

We Thought This Would Be Easy...

In early 2007, the term “Social Media” started to appear in business articles and blogs as a catchall term for interactive applications and web sites. Newer sites like Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, and LinkedIn took off in popularity. Businesses dipped their toes into this area slowly, unsure as to its staying power. As we now know, Social Media has continued to build momentum and is widely used by both individuals and companies for many reasons.

With the growth came the hype about what Social Media could do. While the term was new, the concepts and ideas behind the Social Media movement were not. Beginning with the first set of listservs, chat rooms, discussion forums, online communities, and even email marketing tactics, the internet has always been a social tool. In fact, the “Father of the Internet” Tim Berners-Lee stated in an interview with IBM’s DeveloperWorks in July of 2006:

“Web 1.0 was all about connecting people. It was an interactive space, and I think Web 2.0 is of course a piece of jargon, nobody even knows what it means. If Web 2.0 for you is blogs and wikis then that is people to people. But that was what the Web was supposed to be all along.”¹

As more and more companies started using Social Media, ‘rules’ were set up for how to use it properly. Somewhere along the line, the message was made more complex and the idea of using simple tools to enhance communications using the web was increasingly hidden in a maze of incomprehensible jargon. Think about it for a minute, have you ever heard these comments when it comes to using Social Media:

- “You have to be authentic.”
- “You have to be transparent.”
- “Social Media means giving up control to your followers/friends/members.”
- “The Wisdom of the Crowd will provide you with direction that is relevant to your market.”
- “You don’t own your brand anymore.”
- “Social Media will change how the world does business.”

With all due respect to the authors, bloggers, and pontificators, all of the above is wrong. Too often, organizations jump into the Social Media world and make simple mistakes that are magnified across the internet by following these so-called ‘truths’.

In this paper, we’re going to show you how to move beyond the hype and conventional wisdom to use Social Media tools and third party sites like Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and blogs in a business setting to achieve results while avoiding the common mistakes that many companies make.

Our Methodology

Since 2003, we’ve counseled our prospects and clients to begin their project by identifying a clear goal for their work using Social Media. Examples of goals can be increased lead generation, employee recruitment, reduced support costs, or even something as simple as reducing our external marketing communications costs. From that point on, everything discussed must focus upon attaining that goal.

For many firms, we go one step farther and develop key performance indicators (KPIs) to track progress against the overall project goal. Looking at lead generation as a goal, KPIs might include metrics such as net new names (contacts, registrations), visitors referred from the external Social Media sites, and/or content offer downloads. It’s not just what metrics to measure though, it’s setting a goal of 50 net new names in 90 days or increase traffic to our offers page by 10% from using Social Media sites or 75 downloads per week for each offer period.

By starting here, the team will be aligned on meeting a goal rather than focusing on a tool or set of tools.

¹ developerWorks Interviews: Tim Berners-Lee, 7-28-2006, <http://www.ibm.com/developerworks/podcast/dwi/cm-int082206.txt>

Focus Upon the Behaviors, Not the Technology

Social Media is a set of tools available to everyone to communicate and build relationships online. It's that simple. Blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn are a newer set of business tools in the same way that the telephone introduced voice communications to business (replacing the telegraph), and in the same way that direct response mail introduced junk mail to the business customer. And just like these two tools, Social Media can be used to drive results and build a loyal customer base or they can be used to clutter up email boxes and annoy customers.

In far too many of our initial meetings with prospects, the starting discussion centers on technology rather than a fuller discussion of what the goal of using the tools is and what success looks like. Instead we hear comments like "Should we use blogs, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, discussion forums, or LinkedIn Groups?" What is missing is the focus on the behaviors you'll need in order to gain the results to meet your goals. Remember, tools are just tools. Success comes from how people use them and if they use them in a way that provides benefits to both sides of the Social Media equation.

