

Whether you choose one or two people or you create an entire committee or department, finding the right kinds of people to run your social media efforts is necessary if you want to see a positive ROI and increase in sales and your customer base.

Assigning responsibility and holding both yourself and your employees accountable for social media marketing is sort of the glue that holds your efforts together. The management and reporting will keep your organization on course and navigating through the waters, sometimes treacherous, sometimes not, of social media. And that just leaves the last piece of the puzzle for your company to be ready for the social web.



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## This Is NOT a Sandbox. It's a Business.

*Eric Brown owns an apartment complex in southeast Michigan. In 2004, he stopped using traditional means of advertising and pushed most of his marketing budget into pay-per-click (PPC) advertising. He didn't start out with \$100 and play with Google AdSense, Google's advertising system. He studied PPC advertising, learned how to do it by reading blogs, watching videos, and following the helpful Google how-tos on the AdSense website.*

*In 2008, Brown started his first blog to promote Urbane Apartments. He didn't throw up a basic Blogger.com site (a free blogging platform owned by Google) and experiment. He went at it after following his same pattern of success with pay-per-click advertising. He studied, learned what blogging could do, and set out to make it drive business.*

Eric Brown is a no-bullshit kinda guy.

The bottom line for me is, was, and will always be, did we rent more apartments,” he told us. “Because if we didn’t, the practice of social media marketing is just a hobby.”

Like Eric Brown, you probably can’t afford to waste time, effort, and even money on something that isn’t going to move the needle for your business in some form or fashion. So listening to some social media consultants—those who have the hippie tree-hugger gene—can be frustrating.

Even social media’s poster boy, Chris Brogan, espouses the value of experimentation. His main consulting firm is even called *New Marketing Labs*. He uses any of several side projects to experiment with blogging, business models, monetization strategies, and more. He’s good at experimenting and passing learning on to others. But you’re not a highly paid marketing consultant who gets paid to break stuff and report back on what fell out. You’re trying to grow more checking accounts or subscriptions or get more people to buy policies, houses, or cars. You can spend all day, every day just selling your product or service and still not meet your quotas or goals.

Where in that world do you have time to exercise trial and error? Nowhere. That is why you need to be like Eric Brown.

## Now Know What It Can Do, Now Decide What You Want It to Do

In Part II of this book, “How Social Media Marketing Really Works,” we focused on the seven major outcomes social media marketing can produce for your business. If you don’t have them memorized by now, you should. This is the point in your own strategic planning process where you ask yourself, “Okay, what do I want social media to do for my company?”

Deciding your goals now will guide your decision-making for the near future and probably for the distant future as well. Even though it would be superhelpful of us to fill the rest of this chapter with answers to the question of what you want to do with social media, it wouldn’t be very useful because we can’t possibly know your business. Only you understand the challenges you face and the opportunities that might lie ahead.

But we can help your thinking to better answer the question, “What do I want social media to do for my business?”

Do this:

- Write down the top five problems you’re facing in your business.
- Take each, one by one, and look at our seven outcomes. Will enhancing branding and awareness solve the problem? How about protecting reputation? Facilitating public relations? Building community? Improving customer service? Driving R&D? Increasing sales?
- Now look more specifically at the top five communications problems you’re having. Be sure to consider internal communications and vendor and partner communications alongside those with your customers.
- Do social channels like blogs, social networks, video sharing, collaboration platforms, or social media monitoring services help solve those?

You’ll start to see potential solutions emerge that will help you decide what social media marketing can do for *your* business. Write these down and focus on them as potential areas to focus on and solve business or communications problems using social media marketing.

Certainly, you’ll need to prioritize and, depending upon your comfort level using the tools and technologies available, you might be ready to dive headfirst into a full social media marketing program. But you might also still be rather unsure what you’re going to get out of your activity here, whether or not you can achieve your goal or goals, and what the unknowns you’ll encounter along the way are.

It’s easy for social media marketing consultants to recommend experimentation. It means they don’t have to think about the what-ifs. Remove contingency planning and the strategy process is simple: Just roll the dice. Our guess is that not many of the social media advice-givers out there were ever Boy Scouts, whose motto is “Be Prepared.” The sometimes prevalent attitude that social media is a sandbox and it’s okay for businesses to just play there until they figure it out is a polite way of telling you to potentially throw your business away. Although we’re all for starting a personal Facebook account, turning the security settings up as far as they’ll go, and learning the platform a little at a time, we don’t recommend launching a Facebook page for your business without knowing what you want to get out of the channel first.

“We have a Facebook page!” is often announced as a sort of social media success story by business owners and marketing managers. But ask them what they get out of it or what it’s for and they look at you as if you have three heads. After taking the knowledge in this book to heart, you should start your Facebook page with an understanding of the seven outcomes a business can see using social media marketing, decide which one fits your audience, your needs, and the environment of Facebook, and then launch the page with a purpose. If you do, you won’t say, “We

have a Facebook page,” but rather, “We drive sales through our Facebook page.” Or perhaps, “We handle customer service issues on Facebook, which amplifies our support and responsiveness, thus growing our online audience and positive brand sentiment.”

The same will hold true for following the strategic planning process for other individual channels within social media or for your social media marketing efforts as a whole. The more social your brand becomes, the more time you’ll need to answer the question, “What does your business use social media marketing for?” because you’ll use it for many business objectives.

