

# SOCIAL MEDIA

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## Introduction

Most media companies have failed. Too many marketers have failed. The world has changed; consumers have changed. Most companies have not.

What's this big change? Consumers have been empowered by the Internet. They're no longer willing to just be the recipients of marketing messages from brands, or readers and consumers of media content.

There are an estimated 70 million blogs in circulation. Emarketer predicts 800 million people worldwide will be participating in a socialnetwork with their mobile phones by 2012, an increase from 82 million in 2007.

And Emarketer also predicts that ad spending on websites like Bebo, Buzznet, Facebook, and MySpace will reach almost \$2 billion in 2009.

The power of information has tilted to the consumer, but that isn't a bad thing.

Now they can talk back to brands, and to big (and little) media. They're free to ignore brand messaging and get their purchasing advice from digitally networked friends.

We are smack dab in the middle of the age of personal expression, where the tools allow everyone to not only express themselves in many forms, but to reach out to distant and personally relevant audiences where the cost of doing so is close to zero.

The consumer is eager participant, willing to contribute as well as consume. The old one-way is dying.

Marketers and media companies are looking for help in understanding this profound transition, and then for advice in adapting.

It is our hope that this white paper will shed some light on what's happening, and offer some ideas to you and your company for not just surviving the transition, but prospering because of it.

## What is social networking? Grassroots media?

Social networking, as defined for the online world, is about forming communities of shared interest, and giving people in those communities tools to come together, communicate with each other, and produce meaningful content that is important to them. Online social networks allow people to dramatically expand their personal social networks, finding others with shared interests or values. They are friend-making and -keeping machines.

Social networks also provide the tools for their members to become content producers, facilitating user-submitted photos, videos, blogs, multimedia, reviews, etc.

Their members share of themselves with their personal social networking communities, becoming publishers by participating. The "content" that is on a social network does not come from the publisher, it comes from the users themselves — and their interaction is a major portion of the content.

What the social network operator brings to the table is the publishing and personal-communications tools, plus management and oversight to keep the community in order. (The latter is super important. Online communities can be messy things.)

Grassroots media is another element of the grander "social media" picture that includes social networking. A key word in understanding grassroots media is "we." As in, it's "we" who provide the content for grassroots media. Anyone with an interest can share a photo or video that they shot on a grassroots media site, or post a blog item, or write a story covering an event. You don't have to be a professional writer or photographer to participate in grassroots media. It's for everyone.

### Opportunities in social networking + grassroots media

Social networking is the fastest growing segment of the Internet right now; social networks are the highest-traffic category of website, thanks to the wild success of MySpace and Facebook, especially. The social networking leaders have proven that people of all ages (but especially younger people) — in very large numbers — do want

to interact and create content on the Internet, not just consume information.

This is the major lesson of the Internet era. Media today is no longer about “elites” [professional media, marketing departments of companies] pumping out information and sales pitches while the masses listen in. The Internet is the dominant force in our culture today because it enables people to find and talk to others — existing friends and new ones who share their interests — and **talk to brands that they care about**.

For both companies and publishers, social networking and social media represent a promising new line of business. If your organization can get its customers or members to interact with each other — and with you — online on a regular basis, you’re looking at a potentially large increase in web traffic for your brand. Facebook and MySpace are among the very top trafficked websites on the Internet because their users click a LOT. Communication flies back and forth between social network member friends, and page-views (and resulting ad impressions) mount.

Any organization with a tight customer or user base should be thinking about applying social networking and social media applications to its business. For companies not already in the media business, they can even think about getting into it via social networking.

For media companies, adding social networking to what they already do — creating a new new-media segment for their businesses — is a no-brainer. What’s less obvious is the notion that other types of companies can take advantage of the phenomenon.

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## Social Networking as a Marketing Tool

Traditional marketing is undergoing a transformation due, in large part, to the Internet and social networks and social media. The evidence is everywhere, for example, many consumers no longer look up items in the Yellow pages; they search for them on the Internet.

What does all this mean for the events industry?

