

"What Is Social Media?"

by James Burchill

What is SOCIAL MEDIA?

SM is an umbrella term that encompasses the technologies and the activities that people use to share experiences, ideas and information with each other. The term is still evolving. The term "SOCIAL MEDIA" most often refers to activities that integrate technology, social (or human) interaction, and the construction of words, pictures, videos and audio - better known as "user generated content" [an example of UGC would be videos on YouTube.]

Social media can take many different forms, including Internet forums, weblogs, wikis, podcasts, pictures and video. Technologies include: blogs, picture-sharing, vlogs, wall-postings, email, instant messaging, music-sharing, crowdsourcing (crowd outsourcing), and voice over IP, to name a few.

Examples of social media applications are Google Groups (reference, social networking), Wikipedia (reference), MySpace (social networking), Facebook (social networking), Youmeo (social network aggregation), Last.fm (personal music), YouTube (social networking and video sharing), Second Life (virtual reality), Flickr (photo sharing), Twitter (social networking and microblogging) and other microblogs such as Jaiku and Pownce.

What is Social Media Marketing (SMM)?

SMM is where you use social media networking and user-generated content platforms to promote a product, service or content. SMM typically involves creating and participating in a "conversation" with the target audience, rather than blatantly advertising to them.

SMM can also include creating and promoting viral content that is meant to be shared by users. Many marketers are not comfortable with the lack of control over social media but when approached properly, social networks can be extremely effective channels for building product evangelism, reputation management or corporate branding

Why is it becoming so popular?

I believe it's simply because it mirrors our true nature. We are gregarious by nature and for once we are able to use technology easily to reach out and connect in new and exciting ways. It's still all so new too, there are new frontiers popping up regularly and it's a bit like the early Internet "gold rush" days during the 90's

Is every Social Media site for every entrepreneur?

They might not think so, but it is. You do it naturally every day, SM online is simply the same thing applied technologically.

How does a business owner determine which site is the best match for them?

Good question. Not all SM Sites are equal. I typically advise people to think "classical marketing" and don't let the 'flashing lights' fool you. Visit the site, pay attention to the conversation. "Lurk" for a while. Ask a question, see what happens. Each environment has its own rules. Blunder in and start shouting and you'll get flamed. Respect the environments 'sub culture' and you'll do fine. An obvious example of this in action is a site that caters to "gamers" - you instinctively know that if you're selling insurance you would have a tough time in that environment. Like I said, think like a classical marketer.

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Are there some “best practices” steps to starting and maintaining your SMM sites? And how do I make social networking work for me?

Social Media Marketing

Many a company has forgotten the old maxim, “Act in haste, repent at your leisure...” The same warning should be applied to companies rushing to get in on the social media marketing wave.

If you hear things at work like “We should have a blog,” or “Let’s join Facebook,” I suggest [respectfully] that maybe you are about to make a whopper of a mistake.

Here’s why...

Backwards is bad

You are starting your social media strategy design backwards - and this will lead to trouble.

In any other business endeavor we start by figuring out what we want to accomplish. Social media technologies are not magical. They’re just tools too. It’s time to stop doing social media marketing because it’s trendy and instead do it because it works!

4 Things to Remember

- 1 - The web is about people. You need to know your audience. Understand their capabilities, their hangouts online, their language and behaviors. If you’re targeting business travelers then consider rating and review sites for example. Just don’t guess...
- 2 - Figure out what will be different when you are done. This is the “why” behind your plans. Do you want to create a close knit community or a product testing ground. Understand the motive’s behind your actions.
- 3 - What outcomes and objectives are you seeking to achieve. Consider the end result and how you will measure it. A fuzzy or fluffy end result is almost as bad as not specifying one at all. How will you measure success?
- 4 - What technology to choose. Only answer this question when you’ve completed the others because then you’ll know with clarity and confidence.

In conclusion, if you recognize classic business planning and management principles amongst these notes you’d be correct. The game may have changed, but the rules are still the same. Plan first, then act with confidence.

