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Solving the Social Media Marketing Puzzle: How to Find Resources that Fit Your Business Marketing Needs



Tighter budgets are forcing marketing managers to look at low-cost marketing methods such as social media. Pressured by stakeholders to improve marketing returns, many managers are wondering where to concentrate their efforts. Is Facebook the best platform to use? What about Twitter, LinkedIn, or social bookmarking? Where is the best place to find qualified help?

Social media is uncharted territory for many marketers, and time is not on their side. With so much to learn, the push to get up to speed quickly puts managers in a difficult position. Where can they turn for reliable information?

Blogs, podcasts, webcasts, and courses on every aspect of social media are everywhere, and that's part of the problem. How do you decide what is right and what is wrong? Of all the so-called "social media experts" out there, who can you trust?

Fortunately, best practices and ethical standards are stabilizing in this young industry, and comprehensive sources for up-to-date information and help are emerging. Professional social media associations are one such source, and can provide organizations with an effective solution for staying competitive in today's shifting social marketing environment.

Professional associations can educate members on social media topics, keep them up to date on trends and techniques, and also provide a ready pool of industry-qualified contractors and consultants. This white paper will explore the social media challenges faced by marketers today and examine the many benefits of joining a professional social media association.

Social Media Trends Impacting Marketing

Your customers and prospects are actively using social media networks, and you need to be there to interact with them. A 2009 report by Nielsen¹ indicates that two-thirds of the world's internet population visits social networks and blogs, and that percentage is rising. People spent 17% of their Internet time on social networks in 2009, up from just 6% the previous year.

Jon Gibs, Vice President of Media and Agency Insights (Nielsen's online division) notes that this trend represents a major shift in Internet use: "While video and text content remain central to the Web experience – the desire of

¹ Nielsen Report, "Global Faces and Networked Places" 2009

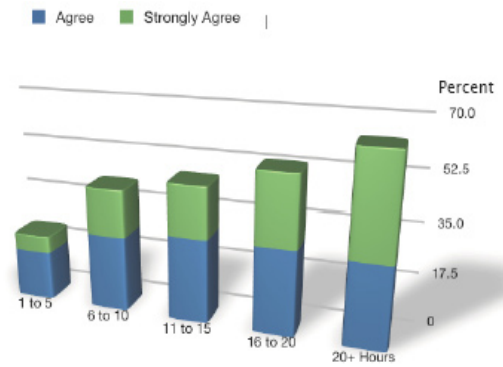
The new concept that a company's perception in the marketplace can change quickly via social media causes anxiety for some marketers



online consumers to connect, communicate and share is increasingly driving the medium’s growth,” he states.

In addition, a study of nearly 900 businesses outlined in the 2009 Social Media Marketing Industry Report² states that businesses are seeing real results using social media. In fact, over half of those that use social media at least six hours or more per week report that it has helped them close business, increase new business partnerships, and generate qualified leads (see the diagram below).

These numbers indicate that social media gives consumers more power to influence markets than ever before—but this can be a bit frightening to businesses new to marketing with social media. The new concept that a company’s perception in the marketplace can literally be raised to lofty heights or crash and burn at the “speed of a Tweet” causes anxiety for many marketers.



Social Media Marketing Industry Report graph of businesses that believe social media marketing has improved qualified lead generation.

There are two other factors tied to this trend that have a major impact on social marketing as well:

New Media: New Rules

The explosion in popularity of networking sites like Facebook and Twitter has created a sense of panic for marketing managers. Under pressure to “do something,” many jump in feet first without learning the new rules that govern social media communication. “Follow us on Twitter,” and “Become a Fan” links are appearing on websites, direct mail pieces, television ads and fliers—but treating social media like a broadcast medium lands marketers in hot water.

Companies have made some costly blunders by ignoring the rules of engagement. Consumers who frequent social networking sites are looking for information that helps them solve their problems—not another advertisement. Unfortunately, marketers who don’t understand this lose an important business asset—trust.

Mobile: Driving Communication Forward

In his book, “Mobile Persuasion: 20 Perspectives on the future of Behavior Change,” Stanford professor and social media expert B.J. Fogg writes: “Mobile phones will soon become the most important platform for changing human behavior...Nothing can stop this revolution.”

Everything’s going mobile. Yesterday’s desktop and laptop computers are today’s smart phones. We access the Internet, send status updates to networking sites, check e-mail—even watch TV with mobile devices. New mobile applications for advertising and social networking are being created daily, accelerating social media use even more.