The answer isn’t clear yet and won’t be for several years as we are in the beginning stages of social networking. But we have to be aware of social networks that are forming within their exhibitors and visitors.

The power of information has tilted to the consumer, but that isn’t a bad thing.

Organisations that treat their customers well have nothing to fear. Those that don’t will be found out, as the Internet has shown there is no place to hide in the digital age.

Information is disseminated worldwide in a matter of seconds. Social networks and social media are part of a phenomenon that is changing the way we communicate with our members and potential members.

Consumers are using online tools to take charge of their own experience and connect with others. They are using blogs, wikis, podcasts and YouTube, to name only a few.

Some marketers are using Facebook to build awareness for their

credit union and build a strong online presence and community. The key with Facebook and other social media is to have interactivity and maintain freshness. If you have employees or members who are passionate about the organization and spend time on the Facebook page that is especially helpful.

Online search advertising is relatively new for credit unions, but those that have tried it find it encouraging. The ads are based on what consumers are already searching for, so if the consumer clicks on your ad, you have a motivated consumer. You also pay per click, which gives you a more accurate assessment of where advertising dollars are going.

One potential downside is that the relative newness of online search advertising means that many ad agencies lack the expertise to handle this professional task, even though they may argue otherwise.

Twitter is a free social networking tool that has gained a number of credit union adherents among its users. It allows users to send “tweets” of up to 140 characters on the web or as a text message via a mobile phone, which can then be sent out to all of that person’s “followers”.

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## The Groundswell

Social networks and social media are part of a phenomenon that is changing the way we communicate with our members and potential members. It is aptly described by authors Charlene Li and Josh Bernoff in their landmark book *Groundswell*.

“A trend we call the groundswell, a spontaneous movement of people using online tools to connect, take charge of their own experience, and get what they need—information, support, ideas, products, and bargaining power—from each other. The groundswell is broad, ever shifting, and ever growing.

It encompasses blogs and wikis; podcasts and YouTube; and consumers, who rate products, buy and sell from each other, write their own news, and find their own deals. It’s global. It’s unstoppable.”

The groundswell affects every industry and is a social trend in which people use technologies to get the things they need from each other instead of from companies. The authors maintain that the groundswell is not a flash in the pan. And a growing number of credit unions agree. They are using social media like blogs to build online communities to connect with their members.

We are still in the beginning stages of the social networking evolution. Many adults are unaware of social networks.

According to a study of adults surveyed in 17 countries, one half do not know what social networking is, according to Synovate.

The company surveyed 13,000 consumers and asked if they were familiar with social networking. Some 26% of the respondents belonged to social networking sites. Membership was highest in the Netherlands (49%), followed by UAE (46%), Canada (44%), and the U.S. (40%).

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## Online Search Advertising

When considering online search advertising, there are several useful definitions to consider:

- Web analytics is the process of analyzing the behavior of visitors to a website. The use of web analytics is said to enable a business to attract more visitors, retain or attract new customers for goods or services, or to increase the dollar volume each customer spends.

- Click-through rate refers to how many users followed your online ads to your website out of the total number of advertising impressions delivered.

- Unique visitors refers to how many individuals came to your website from a current marketing promotion over a specific period of time.

### Pay per Click (PPC)

Pay per Click (PPC) advertising has advantages over other types of advertising mediums you are paying for results. You pay for a click when someone clicks onto the ad. You are in essence buying clicks. A click is not the same as a lead. A lead in sales parlance is where someone has expressed interest in a product.

PPC advertising can be more effective than banner ads on the Internet because consumers are looking for something specific. The ads are based on what consumers are looking for, so if that consumer clicks on your ad, it's likely they are interested in your ad. As the advertiser, you pick where your ads are placed by associating your ads with various key words. You might choose, for example, to have 30 key words targeted to your field of membership which could be 15 counties and a capital city. PPC ads vary substantially in price. On the main PPC systems the fees can range from 10 cents per click to \$20, \$50, or \$75 per click. You are competing with other users who want to display ads at the same time you are displaying ads.