By understanding your audience, you'll understand what tools to utilize to reach them. For consumers, it's Facebook and Twitter accounts aligned with offers on your web site. For a B2B audience, it's more complex. But understanding why your audience would connect with you or what the value they receive is critical to understand at the early stages of your Social Media efforts. (The answer is always that you are providing something of value – information, a discount, access to company executives, etc. which leads to our next section...)

Content is King

Why do most blogs fail? Why do Facebook fan pages lose steam over time? Why does Twitter stop referring visitors to your site?

It's the lack of a consistent content strategy and coordinated plan. Too often companies start with great gusto, then like a camp fire slowly burn to embers, then go out all together. Why? Social Media takes content. Lots of it! If your organization is not a good content creator or a prolific content creator, then you may have a problem using Social Media. Remember that online content has a very short life span. It can be re-purposed, but your regular followers will lose interest if you are providing the same content again and again.

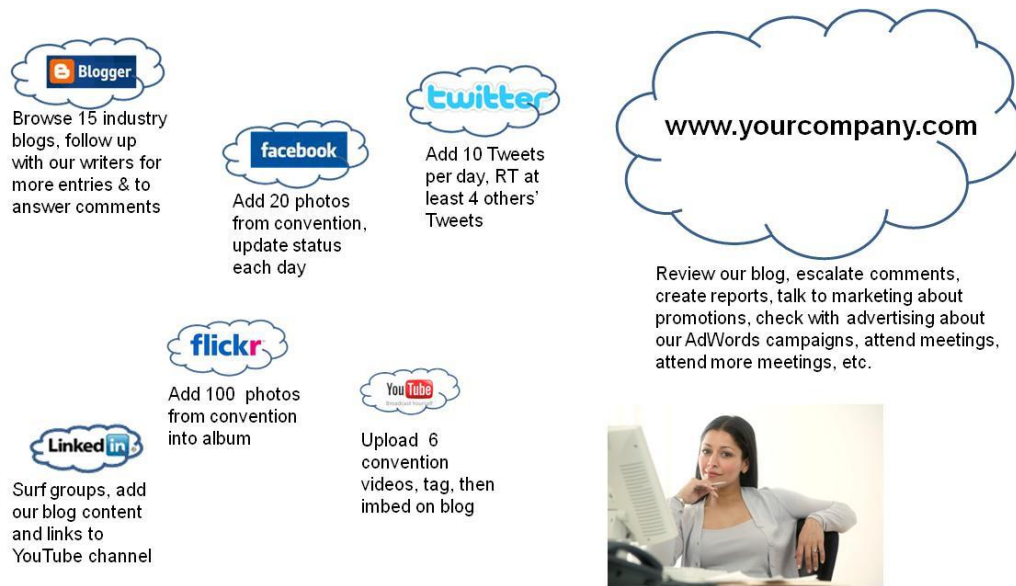
This also takes effort to post and maintain. While the idea of employee blogs or Twitter accounts is appealing, most die off slowly as employees realize that they don't have the time to continuously create new content. IBM is a classic example. For one of our technology clients we did a competitive scan of companies using Social Media. What we found was that the sheer volume of accounts had exploded over the nine months since we had last performed a scan. In IBM's case, twitter accounts increased from 18 to over 160! Their Facebook accounts totaled more than 500. We found over 75 employee blogs, many of which had been abandoned and were collecting pornographic comment spam.

Third Party Applications are Beacons Not Stand Alone Offerings

Does this sound familiar? You've launched a Twitter account, Facebook account, and blog as separate information sources which are supposed to help achieve a common objective like lead generation. Your blog covers press releases while the Twitter account pushes links back to the press releases and your service pages, retweets favorable news content, and promotes company events. Your Facebook fan page seemed like a great idea at first, but it's hard to keep updated with everything else your staff has to do. The result is a lot of content but no real business results because there is no integration of effort nor is there enough focus on the end result or the actual visitor.

