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Make Some Noise: Social Media Marketing Aids in Branding and Awareness

One of the first groups that will lay claim to social media is the marketing department. And that might not be such a bad idea. We're both marketers by trade, so we're going to be a little biased in our support for this argument. Even though other departments in your company could own social media, we believe the responsibility for social media across the organization belongs with marketing.

After all, social media is about communication, and that's all marketing is, isn't it? Most companies communicate with their customers through the following:

- TV ads
- Radio ads
- Newspaper ads
- Billboards
- Brochures
- Trade shows
- Direct mail campaigns
- Websites

A lot of companies don't even make it as far as a website. A website was a big stretch for a lot of companies as recently as five years ago. Even now, only 44% of small businesses have an actual website. The companies that have one might not fully understand how to work it or use it effectively, and they might even outsource the management of it. But they know the world is plugged in and people are looking for websites.

We've reached that point with social media.

One reason is the speed at which social media has been accepted and carried into the mainstream. Businesspeople have a hard time accepting it as anything real because its widespread adoption took a fraction of the time traditional mediums took and they didn't have a chance to watch and learn the way they did with radio, television, or even early versions of websites.

Erik Qualman collected stats that reveal just how quickly social media has caught on. In *Socialnomics: How Social Media Transforms The Way We Live And Do Business*, he wrote about the number of years it took each medium to reach 50 million users:[1]

- Radio: 38 years
- TV: 13 years
- Internet: 4 years
- iPod: 3 years
- Facebook: Added 100 million users in less than 9 months
- iPhone applications: 1 billion downloads in 9 months

Just because it happened fast doesn't make it a fad. It makes it something to pay attention to. So what does this have to do with the marketing department controlling social media?

Everything.

Marketing is all about customer communication, but up until a few years ago, it was all about talking at the customers, through commercials, print ads, billboards, and brochures. The only time marketers talked to customers was at trade shows or in focus groups. Now the customers are able to talk back, and a lot of companies don't quite know what to do about that. It freaks them out. And they're freaking out a little more when they realize their customers are talking with each other, too. Some companies are frightened at the prospect of their customers talking to each other.

We know of one company whose sales staff nixed the idea of sponsoring a social network for its customers. It was afraid their customers would talk about the company's pricing, despite the fact that the customers were already members of an industry trade association and could communicate via email. The company's fear kept it from utilizing a closed social network that could have helped it win future customers because it was too scared of something that was a nonissue.

What that company failed to realize was that its customers weren't prevented from talking about its pricing because it decided against the social network. The customers continued to talk but through back channels and away from the company's watchful, even potentially participatory, eye. By "controlling" the message, the company missed the opportunity to have any say-so in the message at all.

Social media hasn't just wrested control of your message away from the marketing department, it shows that the marketing department never had it in the first place. Now we can see people talking about the company in public channels. Before social networks, blogs, and online forums, those water cooler conversations weren't indexed, searchable, and found by people online. Marketing never controlled your message; your customers did. Marketing was, and is, just along for the ride. The only way it can affect the message in today's socially enabled world is to participate in these conversations, defend the company when it's warranted, and even inject the company perspective if the opportunity presents itself.

Your Brand Is What the Community Says It Is

In their book, *Branding Yourself: How to Use Social Media to Invent or Reinvent Yourself*, Erik and coauthor Kyle Lacy said that a brand evokes "an emotional response to the image and/or name of a particular company, product, or person." In other words, it's how the image or name makes the person feel—anger or happiness, comfort or discomfort.

Marketing guru Seth Godin defines a brand as "the set of expectations, memories, stories, and relationships that, taken together, account for a consumer's decision to choose one product or service over another."[2] The brand is less of a physical object, logo, or even organization. It is a world of images, emotions, and intrinsic values that can only be determined by each individual the brand touches. Your marketing people are going to disagree vehemently because they believe brands are what they make. Brands, in their eyes, are the logos, symbols, color combinations, taglines, sales copy, and all the websites and marketing collateral they spent hours and hours of committee time debating and agonizing over.

But those are only identifiers for your customers, so they can recognize you in a crowd of other logos, symbols, color combinations, and taglines. It's why they should pick your box off of a shelf or how they know to go into your store and not the other guy's. It's how they know what products, services, or companies to tell their friends to try or to avoid.

And social news sites like Reddit.com provide opportunities for customers to influence their friends' buying habits. Reddit is a popular voting website where users can submit stories and then vote on them. The more votes, the higher the story appears on Reddit's pages. The site is so popular it sold to Condé Nast for an unverified amount of money, believed to be in the millions. So when users take an interest in something, it's bound to be seen by thousands of people.

One of the things Reddit readers took interest in was a Greenpeace antiwhaling campaign. In 2007, Greenpeace asked people to name a humpback whale it was tracking as part of its Great Whale Expedition. One of the suggested names was "Mister Splashy Pants," but some Greenpeace whaling advocates hated the name, saying it wasn't "beautiful enough."

Users from Reddit and other social networks thought it was awesome, so they voted heavily for Mister Splashy Pants, and moved the percentage of votes from 5% to 75% of the total in less than a day. More than 20,000 votes came from Reddit.com users. The surprise success prompted Greenpeace to extend the voting for an extra week, and that's when things really took off. Greenpeace said they had never seen traffic on their server reach such high levels. The traffic meant exposure to new audiences and better numbers in people who sign up for enewsletters, donate to their cause, and more. More traffic means more volume of everything, so Greenpeace benefitted, as could your company.

On December 10, 2007, Mister Splashy Pants was declared the winner, gaining more than 78% of the 150,000 total votes. The second-place name was Humphrey, which received 3% of the votes. The other beautiful names? Less than 1% each. Greenpeace not only responded to the loss of control of their whale naming by donning the animal, "Mister Splashy Pants," but even took a cue from its public and developed website calls-to-action labeled, "Save Splashy."

Alexis Ohanian, the founder of Reddit, pointed out that with social media, companies will lose control of their message, which is not such a bad thing. During a speech about the Greenpeace instance he said, "By giving more control and authority to your users they will surprise and impress you."

What Greenpeace did in the case of Mister Splashy Pants was watch its marketing message and connection with its audience get hijacked by an audience it wasn't anticipating to be involved in the effort. Instead of changing the rules, shutting the contest down, or even doing something to motivate the more conservative naming fans to counteract the social audience's response, it embraced the new direction. The audience wanted something the brand perhaps even wasn't sure of, but it trusted them and even allowed the audience to co-own a bit of the brand. That collaboration with fans and customers comes at a small price—the temporary comfort level of your marketing department—but reaps benefits well beyond a small marketing effort like the naming of a whale. People who participated will always feel a sense of ownership in Greenpeace they may not have before.

Co-ownership with customers is a powerful position that Moleskine now knows well. Its notebooks are considered some of the world's best and most popular notebooks. They're easily identified by the black cover, elastic band, and accordion pocket in the back (see Figure 5.1). But the brand alleged to have been used by creative greats like Pablo Picasso, Vincent Van Gogh, and Ernest Hemingway faded out of existence by the mid-1980s.

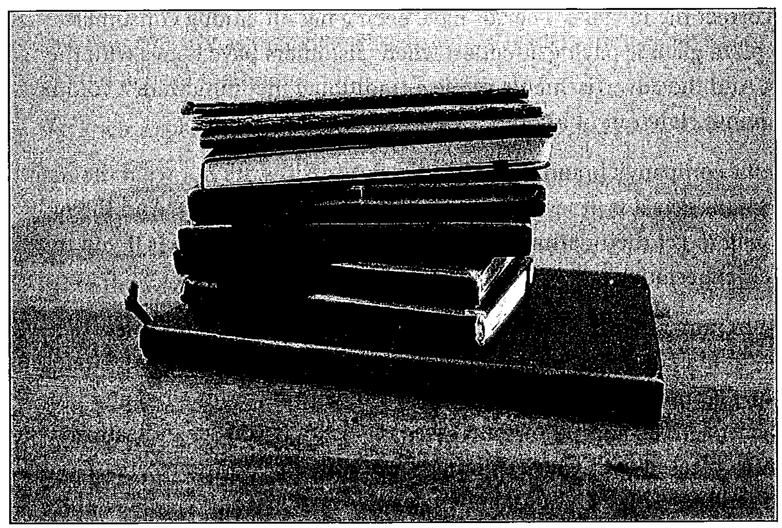

Figure 5.1 Moleskine notebooks engender a lot of passion and support from their fans. To them, the brand "Moleskine" is just as important as the notebook itself.

