

Or you can be a leader...willing to push change, not fear it; a driver of innovation, not a passenger in someone else's ride.

You can listen to what customers—yours and your competition's—are saying about their needs and adapt to meet them. You can build relationships and trust with consumers over time, making them loyal to you and stakeholders in your success. You can focus on the lifetime value of a customer, not the short-term dollar amount of his or her next purchase.

You can join your stakeholders in conversations and even collaborate with them to create new products, services, or shared value for the greater good.

You can join social media sites *and* be social there.

But you better do it quick. Because although the world of social media marketing is relatively new, it's not right off the assembly line. Your competition is considering social media marketing as well. In fact, they may already have a head start.

Endnotes

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Your Competition May Have Already Kicked Your Ass

Look out the window. Do you see your competitor peering in? Do you see the dozens of people chatting with their sales representatives in the streets right under your nose? Do you see the person walking up to your door only to be intercepted by a friendly passerby from your competition's support team?

If your company is not using social media for marketing purposes, this very scenario is happening under your nose right now.

You might not be blogging, chatting up fans on Facebook, or soliciting new product ideas from anyone and everyone in a public forum like MyStarbucksIdea.com, but the other guy is still peering in your window.

Using social media monitoring platforms—services like Google that crawl the Web and report back on what they find based on the keywords input—your competitors are watching your prospective customers talk. They’re talking about how they’re ready to buy a product like the one you sell and asking if anyone knows of a good source. They’re watching your customers complain about the rude and annoying sales clerk or your please-kill-me-now hold music. And do you know what your competition is doing next?

They’re saying, “You should expect more from a company than that. Perhaps we can interest you in buying from us. You know us better. We’re here having conversations with you online. We’re part of your world, and we understand you.”

And then they’re taking your customers right out from under you. But you never even saw it coming. In February of 2010, Chris Geier, the community and social media manager for Redman, Washington-based K2, a business process management software company, posed an innocuous message on Twitter. It read, “Alternatives to Telligent Community Server? Recommendations?” Michael Fraietta was watching. He wasn’t actively following Geier, waiting to pounce the day he decided to shop around for a different community service. Fraietta was just performing his duties as community manager for Jive Software, an enterprise social platform and Telligent Community Server competitor. Part of those duties included checking the alerts from his social media monitoring platform, which included a search for Jive’s main competitors.

When Geier’s mention of “Telligent” hit the Web, Fraietta was instantly alerted to the message. He responded by posting a public Twitter message directed to Geier. (This is called an “at” message because of the @ symbol used to tag the username and notify the user who has mentioned them.) The message was viewable by anyone but notified Geier to see it because his username was mentioned. It said, “@chrisgeier Chris, check out @JiveSoftware for an external community server. Here’s ours, <http://bit.ly/jivespace> - Mike.” In Twitter vernacular, what Fraietta essentially communicated in that simple message was this:

“Hey Chris! Look over here! I saw your tweet about alternatives to Telligent, and this is my response. You should check out Jive Software for an external community server. Here’s a quick link so you can click and see the company’s Twitter profile. You can click on it and go right to the product page. My name’s Mike if you have any questions.”

All this was packed in the message and told Chris everything Mike wanted him to know:

- The “@chrisgeier” syntax told Chris that someone had mentioned him in a tweet.

- Twitter told Chris it was a reply to a previous message and linked to it, for future reference, or even a reminder of what he had previously said.
- The “@JiveSoftware” listing appeared as a hyperlink, so Chris or anyone else could click through to the Jive company’s Twitter page.
- The “<http://bit.ly/jivespace>” link is a shortened URL (web address) that, when clicked, takes Chris (or anyone else) to the Jive product page on the company website.

Geier told us that after seeing Mike’s timely and direct response, he clicked through and investigated. He signed up for a demonstration of the Jivespace software solution and became a qualified lead.

You might think the moral of this story is how Mike Fraietta was paying attention to Twitter and was able to jump on the opportunity presented to him, but it’s not. It’s important, but it’s not the most important one. You might think the moral of the story is how Twitter enables people like Chris Geier to ask their network for recommendations to products or services, but it’s not. It’s important, but it’s not the most important one. You might even think it’s about how Jive had an awesome product that was able to do everything someone like Chris was looking for, but it’s not. It’s important, but it’s not the most important one.

No, the most important moral of this story was the fact that, out of all the people Telligent has working for it, none of them seemed to be watching for their company’s name on Twitter, and thus may have missed the chance to fix Chris’s problem, salvage the relationship, and keep the customer.

So who do you want to be? Telligent or Jive?

Your Audience Doesn’t Trust You Anymore, Anyway

The problem isn’t just that your competition is using social media to woo your customers. It’s that your customers are also talking to people about products and services, instead of talking to you. You have an ulterior motive. The social connections they make online do not.

It’s easy to think your customers should trust you—especially if you’re really good at what you do. The problem is, they don’t. They don’t trust you because you make money when they do.

Put yourself in the role of the consumer for a moment. Let’s say you’re buying a car. You walk onto the lot and from the moment the salesman approaches you, you’re skeptical. And you should be. Salesmen over the years have generally taught us they’ll do anything to make the sale. They’re in it for them, not us.

