

# Using Social Media

In 2009 and 2010, social media went mainstream. Companies, products, and nonprofits rushed to establish presences on Facebook, Twitter, and media repositories such as Flickr and YouTube. If they already had blogs, the streams of bite-size messages on Twitter and Facebook gave those blogs new audiences. Organizations discovered that if they published a steady stream of appealing content, customers and influencers would pay attention to them—and if a piece of content “went viral,” that organization’s brand would spread far and wide. For free!

Well, not really for free.

Organizations put in a lot of effort to establish successful social media presences. Someone has to spend a lot of time writing and disseminating content; someone else needs to spend time reading relevant conversations across the Web and responding sensitively to them. Valuable home page real estate may support these social media efforts, and pages on other sites (such as Facebook or YouTube) must be designed and tended. And someone needs to devise an overall strategy: where is effort spent, when, and on what topics?

A few best practices are emerging that can inform those efforts. Social media is still a young field, and specific recommendations will change rapidly over the months and years. Like the rest of this book, this chapter’s principles and patterns aren’t hard-and-fast rules, though ideally they will outlast 2010’s most popular sites and technologies.

This chapter will focus on one aspect of online social interaction: how to use the various forms of social media to promote a brand, share an idea, disseminate a video or other artistic expression, and otherwise support your particular enterprise. The key is to acquire *followers*—people who voluntarily listen to what you have to say. Brands that create excellent experiences for their followers gain huge audiences from their social media efforts. (Here, we will keep the scope of this chapter broad enough to include “brands” that are personal, nonprofit, arts-based, cause-driven, or just for fun.)

## What This Chapter Does Not Cover

Personal use of social media varies dramatically from person to person. There may be best practices for personal consumption of social media—in fact, that might be a very fun conversation to have among practitioners. But this book was written for designers of sites and software, and so the focus will be on what those designers need.

Another topic this chapter will not cover is the design of online communities. That's an art unto itself, and its patterns and best practices are somewhat different from the ones that are described in this chapter. As of this writing, a few organizations and brands have successfully built online communities around their brand, but there's not much evidence that they actually help the brand. (If the brand *is* an online community, such as Stack Overflow or Ravelry, that's a different story; they can be quite successful. In any case, this chapter doesn't address them.)

Finally, many sites have sprung up that use social interaction in innovative ways. Delicious, Yelp, Foursquare, and others have all created products out of collective intelligence, mediated online. I expect that more of these kinds of sites will arise over the years. Erin Malone and Christian Crumlish have skillfully written about some of these ways of gathering and concentrating opinions in their book *Designing Social Interfaces* (O'Reilly, <http://oreilly.com/catalog/9780596154936/>). This chapter complements that book.

## The Basics of Social Media

What principles and patterns should you consider as you help develop a strategy for using social media?

The first topic is so obvious and so basic that I gave it the number zero. It's something you need to do before you create any social media presence at all:

### 0. Listen.

Find out where people are talking about your brand, product, organization—or competitors. Go beyond that, too: which broad topics touch on your brand's purpose or mission, and what are people saying about those topics? If your organization has something positive to contribute, take part in those conversations.

- Find the online conversations and read them. Use tools to help you monitor them if necessary, especially if you're working for a well-known brand with a strong online presence.
- Make sure the organization knows what is being said about it, even if the comments are negative.
- In reputable places with a large readership, such as certain well-known blogs, have someone from your organization sign up and participate in the conversations. Make it clear that that person formally represents the organization.

- When you participate, answer questions, offer information, gently correct misperceptions, and acknowledge gripes.
- Be a responsive, dignified presence; don't be too chatty, and don't be too defensive. And hold back on the sales pitches.

Now we'll talk about the active, creative aspects of using social media. How do you build a fruitful social media presence that people enjoy following?

The following six principles come more or less in order of importance. If you don't write content that people like to read (principle 1), there's no point in spending effort to disseminate it or make it findable, for instance. Some of these recommendations will be relevant to your situation, and some will not. Principles 5 and 6, especially, are uncommon because of the effort they require.

### *1. Produce good stuff.*

Write, design, record, or otherwise create items that people enjoy consuming. Produce them regularly and frequently enough to keep people interested. Set up conversations around those items to make them even more intriguing—invite Facebook comments, for instance—and participate in those conversations yourself.