How long is this new type of marketing going to take to master?

The actual skills are quite simple - you likely already have them mastered. What you need to learn is the PROCESS. That takes a little time, but frankly not that much.

What if I don’t know many people to invite to my network?

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No problem. Answer this question "If you are the ANSWER, what was the QUESTION?" Armed with that answer you can locate groups of people who would need what you offer. You can then invite them to participate and you can SHARE your knowledge and expertise to PROVE you are the answer to their problem. Use your favourite search engine to locate these people - simply type in the QUESTION or problem. Remember, if people knew the answer they wouldn't be looking :)

How can I get business through SMM?

It's a funny thing when I'm asked this. We do it daily, so I marvel at the fact people think it's different online. Sure there's a layer of technology in the mix, but it's still about people getting to know people. Remember the old maxim, people buy from people they like and trust.

SMM simply enables (or should I say empowers) you to do this more effectively.

Why Most Brands Fail on Social Networks

A new report from JupiterResearch sheds light on what many online marketers suspected for quite some time. Most brands are failing to make impact on social networks...

Naughton's Law states: "We invariably over-estimate the short-term implications of new communications technologies, and we grievously underestimate their long term impacts." Every brand should be online in the best way, know its consumers, and maximize the benefit of its online offering to those consumers.

Here are some startling facts from the report:

Startling Facts:

- The average branded social networking page has only 6,494 friends.
- Many advertisers are still building branded social networking pages that broadcast content rather than inviting users to interact.
- "Most advertisers simply don't know how to market properly within social networks." - JupiterResearch

New Research Suggests:

- You should promote your SM pages with paid adverts rather than relying on viral marketing to get the message out. Building viral buzz is harder than you think.
- You need to engage users on the page. Even simple forms of engagement, such as contests, on average doubled the number of friends acquired by each branded page.
- You must also appeal to social networkers' love of multimedia to get noticed. Social Networkers are twice as likely to visit a branded page focused on media content than a branded page focused on products.

How does the non-writer do this type of marketing?

It really shouldn't pose a problem. The 'Net is vast and there's room for each of us to be AUTHENTIC. Even behind the shield of a computer many of us seem able to sense a scoundrel or someone "putting on airs".

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If you can email you can do SM. If you can talk you can SM. If you have a pulse... you get the idea.

Do the Social Media Marketing sites have fees to pay?

Typically NO. I advise you to initially avoid any sites that ask for payment until you know precisely what you are paying for. There are some good fee based sites out there, but the good ones also offer a free version too - start there if you wish. Let the results determine the level of investment you are prepared to make.

Are there some sites that you would recommend for business people?

www.Linkedin.com

www.eCademy.com

www.SelfGrowth.com

www.Ning.com - 'create your own' Social Media website.

Will I have to spend hours a day keeping in touch with all of the people who write to me?

You will need to invest time and energy in your online marketing. Whether it's YOU that does this or one of your staff is entirely up to you. But you cannot expect a "set and forget" solution to something that is inherently human.

How can I protect myself from "weirdoes?"

Be careful. Don't give away sensitive or private information online. You will always be exposed to some degree to odd people. I get some very odd emails and propositions, however you need to remember this is business, and although you are using "personal skills" to network online, never forget that.

How can I come across as a professional on these sites, and is it possible to do "real" business this way?

Yes. Publish a professional PROFILE. Show you are a professional and act accordingly and you will be perceived as such. Include family photos of you dressed as a clown at your kids birthday party at your own peril. Remember, online your "goofs" are eternal and will haunt you forever. Online reputation is area you need to tread carefully within. It's a bit off topic, but that's why I tell teenagers that they should be very careful about the pictures and posts they put on these social websites. Because in a few years the recruiters will be Googling them and this will be part of their "resume" and frankly it can be a career killer before it even starts.

Why do some people seem to get good results and others just get discouraged?