Social media and technology company Alterian conducted a survey led by Lancaster (U.K.) University professor Michael Hulme in early 2010. They asked 1,000 people in Great Britain and 1,000 people in the United States about their level of trust in a variety of brands and companies.¹

Only 5% of those asked indicated they trusted advertising. Only 9% thought companies always act in the best interest of customers. The survey showed that 58% sampled felt that companies were only interested in selling products to them, not necessarily the product or service that was right for them. Meanwhile, 84% of the Alterian sampling said they use the Internet to find some form of comparison with people they believe to be similar to themselves who are reviewing or talking about the product.

Certainly, we could go on with stats about how word-of-mouth marketing is more effective, how chief marketing officers of companies indicate ratings and review sites as primarily important in their social media efforts, or how your customers don't trust you, but let's step back and look at how this environment of mistrust emerged in the first place.

Picture yourself in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The dot-com era is running high (too high perhaps). Enron is making loads of money (or so it seems) and Arthur Andersen is counting it for them (again, so it seems). Corporate America is on top of the world.

But consumers are angry. A movement is beginning that would result in the National Do Not Call Registry in the United States. (It was implemented in 2004.) XM Satellite Radio, which offered to clear up your radio programming of annoying advertising, was readying for a 2001 launch. Some of the crafty web developers were adding pop-up blockers to Internet browsers and digital video recorders—devices that allowed you to fast-forward through commercials—were appearing at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) for the first time.

Notice a theme?

Shortly thereafter, the bubble burst, as did Enron, Arthur Andersen, and more. Destitute web hopefuls then realized if they were to recover from the ashes of an inflated online market's explosion, there was only one answer: Make it easier for people to get online so a market existed.

Armed with a new consumer's bill of rights, developers and programmers began exploring new ways to get people online. It was no longer about the corporate website or selling things. It was about connecting people, tearing down geographic boundaries, and (sometimes) just seeing what would happen.

August 1999 saw Pyra Labs launch Blogger.com, a publishing platform that allowed people to build and publish their own websites full of web pages in a mechanism no

more difficult than filling out an email subject line and message. With the start of Ryze, a professional social networking site launched in 2001, and later Friendster (2002), online communities beyond seemingly archaic bulletin boards and forum communities began to rise. As more and more discovered the new post-dot-com-burst web, one in which you could not only control your media environment, but also discover like-minded people from around the world without leaving your home office, the new medium of social media took shape.

Today, it's not enough for a website to offer pictures of products. Now customers want to write a review, then share it with a friend. If they have a bad experience with a company, they want to tell their social networks about it. And many of them have built up large communities of followers and friends to share that review with.

Take that promise of user-generated content one step further and see how consumers like Dave Carroll can write a song and record a music video called, "United Breaks Guitars," that brings an entire international airline to its Internet knees (see Chapter 4, "Here's the Secret: There Is No Damn Secret!") and you're looking at a new landscape of customer interaction.

And so is your competition.

Go Ahead, Buy an Ad

You've seen the statistics of social media, but let's also look at the statistics of traditional media. This is probably where you feel more comfortable, but should you?

The cost of participating in social media isn't free. There will be time spent and some hard costs, regardless. But logging on and signing up for a social networking account that allows your customers to engage with you is free. And using some alerts to let you know when people mention your name online doesn't require a financial investment. Compare that to your traditional methods of communicating with your customers and you see why we're bullish on social media for your business.

- Trade show attendance has declined 38% in the last decade while the cost to exhibit has risen 50%.²
- Newspaper advertising revenue fell more than 28% in one quarter in 2008 according to Media post.³ No fewer than 20 U.S. metropolitan daily newspapers have either folded or moved to a hybrid or online-only model since March of 2007.⁴
- Generator Research predicts television advertising will fall more than 75% in the next decade.⁵
- Starting in 2007, radio advertising declined for 14 consecutive quarters.⁶

- From 2008 to 2009, only cable television and online mediums showed audience growth with network television, local television, magazines, and newspapers all in decline.⁷

We're not saying traditional media is dead, or that you should ignore it completely. But you should take a long, serious look at what each channel can produce before you start your "business as usual" spending for your upcoming fiscal year. Remember: It's not always an argument of ROI, but what you get out of the activity.

So while the social media marketing skeptics spend thousands on billboards and millions on TV spots that deliver guestimates as metrics and have little long-term benefit, their competition (and perhaps yours) is building lasting relationships with customers on the social web.

But We're a B2B Company; We Don't Count

And don't think you can get away with the excuse of being a business-to-business (B2B) company. They aren't different animals.

Yes, buying cycles are longer, costs are typically higher, there's (usually) no such thing as a showroom or retail space, and people don't just walk by and consider buying. Sure, it's different in some ways, but there's one critical area where B2B marketing isn't different than business-to-consumer (B2C) or any other kind (if there is another kind).

People don't buy products from a building. They don't buy from a logo. They don't even buy from a company. People purchase products and services for their business from other people. And those other people are human. Humans engage in conversations. Humans frequent social networks. Humans enjoy finding and sharing content with their contacts. We're here to tell you there's no such thing as B2B marketing. It's P2P marketing—person to person. Social media is important for the business customer and those types of customers are using social media:

- 57% of U.S. workers use social media for business purposes at least once per week.⁸
- Social media tools are gaining a "deeper penetration into the enterprise with use by executive managers and IT."
- 59% of B2B buyers are engaged with peers online who addressed their challenges.
- 48% followed online industry conversations on topics.
- 41% followed online discussions to learn more about topics.
- 37% posted questions on social networking sites looking for suggestions or feedback.