- Create an [Editorial Mix](#) that represents your organization well. Generate original content that appeals to different people, using a mixture of length, style, and media type (text, images, video, podcast).
- Link to other people's content. Use [Repost and Comment](#) to augment your original material and to give credit to other worthy sites on the Web.
- Having [Personal Voices](#) in your mix can be more appealing than a single, generic corporate voice.
- Use [Conversation Starters](#) to prompt followers to respond. Once someone engages in a conversation with you, she's more likely to come back.

### *2. Push that good stuff out to readers.*

Go to wherever they spend their time: email, Facebook, Twitter, RSS feeds, Digg, or wherever you discover your readers are hanging out online. With your readers' permission, get your content into their personal [News Streams](#) (Chapter 2)—the daily flow of news and updates they get via those services. (In other words, make them followers.)

- Use more than one social media channel or service to reach as many readers as you reasonably can. Meet them where they are; don't expect them to join a new service just to get your updates.
- Don't overwhelm your followers with too much content. Use the different services wisely, according to the conventions developed for each one. Develop a [Timing Strategy](#) for releasing content.
- Put [Social Links](#) on your home page to direct readers to your social media channels; make it easy for them to become followers.

- If your organization produces a lot of content and has many different audiences for different products or topics, consider using [Specialized Streams](#) instead of one very busy stream of content.
- Use the [Inverted Nano-pyramid](#) to write status updates, summaries, and headlines. These attract more readers when they are written skillfully and “hook” people into reading more of your content.

#### *3. Let readers decide which stuff is good.*

Give readers a way to share your content with their own followers, and let readers send items privately to close ties. Gather feedback via voting systems, thumbs-up/down gadgets, and other systems. Note which items have active conversations about them, as this is another signal of “good”-ness.

- Provide mechanisms for people to comment on the items you post, but be selective. Low-interest news items or blog posts don’t draw many comments, and empty comment areas don’t draw attention. Lively ones, however, can pull in more readers.
- Put a [Sharing Widget](#) beside your posts, so people can easily share them with their own social followers. This is a very powerful mechanism; it disseminates your content to more people, engages the people who do the sharing, and gives you data about which items are most popular.
- “Email this” buttons let readers send items privately to their closer social ties. Emailed articles are likely to be read by the recipients, since someone they know has specifically recommended it to them; this kind of [Personal Recommendation](#) (Chapter 1) is powerful.
- When you post items such as product descriptions or recipes—things for which negative reviews won’t reflect badly on your organization—consider letting people review or rate these items. Their collective intelligence can identify the bad and good for other readers. (You may invite trouble, however, if you ask people to rate items that your organization directly produces and is invested in.)
- Let viewers “vote up” their favorite pieces of content. You might do this with a “Like” control, a star, a thumbs-up, or some other mechanism. For more details, see the “Vote to Promote” pattern in the Yahoo! pattern library or in *Designing Social Interfaces*.

#### *4. Make the good stuff findable.*

Organize your home page well; put fresh content there regularly, and use sidebars to show most-viewed items, best-of lists, and other views into your library of content items. Show related items to users who click through, and make archived items and conversations available. Put your content where search engines can find it, because in the long run, that’s how most people will arrive at it anyway.

- Put a [News Box](#) on your home page to showcase your most recent articles, news items, blog posts, videos, and so on. These are usually “social objects,” disseminated via social media and commented upon by the public.
- If you collect data on how many times an item is shared, emailed, rated, or commented upon, you can create a [Content Leaderboard](#) to showcase the most popular items.
- Consider creating a “best-of” list for your blog, video library, or other large collection of content. This gives newcomers a convenient place to start. Make sure someone curates it competently so that it remains both accurate and fresh.
- When a reader clicks through to the blog post, news item, and so forth, show him a set of links to related content. Presumably the reader is interested in this topic; would he like to read more material on the same topic? Keep him reading and clicking through to pages on your site.
- Check that your material shows up on search engines. Make sure the titles and other metadata identify the content items well. Also check that your site’s search box finds content correctly.
- Maintain stable, well-named social media identities. Can a random Facebook user find the right Facebook page via a search for your organization’s name? Or does she have to go to your actual website and follow the [Social Links](#) to get there? (That should also be possible, of course, but searching within a social media site is less effort for the user.)