2 Social Media Marketing Industry Report, March 2009

Social Media panic can cause marketers to make costly mistakes

The rapid adoption of mobile technology is expanding opportunities to connect with customers via social networks and is changing the advertising landscape

Over 180 carriers in 60 different countries promote Facebook mobile products today—and that’s only one platform. Research shows that unlimited data plans are on the rise across providers. According to a review by **comScore, Inc.**³, unlimited data plan subscriptions rose from 16 to 21 percent in 2009, and 3G phone ownership rose from 32 to 43 percent—an upward trend that shows no sign of slowing and is changing advertising in ways we never thought possible a decade ago.



The changing face of internet use and exploding mobile technologies show us that businesses need reliable resources for staying on top of social media. To stay competitive, moving forward is the only option—but for many, that means getting out of their comfort zone and learning how to wrestle with a new set of problems.

3 Key Challenges in Social Media Marketing

Lead generation, closing sales and increasing customer life-time value have always been universal marketing goals. However, marketers are uncertain exactly what role social media plays in the equation.

Sometimes there can be a disconnect between traditional marketing thinking and the social media goals of community building, engagement and interaction. Terms like **transparency**, **authenticity** and **collective intelligence** float around in social media circles, but what do they really mean in practice? How do these concepts affect bottom line?

For most marketers, the key issues revolve around planning and measurement of results, and top concerns include:

- Accurately measuring return on social media initiatives
- Deciding which tools work best for a given industry, and
- Allocating resources effectively

1. Measuring Social Media ROI

Most marketing managers define and measure return on marketing investment in terms of dollars and cents, so they often wrestle with using social media because it doesn’t seem to fit the same mold. Many ask themselves: “Without a clear way to measure success, how can I prove that my efforts are working?”

Companies that have learned to measure social media results based on the criteria of “influence” versus “investment” seem to be experiencing the most success with the medium. For instance, Avaya, a communications company, interacts with dozens of customers and potential clients per week via social

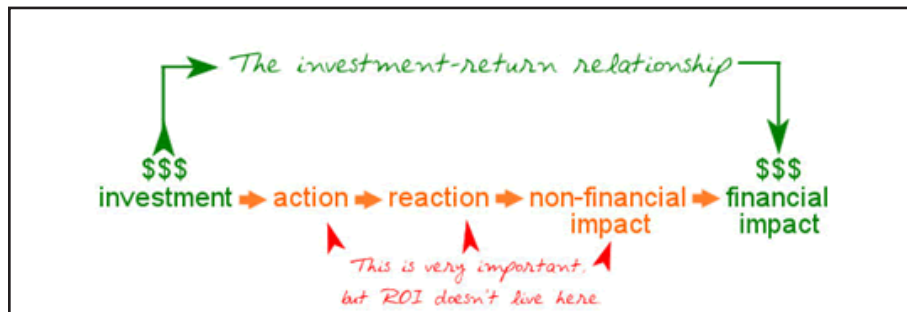
3 comScore, Inc. “2009 Digital Year in Review” February, 2010

Marketers face many challenges in learning to use social media, but the biggest hurdles are measurement, choosing the right tools, and allocating resources

media channels. Actively listening and responding generates measurable returns for Avaya, such as a Twitter query that resulted in a \$250,000 business transaction⁴.

Other well-known brands, such as Starbucks, Dell, Pepsi and Toyota have noted success with social media as well. However, measurement of return on social media initiatives remains a major challenge for most businesses. Social media conversations and activity usually take place outside traditional websites where marketers can easily analyze electronic footprints. This creates a multi-faceted measurement challenge. How do you tie it all back to sales?

The companies that have shown success in social media marketing tell us that it requires a new mind-set—one that concentrates more on affecting ROI through engagement and interaction with customers and less on controlling the message. However, marketing managers still need to “prove the numbers” to company stakeholders who think in more traditional terms. As the following diagram⁵ indicates, the social media road to ROI is longer and requires additional analysis along the way.



Many businesses get stuck in the “action—reaction—non-financial impact” section of the above equation. For them, finding the personnel knowledgeable enough to handle the social media measurement and analysis work needed to get to true ROI is a big hurdle.

2. Choosing the Right Social Media Tools

How does a marketer new to social media know which platforms work best for his or her industry? With so many choices out there, it can be difficult to know where customers are congregating. Trial and error can be time-consuming, and marketers often get disappointed when they don’t see immediate results from a given initiative. They can also make early blunders that cost time and money to repair, such as jumping into a platform that isn’t frequented by the ideal customer/prospect base, or ignoring negative brand sentiment.