A small Italian company, Modo & Modo, decided to relaunch the Moleskine notebook in 1997. They ended up launching a notebook craze that has seen rapid growth and use of the little black notebooks in the last 13 years. But what's interesting about Moleskine is that they let the users define the message about the notebooks, even going so far as to adopt some of the recommendations their customers made in conversations on the site.

One Moleskine fan, Armand B. Frasco, even started a blog community at Moleskinerie.com, where fans could gather and discuss the different uses of the notebook, show off their different photos, art, and usability hacks, and even discuss the best pen to use in the classic notebooks. The company was watching. And listening. They remained responsive to ideas shared on Moleskine about the product, letting the site's community provide ideas for giveaways, promotions, and more. The community was so important to Modo & Modo's market research and even marketing efforts, it eventually bought the blog from Frasco. It continues to maintain the blog today, much in the spirit of giving fans a place to share and collaborate.

Domino's Pizza is another example of letting customers define who they are, but one that even took cues from the social media world and translated them into traditional advertising. After the company was embarrassed in early 2010 by a YouTube video of two North Carolina store employees desecrating a customer's order, it responded by changing its mainstream advertising messages to emphasize the company's responsiveness. Television advertisements featured photos sent in by customers of poorly delivered pizzas, then company executives apologizing and taking steps to correct the mistake. The ads have been a big hit among consumers, showing the pizza giant is paying attention when customers have issues with the organization. And the advertisements, while a traditional medium, were a communications response right out of a social media marketing playbook.

Ultimately, your company's brand is not what you think it is. It's not what the marketing department says it is. It's what your customers believe it to be. And the only way you're going to get their definition and your definition to match is if you meet or exceed their expectations.

It's important to remember that because your brand is what your customers believe it is, you need to make sure it's what your customers want it to be. It's not enough to give them a quality product or great service anymore. If they want a red and blue widget instead of a green and yellow one, give it to them. If you see indications your customers aren't pleased with your customer service, make your representatives kill them with friendliness, high-fives, and uber-positive responses.

Because if you do, they're going to tell their friends about how awesome you are, and do your marketing for you. And if you don't, they're going to tell their friends about how badly you suck, and do your competition's marketing for them.

Of course, traditional marketers don't have traditional metrics to measure that kind of word-of-mouth marketing, so they tend to ignore it, taking shelter in the numbers they can explain.

Traditional Marketing and Its Metrics Have Lied to You for Years

A big problem companies have with social media is that they can't measure it using old-school marketing techniques. Traditional marketers expect to see old-school numbers in social media, hoping to gain millions of viewers, tens of thousands of listeners, and thousands of readers.

They believe that, based on the numbers of TV viewers, radio listeners, and newspaper readers, they can get a pretty good estimate of how many people watched the show, listened to the station, or read the paper where their ad was placed.

Here's how the typical argument goes:

1. Ten million people watched this program.
2. Our ad was on that program two times.
3. Therefore, our ad was seen by ten million people two times.

These traditional marketers dismiss social media with a sniff of derision and a wave of their hand because their social media outposts only have a few thousand fans; this is not nearly as many viewers/listeners/readers they believe are responding to the old-school method.

But their expectations are too high. They've been lied to by traditional marketing and PR people. Here's what we mean.

Let's say a company wanted to advertise a new product on the Golf Channel. They check out the Golf Channel's website, which says the network has a global reach of more than 120 million homes, and believe that if they run an ad on the Golf Channel, their ad will be beamed into 120 million homes.

But look again at the exact wording they use. The Golf Channel is beamed into 120 million homes around the world, but that doesn't mean it's watched by 120 million people. Not even close. According to the Golf Channel, there are 26.2 million golfers in the United States alone. Although that's nowhere close to 120 million, is it safe to assume there are 26.2 million Golf Channel viewers?

Not even close.

The Golf Channel's average daily viewership is around 77,000. That's not "a global reach of more than 120 million homes." But the Golf Channel can't sell advertisers on

77,000 average daily viewers. Why? Because traditional marketers have been promised millions of viewers, tens of thousands of readers, and thousands of listeners.

But the Golf Channel isn't alone in all this. Newspapers and magazines do it all the time. They like to boast about print runs, but rarely mention readership. Radio's Arbitron ratings and TV's Nielsen ratings are based on surveys and estimates, not actual numbers of viewers.

And this is the problem. There is not a completely accurate way to measure the number of viewers on a TV channel, but marketers like to think they're reaching more than 120 million homes. This is why measuring traditional marketing and PR is actually quite difficult. We're being told we need to pay attention to one set of numbers, but it turns out the numbers are not even realistic.

When those traditional marketers turn their attention to social media data—numbers that are much more defined because in an all-digital medium, counting things is scientific, not guesswork—they're deflated. Since they're used to inflated and hypothetical numbers that have set unreasonable expectations, the real numbers of how many people interact with online content seem infinitely low. It's easy to convince a CEO that spending $100K on an ad buy on the Golf Channel is worth it when you can say, "It has a global reach of 120 million people." It's a challenge to make that CEO happy when talking about spending $100K on a social media initiative that, if successful, might drive a few hundred thousand people to sign up for your email newsletter or share a review of your product with their friends.

Why We Can't Measure Traditional Marketing and PR

Public relations, traditional marketing, and the mainstream media people like to say they can measure what they do by measuring sales, web views, column inches, and so on. They run some ads, put up some billboards, place a few stories, and look for a spike in sales.

In public relations, the common practice of "measuring" success is to count the number of column inches or airtime gained through story placement, measure the cost of the advertising costs based on the column inches or airtime (usually at the standard, nondiscounted rate), and come up with the "value" of the press they received. If sales went up after a particular block of TV ads or a placement of their product in some major newspapers, they say, "Look, we made sales go up." If sales don't go up, they say, "Well, it's a work in progress, but hey, at least we got this much 'value' in earned media."

The same is true for advertising. Commercials are produced, ad space is purchased, and Nielsen and Q-Scores are pored over. "Look!" they shout, "our show was viewed by three million people," but they can't be sure whether 2,950,000 of those viewers were in the bathroom when the ad was shown. So when you ask the advertising

department to accurately measure the sales and return on investment (ROI) of the communications effort, they explain that advertising is more of a top-of-mind-brand-building exercise that's more art than science.

And don't forget trade shows. You spend anywhere from a few thousand dollars to more than $30,000 for a major trade show. You hire a booth designer, hire a display firm to put up your display, and collect dozens of business cards, which your staff forgets to follow up on or put into a customer relationship management (CRM) system. And the hundreds you spent on giveaways were a success because you gave most of them away, but you didn't track who received them. When sales don't go up (mostly because the contacts aren't in the CRM system, and no one called them after three months), you call the trade show a failure. When a few people do call your company first, and the salespeople remember them from the show, you think maybe the show was worth going to, and so you're willing to do it again.

We don't mean to pick on traditional marketing. They really do have a tough time measuring the cause and effect of their work. Did the latest block of ads cause sales to increase, or was it the end-of-summer discount? Did the newspaper articles lead to increased product sales, or did a client finally make a major purchase at the beginning of her new fiscal year? Did sales tank after the trade show, or do you typically have a long sales cycle? Traditional marketers can never be entirely sure.