## Done Is Better Than Perfect

Marketing guru and author Seth Godin talks about the need to “ship.”

“Real artists *ship*,” he says, echoing Apple CEO Steve Jobs. But artists aren’t the people who paint, write, sing, or perform. Artists are entrepreneurs and businesspeople who create new products and new ideas.

When you ship, you bring your new products or services to market. You put them out, not when they’re perfect, but when they’re done—sometimes even before they’re done. When it’s “good enough,” it’s good enough to ship.

But having your social media marketing efforts being good enough to ship shouldn’t be confused with them being scatterbrained and without direction. A Twitter stream with a purpose, even one that doesn’t quite have the right content to really attract the audience volume the company wants to have, is infinitely better than a Twitter stream with no defined reason for being.

Planning will take care of the distinction between immature and idiotic. You will grow into your social media marketing program. And growing indicates you will experiment with ideas and even make some mistakes along the way. But it doesn’t mean you’re playing. Remember what adding the word *marketing* to *social media* does: It makes it about business.

This is where social media’s genetic link to the technology world helps those of us in marketing and business. Technology startup companies and entrepreneurs are taught to iterate, to innovate—launch the product and see where the audience takes it, making improvements and adding features over time. This approach, rather than reaching a “final” point and then sending the product out for sale, gives your offering the capability to launch earlier, but also your product team the power to get actual customer feedback to make early improvements. The process typically strengthens the product in the long term and helps companies generate interest and revenue earlier in the life of the product or service than traditional launch sequences provide.

In social media marketing, this iterative process allows you to take your plan to the public—to launch—but remain poised to listen, respond, and adjust your execution accordingly. Although it is true that listening to your audience is the first step in being a strong social business, listening doesn’t end after step one. You must continue that listening, not just along each step of a campaign or execution, but always.

***Listening to the conversations surrounding your product or service should become like breathing for your company. You should do it naturally.***

This listening will help you take a product, service, or even campaign from good enough to ship to good enough for the customer to buy. But it won’t take a product, service, or campaign to that point if it doesn’t have a direction in the first place. Let the competitors play. You’re here to do a job. But that job takes more than a plan.

You have to translate that plan into action. The best-laid plans only go awry because someone didn’t take the ball and run with it.

## Turn Your Plan into Action

This section of the chapter might be the most important few paragraphs we can share with you. By our estimation, 90% or more of all social media marketing plans fail because people who write them don’t move the plans from being written on paper to actually being performed by human beings. Executing a social media marketing plan sometimes seems troubling because of the diversity of tools and the often-present fear of technology among those in the organization. Imagining what your organization can do is the easy part. The hard part comes when you actually have to roll up your sleeves and make that imagined view come to be.

Social media marketing is not a strange, magical place that has different rules and processes from other areas of business. If you know how to manage a project, you know how to manage a social media marketing project. The steps you’ll take to execute a strong social media marketing plan may include some activities your company has not performed before, like daily social media monitoring. But those activities are just tasks to be assigned to team members. Remember, this ain’t rocket surgery.

Actualizing a plan takes two primary steps: getting everyone on the same page and then assigning tasks with deadlines. Adding steps and layers to that process, as many managers do, only complicates things. Why add layers of to-dos when sometimes all it takes to execute an important part of a strategy is to just put tasks one through three on someone’s list? Both steps are necessary, but let’s not make this harder than it seems.

First, let's get everyone on the same page. If you've read a lot of business books or understand how to write a business plan, you'll recognize this as the crafting of the mission and values statements step. Although you're not going to pound out a 56-page diatribe, complete with financial projections and spreadsheets, you do need a rallying of the troops and a constant reminder of what you're trying to accomplish for each social media marketing effort your company puts forth.

When activating a customer service pilot project for a health-care company, Jason had a number of team meetings where the goal of the pilot project was shared and discussed, along with several if-then scenarios should the effort start out slow or even ramp up faster than expected. With every member of the pilot's team present at these meetings, Jason was, in essence, sharing the mission and value statement for the project with the team, earning buy-in from them, and covering all the elements a strong business activation plan includes. When the project launched, there was little need to regroup and retool based on an initial slow start because the team anticipated it and plowed through ideas to compensate. Three months later, the pilot was elevated to a full customer service support feature for the company.

But it's not just about meeting and talking. Activating social media is about clearly defining goals and expectations for each member of the team. The key to activating a plan is ensuring everyone from the CEO to the janitor understands the goal of the project, its audience and message, and their respective role in achieving the goal. When one person fails to keep their eyes on the prize, the effort suffers and the prize is harder to achieve.

In his 1999 book *Implementing Your Strategic Plan*, C. Davis Fogg discussed 18 key elements to moving a plan to action.<sup>1</sup> Key 1 was developing an accountability system. Certainly, in complex organizations with silos, multiple departments, and sorted reporting, accountability can be confusing. But what accountability really boils down to is dividing up the tasks and responsibilities behind a certain effort and assigning them to someone to complete by a given deadline. Developing a strong accountability system for a social media marketing effort simply requires enumerating the tasks at hand, accounting for a few you might not see (contingency planning), charting them out on a timeline that ensures tasks are accomplished in an appropriate order, and then assigning the tasks to the right team members. The more complex the program, the more complex your accountability and scheduling will be. But shrugging off that action plan, calendaring, and assignments because they're hard? You might as well go do something else for a living.