As with all things in life some people quit too early. Social Media Marketing and Social Networking takes time. It's like any relationship you develop with another human, rushing to the finish just gets you slapped... Metaphorically and literally too!

Also, success online isn't about one big thing, it's about a cluster of little things done consistently with focus and commitment. The strongest trees take the longest to grow. Online things happen a lot faster, but still there is a time commitment, think 6 to 12 months and you'll be thinking along the right lines.

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Is there a "fast start" strategy once I sign up for a Social media marketing site?

There is. Create a professional profile. Publish some content establishing you as an expert in your field. The 'readers' will approve and so will the search engines. Explore the active or "hot zones" within the SM site, pay attention to the type of communication and then dive in. Give first. Build kudos and credit before you try asking for anything.

To keep up, use technology to "feed" your SM presence from your other sites like your blog or website. I use technology to syndicate and publish my content to all my SM sites with the push of one button. It makes connecting and staying up to date a breeze.

Remember to invite your friends to join you. Add a promotional button on your "other" sites - for instance if you decide to join Twitter, you can put a "Follow Me" link on your website. Connect, Communicate and Commit. Now 'rinse and repeat.'

Extra Topics...

The 16 Rules of Social Media Optimization

Social Media Optimization (SMO) is a set of methods for generating publicity through social media, online communities and community websites. Methods of SMO include adding RSS feeds, adding a Digg or Share This button, blogging and incorporating third party community functionalities like Flickr photo slides and galleries or YouTube videos. Social media optimization is a form of search engine marketing (SEO.)

Social media optimization is in many ways connected as a technique to viral marketing where word of mouth is created not through friends or family but through the use of networking in social bookmarking, video and photo sharing websites. In a similar way the engagement with blogs achieves the same by sharing content through the use of RSS in the blogosphere and special blog search engines such as Technorati.

Rohit Bhargava was credited with inventing the term SMO. His original five rules for conducting Social Media Optimization have grown to 16 (as of today.) For reference, here is an aggregated list so far:

1. Increase your linkability
2. Make tagging and bookmarking easy
3. Reward inbound links
4. Help your content travel
5. Encourage the mashup
6. Be a User Resource, even if it doesn't help you
7. Reward helpful and valuable users
8. Participate
9. Know how to target your audience
10. Create content
11. Be real
12. Don't forget your roots, be humble
13. Don't be afraid to try new things, stay fresh
14. Develop a SMO strategy
15. Choose your SMO tactics wisely
16. Make SMO part of your process and best practices

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Much of what is listed here is common sense, some say it just Web2.0 marketing. Whatever you may think it's definitely good advice no matter what. I'm just pleased we are taking the subject seriously now and promoting strategic content creation as an important aspect in the mix.

16 Social Media Facts That You Should Know

1. Approx. 3 out of 4 people in North America use the web
2. Women are a growth area online.
3. 44% of the Internet users are between the age of 35 and 54.
4. Approx. 3 out of 4 people in North America use social networks.
5. They spend an average of 6 hrs a month on these social networks and view more than 800 web pages.
6. 51% of social network users are female - they also consume about 200 pages more than men and spend an extra 2 hours online.
7. Canada is a Facebook nation, the USA is a MySpace nation.
8. 65.7% of Canadians use Facebook each month spending an average of 350 minutes and consuming 725 pages of content.
9. 35+ is the biggest age growth sector on Facebook.
10. Online video and multimedia has grown over 300% in North America.
11. The average length of a video online is 3.4 minutes
12. 89% of all Internet users have watched a video in the past month.
13. 57% of all videos are consumed on YouTube.
14. Blogs reach more than 60% of all (online) people in North America. Blogging is growing at almost twice the rate of the Internet.
15. Social networking and multimedia has a reach of more than 80% of the North American population.

Bottom line, if you are not engaged in social media conversations with your marketplace, then you face a very uncertain future. As I'm fond of saying "Be Found, Be Noticed or Be History!"

** ENDS ***

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