Although we agree that the PR and advertising campaigns are the most likely culprits for increases in sales in the previous examples, we can't be absolutely sure. Which commercial on which station at what time was the most effective? Was it the one with the two guys in the hot air balloon airing during prime time, or was it the one with the talking lizard during the play-off game? Was it the short story in the major metro newspaper, or was it the longer story in the chain of small-town newspapers? Most marketers can't be sure which part of the campaign was the successful one and which part flopped. Knowing this would be helpful because it would help them figure out which parts they could trim to make their marketing dollars go that much further.

Traditional marketing just can't tell us that 10% of January's sales happened because of the ads and not the newspaper articles, or that the radio commercials are doing better than the billboards. And there is nothing but surveys and educated guesses that say you need to focus more attention on radio because it had the highest ROI for this particular campaign. But all is not lost. You can measure social media marketing!

Why We Can Measure Social Media

The great thing about social media is that, unlike traditional channels, there are all sorts of tools to measure its effectiveness. Although the numbers don't run in the millions, or even the hundreds of thousands, companies can see hundreds, and even thousands, of rabid fans who flock to a website and make a purchase.

We can actually demonstrate that blog post A led to a spike in sales on Monday, and a Facebook campaign launched on Friday did absolutely nothing.

But the lower numbers of people visiting or seeing the blog post—12,000 is not 120 million, after all—mean that a lot of traditional marketing people are ignoring social media. Thousands are not nearly as sexy as millions, so no one wants to spend a lot of time dealing with these numbers.

So classically trained marketers and business people write social media off, without realizing that their big expensive TV ads did not reach most of their intended audience anyway, or that most of the people came to the website because of a previous relationship with the company and not because they passed a billboard on the highway.

However, web measurement tools like Google Analytics let social media marketers not only track how many visitors came to their website, but they can also provide the following information:

- What pages they visited, such as a sales or product page.
- What pages they came from, such as blog posts, web articles, online ads, or Twitter messages.
- How long they spent on a site.
- What page-to-page path they followed. Did they take the planned-out sales path?
- What search terms brought them to your site.
- What part of the country they came from.
- What time of day they showed up.

So, imagine being able to determine the following: Customer A comes to your website and purchases three items online. By looking at the web analytics, you can see that she showed up at 11:52 a.m. from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 10 minutes after your marketing department posted a tweet. (You can even confirm that she clicked the particular link they sent.) She went straight to the page, looked at an FAQ page, went to the catalog page, and then placed the order.

Customer B arrives at the website because of a Google search at 12:37 p.m. from Orlando, Florida. He spends 5 1/2 minutes on a blog post that describes how to fix a common problem most potential customers face. (You can also see that it's one of your most popular blog posts.) Customer B goes straight to the order page and orders five items to help solve that problem and to prevent it from happening again.

Compare that with measuring traditional advertising and marketing methods:

You run TV ads for $80,000 in six major cities. Your sales for those cities increase, which shows that the advertising works. But you have no way of knowing which ads at which times on which stations prompted the purchase, or whether all of your new customers even saw the ad. With social media and activity online, you can spend $80,000 designing a campaign that focuses on six major cities and track how many people visit, convert, and even then advocate for your product or service. You can even divide those numbers and see how many came from each city.

Compare Costs Between Social Media and Traditional Media

Real estate giant Century 21 took a big step in 2009 when it dropped its traditional marketing channels, like TV advertising, and set up a presence on social media, focusing on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. More recently, the Realtor launched a blog and an iPhone app.

Century 21's CMO Bev Thorne admitted the decision was very controversial. She believed it was the right thing to do, saying in an interview that "television was no longer providing any real tangible benefit for our brand."[3] Thorne said she realized it did not make any sense to put money into a medium to build brand awareness because 94% of homebuyers start their search online. The Realtor's ultimate goal was to drive homebuyers to Century 21 brokers and agents, and social media could do a much better job of it than traditional TV advertising. Thanks to websites such as Realtor.com, Homes.com, and Zillow.com, interested homebuyers can get a look at homes for sale, see their prices, get a virtual tour of the inside of the houses, and even get questions answered about schools and local hospitals. Before these online tools were available, buyers would have to find a real estate agent to tell them about a house, let them see inside, and answer all their neighborhood questions. Now that these, and many more, online tools are available, many Realtors are being forced to embrace social media.

Although Century 21's decision was not a popular one in the traditional channel, corporate world, it was successful. In the first year of its digital strategy, the real estate giant increased sales leads by 65% and decreased the cost per lead by 50%. In the following year, the Realtor increased leads by another 40% and cut its cost per lead by another 33%. In other words, more people are interested in buying houses from Century 21, and Century 21 is spending less money to reach these buyers, but with greater success than they ever did with traditional marketing methods.

Before we go on, we want to stress that we are not suggesting you should replace traditional marketing with social media. That would be crazy. Although measures in traditional channels are not as specific or defined as they are in the digital realm, you can still reach a large audience using largely consumed media. More people will watch your television commercial than are likely to see your tweet. Social media marketing delivers a more relevant and interested audience, however. Instead of blasting a message to the masses hoping it reaches an audience that is interested, social media marketing helps you gather an audience that is interested in hearing your message.

So don't give up on traditional channels. Instead, add social media to your marketing toolbox. Remember that social media marketing is more about a two-way (or multiple-way) line of communication. It is different than traditional channels. Use those mechanisms to invite customers to connect with you on more intimate level. If you have TV ads, post them on YouTube. If you use direct mail, refer people to your website. Your radio commercials should tell people to check out your Facebook page.

But analyze the cost effectiveness of reaching audience members across your marketing efforts and optimize around what works best. Does direct mail drive more leads or sales than a radio campaign? Compare the costs and benefits and streamline your marketing efforts—including your social media marketing efforts—to ensure you're getting the best bang for your buck. Understand that not all of your customers will be reachable through all channels, so diversifying the touch points you target to reach your customers is important. But stupid is as stupid does. If one or more channels isn't proving valuable, move that money to one that is.

Although we don't want to run through a social media budget, or delve into the costs of traditional marketing channels (thousands of dollars), there are some basic considerations you should factor in when comparing social media and traditional marketing costs.

What Traditional Marketing Costs

If your company is large enough to have an in-house marketing department that can create your ads, you're paying salaries to your creative team. If you outsource everything, you're paying several thousand dollars per month or more just to have your creative team on retainer.

TV and radio commercials have production costs, billboards incur production and placement costs, and direct mail needs printing and postage. You might end up paying even more for specialty pieces, such as hiring a video production company to shoot a high-end TV ad or licensing a piece of music for a commercial.

Of course, there are media placement costs, too. TV commercials can cost anywhere from less than $100 to more than $100,000 for a single placement, depending on the market, the channel, and the time of day. (And remember, the viewing/listening/reading/open rate for traditional marketing is almost always calculated at less than 10%, and more often than not, less than 5%, of an estimated audience, not an actual audience, so you can never really be sure of the real numbers.)

And this is before you get into research and development, production, sales, or distribution of the actual product.

What Social Media Marketing Costs

Social media needs a couple of people: someone who knows web design and someone who knows marketing. (By marketing, we mean understanding message creation and how to move your target audience with those messages. We'll discuss why this person is typically not a fresh-faced college grad in Chapter 13, "Assign Responsibility and Be Accountable.")

Other than that, costs are minimal. The important social networks—Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and blogging—are all free to use. Web analytics tools are free. Social media analytics tools can cost a few hundred dollars per month and are optional for smaller companies, but crucial for larger companies. You can start to spend money as you get deeper into social media, but even that is measured in hundreds, not thousands, of dollars per month.

That's it—nothing else. Throw in the standard computer costs, desk space, and salary for your employees, and you have enough to launch a social media campaign. Or, you can outsource it for anywhere from several hundred to several thousand dollars per month. That much money won't buy you 10 seconds of ad time on a national network, but it will let you reach thousands of your exact target audience directly.

In 2008, Cisco was already a major proponent of social media, with 22 blogs (each gaining 475,000 views per quarter) and accounts on Facebook (100,000 fans), Twitter (2 million followers), and video-sharing site YouTube (2,000+ videos with 4 million views). But the company had never used social media for a product launch, so the sales team decided to do it with a new piece of equipment, the Aggregated Services Router, aimed at network engineers.