- 20% connected directly with potential solution providers via social networking channels.
- 59% shared learning with others through individual discussions, blog posts, discussion forums, and tweets.⁹

In short, even B2B companies can approach social media with a personality. You can have relationships with the people you're selling to. And you can communicate with them in the same way your B2C counterparts are doing it. Several B2B companies have approached social media marketing with a little creativity and have been rewarded with great success.

Destroy Your Printer

Expert Laser Solutions in Southbridge, Massachusetts, is a managed print services provider. They're the people you call when you need to lease a new copier or laser printer, so you can have someone service and stock the machines to save costs and maintenance hassles. Nathan Dube, one of ELS's marketing staff, accepted the challenge of increasing awareness of his company using social media channels.

He didn't fall back on the ho-hum webinar on toner cartridge recycling or even a blog about laser printer technology. Instead, he asked readers of the company blog, followers and fans of the company and Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook, to make videos of themselves destroying their printers. The marketing department comes up with a fun idea that makes customers or potential customers destroy a current product that they'll likely replace by coming to you? Brilliant!

Even with a modest following on the company's respective social networks, the 2009 contest doubled ELS's website traffic and resulted in 100 new inbound links (which helps in search results). The entries were hilarious and even resulted in a recycling magazine profiling the company on a web-TV show.

One company, Telesian Technologies in nearby Worcester, reached out after seeing the contest and hired Expert Laser Services to be their print/copy management provider. The contest was so successful that they did it again in 2010. They now count \$4,000 a month in recurring revenue as a direct result of the contest. For a small business, that's a nice return. The winner won free toner cartridges and a \$100 donation to the charity of his or her choice, which also proves another point: You don't have to spend a lot of money to use social media marketing successfully. The point is that using social media marketing can pay off big time, even if your business is decidedly not sexy. It can pay off for small businesses and even for small investments.

All it takes is a little creativity.

The Shipping Industry Goes Social

London, England-based ShipServ is a leading e-marketplace provider for the maritime global shipping industry. Its vice-president for marketing, John Watton, set out to use social media to improve the company's image and market awareness, drive more website traffic, and attract new sales leads.

ShipServ researched its audience and online behaviors, redesigned its website to provide more customer-focused content, revamped its customer relationship management system to track leads more effectively, and established an online community in a LinkedIn group. Through its content, including blog posts, whitepapers, videos, social networking activity, and e-newsletters, ShipServ turned in the following success metrics:

- Increased web traffic 59%
- Generated more than 1,000 whitepaper downloads
- Cultivated 378 members in the ShipServ Maritime Network LinkedIn group
- Saw LinkedIn and Twitter emerge as top-20 traffic sources for the company website
- Increased contact-to-lead conversion by 150%
- Increased lead-to-opportunity conversion by 50%
- Increased sales-ready leads by 400%

In the end, Watton estimated they would have spent \$150,000 to get that through traditional methods. Using social media over a three-month period, they invested a mere \$30,000.¹⁰

But It Doesn't Have to Be That Complicated

As incredibly productive as a well-planned, measurement-driven social media marketing effort can be, there is still the random act of awesome that makes getting involved even more compelling.

A good example of this involves a small town, a remote car starter, and Jason's mom.

Sara George lives in the small town of Pikeville, which is nestled in the Appalachian Mountains in Eastern Kentucky. During the unusually cold winter in 2010, she decided she wanted a remote starter kit for her car for Christmas.

Jason explored the very few options of car stereo and customization shops in Pikeville, but only one claimed any level of competency in installing such gadgets. He wrote her a check and told her it was for her starter kit

Fast-forward three weeks. Sara logged in to Facebook one morning to see a message from a gentleman named Greg Tackett scroll across her news stream. Small towns are small towns, so it's safe to assume Sara and Tackett had met. They were at least friends on Facebook. Greg's message on that cold, January day was, "Stay warm and get your remote starter today at Greg's Custom Audio, Video & Car Stereo!"

This blatant marketing message was posted on his personal Facebook page. Social media purists would scoff at such an abuse of their precious "community." They would scoff so hard, they'd hurt themselves.

Sara responded, "I'm in the market. I'll call you."

And she did.

One of Sara's more clever co-workers added a comment, "What kind of discount are you giving your Facebook friends?" Greg responded, "Our Facebook friends always get the best deals!" Another commenter said she wanted one too and added, "I would need three," for each of her family cars.

Greg's then-going rate for a car starter and installation was \$350. If each of the commenters who said they were ordering actually did, he pulled in roughly \$3,000 from posting one Facebook message.

Let's make a few assumptions about Greg's efforts and see how he did:

Let's say Greg invested about an hour setting up his Facebook page, and spends about 30 minutes a week on it, but invests no money. He doesn't follow the social media "rules" of keeping business on his brand page and his personal page for personal activity. He doesn't care if he mixes in a marketing message with his other personal interactions on the social network. He has 550+ Facebook friends, and we're pretty certain 75% of them live in Pikeville, Kentucky. He might pass them on the street and say hello personally. They trust him. They know he has to make money through his business. They don't mind the fact that he posts the occasional marketing message on Facebook.