#### *5. Mingle readers’ good stuff with your good stuff.*

Publish guest-written articles, blog posts, reviews, and amateur videos. Hold photo contests and show off the winning images—with attribution, of course. Most organizations never quite reach this point, which is fine; it’s not appropriate for every company or nonprofit. But when your followers are both enthusiastic and talented, work with them!

#### *6. Foster community.*

Again, this is not appropriate for every organization, but some have built entire online communities around a well-loved idea or activity—gardening, gaming, music, technology, and so on. There’s not much evidence that communities actually help build a brand or increase market share, so don’t count on that. What these *can* do is give people an online place to go, where they can ask questions, form friendships, share ideas, help each other out, vent, be silly, and share things that they (not you) judge to be interesting.

## The Patterns

Consider using the following patterns for social content production:

1. Editorial Mix
2. Personal Voices
3. Repost and Comment
4. Conversation Starters
5. Inverted Nano-pyramid

When you design the mechanisms for when, where, and how to disseminate content, use these:

6. Timing Strategy
7. Specialized Streams
8. Social Links
9. Sharing Widget
10. News Box
11. Content Leaderboard
12. Recent Chatter

## Editorial Mix

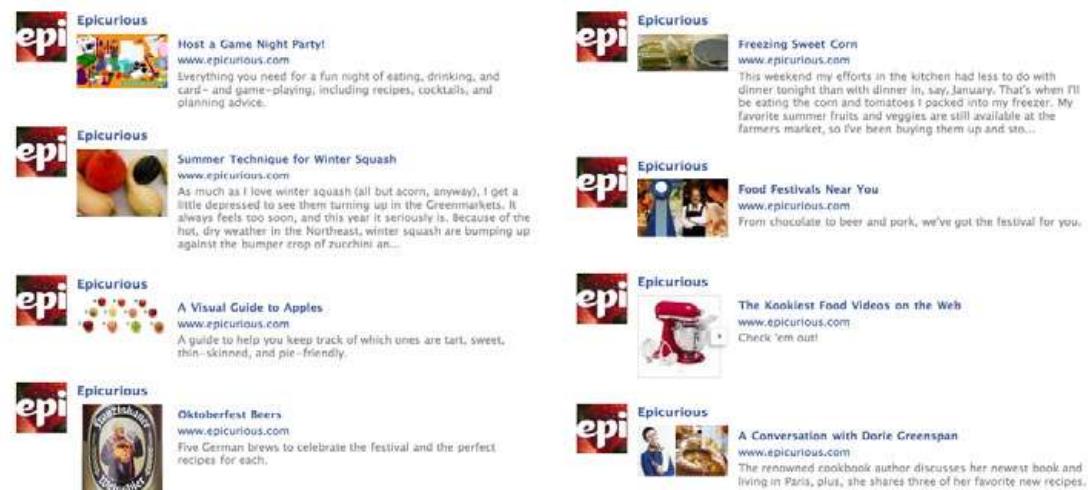


Figure 9-1. Topics covered by Epicurious on Facebook

**What**

Publish a regular series of articles or links that include a mix of news, human-interest pieces, photos, videos, public service announcements, and other types of content. Refrain from direct self-promotion most of the time.

**Use when**

You want to increase name recognition, goodwill toward your organization, connections with customers, and possibly sales. You want readers to follow and enjoy the content you publish, and you have the resources to find or produce that content.

**Why**

A variety of topics and media types will appeal to a broader group of people than a narrower set of interests. Some of those people may learn about topics they wouldn't otherwise have known about, simply because you put it in their stream.

A more fundamental point is that each piece needs to be interesting by itself. You want followers to read the pieces you write, follow the links you post, view your videos, and look forward to your future posts. Better yet, you want your followers to repost those items to their own followers and close ties—this gets your name out there to more people in a viral fashion. Some of them may then choose to follow you.

**How**

Choose a set of topics that are both related to your mission and interesting to lots of people. Of the organizations studied for this chapter, those topics have included food, sports, nature, travel, green technologies, politics, parenting, disaster relief, high tech, and science. People get passionate about these subjects. What topics can you cover that evoke passion and high interest?

Develop a mix that's appropriate for your organization. Everyone who uses social media successfully has a unique blend of content types and topics, though variety and "interestingness" are common to all.

Long written content can be posted to your blog. That blog post can then be linked from shorter-form or microblogging sites, such as Twitter. (Most organizations don't propagate all their blog posts to these other channels.) Short, ephemeral items might be posted directly to the microblogs.

