**Sarah “Intellagirl” Smith-Robbins**, PhD, Director of Emerging Technologies, Kelley Executive Partners at Indiana University; Marketing faculty, Kelley School of Business, Indiana University

“I’ve admired Jason Falls for years. His blog ‘Exploring Social Media’ is a daily must-read for me. Through *No Bullshit Social Media*, a whole new audience will benefit from his practical, smart and—dare I say it—humorous perspective on how businesses can leverage social media. Jason knows how to help your business, but he also knows how to make it fun. That’s a winning combo.”

—**Elizabeth Sosnow**, Managing Director, BLISSPR

“The title of this book says it all. Simple. To the point. Great examples. Useful.”

—**Emanuel Rosen**, Author, *The Anatomy of Buzz Revisited*

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**The All-Business, No-Hype Guide
to Social Media Marketing**

**JASON FALLS
ERIK DECKERS**

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800 East 96th Street,
Indianapolis, Indiana 46240 USA

No Bullshit Social Media

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ISBN-13: 978-0-7897-4801-0

ISBN-10: 0-7897-4801-0

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Falls, Jason.

No bullshit social media : the all-business, no-hype guide to social media marketing / Jason Falls, Erik Deckers.

p. cm.

ISBN-13: 978-0-7897-4801-0

ISBN-10: 0-7897-4801-0

1. Internet marketing. 2. Social media—Economic aspects. 3. Online social networks—Economic aspects. I. Deckers, Erik. II. Title.

HF5415.1265.F35 2012

658.8'72—dc23

2011027856

Printed in the United States of America

Third Printing: January 2012

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About the Authors

Jason Falls is a consultant, speaker, strategist, and thinker in the world of digital marketing and social media. He is the owner of Social Media Explorer, a social media consulting service, as well as Exploring Social Media, a learning community. He works with corporate clients, developing and managing their social media and PR strategies. He is a highly sought-after speaker, traveling around the country to speak to various trade associations, conferences, and corporate groups.

Erik Deckers is the co-owner and vice president of creative services of Professional Blog Service, a ghost blogging and social media agency. His company works with both small businesses and large corporations. Erik has been blogging since 1997, and he speaks widely on social media topics for personal branding, business, crisis communication, and citizen journalism. He is also a newspaper columnist and award-winning playwright.

Dedication

To Nancy, Grant, and Katie. Thanks for sharing, so that I can.

Jason

To Toni, Madison, Emmalie, and Benjamin. You're why I do anything.

Erik

Acknowledgments

Social media is a community first. One of the cool things about this community is that we help each other, even our competitors. So we want to thank some very special people who made this book possible.

First, thank you to Katherine Bull, our editor at Pearson, for making sure we could do our work and that we got our work done. Special thanks to Brandon Prebyski and Leslie O'Neill for the editing work that made the book so much better than it would have been. (We especially want to thank Leslie for being the willow in the windstorm of putting up with our grumblings.)

Thanks to Karen Annett for copy editing and making this book look so damn good, and to Betsy Harris for keeping us on task and making sure everything is done properly! Thanks to the rest of the support team at Pearson for believing in our off-beat approach.

We also want to thank people in our community. Without working with you, learning from you, and sharing ideas with you, we wouldn't be able to write a book like this. Your generosity of time, knowledge, and ideas made this book possible. So thank you, in no particular order, to Paul Lorinczi, Kyle Lacy, Lorraine Ball, Doug

Karr, Jay Baer, Darrin Gray, Sarah Robbins, Scott Stratten, Amber Naslund, Scott Monty, Chris Brogan, Nick Huhn, Tamar Weinberg, DJ Waldow, Aaron Marshall, and Dean Holmes. Also, thanks to Gary Vaynerchuk, whose line, “If you’re not using Twitter because you’re in the camp that thinks it’s stupid, you’re going to lose,” became the seed of an idea that resulted in this book.

We would be remiss if we didn’t thank our teachers over the years. You don’t become a writer or professional without help. Jason would like to recognize Jeanne Williamson Clark for teaching him how to write and Modena Sallee for making him want to. Jason also tips a cap to Dan Burgess, Todd Spencer, and Dave Wilkins of Doe-Anderson for giving him the confidence and freedom to work with clients when few knew what social media was. Erik wants to recognize his friend Joel Hedge for giving him his first writing break, Carmon and Jan Wenger of WE International for teaching him enough about business and marketing to become the kind of professional to write a book like this, and his mom and dad for instilling a love of the written word in him.

(Erik would also like to thank Jason for saying yes to a late-night text, asking him if he would like to write a book, after spending the previous two years swearing he never would. Jason would like to thank Erik for talking him out of being such a curmudgeon and putting his ideas down on paper.)

Finally, Erik would like to especially thank his wife, Toni, and his children, Maddie, Emma, and Ben, for their unwavering support, love, and hugs. Jason would like to thank his wife, Nancy, and his children, Grant and Katie, for giving him the freedom, the support, and the reason to do what he does. And finally, his mother, Sara George, for getting him to the point he could.

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As the reader of this book, *you* are our most important critic and commentator. We value your opinion and want to know what we're doing right, what we could do better, what areas you'd like to see us publish in, and any other words of wisdom you're willing to pass our way.

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Introduction

Change or Die?

“Daddy, where did you hear about Osama bin Laden’s death?”

“On Twitter, buddy. On Twitter.”

It’s three days after Osama bin Laden was killed by U.S. forces, and the Internet world has been abuzz with how we heard the news several minutes before the mainstream media made the announcements.

Welcome to the world of social media, where people are not just talking about the news, they’re breaking it.

What do social media and the news have to do with social media and the business world? Everything. In both cases, social media is changing the way people communicate and gather information. It’s changing how people share news, share opinions, and share personal events. Social media has made word-of-mouth marketing one of the most powerful marketing tools available.