Keep in mind your accountability system should include some important facets:

- A clear delineation of the task
- A clear understanding of who will perform the task, in coordination with whom, and using what resources

- A specific deadline and explanation of subsequent tasks dependent upon the assignment given
- A reminder of the overall goal, and success metrics, of the project

Team members who buy into your system and purpose, who believe in why you are doing what you're doing, will take those assignments, run with them and the project will move along as needed. As a manager, you should always install checks and balances, reporting, frequent interludes of motivation, and reminders of the goals of your projects. But with the above information and intentional team members, you won't have to fret much about activating.

Fogg's book goes into great detail on organizational management and outlines how to create plans within plans and build out complex activation structures for your strategies to see reality. We don't think activation needs to be quite that complicated. Whether you enumerate the tasks required to accomplish your strategic plan, then route them to a project manager and insert them into a Gantt chart or dump them into a project management software like Basecamp, you assign the tasks to the right people in the right order and accomplish your plans.

## Planning for the Unexpected

All this talk about planning, though, makes us a little nervous. It's as if we're saying you can script social media marketing. You can't. Remember that success in the social media world does include participating in two-way (or multiple-way) conversations with consumers. It requires you to engage and be responsive to prospects, customers, the media, or even competitors. And sometimes it even requires you move with those audiences, changing your products, services, and communications along with their needs, moods, and direction. And those changes aren't typically accounted for in a written plan.

This is the core reason you hear a chorus of social media evangelists constantly singing about changing your company's culture. The scripted, predictable way of doing business—often directed or at least affected by a company's legal department—is a thing of the past. By not being flexible, responsive, and even interesting in how you communicate with customers, you're saying to them, "We stick to the script." Unfortunately, empowered online consumers do not, and they resent it when you do. Worse, your company will look stupid when you're sticking to the script and the customer has taken the conversation and their problems in a whole new direction.

Although we'll discuss the culture of being social more in Chapter 15, "Being Social," when it comes to your action plan, you need to ensure that those responsible for first-line customer interactions are empowered to act. They need to be able

to respond quickly and decisively to customer needs and concerns, and they even need to be able to vary from the script sometimes to deliver the experience today's consumer expects. This requires that those frontline employees have decision-making and diplomacy skills. They need to be able to differentiate between doing what's right for the customer and knowing where the company has to draw the line to avoid being taken advantage of. Certainly, a system of management feedback can be incorporated into most situations that the social web will present, but real-time decision making is now a critical need when companies are hiring frontline employees.

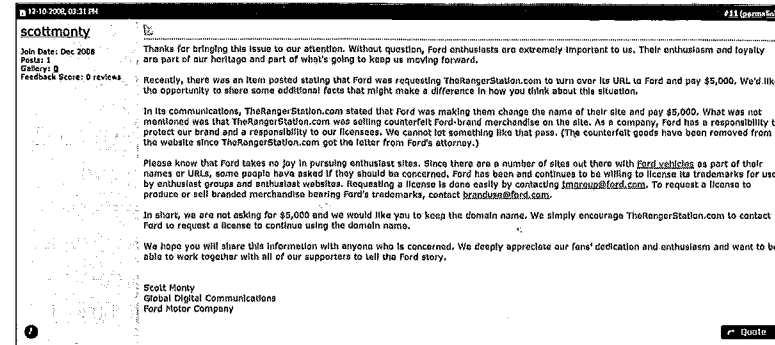
You might find yourself in a situation like Scott Monty did on December 9, 2008, when the recently hired social media lead at Ford Motor Company awoke to find online message boards and blogs denouncing his company. In the midst of a highly scrutinized but impressive rise to the top of the marketing world as the first true director of social media at a Fortune 10 company, Monty had to stare down an angry public that morning.

A website called *The Ranger Station*<sup>2</sup> reported Ford's legal team had threatened it in a cease-and-desist letter and demanded its URL and \$5,000 be turned over to the company. The reasons, as Monty would find out throughout the day, were not made clear to the audience and the issue raged out of control.

What Monty didn't do that day was follow the script. He quickly investigated internally to find out what letter had been sent to *The Ranger Station*. He reassured the public through messages posted on Twitter that he was on it. He even called Jim Oakes, the owner of *The Ranger Station*, to hear his side of the issue and get a well-rounded perspective.

At the end of the day, Monty discovered that the site was allegedly selling counterfeit Ford products (stickers) and the legal team simply wanted them to stop. Oakes panicked, not wanting to give up his URL or \$5,000 (which the legal team added as a "we're serious" kind of threat), and turned to his readers to help defend against the big company coming down on a little website. Monty convinced the legal team to separate the counterfeit product issue and the URL/money threat, worked with Oakes to ensure he understood the reasons for the letter, and then posted a Ford response to the matter online, including a recording of the phone call with Oakes that assured everyone that the controversy was understood and addressed.<sup>3</sup>

None of the expert handling of a communications crisis situation would have happened if Monty was simply ticking off to-dos on the Ford social media strategy. To his credit, he spent a good deal of time that day continuing to nurture Ford's vibrant online community with news, notes, and tidbits about lots of items other than *The Ranger Station* controversy, but Monty also went off script to tend to the real-time, real and live nature of Internet conversations and community reactions (see Figure 14.1).