Encourage followers to comment on the things you post. This is more likely to happen on social networks such as Facebook, or microblogging sites such as Twitter. Sometimes people leave comments on blog posts, but as of this writing, conversations don't take place on blogs when there are better alternatives.

Don't overload the social media channels with too much content! See the [Timing Strategy](#) pattern for more information about quantity and timing.

Avoid overt marketing most of the time. In a larger sense, of course, it's all marketing; but readers know when they're being subjected to a sales pitch, and they don't like it. They probably didn't subscribe to your updates to be deluged by commercials. So post informative or entertaining content most of the time, and limit the advertisements to very specific and useful items—discount codes, new products, or reminders about popular sales events. Ask yourself before posting: if your followers didn't see this, would some of them be sad to have missed it?

Here are some types of content that you may consider:

- News articles
- Interviews with subject experts
- Short, pithy quotes and one-liners
- Product reviews
- Essays or videos about what happens “behind the scenes” at your organization
- Recipes and how-to instructions
- Public service announcements
- Ways that people can help out with charities or other altruistic efforts
- Humor
- Opinion pieces
- Letters from readers
- Short stories, real or fictional
- Musical or artistic performances, usually on video
- Slideshows
- Podcasts
- Questions intended to evoke reader responses; see the [Conversation Starters](#) pattern
- Regular commentary from high-profile employees; see the [Personal Voices](#) pattern
- Other people's blog posts; see the [Repost and Comment](#) pattern

Remember that the material you provide in your social stream will be used by your followers for their own purposes: forming or supporting an online identity (“I'm interested in this topic”), passing information to their close ties, entertaining their larger circle of friends, indirectly stating an opinion, or just connecting. Will your followers be willing to do that with the content you produce? Is it funny, controversial, beautiful, truthful, or authentic?

## Examples

Starbucks publishes content that its customers would be interested in: subjects include coffee, tea, store specials, music, altruistic efforts, and other topics. Some are text-based articles, some are video clips, and some are reposted from other sources. Figure 9-2 shows Starbucks' Facebook page.

Corporate blogs need to achieve a delicate balance between focus and diversity of topics. As shown in Figure 9-3, Whole Foods' blog deals with many topics related to natural food, whereas the Google blog, reflecting Google's variety of products and services, covers a much broader range of topics.

 **Starbucks** Curious where our new Tazo full leaf Teas come from? Check out these photos that our Tazo tea buyers took from their journeys to find the very best teas.



**Tazo Tea buyers travel the world.**  
18 new photos

 January 13 at 6:23pm · Comment · Like · View Feedback (5,014) · Share

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 **Starbucks** Are you a tea drinker? Today is a big day for you at Starbucks. Now all of our teas are full leaf teas. There are two new teas too, Tazo Vanilla Roobios and Orange Blossom. Warm up with a cup of tea!



**What's New in Stores | Starbucks Coffee Company**  
[www.starbucks.com](http://www.starbucks.com)

The Skinny Cinnamon Dolce Latte is to die for. Rich espresso. Sweet, buttery, sugar-free cinnamon dolce syrup. Nonfat steamed milk topped with foamed milk and cinnamon dolce sprinkles. And at only 90 calories, what more could you ask for?

 January 12 at 2:28pm · Comment · Like · View Feedback (7,427) · Share

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 **Starbucks** Tomorrow, one of our absolute favorite coffees is returning to stores, Guatemala Casi Cielo. It means "almost heaven" for good reason. If you've had it before, tell us why you love it.

[starbucks.com](http://starbucks.com)  
[starbucks.com](http://starbucks.com)

 January 11 at 3:02pm · Comment · Like · View Feedback (6,455) · Share

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 **Starbucks** Meet b-boy Alex Lek and his crew. They're break-dancing to raise money and awareness for the invisible children of Uganda.

With support from Starbucks and Youth Venture, Alex is using his passion, interest and skills to help displaced children in the East African nation. Starbucks Shared Planet Youth Action Grants fund n...