In a typical product launch, more than 100 Cisco executives and journalists would fly in from 100 countries to San Jose, California, where they would be handed a paper press release. The marketing team would also place print ads in major business newspapers and magazines. Instead, Cisco decided it was going to meet its users in their online worlds, on virtual gaming sites like Second Life, where they could build an online auditorium, and invite people to "sit in" on the press conference and demonstrations. It even held a concert that featured eight bands in seven hours that users could listen to while they were on Second Life. In addition, Cisco used YouTube videos, videoconferencing, video datasheets, an online discussion forum, and a Facebook users group to tell people about the new router. All told, the launch reached 9,000 people, which was 90 times more than they have reached in past launches, and Cisco considered it one of the top five launches in its history.

The net effect was more coverage for less money and lots of audience time saved. Not only did executives save themselves a few hours of time by recording a video presentation, but print ads were replaced with industry media coverage, which netted 1,000 blog posts and 40 million online visits. Best of all? They pulled it off for one-sixth the cost of a traditional launch (and saved 42,000 gallons of gas in transportation costs).[4]

The moral of the story? Go to where your customers are, rather than making them come to you. Speak to them in their language instead of yours. Do the things they like to do instead of making them do what you like.

Social media won't reach millions of TV viewers in 30 seconds. But, social media will let you reach your audience directly and influence their buying behavior directly—by letting your people connect with other people online, joining them where they already are, speaking to them in their own environments, and not interrupting their day.

The 500 Million Water Coolers Are Now One Big One

Since when did the customer become so knowledgeable about your product or service? Most executives ask that very question when seeing what customers are saying about their brand online. What makes them an authority on your product, let alone able to tell other people about it?

The answer is their honesty and willingness to talk about their experiences. Friends trust their opinions because they know the person in question doesn't have a financial stake in whether someone buys the digital camera they recommend. These friends also have knowledge of the customers' expectations and requirements. In contrast, the customers might have a general lack of trust in the marketing departments of the world's companies.

In *Socialnomics: How Social Media Transforms The Way We Live And Do Business*, Erik Qualman shows marketers why trust in companies and brands is so important:

- 25% of search results for the world's top 20 largest brands are links to user-generated content. User-generated content includes consumer comments and reviews on websites.

- 34% of bloggers post opinions about products and brands. Their readers are usually people who trust them or are looking for an unbiased source of information.
- 78% of consumers trust peer recommendations. More than three-fourths of the people trust recommendations from people like them, not professionals.
- Only 14% trust advertisements. The thousands you spent on creating the ad, which will only be seen by a fraction of the audience, is only trusted by a fraction of those viewers.
- Only 18% of traditional TV campaigns generate a positive ROI. In other words, you spent tens of thousands of dollars and only made part of that back.
- 90% of people who can TiVo do. People then watch the recorded shows and skip the ads you spent tens of thousands of dollars on.

Basically, companies are spending thousands of dollars to reach customers through traditional advertising, but consumers are trying to avoid those advertisements, and only a fraction of the consumers who actually see the ads trust those ads.

This may go a long way in explaining the 18% ROI on those traditional TV campaigns.

Meanwhile, consumers trust their friends' recommendations more, and they're communicating with them. More importantly, they're communicating with them publicly on social media. A woman tells her friends on Facebook that she and her family had a great time at a restaurant. A friend responds that he had a lousy time the last time she was there, and 30 people all chime in to the discussion talking about the last time they each visited that restaurant. Some people say they'll try it because of the woman's message; others promise never to go because of the friend's bad experience. But none of them will try it because of the TV ad, because most of them skipped it, and the rest don't trust it.

Other social media tools exist for customers to share their experiences as well. Social sites focused on restaurants, stores, hotels, coffee shops, vacation resorts, and more exist. And other tools exist to pull them all into one convenient location.

For example, Google Local will not only give turn-by-turn directions to a new restaurant on a mobile phone, it will also collect and share reviews on different reviewer websites like Yelp.com and Urbanspoon. The customer can decide whether to visit the restaurant based on the feedback she finds, and after her visit, leave feedback of her own for the next customer to read. Because the social consumer trusts third-party recommendations over brand marketing copy, these reviews on niche networks are critical to your branding and awareness. Keeping an eye on them and ensuring dissatisfied customers have their issues addressed is a must-do for local and review-driven businesses.

But even for larger businesses, the reviews and ratings sites—even niche sites only have a small number of people frequent them—are important to know, watch, and perhaps even be active on. The social consumer is watching your every move as a brand or company. While not all of them can damage your brand or fan the flames of negative awareness, not knowing what's out there can certainly prove detrimental to your branding and awareness efforts.

Putting Metrics Around Branding and Awareness

Like we discussed earlier, it's possible to measure social media success and failure, showing which social networks and messages are resulting in increased sales and market share and which ones are not very effective. The tools range from subscription-based platforms that require a monthly fee to free sites that provide a minimal level of data collection from your social efforts. With these tools, you can glean a lot of valuable information about your social media marketing program:

- Social media monitoring tools like Radian6, Alterian SM2, and Sysomos can not only find the different things your customers are saying about you, but they can also measure the sentiment and the mood of those messages. For example, if a customer complains—"My hamburger from Big Bob's sucked!"—these tools can flag this as a negative sentiment so the appropriate people will see it and can hopefully rectify the situation.
- Influence measurement tools like Klout and Twitalyzer show marketers who the influencers in their industry are. When a blogger or Twitter user with a high Klout score, which roughly translates to having high influence, says something positive about a company, the marketing team will certainly want to know about that. They can take further steps to help turn the blogger into a raving fan. Providing free products for review, inviting the blogger to be a part of a focus group, or even just a thank-you note from the company can go a long way in cementing that relationship.

Here's how this works: A luggage company begins a social media campaign and uses Radian6 as a way to monitor the social media chatter. A frequent traveler and owner of the luggage company's product sends out a tweet or asks a question on a travelers' forum. "How do I change the wheels on my Lift-n-Tote rolling suitcase? Do I need a special tool?"

A representative from the luggage company sees the message via Radian6, even if he has never been on the forum or is not following the customer on Twitter. The representative jumps over to the forum or sends a responding tweet, answers the question, includes a link to buying the wheel replacement kit online, and makes the customer happy. Not only did she get her question answered, but she feels like the company listened to her.

The same company is also monitoring their competitors' name brands in Radian6. Someone sends out a tweet that says, "My new Duffel Drag sucks! The handle snapped off after only three days, and I need a replacement quick."

The luggage company representative has a couple of choices he can make: Send a response that says, "That's too bad. If you stop by the Lift-n-Tote store in your area, I'll arrange a 20% discount for you," or he could send a brochure and coupon to the Duffel Drag owner's home.

By monitoring the social media conversation, a company can keep abreast of what people are saying about its brand and even its competitors, rather than being caught off guard. It lets a company determine what kind of response its marketing team should give and which one would be the most effective.

But the one thing that should never happen is measuring whether a customer is "worth" responding to.

Klout is a way to measure the influence score of customers who are on Twitter. Some companies have begun using this to see whether a customer has enough influence to warrant a response or whether he or she is safe to ignore. The problem with this approach is that influence scores are only a measurement of how influential someone is online, and not in real life.

Erik's wife, Toni, has a relatively low Klout score, about a 21 out of 100. It's enough to earn her the rank of "Explorer," which is only slightly higher than someone who just signed up for Twitter two weeks ago. If she lodged a complaint on Twitter, and a customer service representative checked out her Klout score before responding to the complaint, he might dismiss her out of hand as someone who is not very influential. After all, Toni only has a few hundred followers, and she doesn't tweet that often, so she must not have a lot of sway with her network, right? But actually, Toni carries a high amount of influence among her family and friends.

Six years ago, Toni and Erik bought a new Scion xB as a family car. She was so impressed with the car, she gushed about it to her family. Within three months, she referred her parents to her Scion dealer, and they bought an xB and an xA. She also referred her sister and husband to the same dealer, and they bought two xAs.