The three most used PPC services are:

- Google (adwords.google.com). Google has 69% of the search market. It is easy to set up and provides powerful tracking tools that give the user the ability to quantify results.

- Yahoo (searchmarketing.yahoo.com). Yahoo is less expensive but claims to be the world's most popular portal. Advertisers can target by geographic location and choose keywords related to their business and decide how they want to spend per click.

- MSN (advertising.microsoft.com/search-advertising). Microsoft's adCenter will take you about 15 minutes to set up and allows the user to select up to 100 keywords.

### Blogs

Blogs are written on every subject, and as previously mentioned, there are an estimated 70 million blogs in existence.

Given the widespread nature, you would expect the public to be avid readers of blogs, but that isn't necessarily the case. A recent study by Forrester Research indicates that only a quarter of the adult population reads a blog once a month.

Most marketing professionals agreed that blogs are a communications rather than a marketing tool. It is part of the new culture of where people don't want to be marketed to, they want to be talked with. People want to be engaged in a conversation.

There are things a blog can do that can't be captured on a brochure or ad. A blog can give the essence of what a company or an event is; people can go back in time and read

what was said several years ago. It is simultaneously topical and historical.

Blogs are a natural fit with events since people who tend to take part in events have a proclivity for joining a larger community.

### Developing a Successful Blog

Consider the following tips for developing a successful blog:

- Listen. Monitor the blogs in your industry to see what is being said before you start your blog. Listen to what is being said to see how you can join the conversation.

- Determine a goal for your blog. Is the goal to announce new products, support existing customers, respond to news stories, or humanise executives?

- Estimate the ROI. Use a spreadsheet to determine what the blog will cost. This will help get buy-in from other departments.

- Develop a plan. Many blogs will have one author. Writing a blog on a regular basis takes a lot of time.

- Rehearse. Write five or ten posts before allowing them to go live. This is a good practice and allows you to practice topics. If you have trouble writing five practice posts, this shows that you aren't ready to write a blog on a regular basis.

- Develop an editorial process. Who will be reviewing the posts?

You will also need a back-up if the author is sick or unavailable for some reason. The process should be flexible to respond to news events.

- Design the blog and how it is connected to your site. You'll need to decide if you want the blog connected to your organisation's home page. This will determine how official the point of view is.

- Develop a marketing plan so people can find the blog. Start with traditional methods, such as a press release and emails to get coverage in your area. Buying keywords search engines is also an option.

- Blogging is more than writing. You'll need to monitor the blogosphere and respond to comments. You'll also need to moderate comments, deleting offensive or inappropriate comments.

- Be honest. A blog has to be a person's opinion, transparent and free of the traditional public relations spin. People expect a real person to be writing a blog, not a company skill.

### Twitter

Twitter is a free social networking tool that allows users to sign up free and send "tweets" which are text based posts of up to 140 characters. The user types in the message on the web or as a text message via a mobile phone. That message can then be sent out to all of that person's "followers," essentially anyone who is interested. Senders can restrict delivery, though, to a certain group of people.

Twitter has the potential to develop online communities since it has a large number of people using it. As of July 2008, over 2,200,000 accounts were registered, according to Wikipedia. But people also use Twitter for inane ways, such as what they had for lunch or their latest conversation with their dog. Or perhaps inane is in the eye of the beholder?

Most people using Twitter view it as social networking medium. It allows people to have meaningful relationships with people who wouldn't otherwise know

Some companies are experimenting. Southwest Airlines, for instance, uses Twitter to let customers know that if they book a ticket using PayPal they will get \$50 back in PayPal credit.

Southwest also tweets press activities to blogs. Starbucks and Dell are also experimenting with Twitter. Several employees at Dell have conversations on Twitter.

## Avoiding Narcissism in Social Networking

Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the greatest social networker of all?

The threat of carpal tunnel induced by excessive status updates and wall posts, inane blog posts and comments, and the over-use of other social networking tools is now overshadowed by the more pervasive psychological risk of social networking: narcissism.

But what differentiates narcissism from the proper utilization of social networking?