At least it is for those companies taking advantage of it. The companies that aren't using social media marketing may get stung, or even hammered, by its users, and never even realize it.

Can you imagine getting a phone call from a reporter from the *Daily Mail* in London asking you for your reaction to the tens of thousands of angry blog posts, Twitter messages, and Facebook updates about a seemingly innocuous comment your CEO made at a small conference two days ago?

Your first thought is “What’s Twitter?” Your second is, “Why is this reporter calling us? How did they even hear about us?” Your third is “Wait, did she say she was from the *London Daily Mail*? As in England?!” That’s when you realize this social media thing has a worldwide reach.

What you didn’t realize—until now—is that most of those people were blogging, posting Twitter messages, and updating their Facebook statuses about the thing your CEO said, right as he said it. Those messages reached hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people, in a matter of a few hours.

Don’t think it can happen? We wouldn’t have written this book if it didn’t. A lot. To big companies. The news about Osama bin Laden scooped CNN by several minutes, and Twitter messages were being sent at a rate of 4,000 per minute while President Barack Obama was announcing the news to the world. The only other time Twitter reached that rate was during Super Bowl XLIV this past February. The immediacy of social media channels isn’t just kicking traditional media’s butt in first-to-market for news. Journalist Sarah Lacy was raked over the coals on Twitter by audience members watching her 2008 South By Southwest Interview with Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg. Her reputation as a journalist was publicly questioned and potentially damaged before she even got off stage. One audience member even approached the question-answer microphone during the session and asked, “Has this been a rough interview for you?” directing the question not at Zuckerberg, but Lacy, who was clueless as to the public reaction.

We’re going to say it several times in these pages. Social media is not going away. It’s only going to get bigger as more people use it and learn to share with each other. More people are going to share news, information, and personal events, and it’s going to eclipse traditional marketing and advertising channels. And your company is going to be right in the middle of it as you deal with customers, announce company news, experience down-turns or crises. Tuning out social media for a few minutes as Sarah Lacy is one thing. While Lacy recovered (somewhat) and is still a successful journalist, if you tune out your audiences and their voices on social channels, it could be the difference between a successful business and an unsuccessful one.

Social media is going to become like the ocean: You never want to turn your back on it.

What Is Social Media Marketing?

Social media marketing has had more effect on the communication world than any technology since television. Even such a dramatic change to the television landscape like cable was nothing more than segmented television. You still sent marketing messages the same way: through 30- or 60-second advertisements that interrupted the programming people tuned in to see.

Wireless communications simply added short text messages to telephone technology. Advertisers still delivered a message to a phone that you hoped the receiver paid attention to. They could respond, but seldom did.

The Internet presented a vast new universe for companies to explore and build outposts for customers to find and perhaps even browse around. But most websites for company communications were simply versions of printed brochures viewed through a web browser well until the mid-2000s. Even today, some corporate websites still suffer from online brochure syndrome. But with the advent of social networking platforms and blogs—which captured Internet users’ imaginations throughout the 2000s as their online experience became less about receiving and also about sending messages, or even having conversations—corporate websites began to evolve, too. The Web was no longer static. It was dynamic. The near- to real-time nature of today’s communications platforms make it possible for the Internet to be a living, breathing thing, kept alive by its own users who contribute, write, ask, respond, and interact. The two-way nature of conversations in social media channels presents a fundamental shift in how companies communicate with their customers. *Now they can talk back to you.*

Nothing in the history of marketing has let us consumers communicate with our favorite brands in so public a manner. Sure, we could make a phone call, send a letter, and tell a few friends about our good and bad experiences, but the phone call could be ignored, the letter could be thrown away, and we would lose energy after we told four or five friends. Now, we can tell our favorite companies how we feel about their brands and let thousands of our friends know about it at the same time.

Social media sites—blogs, social networks, community-manicured news sites, and photo- and video-sharing platforms—add an element few marketers and business owners expected: conversation. Sure, many companies had on- or offline customer service functions before social media existed. And yes, those channels provided customers the opportunity to respond and even have a back-and-forth exchange with the company. But these conversations were primitive at best when compared with what social media sites are doing today.

No longer are marketing communications about the company spraying sales talking points out to as many people as it could, hoping a few of them would hear or read those points before making a purchase. Fundamentally, social channels are different because companies can send messages to their audiences and the audiences can send messages back ... and even send messages to other customers without the company's blessing or even knowledge.

(Cue the thunderclap and sinister music.)

This is the part that freaks out a lot of businesspeople: the idea that their customers can and already are talking about them. They can't quite get comfortable with that idea, and will hide from, squash, ignore, abuse, or even sue the people who do it, because they're so afraid of the power their customers have.

Social media didn't change marketing from a monologue to a dialogue—it changed it to a *multilogue*. Now, companies can talk to customers and customers to companies, but customers can also talk to other customers, prospects, and the public in general. While initially shocking to the systems of the corporate world, which is used to controlling the marketing message, smart companies see this new world as an opportunity. For the first time, they can watch people talk about them, often in real time, and use that listening to gain insights about what their customers want and even to intervene when customers seek advice and support.

Still, many companies—especially small businesses or those in regulated and conservative industries—shy away from the multilogue, often needlessly. Whether the new dynamic of uncontrolled conversations worries them or the uncertainty of regulatory or legal interpretations of even basic definitions of *marketing* and *advertising* are holding them back, those companies understandably play it safe. Many of you reading this book are part of that group. Don't worry: You're not alone. (And you're reading this book, so you'll soon separate yourself from the safety of what you know to participating safely in the new world of social media marketing, much to your competition's chagrin.)

But by standing on the sidelines and riding the bench, some of these companies are seeing now they've perhaps fallen behind. Some may even feel as if they've missed the boat: that marketing communications has changed course, set sail, and left them behind. If you feel you've missed the boat, you haven't.