Now, according to Toni's Klout score, she is someone a numbers-focused rep would immediately ignore. But she is also someone who directly influenced the purchase of four new cars within a three-month period, all with the same dealer, and even with the same salesperson.

The moral of the story is this: Just because someone has a high Klout score doesn't mean she is necessarily influential. And just because she has a low score doesn't mean she isn't influential at all. Although someone with a high Klout score might reach a lot of people, that doesn't mean she can get those people to make major buying decisions. It sometimes just means she can get people in her network to click a link to a new blog post or to see a new picture or video, not buy a new car.

It also means that someone with a low Klout score still has people in her life who love and trust her. And if that person recommends her family or friends buy a product or service, chances are, they'll buy it. And if she recommends her family or friends avoid a company or brand, chances are, they'll avoid it.

Analytics tools are a great way to measure the influence of people in a social network, but they shouldn't be used to pick and choose who you're going to be nice to or help. If nothing else, these people might know someone who does have a high influence and enlist her help in making their situation public. Reaching out to influencers in a community is a great way to build your network. (We'll discuss this more in Chapter 8, "The Kumbaya Effect: Social Media Marketing Builds Community.")

Although we could devote an entire chapter to the flawed thinking and metrics behind many social media influence scores as well, we won't. Suffice to say that each measurement tool, especially those that claim to rank and deliver influencers for your outreach and targeting efforts, has different ways of looking at influence. Klout earned due criticism when it first appeared because it only measured Twitter. Influential people not signed up for the service, like noted author Malcolm Gladwell for instance, didn't have much clout, according to the site's rankings. This is a ridiculous notion.

What these tools do provide is a layer of measure and statistics to add to your decision-making for social media marketing efforts. Influencer ratings like Klout, measurement aggregators like SWIXhq, and even the measures you can pull out of Facebook Insights or monitoring platforms like SocialMention.com or Sysomos, add context and depth to your branding and awareness efforts. Sure, some of them can provide a neat nugget statistic your CEO will enjoy telling his or her friends, but none of these platforms alone should drive your thinking.

What should is focusing on your objectives and measuring activity that proves or disproves you're moving the needle on them. That is true for measuring your branding and awareness efforts. It is perhaps more true for social media marketing efforts focused on building community.

Endnotes

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6

It's Your House: Social Media Marketing Protects Your Reputation

In March 2010, candy giant Nestlé received a crash course on social media, when it was pummeled on its Facebook page by protestors and critics who were loudly complaining about Nestlé's use of palm oil from deforested areas in Indonesia.

And in one, fell swoop, the chocolate giant learned what every company needs to know: Social media presents a need for a different type of crisis communications. The company created the fan page on Facebook so its fans could talk about their favorite Nestlé products and see announcements about new candies. Waking up one day to see a bombardment of complaints about unethical practices wasn't what the company had in mind for its social media efforts. They weren't prepared.[1]

The comments were part of a Greenpeace campaign against Nestlé that launched that same week, following a report that said the candy giant was buying palm oil from a supplier that was responsible for deforestation in Indonesia and the deaths of thousands of orangutans.[2] Comments from page visitors ranged from why they quit buying Nestlé products to displaying altered Nestlé logos, such as retooling the Kit Kat logo into Killer (see Figure 6.1) or stamping bloody orangutan prints on the traditional corporate logo.

Figure 6.1 Protesters on the Internet had a field day using their graphics skills to retool the different Nestlé logos to draw attention to their campaigns.

Pop Quiz: If you're a large multinational brand that is being hammered by thousands of activists and protesters from around the world, what would you do?

A. Have an open dialog with the protesters and organizers about their concerns.

B. Launch a full-out attack with attorneys and sternly written cease-and-desist letters.

C. Nothing.

D. Turn the response over to a junior-level person who was tasked to handle a community page on the world's biggest social network.

Not too surprisingly, choices B and C are the ones most companies follow, which only makes the problem worse. But Nestlé chose option D. It's most memorable response, and one that is often cited as a big "Don't" in crisis communication seminars, was "...we welcome your comments, but please don't post using an altered version of any of our logos as your profile pic—they will be deleted."

This set off a huge thunderstorm of responses. The Nestlé spokesperson got into an argument with fans who were upset that Nestlé focused on the nitpicky details of an altered logo, rather than discussing the more important issue of Indonesian deforestation and animal slaughter. Here's what some of the comments and responses started to descend into:

> **A Facebook Fan:** "Not sure you're going to win friends in the social media space with this sort of dogmatic approach. I understand that you're on your back-foot due to various issues not excluding palm oil but social media is about embracing your market, engaging and having a conversation rather than preaching!"
>
> **Nestlé:** "Thanks for the lesson in manners. Consider yourself embraced. But it's our page, we set the rules, it was ever thus."
>
> **Another Facebook Fan:** "Freedom of speech and expression."
>
> **Nestlé:** "You have freedom of speech and expression. Here, there are some rules we set. As in almost any other forum. It's to keep things clear."
>
> **A Third Facebook Fan:** "Your page, your rules, true, and you just lost a customer, won the battle and lost the war. Happy?"
>
> **Nestlé:** "Oh please...it's like we're censoring everything to allow only positive comments."

And it only got worse. After hundreds of people expressed their outrage about the extinction of orangutans, the page administrator responded, "Get it off your chest—we'll pass it on." Messages were deleted, both from commenters and the administrator, if they were argumentative, contained altered logos, or were generally negative and nasty.

Finally, for whatever reason, the administrator realized the company was being snowed under with comments, and his own vitriol was not only adding fuel to the fire, it was also bringing in more attention as people who were leaving comments went to their own social networks and asked their friends to get involved. It finally reached its peak when the national and international media started paying attention to the Facebook fight (see Figure 6.2).

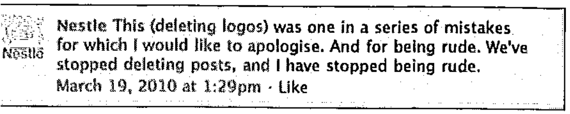
Nestle This (deleting logos) was one in a series of mistakes for which I would like to apologise. And for being rude. We've stopped deleting posts, and I have stopped being rude.
March 19, 2010 at 1:29pm · Like

Figure 6.2 The Nestlé Facebook administrator realized he was not winning any friends and was creating more problems than he was solving. The commenters didn't necessarily stop being rude, but the administrator did stop adding fuel to the fire.

Eventually, after two months of constant onslaught and global attention, Nestlé announced it was no longer buying palm oil from companies that destroyed rain forests, and Greenpeace declared its campaign a success.[3]

But the concession did not come without a price. Nestlé's reputation was tarnished online, and the company completely lost whatever control it thought it had over its social media network. A year later, the page has more than 180,000 fans, and the activism has not stopped. Although people have stopped talking about the campaign, Nestlé only seems to use the page for announcements and not for interacting with fans. Meanwhile, every announcement the company makes is met with more statements of outrage about how Nestlé supports slavery and genocide in Africa, calling on them to cease doing trade with the Ivory Coast, and any other controversial issues Nestlé might be associated with, even on the periphery.

However, Nestlé employees are taking matters into their own hands, sort of. Some employees will post messages saying they work at a Nestlé plant in a particular city or country, but that's it—nothing more than "I work at Nestlé in El Salvador" or "I work 4 Nestle Kenya." Although this might attempt to counter the negative comments, it doesn't make much of an impact. But the corporation refuses to engage with the complainers directly on any issue.

Although this is not a dumb choice, given the furor that arose in 2010, it's also not a smart choice. It means they're not really participating in conversations on their Facebook page at all, and they are giving people the chance to hit it with more negative comments. It means they have given protesters a chance to air their grievances without responding to them, which only tells the protesters this is a safe place to attack the company without any concerns about rebuttals or being contradicted.

This brand attack can—or at least should—elicit a crisis communication response from a PR professional who works to contain the negative publicity about their employer and the brand they've spent years creating and building.