[See More](#)



"When you break, you're united." [HQ]  
Length: 3:02

Figure 9-2. The Facebook page for Starbucks

**RECENT POSTS ARCHIVES BLOGROLL**

- [Discover Australian Wines](#)
- [Help Is Here For Those Hard To Recycle #5's](#)
- [Food on Film: The Garden](#)
- [Let's Stop Playing With Our Food](#)
- [Enter Our Pineapple Recipe Contest](#)
- [Cork ReHarvest](#)
- [Premium Body Care® - A Worthy Challenge](#)
- [Pineapple Perfection](#)
- [Let's Not Mess With Mother Nature](#)
- [Your Overwhelming Generosity](#)
- [Food In Reverse](#)
- [Food on Film: No Impact Man](#)
- [Chance To Win A Trip To Costa Rica](#)
- [Introducing Pineapple With A Purpose](#)
- [Let's Retake Our Plates](#)

[Older posts available in the Whole Story Archives](#)

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**Eating our way through Earth Day**  
4/22/2010 08:35:00 AM

**Greater transparency around government requests**  
4/20/2010 11:04:00 AM

**Introducing Google Places**  
4/20/2010 05:00:00 AM

**The art of search results**  
4/19/2010 01:00:00 PM

**Soaring into the cloud**  
4/19/2010 10:00:00 AM

**Controversial content and free expression on the web: a refresher**  
4/19/2010 09:23:00 AM

**Imagery for Qinghai, China earthquake**  
4/19/2010 08:56:00 AM  
(Cross-posted from the [Google LatLong Blog](#))

**This week in search 4/16/10**  
4/16/2010 05:03:00 PM  
This is one of a regular series of posts on search experience updates. Look for the label [This week in search](#) and subscribe to the series. - Ed.

**Google Apps highlights – 4/16/2010**  
4/16/2010 11:58:00 AM  
This is part of a regular series of Google Apps updates that we post every couple of weeks. Look for the label ["Google Apps highlights"](#) and subscribe to the series. - Ed.

Figure 9-3. Headlines from the Whole Foods and Google blogs

## Personal Voices

**Zappos CEO**

**zappos**

Hi! I'm Tony Hsieh the C of Zappos.com.

Have a question? Here's h to get the fastest response

Customer service: Help finding a product, cs@zappos.com, 1-800-927-7671

Interviews, PR: Speaking requests, pr@zappos.com

Marketing, Sponsorships, Donation & Charity Requests, solicitation@zappos.com

**Follow**

**zappos**

CEO

<http://twitpic.com/112sii> – Wow, Bellagio sent Zappos a cake w/ an edible chocolate high heel shoe!

about 22 hours ago from TwitPic

What happens if you repeat a retweet on Groundhog Day?  
What happens if you repeat a retweet on Groundhog Day?

12:46 PM Feb 2nd from web

<http://twitpic.com/10ypyz> – Gave speech to Bellagio employees at O theater, now enjoying water show!

10:13 PM Feb 1st from TwitPic

Study finds sugar helps with making big decisions –

Figure 9-4. Tony Hsieh's Twitter feed

**What**

Encourage individuals to use their own voices, separate from the social media streams published by the organization itself. Let them publish blogs and write guest blog posts; encourage them to use Twitter and other social channels.

**Use when**

You have social media champions within your organization—people who are willing to put themselves out there, as both individuals and representatives. These may be domain experts, engineers, marketing people, or even CEOs. You don't object to having multiple social media voices, other than the one official voice of the organization.

**Why**

A personal voice humanizes your brand. Readers often connect better with an individual human being, with a name and a face, than with a brand or organization.

**How**

Let your employees write social content as themselves, with their names on their posts. Use personal anecdotes, experiences, memories, reviews of products in actual use, and other topics that humanize the author.

Consider whether to publish guidelines for employees' social media participation, beyond the obvious "don't publish anything that will get us sued." Some companies, such as SAP and Oracle, put their guidelines on the Web to serve as examples.

**Examples**

The CEO of Zappos tweets frequently, and as of this writing has 1.7 million followers (see Figure 9-4 at the top of the pattern). Tony Hsieh's quirky, humorous, very personal tweets draw lots of attention, without ever being overt advertising for the brand. Zappos also encourages its other employees to use Twitter, and the company's website devotes a page to the tweets sent out by its employees (see Figure 9-5).