What he performed that cold morning was marketing brilliance: He sent a relevant message to a receptive audience of people who trust him at a relevant time. And one message posted to a receptive audience at the right time grossed \$3,000.

Social media marketing doesn't have to be any more difficult than that.

Do You Want to Be Greg Tackett or His Competition?

The accidental car starter sale isn't an anomaly. You have people in your social networks (online and offline) who trust you. If you were to find that relevant time to send a relevant message to them when they were receptive to it, you'd drive sales, too.

It might be that you happen to run into them the day after someone breaks into their house and they need a security system like the one you sell. Or that you see a contact on Twitter complaining about the service he or she experienced with AT&T and you work with Verizon.

But it can be more focused, calculated, and strategically orchestrated if you want it to be. You can find out where your target audience is spending time online, what content they appreciate and share, and perhaps what kind of community gap exists in their networking world. You might discover there isn't a good place for people in the maritime industry to go for online conversations about international shipping, and so you create and provide it, cornering the market and beating your competitors to the punch.

You can develop extraordinary content for your customers and fill it full of darn good reasons why they should click through and give you their email address to sign up for that webinar, or even buy something from your website. You can track it, too, by pulling some code from your analytics software and installing it on your blog or website.

You can.

Or you can be Greg Tackett's competition. They probably thought Facebook was a stupid waste of time, something only teenagers do. They figured if someone wanted a car starter on a cold day, they'd think one exists and just happen by the shop for an install. Or maybe they thought the ad they took out in the Yellow Pages (you know, the one on page 312 of that big yellow brick that props open the utility room door?) was all they needed to do.

But if they did happen to have a Facebook account on that cold January morning, if they were connected to Tackett, or even Sara George on the network, and logged in that morning, they saw one thing happen right before their eyes.

Their competition kicked their ass.

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Here's the Secret: There Is No Damn Secret!

From the beginning of human communication, and the subsequent advent of communicating for a commercial purpose, people have been conditioned to accept one-way broadcast communication. Send your message out to the masses as far and as wide as you can, and hope that a few of them get it and come to you when they're ready to buy. This is how advertising works in any medium—radio, TV, print, outdoor advertising.

Thanks to interstate highways and increased time spent in vehicles over the last 60 years, our highways are plastered with billboards and advertisements blare from radio stations incessantly. Magazines and newspapers flood us with advertisements and inserts. Many television programs have done away with the opening theme song just to squeeze in one more commercial. Sporting events plaster sponsors all over the stadium. Even public radio and public television, which were once a haven from advertising, now have their “underwriter messages” two, three, and four times an hour.

Consumers are tired of being yelled at with advertising and marketing messages. Social media allows consumers to turn off the broadcasts and simplify their online experience to communicate with other people. Real communication implies each person speaks *and* listens; communication goes two ways between two parties, not one party yelling all the time with the other being forced to listen. Because technology has evolved that enables them to do so, consumers can now turn off the broadcasts and communicate with other people.

As a result, social media forces companies and organizations to be more human in how they communicate with customers.

Social Media Marketing Is Not About Technology, It's About Communication

Social media is about talking to customers in the places where they're spending their time and are willing to listen to you. In Chapter 2, “It's Not Them; It's You!” we talked about how many people were users on various social networks. Everywhere you look, businesses are pushing their Facebook and Twitter accounts in hopes that these millions of people will connect with them through social media platforms. Social media is where people are spending their time.

Many businesses get confused in their approach to social media because they don't understand that social media platforms are built on technology, but are built for communications. The technology is often intuitive and simple for the users. The communications happen naturally because the people performing the task are humans, not computers or even marketing spokespeople. Thinking social media requires some great technology skill set is like thinking you need to understand digital video transfer code to be able to watch a DVD.

Social media platforms are about technology. Social media, and thus, social media marketing, are about communications.

Instead of thinking about websites, widgets, and whiz-bang apps, you should be thinking about listening to conversations, participating in them, developing key talking points, and providing information as a resource to those you converse with.

By grounding your approach to social media marketing in communications, your efforts will bring far better results. Focusing on the technology means you'll wind up in the weeds of the shiny new object and miss the greater opportunity.

Tools Change; the Need for Messaging Won't

Think about your first exposure to social media. Was it Facebook? Mark Zuckerberg didn't invent social networking anymore than Al Gore invented the Internet. In fact, there were other “modern” social networks in use before Zuckerberg created Facebook, like Friendster and MySpace.

From Usenet groups to early chatlike functionality on computer bulletin board systems that evolved in the 1980s, social media and social networks have connected individuals online for decades. Social media didn't begin to migrate into the everyday user's life until it was easier to be online, thanks to user-friendly tools like blogger.com and early large-scale social networks like Classmates.com.

But that migration did not take place because people were looking for ads. It didn't take place because marketers were there. Sure, some sites had banner ads, but marketers weren't populating the core reason you were there: to connect and have conversations with like-minded individuals.

As marketing types saw the migration of their audiences from TV, radio, and print to this new online realm, some began exploring social networks to see if they, too, could join the online party. Some failed and some succeeded, but those who tried learned.