### Narcissism vs. Networking

There are distinct differences between the narcissistic, attention-seeking, self-promotion aspect of social networking and the strategic use of social networking to build your brand. It is imperative to understand the difference between narcissism and networking in order to effectively connect with people rather than be seen as pushing your personality and having an over-inflated sense of self.

### "I love me some me"

Social networking narcissists appear overly-confident. Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, various blogs, and other social networking outlets often encourage self-centeredness rather than emphasizing actual networking.

The tell-tale signs of narcissism in social networking include:

- Frequent status updates about mundane daily activities
- Posts that are less than witty or entertaining
- Individuals posting about themselves
- Profile pictures that are reminiscent of glamor-shots
- Hundreds of 'friends' that are not real-life friends

Social networking sites are effective vehicles of self-promotion. Online, they can assemble armies of casual friends, choose the photos in which they look most attractive and, through quotes and comments about themselves, create a compelling personal narrative.

The need for individuals to broadcast what they're doing, what they're thinking, what they have found or seen to an online audience that includes friends, colleagues, acquaintances, and even total strangers, is clearly indicative of narcissism.

But there is social networking that doesn't require engaging in shameless self-promotion tactics.

### Social Networking as a Marketing Tool

Using social networking as a marketing tool for your company or product can prove highly effective. Social networking sites allow

you position your company in a way that allows you to reach your target market, build your brand, and advertise in an interactive capacity. After all, people prefer interacting with social networking friends rather than a faceless corporation or marketers.

Today 110 million Americans, or 60% of the online population, use social networks, according to a study by Anderson Analytics in a July 2009 Business Week article. According to Anderson Analytics, the average social networker visits social networking sites five days a week, checks those sites about four times a day for a total of an hour each day, and 52% of social networkers had 'friended' or become a fan of at least one brand.

### What does this mean for marketing?

Social media is strategically relevant in marketing. It creates buzz and connections between brands and customers. Through using specific social networking sites to target certain markets, your business can more effectively and efficiently advertise. Ad supported social network sites can further your company's reach. Also, company culture can be expressed through social networking.

Through social networking you will be able to:

- Brand your business
- Improve customer loyalty
- Expand marketing sphere

This begets the question: how do you social network without sounding like a self-loving narcissist?

*"Use social networking to connect with customers in a meaningful way."*

### It's not about me, it's about you

Rather than focusing on yourself when social networking, focus on those you are connecting with, in order establish a meaningful relationship with potential customers. This will propel your brand.

Remember, this is no time to be selfish. Social networking when marketing your business is all about catering to the needs of your target market.

Don't worry though, the needs of your business will be met too. Effective social networking will allow the wants and needs of your target audience to be aligned with those of your business.

Avoid slipping into narcissistic tendencies when social networking by:

Engaging followers in dialogue

Addressing customer needs, rather than plugging your own personality

Expressing what you have to offer your customers

Connecting people with like interests (ex. an affinity for your brand)

Through adhering to these tips, you'll be able to build relationships and your brand without seeming like a self-loving internet personality.

### Walk the Line

Attempting to brand your business or company through social networking can be a sort of tight-rope act. But with the proper social networking skills and attitude, your business can maintain the balance between asserting brand personality and building

# How to increase trade show visitors.

What works best for a specific show depends on many factors. There's no one formula that works for every industry, every season, every location. As a result show organisers are constantly tinkering, revising stale promotions, testing new media, changing timing and so on. But what happens all too often is that the basics of visitor promotion get forgotten.

This seminar underlines the principles and best practice of visitor promotion as well as exploring great attendance promotion ideas from the staid to wild, simple to complex, inexpensive to costly. In addition the seminar examines ideas that have worked well for trade and public show organisers across the world pulling in large, enthusiastic audiences of visitors and potential customers. Hopefully, they'll get your creative juices flowing and lead to great ideas that will work well for building attendance at your next event.

Some of the subjects covered in the seminar.