Not having a clear knowledge of the capabilities of platforms and their applications can be frustrating to managers who feel pressure from stakeholders to perform. They often fear “missing the wave” and losing market share to more social media-savvy competitors.

Many new tools and applications have been developed to help businesses measure effectiveness of campaigns and gauge market sentiment (see a partial list in the sidebar). Measurement aids such as analytics, PR measurement

MEASUREMENT TOOLS THAT CAN HELP

WEB ANALYTICS
 Google Analytics
 Omniture
 Bit.ly

PR MEASUREMENT
 DIY Dashboard
 Tealium
 Vocus

SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING
 Radian 6
 Scoutlabs
 Visible Technologies

4 Social Media Examiner, “It Pays to Listen: Avaya’s \$250K Twitter Sale.” Nov. 2009

5 Diagram taken from Olivier Blanchard Slideshare, “Basics of Social Media ROI” given at the Social Fresh Conference in August 2009



*Time, Personality
and Knowledge
are major issues in
resource allocation*



dashboards and sentiment monitoring tools can save companies time and money in choosing the platforms that work best. However, marketers often need expert help in using these tools to analyze their brand's market sentiment and preferred platforms.

3. Allocating Resources Effectively

Even if marketers know which platforms they should use and how to measure results, they're often unsure what it should cost to implement a social media marketing plan. How long should the learning curve be? Is it best to bring in an independent consultant, train existing staff members or hire someone new to handle social media tasks? What role should they have?

When struggling with these resource issues the biggest hurdles are money and time, but those new to social media also worry about overwhelming stressed employees with multiple tasks. Some fear that loading employees with additional duties will cause bottlenecks in current procedures.

Personality clashes also cause problems. For instance, putting technical people in charge of social media efforts without considering their attitudes toward customer service can result in a struggle that eats up more time and money.

Other Challenges

Additional problems faced by businesses implementing social media marketing include:

- Planning strategy and maintaining focus
- Dealing with negative feedback
- Staying flexible as technology changes
- Developing a comprehensive social media policy

This is by no means an exhaustive list. The fluid nature of social media and the fast pace of its development present new challenges to marketers on a daily basis. Fortunately, businesses that are wrestling with these problems no longer have to cherry-pick from odd sources to find the qualified help they need. They now have access to a variety of knowledge bases brought together to help them navigate this new marketing environment.

But how did we get lost in the woods so fast in the first place—and what lessons can be learned from the journey? For a better perspective on managing social media marketing challenges, it can be helpful to take a look at historical developments and how they apply to marketing today.

The Social Media Revolution: A Brief Overview

Clay Shirky, author of “Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations” summed up the history of marketing media as we know it in a 2009 TED Talks presentation⁶. In it, Shirky compares today's social media

⁶ TED Talks, “How Social Media Can Make History” <http://www.ted.com/talks/view/id/575>. Jun 2009



revolution to other communication revolutions in human history, namely:

- The Printing Press
- Telegraph/Telephone
- Recorded Media (Photograph/Film)
- Electromagnetic Broadcast (Radio/Television)

Take a look at his video to see how he ties social media into the mix.



To view Clay's TED Talks presentation, click on the image above or use the following link: http://www.ted.com/talks/clay_shirky_how_cellphones_twitter_facebook_can_make_history.html

Social media's many-to-many conversations have essentially reversed traditional roles of "producers" and "consumers" of information

Shirky's discussion illustrates how early technological advances gradually pushed information to larger and larger groups of people, mostly through one-way messages broadcasted to specific groups.

It also shows us how the move to social media has changed everything. Yesterday's consumers and receivers of information are now today's producers and sharers, and there's no turning back. Technology has carried us into an age where the buzz about the events of the day—or even a company's brand—is no longer controlled by organizations, but by the consumer.

Shirky's examples of how social media affected events such as China's 2008 Sichuan Province earthquake and the Iran elections of early 2009 are indeed thought-provoking—however, that's not the end of the story. More recently, social media's impact on the 2010 earthquake in Haiti shows extraordinary implications for business today. According to the Red Cross, more than \$32 million was pledged through a record-breaking mobile text effort for Haitian earthquake relief in a very short time period. Thinking about that from a business standpoint, the possibilities are staggering.

History shows us that the many-to-many conversations enabled by social media have essentially reversed the roles of producer and consumer. Understanding this concept is critical for marketers today if they are to apply social media marketing effectively. In addition, the technology explosion shows us that we need to have reliable, competent resources for learning how to implement



today’s fast-moving social technologies to engage our markets.