In fact, social media and online marketing continues to mature. Although there are still no real rules of social media marketing, enough companies have blazed trails, built case studies, and even monitored consumer behavior in relation to corporate behavior on social media sites to create an accepted standard for "good behavior." There's more proof in the social media pudding today than there was even a year ago. There are best practices to follow, some do's and don'ts to be aware of and, in some cases, even some rules, regulations, and interpretations to help guide companies and their efforts in the social media space.

Social media marketing is no longer in its infancy. It would be premature to call it fully matured—social media, like all other marketing channels, is still evolving and will continue to do so for years to come. But the social media marketing world now knows that companies need business outcomes from their social media efforts, namely increased sales, profits, and market share.

When the early social media evangelists pushed companies to “join the conversation” and “engage with their customers,” they rarely mentioned driving business or measuring success. The single-most talked about subject in the social media marketing world in the past two years has been measuring its return on investment, or ROI. As an industry, we’re defining the answers to that, and other questions. We’re becoming more adept at not just doing social media tasks or implementing social media marketing strategies and programs, but also at accounting for the business side of the equation. Social media marketing is no longer an unclear world. While it’s not yet in crystal focus, we’ve reached a point where most businesses need to take it seriously and the requisite business conversations that help us quantify and understand success and failure there are happening.

The social media marketing world is growing up. And it’s ready for you to ask it out on a date.

This book will help you not only understand the culture-shifting philosophies that make up marketing in the social media world, but also the strategic reasons social media marketing is used for business. It will

- Help you understand what social media can do for your business
- Help you decide what you want it to do for your business
- Show you how to measure what it can do for your business

It is not an introduction to social media, but to social media marketing strategy. It peels away the touchy-feely advocacy of early evangelists and gets down to business, because you are a businessperson. You don’t have time for frivolity, games, and all that bullshit. You need to know the time and money you spend on social media is accomplishing something for you. You need the *No Bullshit* take on social media marketing.

Part I: “Social Media Is for Hippies. Social Media Marketing Is for Business.”

The social media purists laid a healthy foundation for us all. Joining the conversations and engaging with your customers, providing value to earn trust and influence, and other gospels they preach are critical to companies understanding the ethos of social media. But the purists only take us halfway there. A company

requires a back end to the ethos that has something to do with driving business. Part I will give you a gut check to make sure you're focused on social media marketing and in using it to move the needle on strategic business drivers. It will help you understand the difference between social media and social media marketing and level with you about what social media marketing can do. Those insights will come from these chapters:

- **Chapter 1, “Ignore the Hype. Believe the Facts.”**—Learn what social media marketing can do for your business so you can understand better what you get in return.
- **Chapter 2, “It’s Not Them; It’s You!”**—Understand that your hesitation with social media has less to do with the fact your audience has changed and more to do with the fact you haven’t.
- **Chapter 3, “Your Competition May Have Already Kicked Your Ass”**—We’ll zero in on audience drivers that show social media marketing is almost required, address concerns from the business-to-business crowd, and review examples of successful social companies we hope aren’t your competitors.
- **Chapter 4, “Here’s the Secret: There Is No Damn Secret!”**—Check off five mind-set shifts that can make you a successful social media marketer.

Part II: “How Social Media Marketing Really Works”

Now that we’ve seen what social media marketing can do and prepared our mind-sets to ensure we can successfully manage social media for our businesses, we’ll take a deeper look at each business benefit. The chapters in Part II will not only dissect how to plan for and measure each business driver, but will also present case studies and interviews we’ve conducted with business owners and marketing managers out there getting social media done. The chapters in this part include the following:

- **Chapter 5, “Make Some Noise: Social Media Marketing Aids in Branding and Awareness”**—Traditional marketing methods and their metrics have lied to you for years. Learn how these new mediums help you reach customers and build awareness and a case for your brand.
- **Chapter 6, “It’s Your House: Social Media Marketing Protects Your Reputation”**—Whether through responding to online conversations about you or using social media content to protect your standing in search engines, protecting your reputation is a critical business focus social media marketing can anchor.

- **Chapter 7, “Relating to Your Public: Social Media Marketing and Public Relations”**—Public relations used to be as much about the media as the public. Now the public is the media and public relations has changed.
- **Chapter 8, “The Kumbaya Effect: Social Media Marketing Builds Community”**—It’s one thing to preach about the holy grail of social media (building a community of brand loyalists to market your product for you); it’s an entirely different one to show how to build one you can measure and drive business with.
- **Chapter 9, “It’s About Them: Social Media Marketing Drives Customer Service”**—Whether it’s building greater customer satisfaction or cutting costs, using social media marketing for customer service can change both perceptions and company cultures.
- **Chapter 10, “Get Smarter: Social Media Marketing Drives Research and Development”**—We’ll look at collaborating with customers and show how companies can use social media marketing to, in some instances, replace research and development efforts with online social efforts.
- **Chapter 11, “It’s All About the Benjamins: Social Media Marketing Drives Sales”**—How many social media evangelists have told you that you can’t sell through social media? We’ll show you how they’re wrong and you can.

Part III: “Get Off Your Ass, Would Ya!”

Now you’ve got the keys to the car and a map to point you toward your destination. But there are some practical tips to the route you’ll need some help with. This section will solidify your confidence and help overcome those lingering hesitations you may have by giving you practical pointers to putting your social media plans into action.

What you’re trying to run is a business, not a hobby. As a result, you’ll need to address company policies, business goals, and accountability for both internal and external activities. But we’ll also leave you with some parting thoughts to make the business drivers you learned about in Part II more practical to apply to your business. In this section, these chapters will help you:

- **Chapter 12, “Remedy Your Fears with Sound Policy”**—Whether your company is already highly social or heavily regulated, strong social media policies are imperative for your success. We’ll walk you through

how to create social media policies for your employees and your audiences.