**Figure 14.1** Ford's Scott Monty didn't follow a strategic plan's script in assessing, responding to, and mitigating public outcry around a cease-and-desist letter sent to *The Ranger Station*. He even responded to individual forum posts, like this one on SubaruForester.com, to clarify the situation.

## Sometimes You Can't Do It Alone

Ford Motor Company is an exception to the rule. A company that size has the resources and manpower to offer up case study after case study of doing social media marketing right. Not to discount Monty's leadership or ingenuity, but most of us would trade budgets with him with confidence that we could rock social media marketing's socks off, too.

Your company probably won't have the same resources or opportunity. In fact, the vast majority of the people reading this likely work at businesses or for organizations that have zero dollars budgeted for social media this year and just as many people on board to run it all. Those factors, coupled with the fact that (this book notwithstanding) you may not have the requisite understanding and experience to lead a social media marketing effort, and you'll find yourself coming to one conclusion: You need help.

We're the first to admit that we often tell business owners that social media is relatively easy to use, the tools are often free, and volumes of both free and premium information are out there to help anyone figure out how to use the social web for business. The barrier to entry here is not high, in either cost or know-how. Although the tools and technologies might be easy to use, how you use them—and how often—can be downright difficult. Keeping up with the do's and don'ts, the ins and outs, and the changes in technologies keeps us busy, almost 24/7, and it's our jobs to stay informed. Even then we miss a lot of information and opportunity, so we can imagine how difficult it is for someone to manage all of this *and* do their regular job. So there are times that, despite all the books you and your staff are

reading and the goals and measurements you're setting and watching, that you need outside help. There are times that hiring a social media consultant or agency is going to be a good step for you.

We don't see this any differently than the typical kinds of outsourced help you seek. Small businesses often outsource human resource functions, bookkeeping and accounting, and even a lot of their marketing efforts. Big businesses hire agencies and contractors to manage seasonal projects or fill temporary jobs. It makes sense to turn to people who have the expertise to help you navigate the social media landscape, define your goals, develop your strategies, and even execute the tasks to accomplish them.

But the explosion of social media marketing avenues, coupled with the economic recession the world has faced in recent years and the roster of social media agencies, consultants, and experts has exploded. For every one experienced marketer out there offering social media marketing as a service, there are 10 who haven't a lick of marketing experience. They may well know social media, have built well-read blogs, or have accumulated tens of thousands of followers on Twitter, but look beyond to their marketing and communications experience and the cupboard is as empty as their stares when you ask them about channel integration.

The Social Media Group, a Canadian agency headed by Maggie Fox, developed a useful tool to discern social media vendors called the Social Media Request for Proposal (SMRFP)<sup>4</sup> in January 2010 (see Figure 14.2). Version 2.0 of the document was released a year later and includes the following questions or topics we think are pertinent to ask when looking for outside help with social media marketing:

- What social media services do you provide?
- Please outline your social media strategy process.
- Provide a case study of your strategy work that resulted in a social media initiative and the business results achieved.
- Please detail your methodology/workflow for handling online crises.
- Please provide two to three top-level campaign concepts for Company/Product/Service ABC that allow us to see your concept development and creative-thinking abilities.
- Please detail your creative process as it relates to social media campaigns.
- What methodology do you use for measuring the success of your social media programs for clients? Can you give us an example?

Although this list provided only a small sampling of the 100+ questions listed in the SMRFP template, as you can see, these are not questions easily answered by a random blogger who suddenly decided he is a marketing consultant. Why? Because

### Training

#### RFP QUESTIONS

1. What format does your recommended training take (i.e. workshops, presentations, walkthroughs, webinars/online learning)?
2. How do you measure progress and evaluate training effectiveness?
3. Do you have experience working with any Learning Management Systems (LMS) for online training? If so, which ones?
4. Please provide testimonials or feedback from past training participants.
5. Please provide sample curriculum/outline.
6. Please provide a training case study.

#### IN-PERSON PRESENTATION QUESTIONS

1. What internal processes do you have in place to ensure your staff are kept current on social media innovations and best practices?
2. Who are your preferred technology partners for online training?
3. Do you have instructional designers on staff?
4. Who would deliver training and what are their qualifications?
5. What types of materials, guides or manuals do you provide to compliment the training?
6. Do you provide a method for ongoing training of new hires or new staff?

### Social Media Marketing

#### RFP QUESTIONS

1. Please provide two to three top-level campaign concepts for Company/Product/Service ABC that allow us to see your concept development and creative thinking abilities.
2. What are your in-house web design/build capabilities?
3. Please provide a sample of a measurement document or final report (with specifics removed).
4. Provide case studies from at least two social media marketing campaigns.

#### IN-PERSON PRESENTATION QUESTIONS

1. Please detail your creative process as it relates to social media campaigns.
2. What is your process for validating social media campaign concepts?
3. How do you incorporate existing applications, websites, microsites and newsletter programs into your overall social media campaigns?
4. What platforms and software do you use and recommend for social media marketing management?
5. What methodology do you use for measuring the success of your social media programs for clients? Can you give us an example?
6. Tell us about a social media marketing campaign you were responsible for that didn't achieve objectives. Why?

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• Social Media RFP Template V2.0 - 2011 ... 7

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**Figure 14.2** The Social Media Group's Social Media RFP template includes suggested questions for a request-for-proposal document as well as in-person questions you can ask prospective consultants and agencies about their practices and methodology.

social media marketing is about driving business. It is not a sandbox and not meant for folly or to be performed by people who don't understand that when you spend resources, both human and otherwise, there'd better be something at the end of the equation that the business wants in return.