What they learned was that people didn't want to be yelled at with ad messages. They learned that consumers did want information from brands occasionally, but it had to be delivered differently. Walking into a community forum on a social network pushing your marketing message right out of the gates was like walking into a social gathering in a restaurant screaming your recent sale over a megaphone. You were asked to leave pretty quickly.

What they learned was that if you assimilate into the community and build relationships with community members, you eventually earn the right to discuss products, services, and business with community members. Better yet, they learn that you are the right person to talk to when they need those products and services.

So entering an online community or conversation as a marketer isn't such that you don't need messaging, goals, or objectives. It just means that you have to set your expectations of time, volume, and activity differently. You have to watch the crowd from afar, listen to their conversations, and gradually earn trust that you're not there to violate their privacy or take advantage of them. You have to get closer to the group and become a part of it day-by-day, moment-by-moment.

When you spend enough time building those relationships, you learn what the group will tolerate and will not. And you know what? They may not tolerate any marketing on your behalf. But that's okay. You're still a trusted member of that community and those people will turn to you when they're ready to buy.

Notice that in the previous few paragraphs, we didn't mention Twitter or Facebook. We didn't call out blogs or LinkedIn Groups. This is a communications strategy and philosophy. And with regard to the social web, social media, and social media marketing, the approach will remain the same, regardless of which tool is the shiny new community object.

Social Media Is Not an Advertising Medium, but Social Platforms Can Be

So we understand social media users do not want to be advertised to. They've come here to avoid advertisements and being shouted at. This is where they can find peace from commercials for cars, beer, insurance, and cleaning products. Marketers who violate this unwritten "rule" and blast out commercial messages are immediately hammered on by the network's users, until they either apologize and stop, or leave altogether. (There are a few exceptions, but they are by far the exception, and not the rule.)

However, many of these networks do allow for advertising in specific ways, such as on a sidebar. Facebook and other networks sell ads that are targeted specifically to users based on a number of factors, such as geographic location, age, and marital status. Figure 4.1 shows an example of some of these ads. For example, ads for dating sites are only shown to single people, ads for local restaurants are only shown to people who live in that city, and ads for new cars are only shown to people who are not teenagers, who typically don't buy new cars.

Finding target markets is the biggest advertising/marketing benefit of social media. Companies can directly target and reach only those people their products will appeal to. High-end luggage companies can target frequent travelers and road warriors, but ignore homebodies. Public speakers can communicate only with meeting planners. And restaurant owners can target convention goers only on the days they're in town.

Understand that the no advertising "rule" applies to your participation in social networks. But advertisements like those you can place on Facebook, as well as other networks like LinkedIn, are the types of accepted, or at least tolerated, advertising messages in social media. The general population accepts the fact that they'll see some ads in exchange for being able to use the site for free.



Figure 4.1 Facebook shows specific ads to specific users, based on their geographic location, age, and even marital and family status.

Social network advertising, such as Facebook's, is actually much more appealing to the user because of the hypertargeting. Social network users plug in information about themselves to populate their biography on the site. From birthdays to marital status to favorite books to business interests, the network has a lot of user data. By anonymizing that data (and providing users the option to allow the network to use their anonymous data in such a way), sites like Facebook and LinkedIn can allow advertisers like you to drill down your targeting.

If you want to take out a Facebook ad and only deliver it to 35- to 55-year-old men in Dallas, Texas, who list "marketing" as something they're interested in, you can do that. This microtargeting allows advertisers to enhance the efficiency of their advertising by hitting topical relevance points that are generally not possible with other advertising opportunities.

When you take out an ad in People magazine, you have a broad demographic profile. When you take out an ad on LinkedIn, you can deliver it only to CFOs. What you sacrifice in total impressions, you make up for in relevant impressions and higher click-through rates.

Facebook and LinkedIn add an interesting layer of user data, too. Because you can "like" a company on Facebook and "follow" a company on LinkedIn, your

advertising can even be targeted to people who like or follow companies in certain verticals. To a degree, you can use social platform advertising to home in on your competitor's audience.

Erik recently noticed an example of hypertargeting on Facebook. An ad started appearing on his Facebook page for Audible.com, featuring *A Dog's Purpose*, a book written by W. Bruce Cameron (author of *8 Simple Rules for Dating My Teenage Daughter*). Because Erik knows Bruce and is connected to him on Facebook, Audible was able to see the Facebook connection, determine that this Bruce is also one of their authors, and then feature Bruce's book in the ad. The idea is that because Erik knows Bruce, he's more likely to buy an Audible.com subscription to get Bruce's book.

Twitter's advertising opportunities are different and somewhat limited to larger companies with big budgets. You can purchase promoted tweets and be a promoted account on a certain hashtag conversation so your account and name appear at the top of any search for that hashtag. In general, Twitter advertising is interruptive and early reactions from Twitter users have been more negative than positive. But it gets your name and account in front of others, so it has some merit.

Only a few companies of any significance, out of 150 million Twitter users, have had major success by using their Twitter streams as advertising-only options. Dell is the most notable. Its @DellOutlet twitter account promotes sales and overstock items to purchase for discounted rates. Since 2008, Dell has surpassed \$6.5 million in sales from the channel.