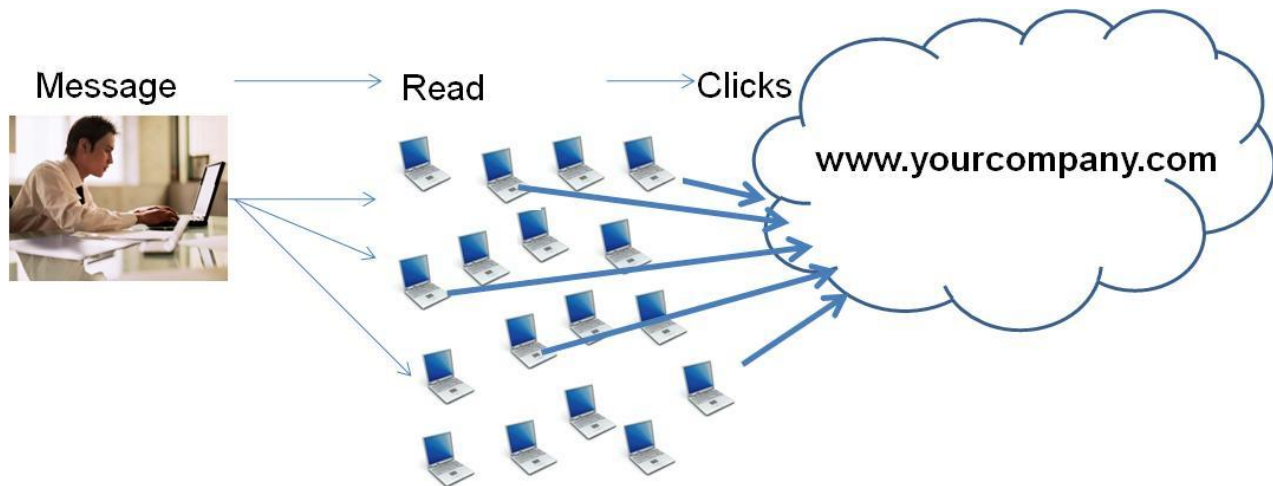


Far too many companies approach Social Media like this:



Using this model, companies use external applications as competitive information sources rather than complimentary sources to their own web site. While it may be helpful for the follower/friend/fan, it doesn't help the company because it doesn't produce measurable results. Instead of approaching Social Media platforms as standalone tools with the occasional link to each other, use an integrated approach.

A better use is to think of all of these third party applications as beacons to drive traffic back to your site or to a specific landing page to answer a call to action offer. In this way, the organization controls the data while also understanding the mix of referring sites. Cisco and its partner channel do this very well. By mixing up the channel content, but continually providing links to specific content with registration requirements, Cisco is able to measure its effectiveness in using third party applications.



See what's missing from the above illustration? The actual tools used for your message. You only use the tools where your audience is located. Otherwise you are wasting effort. But the idea is to use them to send interested visitors back to your web site, hopefully to a specific landing page with an offer which will help to unmask the visitor. The simplest way to do this is with a registration asking for name and email address only in return for something of value to the visitor. (And while you're at it, ask for an opt-in!)

Why focus so much on sending people back to your website? **Simple, you can measure them, their actions, and their economic value.**



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For B2B Companies, Don't Confuse B2B Social Media with B2C

A big common mistake that we see is using Social Media for B2B programs in the same manner as companies in the consumer market. Organizations launch a Facebook Fan page, Twitter account, LinkedIn Group, Flickr account, YouTube account, and a blog. Then they begin to populate these applications with content about their products, company, and analyst reports supporting their products. They constantly retweet content that might be interesting or might not be in order to get their follower counts higher. The end result is a lot of content, but no real strategy.

B2B audiences are different than Business-to-Consumer (B2C) audiences. B2B audiences are looking to build a relationship with the organization rather than engage in transactions. B2B Social Media is all about building those relationships rather than pushing information such as press releases, product launches, and event promotions. Instead, it is about thought leadership, executive access, and where your organization is going from the customer standpoint. But this also means that you must interact and engage with audience members who use these tools to respond to you. Whereas B2C audiences will download a coupon code, B2B audiences want to know your view of the world and if you'll be there to support them once they purchase your product. In other words, the B2B audience has much higher expectations than B2C readers. Companies like SAP, Cisco, NetApp, IBM, Caterpillar, many smaller organizations understand and use this difference to realize significant results with their Social Media programs.