Gone are the days of writing off an agency or consultant's inexperience because this thing called "social media" was something no one had heard of. Although it is true the industry and practice are still young, even in their respective infancies, that status provides no excuse for spending your organization's time or dollars experimenting. If this book gives you anything, we hope that it is a clear understanding that

social media marketing is a strategic exercise that your company can execute to accomplish one or more of the seven business outcomes we've explained. We hope you know now that social media for your company is less about Twittering, conversing, and engaging and more about setting goals, developing measurable objectives, and executing strategies and tactics to accomplish each.

Understanding this will help guide your decisions and ability to select and hire the appropriate consultants, agencies, or partners to help you. Whether you operate your social media marketing efforts with consultants or agencies or conduct your efforts with internal staffing, still greater questions remain unanswered about who does what and who owns responsibility. Those answers become clearer as you turn the page.

## ndnotes

1. C. Davis Fogg, *Implementing Your Strategic Plan*, Amacom, 1999.
2. *The Ranger Station*, <http://therangerstation.com/>
3. Ron Amok, "Ford, Fansites and Firefighting," RonAmok.com, Dec. 18, 2008. <http://ronamok.com/2008/12/17/ford-fansites-and-firefighting/>.
4. Social Media Group, Social Media RFP Template, 2010. <http://socialmediagroup.com/social-media-rfp-template/>.



# 15

## Being Social

*As much as we've tried to do so in the previous 14 chapters, diagramming one single playbook or one scientific approach to social media marketing is next to impossible. Sure, we've given you plenty of instructions, ideas, and even some how-tos on what it can do for your business; what your goals and objectives are; and actions to follow through with. But none of that instruction makes your business social.*

*Mind you, there is a distinction between marketing through social media and being a social business. One is prescriptive, strategically driven, but tactical. The other is a state of being, a culture, a personality. You can cross your T's and dot your I's on your social media marketing strategy and successfully move some needles for your business. But that doesn't make you social as a business. What does being a social business have to do with anything, then? It separates companies pulling off a neat marketing trick from those that people truly want to be associated with.*

In *Brand Hijack*, Alex Wipperfurth alluded to the notion that fans of Pabst Blue Ribbon or Doc Martens were not just loyal to the brand, but proudly wore their badges. Companies that “get” their customers are companies that not only succeed, but serve as case studies for the rest of us. They’re talked about with a different intensity and vigor. They get more and mostly positive buzz than their competitors.

## Being a Social Business Makes Customers Proud to Wear Your Badge

Although we can (and will) list some ideas on how you can now take your social media marketing know-how to go a step beyond to become a social business, the no-bullshit explanation is easy. If your company doesn’t like interacting with people—particularly your customers—don’t fool with social media marketing. If you as an individual would rather have an administrative assistant respond with a prewritten answer to questions from the public than write the note yourself, then someone else ought to be responsible for social media in your organization. There are people who are good at communicating with others and those who aren’t. If you aren’t, social media won’t be up your alley. Although we would never discourage anyone from trying, if that describes you, factor in some time and patience to deal with the fact you’re not going to be good at this right away.

In their book *The Now Revolution*, Jay Baer and Amber Naslund argue that companies must have a “new bedrock” that creates a “real-time culture.” The five characteristics of this type of corporate environment include solidarity of purpose, demonstrated trust in employees from management, laboratories and feedback loops for innovation and ideas, a diverse workforce in makeup and in creativity, and reward systems to fuel active participation from employees. Does this sound like your company’s culture?

Baer and Naslund present common roadblocks to becoming an adept social business, which include fear of employee and public feedback, blaming internally for external conversations, and the fundamental changes that your business needs to make. If those challenges lie ahead for you, don’t worry. You’re not alone. It is our belief that most companies today are not inherently social. They still want to control employees, messages, and conversations, even though the company has never had control over them in the first place. They still see random customers complaining about something online and point fingers rather than simply fixing the problem. And they refuse to tear down silos internally or even put traditionally disparate departments at the same table to help understand today’s empowered consumer because “that’s just not the way we do it here.”

The bad news is that those companies are doomed to fail at social media marketing. The good news is that things can change within companies, even gradually, that allow for a more socially adept approach to marketing and, more important, business itself.

## Social Media Marketing Is More Than Just Business

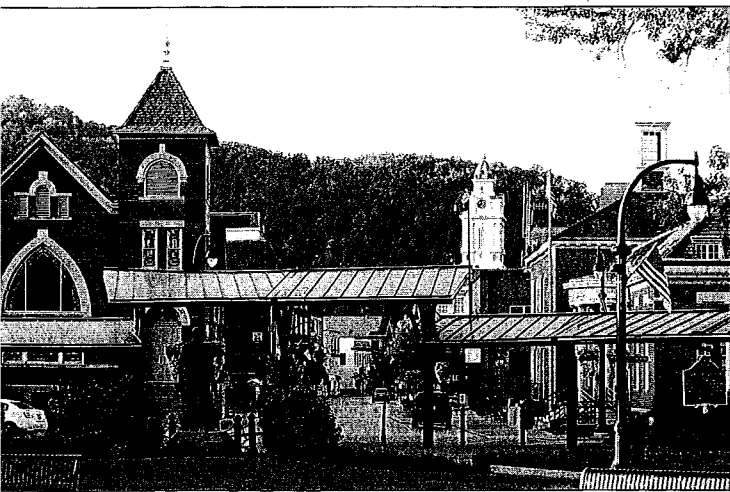
The critical point is knowing that business alone is not the answer. Yes, we want you to understand the seven business drivers of social media marketing, choose which you want to focus on for your company, set goals and objectives, build strategies, and so on. But we want you to embrace more than just the systematic checklist in this book. We want you to understand that, to borrow a phrase from Baer, “It’s one thing to have social media, it’s another thing to *be* social.”