- **Chapter 13, “Assign Responsibility and Be Accountable”**—The larger the organization, the more unclear the answer to who owns responsibility for social media. This chapter will help you decide who should own responsibility for social media marketing in your business.
- **Chapter 14, “This Is NOT a Sandbox. It’s a Business.”**—Although experimentation in new mediums is almost necessary for you to learn how to use these channels appropriately, you have to remember that you’re not playing a game here. Social media marketing is about business.
- **Chapter 15, “Being Social”**—This is our parting shot to help you marry the philosophies of the social media purists and the No Bullshit approach to social media marketing presented in the previous chapters.

And that’s No Bullshit Social Media. Although we make no claims to know and understand your specific business, we will present ideas, arguments, and case studies here to help you apply these ideas and the no-nonsense approach to your organization or business efforts. Everyone’s experience will vary, but at the end of this book, you will have both the knowledge and confidence needed to approach social media as a business...for marketing...and not just as someone wondering if the chatter can do something for your business.

Enjoy!



1

Ignore the Hype. Believe the Facts.

You're afraid of social media, aren't you? It's okay to admit it. It's a little terrifying to us, and we do this for a living.

A lot of businesspeople, especially C-level executives, VPs, and directors, are afraid of it because they've never used it. That lack of understanding breeds more contempt than familiarity because they don't understand that it can be used for business and certainly not how it can be used for business. And then there are the common fears that creep in. "People might say something bad about my company" is a popular one. (Hint: It's not that they might. If your product or service is such that people might say something bad about it, they already are. But by not participating in social media, you're not aware of it.)

But social media is not-so-slowly creeping into the business world. Despite some business leaders' attempts to hide from it, and lots of business owners and managers shying away from it, social media has arrived. Forward-thinking companies are not only starting to use Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and blogging as a way to reach customers, those companies are surging past the competition to do so.

The ones who aren't using social media? They're choosing from myriad reasons why they're afraid of it.

Australian social media professional Jeff Bullas identified 28 of those reasons, and wrote about them on his blog:¹

1. It is detrimental to employee productivity.
2. It could damage the company's reputation.
3. Security risk.
4. Fear of the unknown.
5. We already have information overload.
6. Don't know enough about it.
7. So much of what's discussed online is shallow and we have real work to do.
8. We don't have the time or resources to contribute and moderate.
9. Our customers don't use it.
10. Traditional media is still bigger, we will use Social Media when it is more mainstream.
11. It doesn't fit into current structures.
12. No guaranteed results.
13. The tools to measure and analyze Social Media aren't mature enough yet.
14. We are in B2B and who wants to hear about our boring product on a blog or Twitter.
15. We will lose control of our brand and image.
16. Upper management won't provide support.
17. Waiting on ROI (return on investment) with facts and figures.
18. We are afraid of making a mistake.
19. Lack of experience.
20. Ignorance.

21. Unwilling to be transparent.
22. Confusion.
23. No money.
24. No expertise.
25. Lack of leadership.
26. Terrified of feedback and truth.
27. The “newness” of it, going to wait.
28. High degree of skepticism.

If you're not using social media, how many of those reasons did you find yourself nodding at? If your company is using it, how many of these objections did you have to overcome to convince your boss to let you use it?

This book is called *No Bullshit Social Media* for a reason. We're not screwing around, feeding you a line, or trying to teach you how to use something you're not yet convinced will entirely work.

We're going to give you information about why social media marketing is important to your business. We're not going to couch this book in marketing speak or use business school jargon. This is the no bullshit book.

We want you to understand four things:

1. Social media is the wave of the future. It's not going away.
2. The companies that will succeed over the next 10 years are the ones that embrace social media marketing.
3. The companies that will fail over the next 10 years probably won't embrace social media marketing—most likely because of the fear we hope to eliminate.
4. Social media marketing can be real. It can be actionable. And it can be measured.

Social Media and the Hype Cycle

No single subject has exploded into society and the business world the way social media marketing has.

In 2004, there were no books in your favorite bookstore that even used the term *social media*. Only James Surowiecki's *The Wisdom of Crowds* even considered this soon-to-be-emerging niche of marketing.

Fast forward to 2008: You couldn't swing a dead laptop without hitting a handful of "social media consultants." Few people in the mid- to late-2000s could accurately describe social media properly, much less prescribe marketing strategies and tactics for it. It was a newborn environment, full of experimentation and exploration. There were no rules or best practices. Businesses were curious, but only a little bit. Small businesses were willing to try it because they needed any advantage they could get. But the larger businesses were unwilling to try it, usually for one of the previous 28 reasons.

With information explosions comes the inevitable hype cycle, first described by Jackie Fenn of Gartner Research in January of 1995. After the market is set on fire, with talk about this hot new thing, the "trough of disillusionment" hits: People remember the "dot-bomb" era, and wonder if the "next big thing" is just a fad. (*Hint: Facebook, the world's biggest social network, is valued at over \$50 billion; it's not going away anytime soon.*)

But the companies that embraced it in the 2007–2009 time frame learned how to use the tools, and reached a plateau of productivity. These companies learned how to actually process the information (or product, style, methodology, etc.) and use it in a practical, sensible manner. These companies discovered it was real, actionable, and measurable.