- Attendee Communication
- Attendance Boosters
- Attendance Promotion Notions
- Coping With the Trade Show Terrible T's - terrorism, travel, technology, and trimming.
- Creating awareness and credibility
- Guerrilla marketing techniques
- Ideas for attracting and keeping attendees
- Identifying the international buyer
- Reaching the buyer
- Forget attendance figures; find the power buyers
- Oomph that lures customers back time and again
- Positioning an event in the market
- Promotional Tools and Opportunities
- The Visibility Campaign - How to grab media attention and beat out the competition
- The Visitor promotion timeline
- Trolling for International Attendees

The seminar is run as an internal dedicated event for individual organisers in order to address individual show needs.

For more information send and email to [admin@ispypublishing.com](mailto:admin@ispypublishing.com)



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strong customer relationships.

So keep in mind the following:

- Put customers first
- Create an open dialogue with followers, friends, members, etc.
- Build connections
- Forget the self-aggrandizing 'about me' section
- Ditch the sexy profile picture

Now that you're armed with the know-how to prevent social networking narcissism, you can safely avoid T.O. moments...at least online.

## How to Successfully Use LinkedIn for Business and Networking - a personal view

Okay, I admit it, I have dabbled half heartedly with social networking for the last year.

Yes, I do have the cursory MySpace site, a Facebook page, and a LinkedIn profile, but I have not embraced social networking; it seems like too much trouble.

It wasn't until this last month that I decided I really should carefully evaluate social networking to see how the typical business owner could use social networking for successfully growing their business and connecting with customers.

I selected LinkedIn as the social networking service I would really focus on. One reason is that this is where many professionals in my business arena have migrated. MySpace is still owned by the high school set, Facebook by the college and young professional set (although I do use and like Facebook too), and LinkedIn has become the social networking platform of choice for most business professionals such as myself.

What I found out in my testing was, well, shocking. So much so, that it has dramatically changed my viewpoint of social media and social networking. Here's my candid experience and story.

In mid August, I had 10 contacts on LinkedIn. I had simply connected to anyone who had sent me an invitation. I had not aggressively tried to grow my own network. My point of view was I was incredibly busy and spending time on a social enterprise was "fluff" and consumed time that I simply did not have.

So, one afternoon, I decided I would give it a "real go" as research. I loaded my Outlook address book to LinkedIn and clicked "send invitations". I didn't even do a custom message, as I was so half hearted on embracing this new "time pit" called social networking. What happened in less than 30 minutes staggered me. I had clients, contacts, and prospects send responses, some with an immediate link to connect with me, others with personal notes. I earned nearly 20 new connections in a very short period of time. Wow, what a response and nearly immediate! What I found was that people are hungry, no, starving to connect.

I then went a step further and sent a request for recommendations to a number of clients. In no less than another 30 minutes I had five excellent reviews of my services that were posted on my LinkedIn profile. As I staggered away from my computer, I was shaken with how quickly all this had all happened. Word of mouth testimonials are "worth their weight in gold" for a business such as mine.

I was able to get an approval from each client to use the recommendation on my website for marketing purposes. (If you post testimonials on your own website, you know and understand how important great comments can be toward establishing your authority in winning new clients.) The people who did my recommendations were warm and eager to help me. Wow, the power of social networking at play right in front of my eyes.

The next thing I did was to post a question in the "Question and Answer" section on LinkedIn. I asked what types of social media people were using, was it generating sales, and did they consider social networking a "time pit".

In less than 30 minutes again, I had 12 excellent responses; thoughtful in nature and addresses personally. Many of the responses to my question were from top executives at companies like Boeing or from film makers or professional social networking consultants. I really benefited from the group insight and comments returned from my "loaded question".

After that I decided that maybe I should interact too in the "Question and Answer" section and went on to review and then answer 9 questions. All comments and results were posted to my LinkedIn profile as well. My responses allow others to review my insight, candor, and point of view, kind of like a snap shot of my personality and expertise.

The next day, after now having doubled my connections to over 30 or so, I decided that I should really "get serious". I loaded my subscriber list and sent a custom greeting and explanation of who I was, how I had their email address, and sent out the invitation to connect with me on LinkedIn using email within the LinkedIn control panel.