Being social means thinking about customers as long-term partners, friends even, who you don’t just sell to, but who you know, trust, and value for more than their dollars. It’s about reaching for the lifetime value of a customer, not the end-of-month quota. It’s about bringing a value system to your company that holds the customer in the highest regard.

Think about small towns like the one where Jason grew up. Pikeville, Kentucky, population 6,903, sits nestled in the Appalachian Mountains in Eastern Kentucky (see Figure 15.1). If you aren’t familiar with small towns, think Mayberry in *The Andy Griffith Show*. In many ways, towns like Pikeville (or Mayberry) are perfect examples of the ecosystems that make up social businesses. The lack of population volume means it’s easier to know most everyone, but it’s also easier to keep up with them, too. That familiarity breeds a bond of commonality that translates to people helping each other and even protecting one another from outsiders or interlopers. Those who want to join the community first have to illustrate they have shared beliefs, needs, and interests and become members by helping others in some way.

These community aspects are found in social businesses. There’s a sense that everyone in the company knows each customer and vice versa. The transparency involved in social media marketing plugs the various external audiences into what’s happening within the company. It also holds everyone accountable for their words and actions. Take as an example Facebook’s terms of service and stance on user accounts, which stem from the ethos of its founder, Mark Zuckerberg. He told author David Kirkpatrick, “Having two identities for yourself is an example of a lack of integrity.”<sup>1</sup>





**Figure 15.1** Pikeville, Kentucky, population 6,903, has a typical small-town market ecosystem, which mirrors a connected one like social businesses. Photo by Sara Falls George.

In a small town and in a social business, there's no hiding behind a mask. You are who you are and you are responsible for your words and actions. And that goes for the company as well as the customers. Although many perceive this ultratransparency to result in a gross lack of privacy, the environment created when everyone knows everyone and their business means the collective trust is stronger. People in a small town know when someone is trying to pull one over on them. When they know someone is not doing so, they trust them more. By insisting that companies like yours be transparent and honest in your social media marketing efforts, the public forces you to become stakeholders in a greater online community. When you resist, the public knows where to put you on their own personal trust meter.

This familiarity and community then results in an unspoken bond. Everyone in Pikeville, Kentucky, would come to the defense of a fellow towns person being insulted or attacked by an outsider. Many of them would bend over backward to help a fellow Pikevillian in need as well. Brand advocates are the same way. You only have to look at the sports world to see that when someone in the crowd is wearing the same colors as you, you have a natural tendency to support one another, especially when outnumbered. For a social business, it needn't look far for help when someone insults or attacks the credibility of the company. Remember our example of Sea World San Antonio from Chapter 6, "It's Your House: Social Media Marketing Protects Your Reputation"? When someone attacks your social business, your customers and fellow community members have your back.

Becoming a social business—plugging into that greater consumer community as a participant and stakeholder—only requires that you provide value to the community. Whether through your actions or content, giving to get works here, so long as the intent is perceived as genuine. But once that intent is revealed as not-so genuine—when customers think you're participating in the community for purely selfish reasons—the cost becomes incredible. Wal-Mart learned this the hard way in 2006 when a folksy blog featuring a couple traveling the country to visit Wal-Mart's and interview their inordinately happy employees was learned to be a stunt devised by Edelman, the company's public relations firm. It took the company nearly a year to recuperate and launch more honest social media efforts that the online community didn't write off as violations of its collective trust.

What the marketplace of social businesses looks like is what those of small towns often look like. Jason summed it up in a 2011 blog post:

"My family didn't buy cars from Dodge, Ford, or Chevy. We didn't buy insurance from State Farm or Nationwide. We didn't bank with PNC or Wells Fargo. And we didn't buy our clothes from JC Penney or Target. We bought our cars from Terry and our insurance from Sharon. We banked with Danny and bought clothes from Jerry. All four people in question sat within four pews of us at the Pikeville United Methodist Church each Sunday.

People buy from who they know, like, and trust. Becoming one of those that others know, like, and trust...that's the point of social business."<sup>2</sup>

For your business to become social, you must add these human layers to your social media marketing. Checking off to-do lists on strategic plans isn't enough to be ultimately successful. Your customers make up the online community we've come to know as social media. Beginning with *The Cluetrain Manifesto* in 1999, that community has insisted companies like yours behave differently to gain their attention, trust, and, ultimately, dollars. You need to have a plan, set goals, and devise strategies and tactics that provide those items of value to your customers. But you also simply have to be better at joining your customers where they live, work, and play, rather than just dropping by and yelling through the bullhorn at them from time to time.