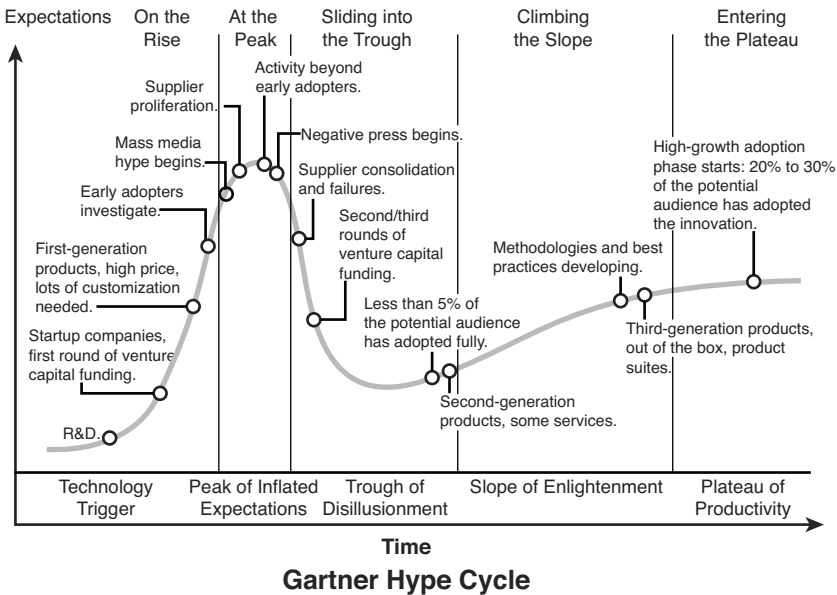


Figure 1.1 Gartner's Hype Cycle demonstrates the cycle of peak interest, followed by a dip in interest—the trough of disillusionment—followed next by the plateau of productivity. Source: Gartner's Hype Cycle Special Report for 2010, August 2010.

We think the first domino in the chain of events that brought social media into being as a communications channel, not just underground forums on nerd websites, was the publishing of *The Cluetrain Manifesto*,² the twenty-first century's 95 Theses nailed to Corporate America's door, declaring, "Markets are conversations." The proclamation in the 1999 work by Rick Levine, Christopher Locke, Doc Searls, and David Weinberger insisted that companies must join the customers in these conversations in order to survive. Consumers were sick and tired of being talked at. They wanted to be talked with.

Social media reached its peak of expectations in 2009 and early 2010. Facebook exploded into the hundreds of millions of members and early corporate social media adopters such as Dell began sharing sales data from social programs. Companies and their marketing managers worked themselves into a frenzy, trying to grab social media's reins and hang on for the ride.

Many of those marketers who were frothing at the bit dove into Facebook to sell their wares, blasted links to their websites on Twitter many times a day, and set their unwitting PR teams on blog comments to promote, promote, promote. They did it old school, with old school results: They got spanked.

Their return on investment was either nothing—or a public relations nightmare when bloggers called them out for spamming their comments with one-way, blast marketing messages.

Unfortunately, reality and the trough of disillusionment hit those marketers hard.

Turns out, *Cluetrain* was right. The marketplace has changed. Customers are in control, not the marketers.

You can't treat social media like TV, newspapers, or billboards. More is not better.

Maybe you see the trough of disillusionment not as the next step in the hype cycle of social media, but rather as the first indication that the fad is over.

You would be wrong.

Businesses that will succeed in their marketing efforts in the coming years have turned the corner—not their heads—toward the slope of enlightenment and are moving toward the plateau of productivity. While the "hype" is quieting, it is not because social media is a fad that is going away. It is because people using it are starting to see it for what it really is and can do and are using it that way. People who ignore social media because they think the fad is over are just treading water while their competition swims by them.

The businesses that will succeed are no longer saying, "I want a blog!" or "We need a Facebook page!" Instead, they're saying, "I want to engage my customers using social media strategically."

Just by purchasing this book, you've identified yourself as someone who is ready to look at social media as a real marketing tool with real potential to improve sales and profits.

Would it surprise you to learn that social media marketing, as we know it today, isn't just some surprising development spawned by tech startups and Gen Yers reeling after the dot-com bust of 2000? Would it shock you to know that the era of consumer-centric marketing began in the minds of traditional marketers in parallel with the information and technology explosion of the last decade?

Philip Kotler, author of more than a dozen books on marketing, discussed several interesting precursors to social media marketing in his 1999 book, *Kotler on Marketing: How to Create, Win, and Dominate Markets*.³

In a decade-old comparison of successful business practices, he shows a clear transition from "be product centered" to "be market and customer centered." He says:

"Old marketing thinking is, fortunately, now giving way to newer ways of thinking. Smart marketing companies are improving their customer knowledge, customer connection technologies, and understanding of customer economics. They are inviting customers to co-design the product. They are ready to make flexible marketing offerings. They are using more targeted media and integrating their marketing communications to deliver a consistent message through every customer contact. They are utilizing more technologies such as video-conferencing, sales automation, software, Internet web pages, and Intranets and Extranets. They are reachable seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day at their 1-800 customer telephone number or by e-mail. They are better able to identify the more profitable customers and to set up different levels of service. They see their distribution channels as being partners, not adversaries. In sum, they have found ways to deliver superior value to their customers."

In 1999, Kotler also predicted that by 2005, every product, even business-to-business offerings, would be available over the Internet and that retailers would have to find, "imaginative ways to exceed customer expectations."

This is what social media marketing is: Exceeding customer expectations, often but not always, in the online world, through human connection and relationship building.

Social media, then, is simply defined by the channels we use to achieve that. Blogs, social networks, podcasts, question-and-answer forums, email, and more are simply the strings between the tin cans that we use to communicate with our customers. The channel is social because the technology makes it easier.

Certainly, much of our focus is on the Internet and online tools to achieve this communication. But a bulletin board (the corkboard type with thumbtacks, not the online forum type) is also a social medium if your intent is to use it as such. Just post a question on the bulletin board for those passing by; provide a pen, note cards, and an envelope for folks to respond; then post those responses with your comments next to the question sheet tomorrow and you have social media.

