Make Cyberspace Work for YOU:

A GUIDE TO CONNECTING WITH YOUR TARGET AUDIENCES
THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Rachel Roberts
California Polytechnic State University
Spring 2009
# Table of Contents

- **Introduction** ............................................................................................... 3
- **Market Drivers** ........................................................................................... 4
  - Why should you care about social media?
- **Problems** ..................................................................................................... 5
  - Challenges facing social media
- **Historical Approach** ..................................................................................... 6
  - How has social media evolved?
- **Generic Solution** .......................................................................................... 7
  - How does social media work?
  - How is social media used?
- **Specific Solution** .......................................................................................... 9
  - What should you do now?
- **Conclusion** ................................................................................................. 11
Introduction

All of these microbloggers keep tweeting about the rise of social media. My feed is filled with status updates of links to articles stating the astounding statistics. I watched @aplusk reach one million followers live on Ustream last night! I anticipate there will be tons of vlogs posted tomorrow about this historic moment and what it really means for the social media community. I heard that Oprah Winfrey will be Skyping with listeners and posting her first tweet live on her show! I will have to download the podcast version to listen to on my way to work. I wonder how many connections I have with Oprah on LinkedIn. Sarah just posted on my wall that she has ten connections! I think this would make an excellent blog topic.

Wow, even my 2008 Word application does not recognize these new vocabulary terms and it’s only April 2009! Nevertheless, most of these words are used daily by millions of people across the globe. With the boom of social media and the rapid pace of innovation, new terms are coined almost daily to talk about the various aspects of this phenomenon—Twitter even has a right-hand menu bar that defines terms related to the site.

Technology is extremely prevalent in our daily lives; it’s almost as if children come out of the womb computer literate. As a member of the millennial generation, I feel rather tech-savvy and confident in my social media knowledge. When the buzz about social media got louder and louder I figured I could just tap into my innate source of computer knowledge and jump on the bandwagon. Oh how I was mistaken. I think I could have gotten by if there were only a few new tools that I needed to learn, but there are hundreds of new programs and applications on the market now and I didn’t even know where to begin.

There is an overwhelming amount of social media created daily. Today’s generation is growing up in a world full of user-generated content— with over 112,000 blogs presently online, a rise of citizen journalists, and the exponential growth of new websites, such as Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. As the economy is at low point, businesses are looking for the most effective and most cost-effective way to disseminate their messages. Traditional advertising methods and markets are over-saturated and companies’ messages are lost in the sea of advertisements. Millions of people use social media every day and are not being reached by businesses. The crucial question is: how can you most effectively use social media tools to generate exposure and build new relationships for your business?
Social media tools are becoming mandatory for successful businesses. They are essentially free advertising that give you the ability to connect directly with your target audiences. The Internet can be like a giant black hole if you do not learn to use these tools to your advantage. It is imperative that businesses create an online identity that allows clients to discover and connect with the company on a more personal level than traditional advertisements.

An overwhelming majority (88%) of marketers say they are using some form of social media to market their business, though 72% of those using it say they have only been at it a few months or less, according to a social media study by Michael Stelzner, sponsored by the upcoming Social Media Success Summit 2009.

The study found that Twitter, blogs, LinkedIn and Facebook - in that order - are the top four social media tools used by marketers, writes Marketing Charts. Respondents report that the number one benefit of social media marketing is gaining attention for the business, and 81% say their social media efforts have generated exposure for their businesses.

Improving traffic and growing marketing lists is the second major benefit, followed by building new partnerships. At least two in three participants found that increased traffic occurred with as little as 6 hours a week invested, while those who have been doing this for years reported better results. When marketers were asked which social media tools they most want to learn more about, social bookmarking sites slightly edged out Twitter as the number one response. A four-way tie for third place occurred between LinkedIn, StumbleUpon, Facebook and Digg/Reddit/Mixx.

“It is difficult, indeed dangerous, to underestimate the huge changes this revolution will bring or the power of developing technologies to build and destroy not just companies but whole countries.” Rupert Murdoch
The problem is that many business executives do not have a background in journalism or public relations and do not know how to effectively use new media technologies. New technologies and methods can be susceptible to resistance from people lacking experience in these areas. However, companies who embrace change and are ahead of the curve will undoubtedly rise to the top. Change is inevitable and needs to be accepted if companies wish to stay afloat. The good news is that new technologies are becoming increasingly user-friendly. With the rise of web-based operations it is imperative that businesses learn how to connect with their target audiences through social media platforms.
New means of production and distribution...

Rather than asking, “are blogs a fad?” or “how much of this is hype?” it is more useful to look at the fundamentals behind the phenomenal growth of social media. It used to be that the ability to create content and distribute it to an audience was limited to individuals and organizations that owned the production facilities and infrastructure to do so. In other words: ‘the media’. Today, the ever-lower costs of computers, digital cameras and high-speed internet access, combined with free or low-cost, easy-to-use editing software means that anyone can have a live blog website up and running within minutes of deciding to do so. With a little reading and fiddling they can upload video or sound too.

Production, is only half of the story. What good is great content unless you can get it to people? Take blogs for instance, people have a limited amount of time to check websites regularly – few people are going to be bothered to check more than a couple of blogs every day. Now they don’t need to. The innovation that has increased the reach of blogs and podcasts and has given terrific impetus to social media’s evolution is a technology called RSS (Really Simple Syndication) which allows people to subscribe to a blog or website. RSS notifies a ‘newsreader’ or your personal homepage that there is new content available and sends it the text and images. You can then read these in your newsreader without having to visit the website itself.