## Five Kickstarters to Change a Traditional Mind-Set

So how do you get from bullhorn to best friend? What does it take in terms of actions, time, and investment for your company to become a social business? Unfortunately, the answer is, "It depends." Like any aspect of marketing, a lot depends on your product or service. Then there's your communications, the audience, the competition, the market conditions, and more. But there are steps you can

take to drive the elements of that mix you control. We call them kickstarters. When set in motion, they begin to chip away at the traditional mind-set and approach and build a bridge to a new way of doing business.

The kickstarters are operational, even tactical, so they come across as to-dos. And that they are. But each of the five only work if all the stakeholders within and around the company center their focus on the most important core concept your business will ever have: “At the end of the day, the most important person in our company is our customer.”

Notice that we didn’t say the most important person “to” your company. Rather, we said the most important person “in” your company. If anything, transitioning your company to become a social business is about making your business care about your customers so that your customers care about your business. The people you provide products or services for are not external stakeholders. They are the ultimate internal stakeholder. When you follow the traditional mind-set of company knows best, you disregard the most effective source of easy-to-follow, how-to-be-successful instructions your business has: the customer’s.

From a business perspective, especially a social business perspective, the customer is king. So, let’s kickstart your company’s actions to ensure that belief runs through the organization.

## Kickstarter No. 1—Hear, Then Listen

Hearing is a physiological act. Provided your ear drum and subsequent bones and nerves behind it work correctly, you hear. Listening, however, requires thought and decision making. Similarly, social media monitoring is a technological act. Provided you have signed up for some type of social media monitoring service, the data comes into your account and is available for you to review. But it takes action to look at the data, analyze it, and turn it into meaningful intelligence that your company can put to use.

The biggest problem with social media monitoring platforms, from basic and free ones like Google Alerts to complex and paid solutions like Radian6, is that most businesspeople using them think that the tool will magically perform social media actions for them. Even though the technology and algorithms behind such tools are impressive, none of them perform analysis, interpret what actions need to be taken, route those issues to the appropriate internal parties, or follow up to ensure the intelligence is used in an efficient and effective manner. These activities require human action, and those humans are typically housed within your companies. Relying on software to hear is fine, but relying on it to listen is like expecting the hose to wash the car.

Set a time each day or week to really look at the online conversations and feedback your customers are giving you—subtle though some of that feedback might be—through online conversations. Turn the hearing into listening and find trouble areas you need to address quickly and either respond or route them to the appropriate internal party for response. Then follow up to make sure a response happens. Then make lists of ideas and suggestions for the various internal and external stakeholders. You’ll need them in Kickstarter No. 2.

## Kickstarter No. 2—Share, Then Solve

Now route your list of ideas and suggestions to the appropriate managers or department heads. Share this feedback with your team. If they’ve never heard information straight from the social web before, take the opportunity to explain to them where you got the feedback, that you’re using new online monitoring tools to see what people are saying about the company, and that these issues are coming up in conversations online that everyone can see. If need be, open a web browser and show them where the conversations are happening so they can see the potential impact on the public participating in that conversation.

Now work with those internal teams to address the issues and suggestions, even if only to confirm why the feedback cannot or will not be incorporated moving forward. Collaborate to solve the problems or bring resolution to the questions posed or the ideas offered. Bring various departments, even customers themselves, to the table to discuss and decide what improvements can be made, if new products or features can be added, or how procedures or policies need to change.

Think of this collaboration as the new team building. But add your customers to that team and empower them as well. And no, you don’t have to invite all 156,000 people who bought from you in the last five years, but you can select 1, 2, or even 10 loyal customers who know your product well to be an internal voice for the greater prospective audience.

## Kickstarter No. 3—Launch, Then Learn

Your collaboration will result in new ideas, new action items, and new approaches for your product or service. Launch that newness, encouraging all the stakeholders involved in building it to watch, share, and participate. Connect the audiences that gave the suggestions and provided the intelligence or opinions you listened to with the new initiatives. Show them you were not just hearing, but listening, and that you now want feedback on how you did.

Then listen again to the customer’s opinion on your new products or approaches. Learn where you hit your mark or missed it and iterate through the first two

kickstarters again. Like a technology startup, iterate, iterate, then iterate some more. Keep the feedback coming, the team collaborating, and the launches and relaunches happening. Whether this is information and workflow relevant to your product or even just to your communications programs, bringing all the relevant stakeholders into the system and listening, processing, and incorporating their ideas into what you do empowers them with a vested interest in your business.

### Kickstarter No. 4—Trust, Then Adjust

The process of getting previously loosely connected parties, internal and external, together should now have created an environment of familiarity—even a sense of community—among the core team closest to your listen-solve-learn process. Trust your team—even those empowered customers—to take those messages, changes, and even products to the rest of the world. Empower the product team to answer questions in industry forums. Let retail clerks remind their Facebook friends of Saturday's sale. Trust that the newfound bond that bridges the gaps of the old guard, siloed divisions makes for more well-informed and even motivated employees.

After the various stakeholders begin engaging online, you can then see who is taking the initiative and who needs further learning, motivation, or resources. Adjust your requests of both internal and external stakeholders to fill gaps in departments or messages. Look to ensure the broader customer base is connecting to all the various touch points their questions and concerns refer to. Have more-experienced communicators or other well-grounded or groomed stakeholders coach less-comfortable ones. Read and react to those who, for all their love of the company, just aren't comfortable being plugged in and turned on.