The screenshot shows a Twitter interface for the domain [twitter.zappos.com](http://twitter.zappos.com). At the top, there's a header with the Zappos logo and navigation links like "Zappos Public Mentions", "Employee Tweets", "Employee TwitPics", and "Employees Who Twitter". A link to a "Beginner's Quick Start Guide and Tutorial to Using Twitter" is also present. The main content area displays a series of tweets from Zappos employees:

- A user (@) tweets: "Usher's new song is stuck in my head! Oh, Oh, Oh-Oh....." at 11:13 AM Pacific - Fri 04/02/10.
- Zappos Service (@ZapposService) replies: "Welcome to the Zappos family and thank you so much for your kind words!" at 11:09 AM Pacific - Fri 04/02/10.
- Zappos Service (@ZapposService) replies: "Please send an email to [cs@zappos.com](mailto:cs@zappos.com) and we would be happy to help." at 11:06 AM Pacific - Fri 04/02/10.
- A user (@) tweets: "Sweettarts for breakfast. bamf" at 10:36 AM Pacific - Fri 04/02/10.
- A user (@) tweets: "<http://twitpic.com/> - Hahaha, this is the best eyemask ever!" at 10:23 AM Pacific - Fri 04/02/10.
- Zappos Employee (@ZapposEmployee) tweets: "If there's a new niceness online, don't expect it to sell. <http://bit.ly/c63pPX> from @" at 09:56 AM Pacific - Fri 04/02/10.
- Zappos Employee (@ZapposEmployee) tweets: "First Friday tonight?" at 09:45 AM Pacific - Fri 04/02/10.

Figure 9-5. Zappos employee tweets

Several of CNN's well-known anchors and reporters use Twitter, including Wolf Blitzer, Anderson Cooper, and Ed Henry (see Figure 9-6). These posts tend to have much more personality and intimacy than the "official" CNN tweets. For a complete list, see the CNN Twitter list called [@CNN/anchors-and-reporters](#).