Even a conversation with a group of people over lunch is a social medium. The key is understanding how to use a medium that is primarily social for marketing purposes.

The Problem with What Social Media Purists Preach

It's really kind of sad that social media marketing advice evolved the way it did. Social media enthusiasts in the mid-2000s interpreted and preached the principles of the *Cluetrain* with a vengeance.

Their themes included “talk with your customers, not at them,” “engage your audience,” and the ever-popular (and really annoying) “join the conversation!”

This last talking point even became the title of social media pioneer and agency entrepreneur Joseph Jaffe's book.

*Join the Conversation*⁴ did an excellent job of pounding the purist drum and pointing businesses down the road of changing their traditional ways to connect or reconnect with a dissatisfied consumer. But for all the talk of collaboration and community, the book only offered real-world case studies of companies that made marketing missteps, but never really talked about whether or not “conversational marketing” actually works.

Unfortunately, Jaffe's gaffe was the loudest song being sung by social media evangelists in the late 2000s. They would talk about the touchy-feely part—we call it the Kumbaya Effect—but they conveniently overlooked the other half of the equation: the bottom line.

To be fair, this was when social media marketing was just getting started, and the evangelist needed to spend a lot of time teaching businesspeople how to just listen to the new, connected customer. He or she didn't have time to focus on harder topics such as how to measure conversations or the ROI of social media.

The social media purists even had us convinced. In October 2008, Jason wrote a blog post on SocialMediaExplorer.com called “*What Is the ROI for Social Media?*” that still garners a fair amount of traffic and discussion. He wrote:

“The problem with trying to determine ROI for social media is you are trying to put numeric quantities around human interactions and conversations, which are not quantifiable.”

(This is the business equivalent of your kids finding photos of you wearing your favorite clothes 20 years ago.)

Thankfully, Jason’s opinions have evolved in the years since. His focus is now on social media measurement and monitoring for his clients, cutting out the purist’s bullshit and getting down to the business at hand.

Social business and technology analyst Jeremiah Owyang of The Altimeter Group confirmed that you can, in fact, measure social media and its return on investment:

“Human interactions can certainly be measured. You can measure time spent together, eye contact, words exchanged, sentiment, tone and body language. Now with the digital mediums like social, you can find attributes that also relate to those: time on site, words exchanged, sentiment and tone... but not body language.

“To truly measure ROI, the interactions and engagements in the social space have to be measured in one of the two following ways: 1) Specific actions have direct trackable activities that lead to generating a lead or transaction. This could be a unique URL, cookie or even registration code. Or 2) Track it post-purchase by asking questions right after or running a survey to all customers later.”

Owyang often cites his boss, Charlene Li, and her case study of defining the ROI of corporate blogging for General Motors and the GM Fastlane Blog.⁵ When Li was with Forrester Research, she helped devise a measurement system that included translating the number of unique blog readers to the cost of reaching the same number of people via a regular advertising channel. She then determined the time and financial costs of blogging to produce an “ROI of Blogging.”

But Asking About ROI Is Asking the Wrong Question

So measuring social media and its value to a business has been—and is being—done. But this notion of a return on investment (ROI) is bothersome. We don’t want you to think of social media marketing in terms of ROI. And no, we’re not contradicting ourselves. We want you to think in terms of what social media marketing *can do for your business*. Those are two distinct ideas.

Asking “what’s the ROI of social media” is pretty foolish. You should actually ignore the question...at first.

“What’s the ROI?” is a cop-out question asked by people who don’t understand all of what social media marketing can do for their business. It is also a financial metric, so asking that question implies that all you can get out of social media is money.

Social media consultant and author Scott Stratten once said during a speech, “The next time someone asks you about the ROI of Twitter, substitute Twitter with the word ‘talking.’”

“What’s the ROI of ‘talking?’” he asked. “How much money do you make with this new ‘talking’ business? I don’t understand why you’re ‘talking’ to customers all the time.”

Another social media author and public relations expert, David Meerman Scott, once shouted during a podcast interview, “What’s the ROI of your secretary?!” His point was that you don’t measure the ROI of the person who answers the phones at the front desk.

Although the three true business metrics—revenue, cost savings, and customer satisfaction—can certainly be affected by strong social media marketing, so can other areas of your business and marketing efforts. What if you want to enhance the awareness of your product? Do you measure that in dollars? No. Thus, ROI is often the wrong measure to apply.

Even if you are going to use social media marketing for a money-driven purpose, asking the ROI question first is out of order. You’re asking what the ROI of your social media marketing efforts is *before you ever get started*.

The smart approach to gauging your potential success in social media is first knowing what social media can do for your business. You then set goals within those expectations for your efforts. You can gauge an ROI, but only if your goal is financial success and you’ve implemented some activity toward those goals.

Now, this is not to say that social media should not be measured. It absolutely should. That’s how you’ll know it’s working. You should be measuring all of your marketing efforts, whether it’s a print ad, a TV commercial, a trade show, or a direct mail piece. But we’re willing to bet no one asked about the ROI of those things before you bought them. (We’re also willing to bet that a lot of people aren’t measuring them afterward either.)

If you ask the ROI of social media question before you ever get started, you’re setting yourself up for failure because you don’t know what you’re trying to measure.

The honest answer to the ROI question for your business before you start a social media marketing effort is, “I’m not sure. I can’t make any predictions or promises. I know what I’ve done for other companies, but every situation is different, and we won’t know how you’ll do until we try it.”

This brings us back to why you might ask the ROI question in the first place. People who do ask typically ask out of fear. If they can be assured that they'll succeed, they'll try it. Otherwise, it's "What's the ROI? How much money will we make? Can you guarantee our success?"

Those who ask these questions don't understand social media marketing isn't just about sales; it can also be about customer service and satisfaction, reputation protection, loyalty and advocacy building, research and development, and more.