But understand that Dell created that channel with the intention of giving buyers an option. Other Dell accounts on Twitter serve as engagement and conversation points, and many Dell employees are available as company contacts as well. (@RichardatDell, @LionelatDell, and @JohnatDell are just three of many customer support and communications staff members on Twitter.)

Other companies, such as New Orleans-based Naked Pizza, mix conversation, retweets, and replies to friends and customers with weekend coupons and deals and measure significant success from doing so.

In both cases—Dell and Naked Pizza—neither company paid Twitter for the right to advertise there. They are communicating opportunities to the networks of followers they've built on the platform. But they understand that building those networks of followers is dependent on a more natural and personable use of the networks as well. They mix conversation and engagement with buying opportunities. Their audience either responds or it doesn't. They learn from experimentation and become more efficient over time.

Does Dell still advertise online? Of course. So does Naked Pizza. But they have figured out more efficient ways of driving sales by building relationships and being present in the conversation with their customers.

So while our traditional marketing training and mind-set may tell us the best way to reach consumers is to join a bunch of networks and blast advertising messages all over the place, hoping to reach a few customers, the proof is in the pudding. Social media audiences want their marketing information delivered differently. They want brands to join the conversation and engage with them, to listen to their wants and needs and become a member of their little online group.

And when you do so as a brand or company, the consumers will respond by turning to you when they're ready to buy. See Chapter 11, "It's All About the Benjamins: Social Media Marketing Drives Sales," for more information on how social media can contribute to your sales efforts.

This Ain't "Rocket Surgery"

Social media is not hard. It can be complex, but as we like to joke, "It ain't rocket surgery." If you're adept at talking with people, then you can handle social media. If you're adept at marketing, then you can handle social media marketing.

Anyone who has run a business or focused on marketing and communicating about a product or service understands strategic planning—setting goals and objectives, creating strategies and tactics, measuring results—and knows that although it's complex, it's not impossible. (If you don't understand marketing and strategic planning, hire someone who does.) Social media marketing is not about learning to use a new tool and knowing a bit of HTML code and being able to syndicate content on blogs and matching Twitter feeds with Facebook posts. Social media is about communicating with people. Knowing that will help you start off on the right foot.

Starting in Social Media Is Like Asking an Investor for Money

The right foot is counterintuitive, however. Your first inclination is to sell first. It's been conditioned in marketer's brains, even explicitly taught, in marketing and sales courses throughout the years. But because social media is grounded in relationship building, social media marketing is too. It's not something you can turn on, put your intern in charge of, and expect to work. Like a good advertising campaign, television commercial, or even successful direct mail piece, successful social media marketing takes time to develop. Think of it in terms of asking an investor for money.

You wouldn't make an appointment with an investor without a business plan and some strategies, would you? You shouldn't jump into social media without similarly arming yourself. Before you get started, you should devise a plan of action and pinpoint possible candidates for the job among your employees. Read Chapter 13, "Assign Responsibility and Be Accountable," to see our take on roles and responsibilities in your social media marketing efforts.

Before you dip your toe into the social media marketing waters, you need to first ask some telling questions:

1. Why are you using social media?

If the reason is, "because everyone else is doing it," you're not ready. Remind yourself of the six things social media can do for your business and walk down the road of planning for a bit first. If you jump in without a good reason, you're not going to be able to measure or justify your time. No goals means no way to measure what you've accomplished.

2. Are you willing to follow the accepted practices?

Are you comfortable with having conversations that, at first, don't seem to have a direct cause-and-effect relationship to making the sale? Can you be satisfied talking to a few hundred or thousand of the right customers rather than hundreds of thousands of those who might or might not be right? Can you step aside from the sales-first mind-set and build relationships over time? Can you participate in social networks (at least the ones you focus on) regularly? Are you willing to invest time and attention to all this?

Can you be transparent? This means you should be honest about the things you're doing, and don't fake it. Producing fake blogs or planting good comments or reviews from anonymous accounts that don't disclose you're a company official is dishonest and, thus, not kosher here.

Being transparent also means that when someone complains about you, let them. Solve their problem for them, tell them publicly you did it (do it in the same place where they complained, so everyone can see you're caring and responsive), and don't retaliate or try to get their comment taken down. That only makes your company look like a schmuck and a bully, and then you have two problems to deal with—your customer complaint and the public perception of you as a bullying schmuck.

3. Who will be responsible for the social media efforts?

Someone needs to own this, and it can't be a committee. You need someone who will deal with all of the tasks associated with social media. Regardless of who it is, you need to know who will build your social

networks, who will communicate on your behalf, who will plan the editorial calendar, and so forth. You also need to know the following:

- Who will respond to customer complaints, compliments, and questions? You need at least one employee who you can trust to speak for the company. It will most likely not be your intern or newest entry-level employee. It should be someone with experience and maturity to handle angry customers, to hold friendly conversations, and to craft persuasive messages.
 - How often will you participate? Ideally, someone will be monitoring your social media networks several times a day. Your customers are on here at different times, so someone should be handling customer communication on an ongoing basis.
 - Are there restricted topics? You should develop a social media policy to lay out all the rules for topics and content. (See Chapter 12, "Remedy Your Fears with Sound Policy.") A social media policy is where you discuss what you can and can't talk about, where you can and can't participate. This is where legal and compliance departments should actually have a lot of input because this is where they're going to save your bacon.
- 4. How will you launch and promote your social media presence?**
- Will you use traditional marketing channels? Will you put the information on your website or send an email notice, or will you just let people trickle in? You'll answer these questions as part of the strategy you'll develop over time, rather than doing it right at the beginning. Launching social media won't be a one-time event. It will be important to let customers know about your new social media efforts on an ongoing basis.
- 5. How will you define and measure success?**
- Believe it or not, this is where a lot of companies fall down. They decide, "we're going to add social media" and then quit a few months later because they didn't see any results. The problem is that they never defined what success was, and so they don't know if the results are worth anything.