As with Kickstarter 3, you will need to iterate, iterate, then iterate some more. The more connected, empowered, and valued your employees and customers feel, the more motivated and inclined they will be to behave as social beings on your company's behalf, not just corporate drones turning in their eight hours each day.

### Kickstarter No. 5—Give, Then Get

Incorporating the previous four kickstarters in your company gives you an inclusive, iterative process that values the customer first. Now you must give...time, attention, service, content, ideas, encouragement, and support. Give everything you can possibly give to your customers as a company, a department, and an individual, and you'll see something magical happen.

Customers will tell their friends about you. Their friends will reach out to find out more about what you do and what you sell. They'll read your blogs and comment on your posts. They'll retweet your updates and forward your emails to their

friends. They will get to know you, learn to trust you, and then buy from you. Before too long, they'll do something else. They'll wear your badge.

These kickstarters can be implemented quickly or over time. They can come from the top down as directives, but more often than not they creep into organizations from the social media evangelists or clusters of socially enabled employees. They spread slowly as more department heads or managers see the intrinsic, and sometimes extrinsic, value these activities provide. The latter approach is often met with roadblocks along the way because a bottom-up approach is “not the way we do it around here.” You'll have vice presidents and department heads who passively resist and others who actively work against your attempts to kickstart social aptitude around your company. You can overcome them.

The best path to thwarting your would-be thwarters is to come armed with business in mind. Illustrating customer problems solved or consumer ideas the company can use to improve its offerings will raise some eyebrows as you work to get executive buy-in. Offering examples of other companies moving to social business models often helps.

At health-care giant Humana in 2008, several department heads came together and formulated an approach to social media exploration and application for the company called The Town Square. The informal but diverse group of department representatives formed a “chamber of commerce” for the town that was Humana's social media efforts. They decided they would have only one rule: We share.

From innovation to marketing and human resources to information technology, all department representatives sat on the Humana Chamber of Commerce and shared ideas, vendor recommendations, internal projects, suggestions, and more. Although the core idea was to explore the world of social media together, as a social entity within the organization, the body wound up reinventing the way the company communicated internally.

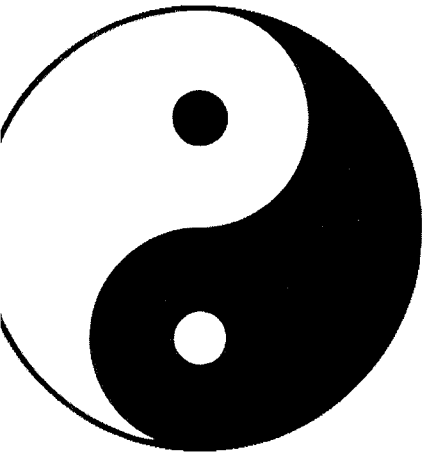
Having the ammunition you need from examples and proof points will help you pursue your kickstarters. And as you do so, you'll almost assuredly add more proof to the pudding and fuel new arguments for top-down blessing or even endorsement. The more each of those proof points can point to business drivers, the better off you'll be, because...

## In the End, It's a Business

We told you in Chapter 1, “Ignore the Hype. Believe the Facts,” that we weren't going to fill your head with warm and fuzzies and try to teach you how to use something you're not yet entirely convinced will work. We also told you that the “join the conversation” hype of the hippies and tree huggers left out the business

part. But we clarified that they weren't wrong, just not complete in their recommendations. Honestly, as we wrote and edited the five kickstarters, we argued back and forth over how substantive they were. But the full circle of social media marketing and social business recommendations has a nice yin-yang (see Figure 15.2) feeling to it:

- You must be human, join the conversation, engage your audiences, and give to get to be successful in social media marketing.
- You must also set goals and objectives and plan, strategize, execute, and measure to be successful in social media marketing.
- You must further balance the business-driving approach with human qualities to evolve into a social business.



**Figure 15.2** The yin-yang symbol from Chinese philosophy can represent the seemingly opposite but realistically interdependent nature of being social and being a business. Image from WikiCommons.

Yin-yang symbolizes the connectedness and interdependence opposite forces have on one another. To be human and to be a business are, in some ways, opposite qualities. To be social as a business, you have to have one to have the other. Humanness begets business because business begets humanness in our new marketing landscape. The more sales oriented you are, the less human you become. In today's world, that often equates to fewer sales or at least a poor long-term sales strategy. The more human you are, the less businesslike you become. If you forget about business in that existence, you suffer as well. It takes one to fuel the other.

You are now equipped with a strategic blueprint for social media marketing. You know the seven things social media marketing can do for your business. You understand step one is to decide which of those you want to focus on. You're ready to establish a goal or several goals for your company or organization. You understand that objectives will follow that must be specific and measurable. You have a blueprint of how each of those seven business drivers is broken down, what activities fall within them, and how they benefit your company. You also have a prescription for developing measures of success for your social media marketing program based on the goals you set forth for it. And you also have some solid ideas on moving beyond the social media marketing strategy to fully embrace the culture and makeup of a social business.

All that's left to do now is to get it done.

Good luck!

## Endnotes

1. David Kirkpatrick, *The Facebook Effect*, Simon & Schuster, 2010.
2. Jason Falls, "What Small Towns Can Teach Us About Social Business," *SocialMediaExplorer.com*, May 16, 2011. <http://www.socialmediaexplorer.com/social-media-marketing/what-small-towns-can-teach-us-about-social-business/>.