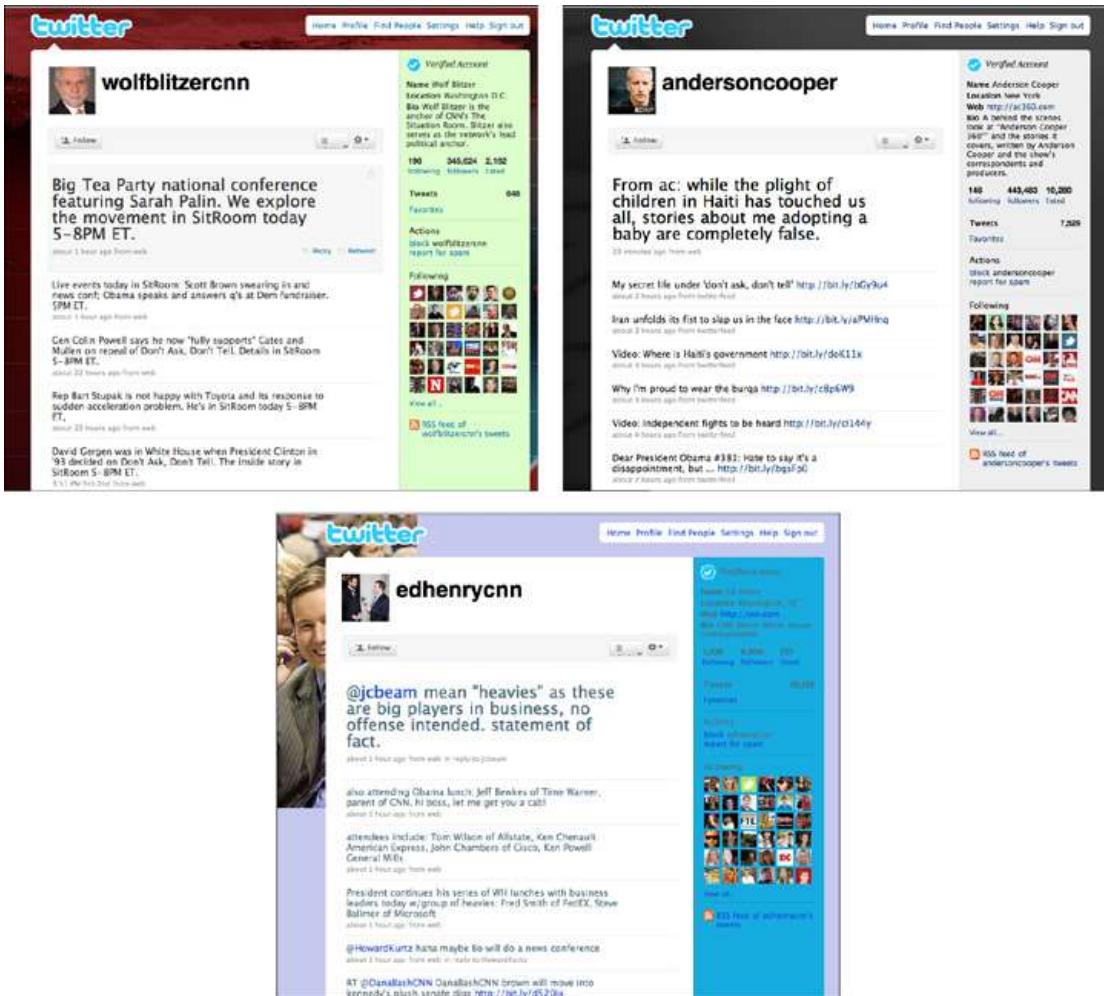


Figure 9-6. Personal Twitter feeds for CNN's anchors

Large technology companies Google and IBM encourage their employees to create public blogs, which are then listed prominently in corporate web pages; see Figure 9-7. (In fact, employees are the only social media presence that IBM has.)

## IBMer's blogs

A menu of expertise and insight from a passionate crowd



As they'll tell you themselves, the opinions and interests expressed on IBMers' blogs are their own and don't necessarily represent this company's positions, strategies or views. But that doesn't mean we don't want you to read them! Because they do represent lots of business and technology expertise you can't get from anyone else. Scroll through the list to browse, or click the links below to jump down to each letter.

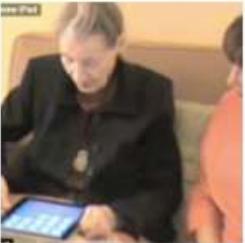
<a href="#">By blogger</a>	<a href="#">By blog name</a>
<a href="#">A</a> <a href="#">B</a> <a href="#">C</a> <a href="#">D</a> <a href="#">E</a> <a href="#">F</a> <a href="#">G</a> <a href="#">H</a> <a href="#">I</a> <a href="#">J</a> <a href="#">K</a> <a href="#">L</a> <a href="#">M</a> <a href="#">N</a> <a href="#">O</a> <a href="#">P</a> <a href="#">Q</a> <a href="#">R</a> <a href="#">S</a> <a href="#">T</a> <a href="#">U</a> <a href="#">V</a> <a href="#">W</a> <a href="#">X</a> <a href="#">Y</a> <a href="#">Z</a>	
<b>A</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Falak Ahmed</b> <a href="#">XML</a></li> <li> <a href="#">Catch Intellectual Exception</a> Ramblings about technology</li>   <li><b>Jean-Francois Arseneault</b> <a href="#">XML</a></li> <li> <a href="#">Life In Technical Sales</a> Stories of an technical sales software rep with more interests than time allows</li> </ul>	
<b>B</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Bob Balfe</b> <a href="#">XML</a></li> </ul>	

### Blogs By Googlers

- [20-Something Finance](#)
- [Abe Tries Again](#)
- [Alon Chen's Diary-in Hebrew](#)
- [Beyond Satire](#)
- [Bikin' my Bloggin'](#)
- [Bladam 2.0](#)
- [Bolinfest Changeblog](#)
- [Catspaw's Guide to the Inevitably Insane](#)
- [Confessions of a Digital Packrat](#)
- [Damon Kohler](#)
- [Donal Mountain's notes](#)
- [Dr. Razavi's Good-to-Know-Info](#)
- [Ego Food](#)
- [Erica's Joys](#)
- [Germart](#)
- [Grokster](#)
- [Gyula Simonyi: smart design](#)
- [iBanjo](#)
- [It Has Come to My Attention](#)
- [Jason Morrison.net](#)
- [Jens Meiert](#)
- [JR Says](#)
- [Kraneland](#)
- [Lorem Ipsum](#)
- [Made of Scarves](#)

Figure 9-7. Some of IBM's and Google's employee blogs

## Repost and Comment



**How the iPad Has Changed One 99-Year-Old Woman's Life [VIDEO]**

**WEB VIDEO** We've seen iPads and cats go viral. We've seen iPads and dogs go viral. But the latest iPad YouTube sensation is far more special: It depicts how the device has changed one 99-year-old woman's life.