In Chapter 1, "Ignore the Hype. Believe the Facts," we talked about how it was rather silly to discuss the ROI of social media before you ever get started. But as we said, that doesn't mean you don't measure social media. You need to choose your goals and define what success looks like. For example, "a successful campaign will result in a 70% increase in web traffic, 10,000 new newsletter subscribers, and a 30% increase in

web sales, within one year.” And if you don’t meet those campaign parameters, then you need to figure out why and whether it can be fixed.

Social Media Marketing Is About Planning and Measuring

Social media is no magic bullet to huge profits. There’s no secret password or handshake that, if you know it, will guarantee success. But there are steps you need to take and best practices you need to follow if you want a chance at success. If you don’t follow them, you might not fail, but you won’t be as successful as you can be.

- **Set goals and objectives**—This is true for anything you want to accomplish, whether it’s a new product or service offering, a new department, or even hiring a single person. You need goals and objectives you want to meet—the end result and how you’re going to meet them. They could be increased sales and profits, higher ROI and reduced costs, or finding the best person available to manage your social media marketing. Your goals and objectives should be realistic and measurable. These could be goals like “increase web traffic by 30% in 6 months” or “reduce customer service calls by 12%.”
- **Create a strategic plan**—After your goals and objectives have been established, you need to know what tools will be needed to reach them, what benchmarks you’ll set along the way, and even knowing who it will take to execute the strategy.

Although you’ll probably want to create a committee to help create and execute the plan, it’s more important to have someone overseeing the entire plan and making sure everyone is doing their part. Committees tend to overanalyze and overthink things like this. Erik knew a university department that spent six months debating what they should do with their social media plan. They didn’t sign up to use a single tool because they debated whether it would even be effective. The obvious solution was to try just one tool and see what happened (but, then again, it was a committee...).

- **Measure the results**—You never know if something is working until you try it and measure it. Erik’s university department could have more easily figured out if they were on the right track if they would have just picked one tool, tried it, and measured the results. Depending on the results they got—based on their goals and objectives—they could have poured more effort and energy into it, held steady, or even dropped it completely.

The great thing about social media is that it is easily measurable. Do you want to measure web traffic? Just check your website’s measurement tools (called web analytics), and see if the number has increased by 30%. Do you want to measure customer service calls? See if the number of calls has indeed dropped by 12% and if the appropriate web traffic has gone up (check visits to the support section or FAQs of the website, visits to customer support blog, articles, and so on).

Social media is often easily and accurately measurable. You can’t say that about traditional marketing, whether it’s TV and radio advertising, print advertising, direct mail, billboards, or even trade shows (see Chapter 5, “Make Some Noise: Social Media Marketing Aids in Branding and Awareness”). Measuring social media is the best way to figure out whether your strategy is working and whether goals are being met.

- **Commit to the process**—Many companies that are unfamiliar with social media follow a two-step process: (1) When we join it, people will show up; followed by, (2) well, we gave it a couple months, and no one showed up, so let’s quit.

Social media marketing is like any other type of marketing: It’s a process. It takes time. If you enter the social media realm, you should allow at least a year before you make a final decision on whether it works or not.

For example, when it comes to starting a corporate blog, it takes at least six months before you’ll start seeing any demonstrable results and successes. Sometimes it will come sooner, but it usually takes about six months of consistent blogging before you see evidence that it paid off. One of Erik’s clients, a manufacturing company in the Northwest, had more than \$200 million in annual sales using a basic Internet sales strategy. But the company realized a 6% increase in sales after following an intensive blogging and social media strategy for an entire year.

Five Mind-Set Shifts That Make Successful Social Media Marketing Managers (and One Caveat)

The answers to these questions will point you in a direction that will inform your plan for social media marketing. But all the planning in the world won’t do much good if you don’t have the proper mindset to follow through with the blueprint. And it’s not just your mindset, but your employees’ too.

The resistance to social media is fairly common in the workplace. The companies that are not using it still outnumber the companies that do use it. But the ones that use it have shifted their mind-set about using it, what they want to do with it, and how it's going to be used.

1. If you want people to trust you, you need to trust them, namely employees and customers. Just as you need to trust your employees, you need to trust your customers to talk frankly about you on your website, as well as on any other. You need to trust that they're doing it already, and trust them to respond appropriately when they're approached by someone helpful from your company. (And if you get people who are unreasonable and refuse to be reasoned with, you need to trust that they were always going to be this much of a jerk, no matter where or how you encountered them.)
2. It's not about the sale; it's about the lifetime value of the customer. Let's say you own a coffee shop that does a fairly brisk business. One customer comes in five times a week, 50 weeks a year, and pays \$4 for a large latte every day. The value of that customer is \$1,000 per year, for as many years as she comes to your coffee shop. If she comes for 10 years, then she has a \$10,000 lifetime value.