Professional Social Media associations offer comprehensive learning opportunities and allow members to stay on top of new technologies as they emerge

The Solution: Plug Into a Professional Social Media Knowledge Source

Professional social media associations are now coming together to offer businesses better learning opportunities, access to reliable information, and pools of qualified experts for help. Instead of relying on a laborious process of trial and error to find the right tools and tactics, accessing the resources of an established association takes the guesswork out of solving the social media puzzle, and can give marketers a clearer path to solving social media challenges. Professional associations offer a clearinghouse of resources, coursework and even certification programs for members, and are a good choice for businesses that need to address social media problems quickly and efficiently.

Listed below are several organizations that offer social media resources:

- [Marketing Profs](#)
- [Word of Mouth Marketing Association](#)
- [Social Media Today](#)
- [Mashable.com](#)
- [International Social Media Association](#)



These resources exist to help members make sense of social media marketing, and to promote professionalism in the industry. Whether you’re new to social media or a seasoned veteran, accessing comprehensive knowledge sources like these can save hours of time and frustration.

In addressing the measurement issues, platform choices and resource allocation problems that marketers face in using social media, professional organizations can tap resources

that may not be available to individuals. They often find hidden gems of information to help their members, such as the POST strategy (illustrated at left) introduced by Forrester analyst Josh Bernoff⁷.

Professional organizations look for tools that can help members make better decisions regarding social media—tools that individuals might not be able to find easily on their own.

One of the best resources that associations provide, however, is the membership itself. One can find a variety of well-trained professionals in an association membership, including virtual assistants, marketing strategists, and experts that specialize in platforms across the entire social media spectrum. Do you need to hire knowledgeable help? Plugging into a professional network can add a level

7 mashable.com



Social Media associations can give members a variety of perspectives and are often populated by well-trained specialists

of confidence to your search. By reaching out to people trained in a professional social media environment, businesses have a better chance of matching their needs with highly qualified individuals.

Benefits of Working with Trained Social Media Professionals

Companies that seek professional social media training for their employees, or that need to hire qualified consultants or agencies receive many benefits from industry-wide associations, including:

- A broad perspective of the industry through the combined experience of recognized professionals across multiple platforms
- A comprehensive view of industry standards and best practices that saves time and keeps members up to date
- Ensured competency among member consultants with appropriate training programs that offer assessment tests and benchmarks
- Increased opportunities to duplicate the success of others by studying documented processes and case studies
- A pool of well-trained members that can be tapped for collaboration, outsourcing, networking and joint venture projects
- A cost-effective alternative to hiring an industry “guru” in a consulting capacity

Professional associations can offer a variety of ways to stay on top of changes in the social media industry, from training programs and information to a rich source of well-educated professionals. Seeking out a professional social media association can give marketing managers the leg up they need to stay ahead in today’s competitive marketplace.



What to Look for in a Social Media Professional

When seeking a qualified social media professional or agency, consider the following important requirements:

Quality Training: Look for an agency or individual trained by recognized industry leaders from across the entire spectrum of social media. Check out their certification, and make sure periodic skill assessment testing and ongoing training are part of the solution.

Long-Term Strategy: Avoid get-rich-quick solutions. Seek professionals with solid business backgrounds that offer an integrated marketing approach—not just a quick fix for a single platform.

Power in Numbers: Look for professionals in associations with a growing pool of members from various industries. A wide range of expertise gives greater opportunity for collaboration, expanded learning opportunities and better



overall industry focus.

Team Approach: The ideal social media professional actively seeks industry-wide collaboration and is plugged into broad, current social media conversation—not just a single viewpoint.

Standards and Ethics: Seek professionals with a clearly-stated, comprehensive ethics policy and mission. Their standards and ethics should match up with those of the social media industry as well as your organization's ideals.

The International Social Media Association (ISMA) Advantage:

ISMA brings together experts from across the social media landscape, and its growing ranks include members from over 49 countries. Its mission is to connect, engage and educate members on social media around the world to advance the knowledge, skills and integrity of the profession.

The association offers both online and offline development seminars and workshops and professional certification training for members, as well as free weekly teleseminar training to the public. ISMA facilitates the sharing and exchange of ideas, and seeks to further the development of expertise, knowledge and service in the social media industry.

ISMA is a professional organization that meets all the challenges outlined in this paper. It was co-founded by Mari Smith, a recognized leader and professional in the social media industry and author of three books, including "Facebook Marketing: An Hour a Day," and Mark Eldridge, internet marketing entrepreneur and co-author of the bestselling book, "The Obvious Expert."

Connect with ISMA at www.ismaconnects.org, or follow them on Twitter and Facebook using the links below.



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