And we're not going to play along with the social media hippies and tree huggers and say ROI should stand for something warm and fuzzy, like "return on interaction" or "return on innovation" or "return on conversation because we're really bad with acronyms." ROI is ROI and always will be.

What you might get out of social media marketing is specific results. Just like other areas of marketing and communications, they might be good...or they might be bad. But asking what they're going to be at the beginning of your journey is like asking the final score before the game starts.

Knowing what you can get out of social media marketing makes it much easier to determine your goals, set expected levels of accomplishment, and ultimately measure what you're getting out of it all. Again, we're *not* talking exclusively about measuring your return on investment (ROI). Yes, you will invest money in your social media marketing efforts, just like you would public relations, letterhead, or even the graphic design of your company brochures. Yes, you should expect to see a return on the money you spend, but you should focus the ROI metric on your whole marketing efforts. Trying to drill down an ROI on one piece is, as we've illustrated, sometimes illogical. (That letterhead ROI is tricky, isn't it?)

But, to paraphrase a common theme from social media measurement expert Katie Paine, "You're not always investing in a financial transaction, so you're not always going to get a financial result." There are times when your results will be intangible but still important and useful.

For example, if you're facing some negative news about a product recall, your goal should be to protect your brand's reputation. Your measure of success won't be an increase in sales or profits, but rather an increase in positive reputation indicators, a reduction of negative search results on Google, an improvement in positive search results, or a reduction of angry phone calls to customer service. Still, if you're using social media to drive sales, facilitate research and development, or even enhance customer service, you *can* track financial results that come from audience members you've cultivated through social activities, or even retention rates among the same crowd. These measures can certainly produce dollar figures on a spreadsheet that will make the "dollars-first" executives take note.

Seven Things Social Media Marketing Can Do for Your Business

It's vacation time. You load your family in the minivan, pull out of the driveway, and say, "Okay! Where are we going on vacation?" As you pull away from the house, you realize you didn't buy gas, book plane tickets, pack, study the map to know your route, make reservations at a hotel, or arrange for someone to feed the dog. Worst of all, you left without even knowing what your destination was.

That's what happens when you don't create goals for a business venture. Even something as simple as signing up for a single social network to do a few tests shouldn't be left to chance.

To understand what you're going to get out of anything, you first have to have goals just to measure whether your efforts are successful. If you don't, you're racing down the highway toward your unknown destination: You're lost, but you're making great time.

Starting with Chapter 5, "Make Some Noise: Social Media Marketing Aids in Branding and Awareness," we're going to dive deeply into the seven things social media marketing does for your business:

- Enhance branding and awareness
- Protect brand reputation
- Enhance public relations
- Build community
- Enhance customer service
- Facilitate research and development
- Drive leads and sales

In our experience, these seven areas cover just about everything you can expect your business to accomplish using social media marketing. And the three core business metrics—increasing sales, decreasing costs, and improving customer satisfaction—are built in to many of them, implicitly and sometimes explicitly.

The strategic approach to social media marketing is to review these seven areas, identify which are a good fit for your organizational goals, then map your goals, objectives, and, eventually, measures of success from there.

1. Enhance Branding and Awareness

The image of your product in the market. Its perception to others (and not you).

It is important to look at your brand from the eyes of your customers, partners, and vendors (your stakeholders), not your own. Because you eat, sleep, and breathe your

brand, you're going to have an extreme, one-sided perception of it. Negatives will be excused away; positives may be lauded louder than they should.

The marketplace's perception of your brand is far more accurate and indicative of your company's value. Social media marketing can build a more positive brand and increase the public's awareness of you.

Social media marketing can:

- Increase awareness of your brand.
- Increase the reach of your brand messaging.
- Increase online conversations about your brand.
- Increase consumer preference for your brand over competitors.
- Increase your brand's Q-Score, or online appeal and familiarity.
- Increase your brand's online conversational market share—the percentage of industry conversations mentioning you versus your competitors.

2. Protect Brand Reputation

Upholding a positive perception of the brand.

Though considered a subset of branding and awareness, protecting brand reputation is important enough to set aside as its own topic. Sometimes, you need to respond to a crisis, and no amount of marketing speak is going to save you. It is important for a company to listen to online conversations to mitigate any negative (and amplify any positive) claims or conversations. But doing so also protects the reputation of the brand in the eyes of the search engines.

Google doesn't rank your company first in keyword searches because you deserve it—or because you do good and wonderful things. It prioritizes search results it considers the most relevant based on the keywords entered in the search box and what kind of information is being discussed lately. That means, if a lot of people are angry about your company, their complaints are what will be found on Google.

If you want to be the top result for certain keywords, you have to earn it by optimizing your site and its content for search. Social media marketing can

- Increase positive online mentions and sentiment of the brand
- Decrease negative online mentions and sentiment of the brand
- Mitigate all negative online mentions of the brand

- Rank in the top-five search results on Google, Yahoo!, and Bing for targeted keywords

3. Enhance Public Relations

Building and maintaining relationships with various audiences, or publics, which reflect positively upon the company, organization, or person.

Social media is closely aligned with public relations because the platforms that make up its world are populated by the public. As companies develop strategies and tactics to communicate with their audiences, they look for mediums the audiences watch, read, or listen to. Social media platforms have become one of those mediums.

As a result, social media marketing has evolved as a convenient extension of public relations, incorporating elements of media relations, crisis communications, event planning, community relations, internal communications, and more. In fact, almost every facet of a traditional public relations program has some sort of translation into the online and social media world.

Social media marketing can

- Build and maintain relationships directly with customers and stakeholder groups
- Publicize organization initiatives through blogger and influencer outreach
- Improve the communications success of community or internal initiatives
- Facilitate critical crisis communications in often a more expedient fashion than traditional media
- Empower greater public participation than traditional approaches by removing a media filter between a company and its public

4. Build Community

Growing an audience of consumers (of product or content) to serve as an advocacy or word-of-mouth marketing channel.