If You Cannot Measure It, Don't Do It

With all of the choices available with Social Media, executives continue to have major issues in defining measurement standards for their Social Media efforts. Each additional application such as Twitter or YouTube adds another issue with measurement. For our clients such as Cisco, The American Chemical Society, and NetApp, we've helped them understand that measurement is about three main areas:

1. Traffic – Scorecard for basic measurement like visitors, referrer visits, link clicks, and page views
2. Behavior – Conversion and engagement to test your messaging, content, and offers
3. Value – Economic benefit of Social Media efforts from a business perspective

The key for executives is to define your measurement in advance of your efforts in Social Media. Measurement is part of the strategy for your program; if you cannot measure it you shouldn't do it. It really is that simple.

Now, About Those Social Media Rules...

Let's take them one by one as a way to wrap up.

- **“You have to be authentic.”** – This is true to a certain extent. You must be authentic in terms of your brand and its image. However, in the context of many blogs, authentic means that you must not be corporate and must be casual in tone. For a B2B brand, this is a very risky proposition.
- **“You have to be transparent.”** – This has been used repeatedly to inform Social Media teams that they must pull back the curtain and be totally open with fans/followers/viewers/etc. A better idea would be to use the word honest. If you cannot share something requested, say so. Remember, Social Media is a great competitive set of tools for monitoring your competition. They are monitoring you too.
- **“Social Media means giving up control to your followers/friends/members.”** Actually, it doesn't and you should immediately run from anyone who tells you this. The idea comes from the thought that Social Media provides you with feedback on your brand, products, service, etc. But you must maintain control over your brand, while allowing your content to be spread.



- **“The Wisdom of the Crowd ...”** What we have found in our experience in working with online communities is that you should ignore the wisdom coming from the crowd and instead focus upon your customers. All too often, the most vocal Social Media users don't have the best ideas -- they are just the loudest. We've seen it with AARP, with SAP, and many others. Be wary of this advice to leave anything important to the crowd's wisdom.
- **“You don't own your brand anymore.”** As Viacom and so many others have proven, you do own your brand and your content for that matter. You just have to watch where it is used and take action (take down notice) if you think it is being used inappropriately. What this 'truth' is really trying to explain is that once you get into the Social Media world, the viral nature of the internet is magnified so expect that your work will show up in unexpected places.
- **“Social Media will change how the world does business.”** A big statement, but one that has been used before with chat rooms (remember them?), online communities, blogs, wikis, and social networks (Friendster anyone?). Social Media is a tool, that's all. It's how you use it that will have an impact.

Social Media is a valuable tool. There are multiple ways to use it, it's inexpensive, and it generates results. The key is to use it in a way to provides value to your targeted audience while being able to measure your results. Be creative, run pilots and beta tests. Measure everything you do intelligently and learn from your visitors' traffic patterns and behavioral trends to improve your results. Then work to tie your efforts back to the economic value you identified in your initial planning sessions. Over the long run, when used properly, Social Media can result in tremendous economic benefits for your business.

We've only just scratched the surface in this whitepaper. Just as Social Media is evolving, so are the tactics and measurements associated with it. If you'd like to learn more, please contact us here at Impact Interactions. We're happy to help you succeed!

About Impact Interactions

Based in the United States, Impact Interactions helps numerous organizations such as Cisco, NetApp, SAP, Intel, Disney, AARP, and the American Chemical Society create, manage, and measure highly successful online interactive communities and Social Media projects. We address the critical need of major global organizations to closely connect with their customers in the online world. Impact Interactions aligns online strategies with organizations' business goals to produce significant, measurable results through our consulting, moderation, Social Media monitoring, and reporting services. Learn more at www.ImpactInteractions.com.



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