In less than 12 hours from my large list invitation my LinkedIn network contained over 90 connections. Less than one week later I am at 140 connections and still growing. In the first 24 hours, I also picked up a possibility for a new speaking engagement in front of 60 local area public relations professionals and a potential new subcontracting partner project for search optimization, ghost blogging, and Google AdWords management. All this with a wee bit of time investment.

This is the bottom line of what I have found from my own personal experience with social networking and LinkedIn. People crave, no, they thirst for personal interaction. People want to connect with you and want to share their knowledge and themselves!

### Here Are Some of My Tips and the Lessons I Have Learned

**One** - You should not be focused on selling all the time in using LinkedIn. The value of your expertise and open sharing of resources and ideas is well worth the time investment alone. Being able to tap others for references or to recommend someone you know to a connection has incredible value and is super easy to do. Reviewing new connections' profiles and then their network can give you opportunities to join new conversation groups and to connect with people with common interests in your industry. To do this, you can either introduce yourself to a new connection directly (if they have that option enabled) or ask your common connection to introduce you. You get five free introductions with your LinkedIn account set up. After that, you can buy more.

**Two** - Responding to "Questions and Answers" can help to educate you and to share your knowledge with others. Each time you answer a question the information is posted to your profile allowing others to see your insight and style.

**Three** - Asking for a recommendation is easy and painless. You can even ask for a revision gracefully, if you do not like what someone has said and you have the option to post the recommendation or not in your profile. If you decide to use the recommendation off the LinkedIn site best business practices recommend that you ask the author for approval. What a great way to build your authority for your services and products in an easy, unthreatening, and painless way.

**Four** - Have fun and invest 15 minutes each day to add new connections either from new prospects you have had the previous business day or by reviewing connections of your connections and looking for common ground to connect with new people.

**Five** – When a prospect contacts you by email through your website, make sure to not only add their email to your e-newsletter subscriber list but invite them to connect with you online with LinkedIn or Facebook. Make sure you have noted in your privacy policy on your website what you will do before you do this to prevent a problem. Although you may not create a sale, by adding the individual to your network, you retain a way to easily share information back and forth and keep connections up-to-date with new services offerings, promotions, new white papers, and other things that bring value to your relationship that may lead to a possible future sale or recommendation.

### My Conclusion

What has surprised me from all of this was the friendliness, speed of response, and overall positive attitude from others eager to connect with me. Truly people are starving to connect and share with others. It just takes you to make the first step to reach out to them. By doing so, you build your network, your credibility, and enhance your LinkedIn profile allowing connections to view your “resume” and interact with you and even approach you for a business.

On my end, I have already recommended one previous client to a connection who was looking for a branding expert, and written one recommendation for another. So referrals and recommendations work both ways benefiting your connections

## Some (social) definitions

If you're intrigued by social networking and social media, it helps to understand the terminology of this new segment of media and marketing.

**Citizen journalism.** (aka, participatory journalism, people journalism, eyewitness journalism)

Refers to the act of citizens playing an active role in the process of reporting the news. It can take the form of non-professionals reporting and writing news stories, as well as eyewitnesses to news events sharing their experiences through text, photos and/or video.

### Conversational media.

This term is close to “grassroots media” and some people use it interchangeably with that. However, there's a subtle and important difference in meaning. Conversational media properties' content is in part the conversations that take place between content producers (which can be anybody) and those who comment or participate in the exchanges. People come to conversational media websites not only to contribute their own

content and commentary, but to view the comments of others. So the content of a conversational media website is the conversation between members, in addition to other content published there

### Conversational marketing.

Most marketers are starting to understand that their efforts in the online environment should involve much more two-way communication between brand and consumer. That their companies need to start thinking of marketing as a bottom-up operation rather than a top-down one. Conversations need to begin taking place online (publicly) between a company and its customers — and between its customers — which builds stronger relationships between company and consumer. Conversational marketing is a fairly broad term, but an example is a company that builds and hosts an online community that draws in people who share a common interest (in a sport, activity, product or brand), allowing members to interact with each other as well as with the brand.