Obviously, we don't want your company to be a mini version of Nestlé. By anticipating negative comments, even public outcries about your company, product, or

service, you can avoid much of this type of negative interaction. By understanding the nature of social conversations, their viral potential, and what it takes to inject your position into a firestorm of detractors in an effective way, you can be a savvy crisis communicator for the twenty-first century.

What Is "Crisis Communication"?

Crisis communication means different things to different people. To former crisis communicators like Erik, who was once the risk communication director for the Indiana State Department of Health, it means communication during a public emergency. More commonly known as Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC; that's government speak for you. Why use two words when four will suffice?), it means communicating as much information as possible to fully inform the citizens of an affected area. To PR professionals, crisis communication means communication during a company crisis with the media—and increasingly, the public—through social media. This corporate crisis communication becomes necessary during product recalls, brand attacks like the one Nestlé experienced, or political crises, like a politician or business CEO-lebrity caught in a compromising position with someone who is not his spouse.

CERC and corporate crisis communication require different approaches, different ideas, and two completely different types of plans. But its qualities are important to understand because they can better inform your business's crisis communications measures. When you boil it down, CERC is basically regular public relations at a lightning-fast pace. It means dealing with the media and the public and working to put people at ease:

- In corporate communication, the first instinct is to hunker down and contain the bad news. In CERC, the first instinct is to flood everyone with as much information as possible. Neither of these is always the best choice, but they usually are the first instinct of their respective practitioners.
- In corporate communication, the negative end result is a loss of money. In CERC, it could be a loss of life. Of course, some instances of corporate communication may also be about a loss of life, such as a tainted food or drug recall, or safety problems related to an automobile. Similarly, a CERC situation could be related to a loss of money, such as during a fire or chemical spill.
- Corporate communication is often about containment, keeping as much information in house as possible to mitigate damage to the company's reputation and avoid a possible lawsuit. CERC is often about

widespread communication, trying to reach as many people as possible, so nothing is hidden from the public.

- Many times, corporate communication is the most visible response from the company with other actions happening behind the scenes, like the legal response, brand management, and the product recall team. In CERC, the communication team is there for support, communicating with the public about everything else that is going on: incident response, medical response, and cleanup. That's because corporate communication is more about guiding the public perception, trying to manage the message people are receiving. CERC is about informing the public, keeping them up to date with what the first responders are doing, and managing the message so people can take the appropriate actions.

Both CERC and corporate communication need social media as a way to monitor what people are saying about the incident and even to respond to the public to correct misinformation and relay correct information. But you need to monitor what the public is saying and respond immediately when appropriate. You can't rely on traditional media to deliver your message because those channels don't operate as quickly as the Internet. Besides, traditional media is going to be a filter on your message anyway, delivering select pieces of it on their own schedules.

You Just Can't Wait for Traditional Media to Catch Up or Get It Right

Natural and man-made disasters move so quickly that developments leave traditional media in the dust. Stories are held until the evening news and the morning paper, unless it's big enough to warrant breaking into regular programming or one of the 24-hour news networks picks it up. The media outlets that have evolved with the times have done so using social media platforms like Twitter and content RSS feeds first popularized by bloggers to post breaking news to digitally connected audiences.

So social media is quickly becoming an alternative to traditional media—even an alternative used by traditional media—letting citizen journalists report on what's happening around them, reaching people in their networks immediately, often before the mainstream media or the outlet's main reporters even show up.

On January 15, 2009, Janis Krums was on a ferry on the Hudson River, when US Airways flight 1549 made an emergency landing on the river. His tweet (Figure 6.3) was the very first communication about the landing, and it had been read and retweeted by thousands of people 15 minutes before the first news reports hit the

airwaves. In fact, nearly 35 minutes after Krums sent his tweet, he was on MSNBC being interviewed as a witness.

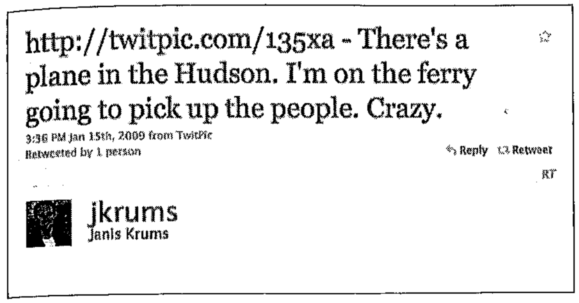

Figure 6.3 Janis Krums's historic tweet was read and retweeted by thousands of people 15 minutes before the mainstream media reported the river landing.

Social media sites, even personal Twitter accounts like Krums's, are breaking news before the news does. Mainstream media often has a printing and broadcasting schedule it has to follow, and they're going to stick to it. People depend on the news being on their TV or their front porch at the same time and the same amount of time/paper every day. And unless the news is truly catastrophic, they'll stick to that schedule without fail.

That breaking news mentality extends to companies and brands as well. Remember the Domino's Pizza story we touched on in Chapter 5, "Make Some Noise: Social Media Marketing Aids in Branding and Awareness"? The pizza giant faced a serious crisis of credibility and cleanliness, thanks to the two employees and their disgusting video desecrating a customer's order. The video was passed around the Internet at lightning speed—almost as fast breaking news of celebrity deaths or arrests—and the company had no time to think before the public outcry was at a fever pitch. One Domino's Pizza spokesman said that people who had been loyal customers for as many as 20 years were "second-guessing their relationship with Domino's."[4]

Domino's Pizza executives decided to do nothing, hoping the furor would die down, but it only grew. They stayed away from social media for two days before finally taking action, creating a Twitter account to respond to any comments and questions. They also created a YouTube video with their CEO addressing the concerns their customers had raised. Although they had been talking about their commitment to customer health and safety in the traditional media, no one on Twitter seemed to notice. The company hadn't already been participating on the network, building relationships with customers and proving they were interested in their audience's feedback or input to that point. The company's traditional mindset meant it was bound by traditional media's schedule and filter, and couldn't reach the social media users who were making the loudest noise.

Although some social media practitioners said this 48 hours of unanswered questions and discussions hurt its brand, the fact that Domino's Pizza took to the same networks where people were questioning the company's commitment to customer care shows some forward thinking and a willingness to address problems head on. After almost two years of active participation on the social web through these channels, Domino's Pizza has a noticeably better online reputation among fans and followers. They have used social media marketing since the incident. And if they've only used it for the one purpose—to be present in the conversation so they can better communicate with the social audience when a crisis arises—that's a significant improvement.

While the crisis communicators are waiting for their stories to hit the media, the public is already talking about what's happening on Twitter and Facebook. By the time the TV news talks about the story, it's been on social media for several hours. By the time it appears in the newspaper the following morning, the events are already in their second day of discussion on social media.

The public isn't waiting for the media anymore. They're using social media to create and consume their own news. Anyone who wants to reach his audience, especially in times of crisis, needs to incorporate social media into a reputation management plan. This type of plan includes choosing traditional and social channels with which to communicate, monitoring mentions and brand pages on multitudes of socially driven websites to ensure accuracy and protect against detraction by disgruntled customers and building a consistent presence to offset any sudden claims or news that is detrimental to the company.

The question facing companies now is whether they will respond to the social media news or will they only wait for traditional media? The biggest mistake they can make is not to respond at all. Social media—if not the mood of the country—makes it necessary for companies to respond to crises as they occur.

When You Don't Listen or Respond, You Get Chi-Chi'd

By now, we've probably scared the hell out of you, and you'd just as soon never get involved with social media. We don't blame you; thousands of pissed-off bloggers and Facebook fans can intimidate anyone. But you can't stay away from social media—because your customers are already expecting you to be on there. Remember Gary Vaynerchuk's statement from Chapter 2, "It's Not Them; It's You!"?

> *It doesn't matter if you think it's stupid (or scary). It's free communication, and there's a crapload of users.*

Social media users have come to expect their favorite brands to be on social media. This expectation of response and interaction has gotten so pervasive that people get upset when they don't hear back from a company about their complaints, so they tell their friends about it, telling them about how they were ignored and their problems went unanswered.