The importance of RSS, is that it makes it much easier for blogs and other social media to build or become part of communities. They may often be small communities, but to their users they may be highly relevant and valuable. The other method of distribution that is sometimes neglected in any discussion of social media is search engines. Because blogs are highly connected, in the eyes of Google the more established ones can become an authority on a niche topic.
Definitions that will help you navigate through the mysterious sea of information we call cyberspace.

Social Networks:
These sites allow people to build personal web pages and connect with friends to share content and communicate. Currently, the biggest social networks are Myspace, Facebook and Bebo.

Blogs:
Perhaps the best-known form of social media, blogs are essentially online journals with topics ranging from world news to ‘what I did today’ and everything in between. Any one can become a blogger and create their own blog cite. Some popular blog hosting sites are Tumblr, Blogger and WordPress.

Wikis:
These websites allow people to add content to or edit the information on them, acting as a communal document or database. The best-known wiki is wikipedia, the online encyclopedia which has over two million English language articles.

Podcasts:
Audio and video files that users are able to subscribe to through services like itunes. They can be produced by anyone with programs such as Garage Band and posting online.

Forums:
These are areas for online discussion, often around specific topics and interests. Forums came about before the term “social media” and are a powerful and popular element of online communities.

Connected Communities:
Communities which organize and share particular kinds of content. The most popular content communities tend to form around photos, bookmarked links and videos.

Microblogging:
Social networking combined with bite-sized blogging, where small amounts of content or updates are distributed online and through the mobile phone network. Twitter is the clear leader in this field.
How is social media used?

Social networks on the web are like contained versions of the sprawling blog network. People joining a social network usually create a profile and then build a network by connecting to friends and contacts in the network, or by inviting real-world contacts and friends to join the social network.

These communities retain the interest of their members by being useful to them and providing services that are entertaining or help them to expand their networks.

Crucially, the growth in the use of social networks by young people in recent years has come at the expense of their consumption of traditional media such as TV and magazines. This switch in behavior was one of the drivers behind the biggest deal in social media to date, when Rupert Murdoch bought Myspace for $580 million. Marketers have also increasingly begun to experiment with trying to reach the members of Myspace and other social networks. Bebo hosts pages for many children’s authors for instance, while Myspace has seen a rush of marketing efforts from Toyota to the US army.

Perhaps the most ‘grown-up’ of the popular networks is LinkedIn, which allows users build their business and professional contacts into an online network. It has been criticized for not being open enough and for charging for too many of its services, but next to Facebook it is still the most popular online social network among people aged 25 and over.
Situational analysis

You can’t leverage social media for success unless you know where you stand today. This includes finding out what your competition is doing, what the market is like and determining who is your target audience. Clearly defining where your company stands will help guide the direction of your social media campaign. It is also important to discuss what are the big issues, problems or needs that must be addressed.

Determine Objectives

Determining objectives is one of the most important steps. Immediate and long-term goals keep a campaign focus and allow for future evaluation of the success of a campaign. A schedule and timeline are also important aspects of the process.

Select the right tools

Social media tools should be selected along the lines of three sets of criteria. First, the volume of the social network is an important qualification because you want to market your company where a lot of people are already active. Plus, social networks like Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, FriendFeed, YouTube, Flickr, Delicious and Digg have millions of users that can share your messages. This allows your brand to go viral and that exposure can help you generate business. Second, the credibility of social networks helps you consider what is best for your business. Finally, the relevancy of the social network, as it ties in to your business and industry, can void the other two requirements. You’ll want to join these because you will connect with people who are interested in your business.

Build your online empire

Now that you have all the tools in place and have filled out all your social networking profiles, it’s time to start building your online empire. This means you have to start generating a lot of content, either written, audio, video or all three. It also requires you to become a resource and a valuable contributor to your community.

What should you do now?

- Identify the primary and secondary target audiences.
- Ask questions about the audience: what is their typical title, average age, general disposition and so on.
- Determine the objective of the marketing campaign: to educate, sell, inform, introduce, etcetera.
- What are the big issues or needs that must be addressed?
- Develop an outline that will guide future discussions.
- Who are the key competitors to analyze?
- What is the schedule and timeline?
Market your brand

Marketing your brand for lucrative success is the hardest part of the process. Most people believe that creating content markets itself, which is completely false and the reason why they have yet to reach a high level of success. Just having social networking profiles isn’t enough. You need to invest many more hours in your marketing campaign than you do actually creating content. There are many routes you can take to market your brand, such as being a member of a special interest group, becoming a leader in that group and speaking to organizations. Then there’s commenting on blogs in your industry, guest posting on other sites and interviewing bloggers. You can pitch bloggers and traditional journalists so that you can be a part of their stories and you can join forums, Facebook fan pages and groups to meet other people that may want your services. Regardless of the way you get your name out there, ensure it’s consistent with your brand.

Monitor your reputation

Whether you choose to use free or fee-based reputation monitoring tools, you need to keep your pulse on what people are saying about your business all the time. The mandatory tools you need to use are search.twitter.com and google.com/alerts because you will be able to catch microposts (Twitter) and macroposts (blogs and news articles) citing your company.

You want to have a fast reaction time so that you can locate Tweets or blog posts that you can leverage as endorsements or find negative messages that you can prevent from spreading. Think about monitoring your reputation as an opportunity to learn more about how you’re projecting your brand to the world and take some of it as feedback to help you in your future brand development.
Social media has opened new opportunities for businesses to connect with their target markets. You are now empowered with the tools and knowledge to harness these opportunities to help your business generate exposure and build relationships with your target audiences. Your audiences are ready and waiting for you to reach out to them. Set up your online identity and start interacting with your target audiences today!