### Grassroots media. (aka, citizen media, people media)

A term for any media form where the people who consume the media also produce content for it. It generally signifies that “professional” status as a journalist or writer is not necessary for publication. “We are the media” best sums up the meaning of “grassroots media.” Grassroots media operations may have professional editors reviewing submitted content, and/or augmenting it.

### Social media.

This term is a bit nebulous, but its essence is that it's a form of media where both provider/publisher and user/consumer get to talk and publish. In social media, the conversation between users is part of the content.

### Social network.

A service that focuses on building online social networks for communities of people who share interests or activities. Most social network services are websites, and offer various ways for people to interact: blogging, user comments, photo and video sharing, discussion forums, buddy lists, messaging, etc. Social networks include uber sites like Facebook and MySpace, which bring millions of disparate individuals together to find each other based on common interests, as well as niche sites that exist solely to bring together people with shared interests

**User generated content.** (aka, user created content, consumer created content)

This term is frequently used to indicate media content that is produced by everyday people, as opposed to traditional media (professional writers, editors, journalists, photographers, videographers, etc.).

### Web 2.0.

A popular term but also a vague one, Web 2.0 describes an online landscape of websites and services that facilitate communication at all levels. It's been described as reciprocity between the user and the provider has an equal chance at expressing him/herself as the provider or publisher, because the latter provides tools for user interaction and communication. Put another way, in a Web 2.0 world, people can upload as well as download. The Web 2.0 online revolution is having and has had a profound effect on corporate communications and marketing.

## 10 tips for your company to have a successful social media/marketing experience

**1** Today's consumer wants to express him/herself, but without you (the brand) dictating how. Resist the urge to control and let the consumer have freedom of expression, within the core rules you have set down.

**2** Use social media and social networking as a way to listen to consumers. You'll learn what they want, gain invaluable market intelligence, and be well equipped to improve your product or service — or create new ones — knowing exactly what the market wants.

**3** Treat your relationships with consumers as long-term conversations. Don't just devise short term programs that open up the conversation for brief periods. Figure out how to become "friends" with your customers. Friends talk to each other, over the long haul.

**4** Bring consumers into your inner circle. Product planning meetings no longer are limited to the ideas of your staff. Use social marketing techniques to identify core enthusiasts, and then tap their ideas.

**5** Find incentives to encourage participation. While website participation levels are high because technology now encourages active engagement, many consumers will merely sit back and view the content and interactions of others. But using incentives to get those people off the sidelines has distinct advantages to your company. You want greater numbers of *engaged* customers. They're the ones who are most loyal to you, and will buy more.

**6** Learn to view your customers in a different light. You used to treat them as "dumb" buyers or recipients of what you offered. But they're smart. (Well, lots of them, anyway.) Recognizing that they have the power, now, to talk back and broadcast their opinions about your brand, you have no choice but to treat them differently — more carefully, and with more respect than you may have in the past.

**7** When things go wrong, don't try to cover up; don't make false excuses. Recognize that your audience now has the power to "out" your mistakes. Be open and honest, and own up to mistakes. The alternative is to pretend that nothing is wrong, then have your audience or customer base turn on you — using your own website (and the rest of the Internet) to spread the disdain. Don't try to spin bad news. You're not a politician!

**8** Participate intelligently in the online social community. **Bad:** Posting a press release about your new product. **Good:** Share pre-release news of an upcoming product and offer sneak previews to selected enthusiasts within your online community, asking them to be reviewers and offer feedback.

**9** What do your customers or brand enthusiasts care most about? That's what you want to create interactive, participative online communities around. What are your customers or your audience most passionate about? Passion is key to assembling online social communities. Your product or service serves that passion. The opportunity in social media/marketing is in serving it, too.

**10** Leverage your people as online community leaders. While social media is all about people talking to people (and people talking to brands), social online communities can benefit from leaders guiding the conversation and encouraging people to participate. So get people within and affiliated with your organization to join the conversation: company executives and employees, as well as company supporters (sponsored athletes, celebrity spokespeople, etc.). Your audience will especially appreciate the opportunity to engage personally with executives and celebrities.

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