The story of Chi-Chi's Mexican restaurant is a cautionary tale often told to executives about what could happen to companies that don't respond well, if at all, and take their customers for granted. Although the story of its demise begins in 2003—long before much of the movement we now know as social media took root—it still shows how crisis communications and responding to customer's concerns are critical components of a company's marketing and communications efforts.

Chi-Chi's was a sit-down Mexican restaurant chain with headquarters in Louisville, Kentucky. In November 2003, a Chi-Chi's restaurant in suburban Pittsburgh was hit with the largest hepatitis A outbreak in U.S. history, resulting in four deaths and 660 more people getting ill. But rather than deal with the problem, respond to media inquiries, or communicate with the public, Chi-Chi's top executives avoided any contact with the news media. Instead, they issued very dry, factual one-page statements. Two weeks after the outbreak was confirmed, Chi-Chi's COO, Bill Zavertnik, visited the site of the outbreak, read a brief statement to reporters, refused to take any questions, and took the corporate jet back to corporate HQ.

Subsequent media statements came from Chi-Chi's parent company, having obviously been written by lawyers who were looking to avoid a class-action lawsuit. The problem is, their reactions made people extremely angry because they felt ignored and unheard, so they filed their class-action lawsuits anyway. Ten months after the initial outbreak, when it was already in bankruptcy, Chi-Chi's was forced to close all U.S. locations and pay $2 million to settle the 60 biggest lawsuits it faced.

Who knows what could have happened if the company had been more transparent in its communication with the media and the public? Would it have kept Chi-Chi's in business? Would it have avoided the class-action lawsuits that ultimately killed it? No one can be sure. But we do know that despite their best efforts to avoid media scrutiny, the company failed and died anyway. However, straightforward communication might have gone a long way to saving them.

Before we go on a huge rant against corporate lawyers being prevented from going anywhere near the communication office, let us first say we understand the need for corporate lawyers. But although they do important work, they should not be in charge of the actual wordsmithing, or even the response. Legalese is signal one to the public that the company doesn't understand them, or that they don't want the public to understand the company. The response needs to be decided on by executive management and created by the crisis communicators, who will hopefully have their finger on the pulse of the public. If you yourself don't know what the public is thinking or wants, ask the people who do.

Talk to the salespeople and the marketing department. Let PR manage the response, give sales and marketing some input, and let the legal department keep people out of jail or from violating any laws or regulations. But don't let them take over the public response, or you could run into the same outrage that Chi-Chi's faced, after it offered up a sanitized, half-hearted written statement, without actually engaging their customers. Remember, you're not going to avoid making people mad during a corporate crisis. You will make them even angrier if you look like you don't care.

Of course, responding poorly is only slightly better than not responding at all, because it only adds to the mess. The story about Nestlé's response to its non-fans created a bigger problem than not responding at all. And now that Nestlé has adopted a nonresponse as its strategy, you can see how well that's working out for them now. (Hint: It's not.)

Six Steps for Dealing with Detractors

Because dealing with detractors, even those who have every right to be talking negatively about your company, is intimidating and stressful, you can handle them with grace, humor, and honesty. We've told you stories of how not to handle crises in social media communications. Now let's look at how your company should handle incidents when people talk bad about your organization online.

1. Acknowledge their right to complain.

   Free speech may not be a founding principle of every country, but it certainly presides in communications online. If a customer has a run-in with your brand at any point and isn't satisfied, she can, and often should, tell someone with the company, or even just a friend.

2. Apologize for their situation or your mistake, if warranted.

   The two most powerful words in diffusing a tense situation are, "I'm sorry." But you don't have to claim responsibility for the situation by doing so, especially if you don't have all the information to make that determination. Apologize for the detractors' trouble, the situation, or their experience and ask for more information on how you can help them or make the situation better. If it turns out your company did something wrong, you can say you're sorry for that, too. Even if your lawyers tell you not to.

3. Assert clarity in your policy or reasons, if warranted.

   Sometimes people are upset about a return policy or some rule you follow that can't be changed. It's perfectly fine to assert yourself to someone who is being negative about your brand, but do it politely, with compassion and by supplying the reasons your policy exists. Don't make the reasons about the detractors; make it about the betterment of every customer's experience.

4. Assess what will help them feel better.

   Comcast's Frank Eliason answered upset customers on Twitter in 2007 by asking the question, "How can I help?" What those four simple words do is turn the power of the conversation over to the customer and let him, if just for a moment, dictate the terms of what would help. When the customer feels listened to and empowered, the company often earns credibility in his mind.

5. Act accordingly.

   If you can, within your company's policies and within reason, do what the customer says will make her happy, do it. We understand there will be instances when a customer request is either beyond your individual power to enact or is just unreasonable. But if it's within the parameters of appropriateness, do it. Putting out the flames of a detractor's fire quickly and sufficiently is the best way to turn that detractor into a fan. Or at least someone who isn't flaming you anymore.

6. Abdicate.

   If you've exhausted all reasonable means of addressing the customer's issue and he still insists on unreasonable responses or refuses to quiet his claims, it's okay to step away. By politely offering the solution again and informing the customer that this is truly all you can do and you are happy to do so, but you have to move on to other customer issues, the decision is on him. The great news is that if you and your team decide you've been fair, honest, and reasonable with the customer, but they're being unreasonable, the rest of the audience watching the conversation will think they're being unreasonable, too. Jason likes to say, "Sometimes a turd is a turd." And no one will fault you from walking away.

But It's Not Always About the Negative

We would be remiss if we spent this entire chapter talking about the negative side of the reputation equation. Protecting your reputation can take on a proactive spin as well.

Using your monitoring solution to search for mentions of your product or service will certainly help you identify the harmful conversations in which you need to participate. But it will also show you many more positive or even neutral mentions of your brand. Just because these conversations don't have the big red flag sticking out of them doesn't mean they should be ignored.

If putting out fires is one execution of reputation protection on the social web, then fanning the flames of good fires is another. Whether it's dropping in to say, "Thanks! Appreciate the support!" or just answering a question someone posed related to your brand or the industry, at a minimum you will appear present and accounted for in the conversation.

Your presence in online conversations alone will cut down on a ton of potential negative conversations or complaints about your company. Socially enabled companies see a customer in need and fix the issue almost instantly. It's not because these companies only respond to the bad. It's because they're present in the conversation. Company representatives chitchat with folks as well as address customer service issues. They drop in and say thank you or retweet a Twitter message that compliments the company.

They're participating in the conversation.

If the only thing you do in protecting your reputation through social media marketing is finding a handful of positive mentions each week and reaching out to say, "Thank you," you're protecting your reputation just a bit.

Protecting Your Reputation Has a Technology Side, Too

Let's say you own the best doughnut shop in Philadelphia. The local newspaper says so, and the general consensus of the public agrees. Even your competition might say, "Yep. They're darn good." But if you aren't using the web and social media much, Google won't think you're the best doughnut shop in Philadelphia. So protecting your reputation applies to search results as well.

This is where social media and search engine optimization overlap to create a golden opportunity for your business. Two of the primary factors that help a particular piece of content rank well in search engines were how recent the content was and how many people linked to it. Recency and third-party endorsement still go a long way in capturing search engine rankings. Recency is most readily won by blogging. Blog platforms are made to help you publish content frequently, so one of those two big factors is addressed when your company publishes blog posts. Promoting those posts to attract links from other bloggers and websites helps the other big factor.

With the evolution of social search, however, Google (which accounts for 80% of the search market) is beginning to use a wider net for capturing those third-party

endorsements, while delivering more customized results for each user at the same time.

Social search is another layer of information the search engines take into account when producing results, based on your social connections. These connections—your social graph—produce what Google considers more relevant results for your search query. When you type in "best bakery in Philadelphia," instead of seeing what *Google* thinks are the best websites that answer that question, you now see results that include what *your friends* think is the best bakery in Philly. That is, if Jason is talking about your doughnut shop, it could show up in Erik's search results.