What is it worth to take a little extra effort to make sure she stays happy and continues to come back? Maybe give her a free biscotti once in a while, or make her 10th coffee a free one? Would you listen seriously to her complaints if she brought them to you? Maybe you'd even consider her a trusted customer and ask her opinion on a new offering or new drink.

Typically, unless you sell a subscription service, like cable TV, it's difficult to track your repeat customers and loyal fans. You don't know which customers come in to a local retail store and buy your brand of ketchup, shoes, or bathroom cleaner. You don't know which of your customers have sworn by your product for years and tell all their friends about you.

Social media lets you hear from those people, find the people who love your product, and communicate with them accordingly. With some clever marketing, you can figure out how to reach your best customers, see what kind of influence they have on their friends, and even arm them with additional information or incentives to tell their friends.

3. Online is no different than offline. You already know you need to trust your employees to talk to your customers online, but what should they talk about? The same thing they would talk about offline. If salespeople learn about new opportunities via referral, they would follow up with

the new lead and see how they could help solve any problems that person may have.

Your salespeople can use the same process with social media. When it comes to finding sales opportunities, your sales staff could use Twitter or LinkedIn to listen for buying cues, provide solutions to problems, or direct users to a web page that answers a question, or even answer the question directly.

IBM takes an interesting sales and marketing approach with social media. They send "seekers" to blogs, discussion forums, and social networks in the public sector and monitor the discussions that are taking place. Whether someone is looking for a new storage device, talks about replacing a piece of hardware, or even has questions about an RFP, the seeker recognizes those as buying clues. The seeker turns that information over to a lead development rep who calls the prospect and qualifies them, and then passes that lead over to the appropriate sales department, who works with that person in helping them make a new purchase. Although IBM hasn't been specific, the company has found millions of dollars of sales leads through this program, and it is continuing to grow in this area.

That is how you use social media to find and communicate with new customers.

4. There's an audience for everything, but bigger audiences are available beyond the spray. "The spray" refers to the typical marketing and advertising "spray" we're showered with whenever we turn on the TV or radio, drive down the highway, or even read a newspaper online.

Yes, there are people who will respond to regular advertising messages. If there weren't, no one would create them. However, these are people who buy their products based on price, not based on value or on relationships with the company. They're not going to be your loyal customers.

The audience you want to find with social media marketing is a loyal audience of raving fans who will tell their friends about you.

In the DirecTV case, no amount of money thrown at a marketing campaign can equal dozens of happy customers telling their entire Twitter network that they're pleased with their TV provider. The people in that network certainly wouldn't respond to tweets about "Buy 3 room receivers, get the 4th free!" or "DirecTV users can watch the Georgia Tech-Clemson game with our Sports Package for just \$9.95 per month (some restrictions apply)." But they would have responded to their friends talking about how much they have enjoyed their own DirecTV.

5. Measure what matters, not everything you can find.

Some marketers love numbers. They believe that the more numbers they know, the better armed they are. Want to know what day more people come to your website? That could be important. Want to know what hours more people are likely to respond to a tweet or a Facebook ad? The analytics can tell you that. Want to know which city delivered the most traffic from the Netherlands in the last year? You can even know that (but we honestly don't know when or why you would ever need to know that).

Don't fall into the analytics traps of trying to know everything you can figure out. Holland's a great country, but knowing the city traffic sources from a country you don't serve won't do a thing for your sales.

What you need to measure are the goals you previously set. If you said you wanted to increase web traffic by 30%, then check to see if you're hitting it. If you wanted to drop customer service calls by 12%, make sure that's happening. That's where analytics are important; the rest is meaningless, even if it is kind of cool.

6. (The Caveat) Your social media fans are a subset of your customer base.

Despite everything we've said up to this point, please keep in mind that your social media fans are only a portion of your entire customer base. Not every Coke drinker is on Facebook, not every ketchup buyer has a cell phone, and not every iPhone user downloads apps.

We may have made it sound like your entire customer base is lurking on Facebook and Twitter, waiting for you to talk to them, but they're not. Don't get us wrong, there are a bunch of them out there—probably a pretty sizable portion too, given the way social media has been growing.

You might do something that raises hackles and causes big outbursts on social media, but that doesn't mean everyone feels that way. Although your social media fans will get loud, you do have an entire customer base to take care of.

This is where understanding your social media customers' habits and measuring your entire marketing campaign are going to become important, as well as monitoring what people are talking about.

Social media marketing isn't different than other forms of marketing in that regard. All of your customers aren't on one channel or another. Some watch TV. Others prefer reading books. Some read the newspaper and others don't.

As you've migrated to the web to market your business, you've probably discovered that some customers will go to your website and others won't. Some want you to email them specials while some prefer to not share their email address. In this regard, social media is very much the same. Some of your customers will check in to your store on Foursquare. Some will follow you on Twitter. Others may "like" your brand on Facebook. And others won't.

The only way social media marketing really differs from traditional marketing is that it requires you to listen as well as talk, to participate in conversations, and to build relationships rather than just check off sales.

The secret of social media marketing is no damn secret. You just have to be human. And we're pretty certain you know how to do that.