This is sometimes considered the golden cow of the social media world. Building community ultimately makes a social media marketer's job easy. Community means loyal customers, raving fans, and product evangelists.

With loyal fans and advocates rushing to defend your company when it is criticized, or amplifying your new ideas and messages to the market, strong brand communities and their advocates move a brand into gold-standard territory. Think of Apple iPhone users, Moleskine notebook fans, or the Maker's Mark Ambassadors Club.

Whether cultivating that community through a robust, branded social network or just informally connecting enthusiasts with your company in loosely tied conversations, brands are doing it.

Social media marketing can

- Increase your number of fans, followers, friends, or readers
- Grow your opt-in email marketing list
- Increase the number of your affinity or loyalty club members
- Increase fan-generated advocacy and promotion of your brand initiatives
- Increase fan-generated defense of your brand in negative conversations

5. Enhance Customer Service

Facilitating customer needs through proactive and reactive communications (on- and offline).

Enhancing customer service is the most popular way of using social media marketing, perhaps because it is the easiest of the seven functions to fulfill. When all you have to do is ask “how can I help” to someone complaining on Twitter, customer service through social media can not only reduce the call center costs, but can also even boost word-of-mouth marketing.

Social media marketing can drive customer service in a few ways. Note the overlap with reputation protection. This is important because a lot of customer complaints can produce similar reputation results as a product crisis.

Social media marketing can

- Increase your customers' satisfaction levels
- Reduce your call center costs
- Increase positive online mentions and sentiment of your brand
- Decrease negative mentions and sentiment of your brand

6. Facilitate Research and Development

Idea generation, improvement creation, and market research.

Some companies have benefited greatly by getting ideas, complaints, and suggestions from their customers. This collaboration, sometimes called “open source” collaboration, enables the product development department to get new ideas and the marketing department to see what their customers need. Dell’s IdeaStorm, a product and feature suggestion and voting site, is the most popular example of social media marketing as research and development (R&D).

If building community is the golden cow of social media marketing, facilitating research and development within that community is nirvana. By tapping into the vested interest and intelligence of your customers, fans, and even detractors, you can harvest ideas that lead to new products, product features, and even profits.

Social media marketing can

- Generate new product ideas for your company
- Improve your product features
- Improve your service lines
- Generate market research for your company
- Generate sales for your company from R&D activities

7. Drive Leads and Sales

Sales of products or services or leads which produce them.

Yes, social media marketing can drive leads and even sales. And no, it’s not just some mystical, magical by-product of “joining the conversation.” You can prescribe goals and objectives around sales using social media. And you can measure them accordingly.

Social media marketing can

- Generate leads and sales from blog visitors
- Generate leads and sales from social channel interactions (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
- Increase conversion rates
- Increase repeat and referral business

When You Add “Marketing,” It’s About Business

The formative years of social media marketing are behind us. This is not an exploratory time anymore. Social media professionals are helping businesses grow through emerging technologies. When you add the word *marketing* to *social media*, it’s about business. Draw that line to the bottom line, or go home.

A few years ago, the social media purists got the marketplace all hyped up about just that: hype. Let’s gather in a circle and sing, “Kumbaya,” with our beloved customers. Let’s “join the conversation” and “talk with, not at” them. Let’s “engage” and become a “social business.”

It sounds nice, in a very holding-hands-in-a-circle kind of way, but that can’t be all we do. We have to make money, or else we cease to have a profitable business.

Still, the tree huggers and hippies of the online world got half of the equation right. We do have to join the conversation. The new consumer requires us to engage and talk with, not at them. We can probably forego the “Kumbaya” circle, but turning traditional marketing around to focus on the consumer and not the brand is imperative for successful online marketing today.

So let us take that direction and do what we do best: Make social media about business.

Social media marketing becomes realistic, actionable, and measurable when you approach it strategically. That is, implement one or more of the seven things social media marketing can do for your business and do the following:

- Set goals your company wants to focus on
- Create measurable objectives within each that accomplish your goals
- Produce strategies or concepts to execute that accomplish your objectives
- Create tactics or tasks that accomplish your strategies or concepts
- Build measurement systems to evaluate the implementation of your plan

None of these five items are new to anyone who has taken a business or marketing course where strategic communication planning was covered. As Jason often says, “This ain’t rocket surgery.”

What seems to be difficult for most businesses is not thinking strategically, but rather remembering to do so. Today’s pace of business is frenetic at best. We’ve forgotten to focus, to ignore the shiny, new object and get stuff done. With the ever-changing world of technology and social media tools, it’s easy to—LOOK! A SQUIRREL!—be distracted by the new tool or strategy.

It's hard to plan, launch a course of action, and stay the course while integrating market changes as they arise.

By grounding your social media marketing in a strategic approach—setting goals, measurable objectives, producing strategies, creating tactics or tasks, and measuring it all—you have a plan. Installing a measurement system for control and evaluation helps you execute the plan. And executing the plan is as easy as working backward: Accomplish the tasks or tactics that execute the strategies or concepts. Those meet the objectives, which then accomplish the goals.

What happens when you approach social media marketing strategically? You see past the hype and understand that social media marketing can be real. It can be actionable. It can be measured. You acknowledge and even embrace the Kumbaya philosophies of joining the conversation, building relationships, and talking with, not at, customers.

But you don't stop there.

You view social media marketing through the eyes of your business and your customers. You see where you can provide value and where value can then return to your business.

And when all that happens, you lose your fear.

Again, it's not hard to plan. It's hard to remember, or make time, to plan. And execution is sometimes challenging, but it shouldn't be hard.

This is, after all, just communicating.

Endnotes

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