Jason has many friends in Philadelphia, so if he searches for the best bakery, his results will be influenced by his friends' activity on social media sites. In early 2011, Google's top result for the query, "best bakery Philadelphia" was a shop called Imagicakes. But Jason's top result was Termini's Italian Bakery, thanks to his friend Bill Lublin's review on Yelp.com.

Google search results can be further influenced by the number of "likes" a company collects on its Facebook fan page or mentions it gets in Facebook conversations. If even casual social media participation can affect where you rank in search results for certain people, then protecting your electronic reputation in the search engines is helped by social media activity.

Affecting the search engine results extends beyond using Twitter and Facebook to ratings and review sites as well. By using social media monitoring services to be aware of new reviews on sites like Yelp, Urbanspoon, MerchantCircle, or even Google Places, companies can immediately address negative reviews and even amplify positive ones to capitalize on what customers are saying about them online.

All this activity helps your company move up in the search engine results. It also helps ensure that if a blogger or online audience member gets upset and takes his or her frustration out on you online, that piece of content doesn't rank high for a search result for your brand or company. Remember Jeff Jarvis's blog post we talked about in Chapter 2? His Dell experience beat out the company for search engine results for "Dell" for quite some time.

You don't want the bad outranking the good any more than you want your competition outranking you for certain keywords. Social media activity adds to the all-important factor of prominence in the search engine's rankings. In a video about Google's Local Search rankings,[5] Google product manager Jeremy Sussmann explained prominence was determined by how well known or prominent certain business are based on sources across the web. Those sources include blogs, review sites, social networks, and more.

Putting Metrics Around Protecting Your Reputation

Protecting your reputation is just as much a function of marketing as it is of public relations. As PR cleans up a mess, the marketing department has to work that much harder to overcome it in the future. A major misstep means marketing has to go to extra lengths to convince people that whatever the earlier problem was is no longer.

This means that a tarnished reputation could become so cumbersome that the only thing that's going to overcome it is millions of dollars. If you're a small company with a huge problem, you don't have millions to blow on fixing it. Chi-Chi's had such a big problem that the only thing that solved it was selling most of their restaurants and closing down the rest, leaving only a few overseas restaurants and a packaged food division.

Obviously, protecting your reputation is worth something. At the very least, it's worth thousands, hundreds of thousands, or even millions of dollars; at most, it's worth your company's very existence.

Although social media activities can be easier to measure than other mediums because of the digital nature of the Web, reputation management is much more difficult. This is because you're using hindsight to look back at incidents and opportunities. You can tabulate the total losses by adding up all the customers who left, adding up their projected sales, and coming up with a pretty good idea of what you lost. But you can't put math behind potential losses you avoided by being on top of the online conversation.

Let's say you discover a serious security flaw in your software that could allow someone's financial information to be stolen. You discover the problem, fix it, address it in the media, distribute the fixes, and weather the storm of complaints, even though no one lost any of their information. For the most part, people are annoyed, but remain customers.

How do you measure what could have been? Would you have lost 2% of your customers or 60%? Would you have been sued and for how much? You can get a rough estimate of what the disaster could have cost, but short of actually letting it run its course, you'll never know what the end results would have been.

That doesn't mean you shouldn't try, though. You can use the different social media monitoring tools to not only find mentions of your company or certain industry keywords, but also to measure the sentiment of those comments, and tell you whether people like, are neutral about, or dislike the name in the mentions. Figure 6.4 is a screenshot from a social media monitoring service.

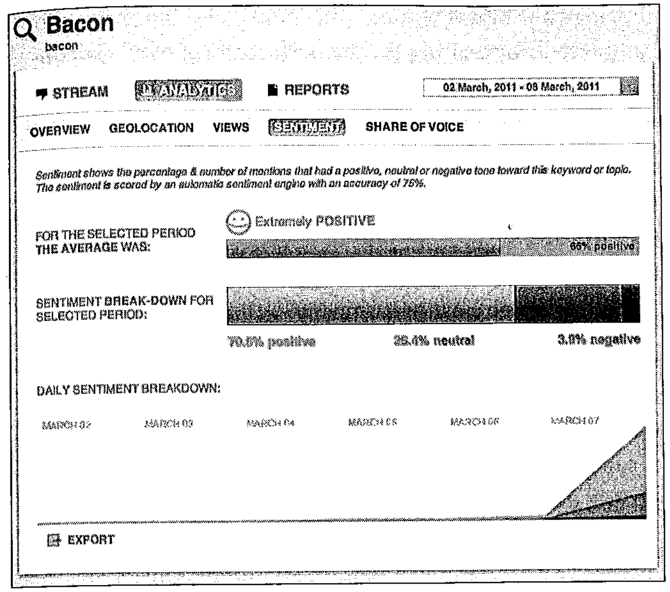

Figure 6.4 Frankly, we were rather surprised to see that 3.9% of the sentiment was negative about bacon. Who doesn't like bacon?

But with tools like Radian6, Sysomos, and AlterianSM2, the people in charge of reputation monitoring can use software to identify problems and complaints and begin addressing them immediately, rather than being caught by surprise. Some of the metrics your company should measure for your reputation management efforts include the following:

- Positive online mentions and sentiment using social media monitoring or online clipping services and data analysis
- Negative online mentions and sentiment using social media monitoring or online clipping services and data analysis
- Search engine result rankings using a search marketing rank checking tool or service

Any of these results can show you a measure of your company's reputation. Comparing your reputation today with a year ago, or even a looking back on today a year from now, gives you benchmarks and even potential goals to improve upon or maintain.

Keep in mind that monitoring your brand reputation is not something that can be handled on a wing and a prayer, or by waiting for the perfect storm of angry consumers and consumer activists to air your dirty laundry. Savvy social media practitioners constantly monitor the sentiment and analytics of their brands and related industry terms.

In 2009, Jason wrote an industry report called "Customer Twervice: Exploring Case Studies & Best Practices in Customer Service Efforts Using Twitter."[6] He looked at the customer service efforts of eight different companies, including Network Solutions, an Internet domain and web hosting company.

Just two years earlier, Network Solutions had very low positive sentiment scores in online conversations. That is, no one liked them; customers disparaged them, complained about them, and, for the most part, had nothing nice to say. But two years later, they were, as Jason called them, "one of the best examples of reputation management via customer service out there."

"The four things we look at in terms of our social media strategy are brand and reputation management, connecting with our customers, connecting with our community, and driving new business," said Shash Bellamkonda, Network Solutions social media director. "The social media team is trained as customer service representatives."

Although Network Solutions uses social media as a customer service tool (product managers will jump in and answer questions from time to time), it ultimately protects their reputation as well. NetSol is unusual, but not unique, in that the company views reputation management as a customer service function, rather than public relations. Even though the customer service department would probably not typically be called on to manage a company crisis, by responding to customer service crises, customer service representatives have managed to improve Network Solution's online reputation in two years with one simple tool that lets people communicate 140 characters at a time.

"Our long-term goal is to have more customer support front-line people there," Bellamkonda said. "We have 40 people on Twitter from customer support right now, but they don't do regular monitoring. We have Twitter volunteers who engage with customers to help the social media team, but our philosophy is to train everyone else to engage in it."

As more people use social media, whether it's Facebook, Twitter, or any of the other thousands of social networks out there, it's important to monitor what's being said about your brand. If you do something wrong, be prepared for people to blast you for it. But don't get defensive because that will become the story.

If an employee behaves badly, be prepared for news to go viral, but don't sit quietly and wait for it to go away because the story will grow even bigger. If your reputation is already poor, start using social media as a way to improve it by listening, responding to complaints, and demonstrating your commitment to your customers.

And look at your search engine results. Do you deserve better? Are you the best, or at least in the top 5 or 10 at what you do in your area? Do you rank there? Start employing search engine optimization tactics to protect your technological reputation as well.

Protecting your reputation using social media lays a great foundation for the next benefit of social media marketing for your business: good public relations.

Endnotes

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