...

 About 10 hours ago **Ben Parr** 23  376

1420 tweets 

730 

37 

Figure 9-8. Mashable repost of a viral YouTube video

**What**

Instead of always generating your own content, find works on other sites that you can link to, quote, or repost. Add your own commentary, or invite your readers to comment.

**Use when**

You see the role of your social media presence to partially be that of an aggregator: you find good stuff out there that you know your audience will enjoy, and you post it for them. You serve as an editor and thought leader whose taste is trusted by your readers.

Not all organizations will find this pattern appropriate. Some may prefer to publish only the content they create themselves.

**Why**

If your presence is seen as a go-to site for good stuff, you'll acquire more followers. These followers then see your logo or name whenever your reposted content appears in their streams.

You don't have to generate content every time you want to push something out to followers. Writing fresh, original content is hard, and more so when you have to do it weekly or more (as you should, to maintain freshness). In exchange for the time you spend looking for repostable items, you can put together a steady stream of posts that interest your readers.

If the content you produce tends to be of only one type, such as essays or photos, including links to other people's content gets you closer to a desired [Editorial Mix](#).

Reposts and links direct deserved attention toward other sites and people. On the Web, no organization is isolated; there are always other bloggers, reviewers, forums, and organizations that deal with similar topics. By reposting their work and giving credit where it's due, you give them attention, validate them, and help them increase their readership. And social reciprocity may kick in—they might do the same for you!

You become part of a larger conversation around events and topics of interest. By finding an obscure news story or video and showing it to your readers, for instance, you invite your readers to carry on a conversation around it, either in your repost or in the original poster's context. (Your readers, in turn, may repost it themselves to their own followers.)

**How**

Find content that appeals to your followers. Use your judgment carefully: does it meet the same high standards that you use for your own content? Is it something that your followers will appreciate enough to repost to their own followers? Has it already been widely reposted on the Web so that you would look outdated if you reposted it? (And is it a scam or urban legend? Check first!)

Make sure followers can tell what the reposted article is about. Does its title or summary describe it well enough to attract interested readers? If not, the onus is on you to create a headline or summary for it.

Give your followers a reason why you thought this was worth reposting. If you're working in a blog, you have enough space to both quote portions of the source text and write a commentary. You should give the full URL to the original material, too. (In Twitter, use a URL shortening mechanism instead.)

Facebook has a built-in link posting mechanism that captures the destination's title, summary, and thumbnail picture—all the factual stuff. Use the message to summarize just enough to get the reader's attention, and perhaps to write a commentary only a sentence or two long.

If you use Twitter, you know about retweeting. Before Twitter provided an actual mechanism for it, Twitter users developed their own customs for retweeting and attributions. If tweets were significantly shorter than the maximum length, that would leave room for retweeters to add their own super-short commentary to a retweet ("Inspiring story." "Will this work?" "What do you think?" "Ironic."). But the built-in retweet doesn't permit that, which is unfortunate. That being said, plenty of retweets stand on their own, since they're just informational; someone might propagate a tweet about an upcoming event, for instance, and no commentary is expected.

Finally, offer your followers a chance to comment on the works that you repost. Facebook comments are one obvious place; blog comments are another. When users do comment, engage with them and help carry the conversation forward. There might be a conversation already underway wherever the content was originally posted. However, your followers constitute a unique group of people! Their conversations might have an entirely different quality.

### Examples

Many companies use their Facebook pages to repost other people's content so that their followers can see things they wouldn't have found on their own. In the examples in Figure 9-9, REI reposts items that further its mission to promote the outdoors and sell outdoor gear. (Note also the use of questions as **Conversation Starters**.)



**Figure 9-9.** REI's use of Repost and Comment

Figure 9-10 shows two ways that the American Red Cross's blog reposts and comments upon other sites' content. Politely, the blogger makes a point of thanking the person who called her attention to the earthquake graphic.

**Comparing the Chile and Haiti Earthquakes**  
Posted on March 19th, 2010 by Wendy Harman  
Thanks to Rachel Weldinger for pointing to this infographic by Good, Inc.  
**A TALE OF TWO QUAKES**  
Stay updated on how the American Red Cross is providing relief to survivors in [Haiti](#) and [Chile](#).  
[ShareThis](#)  
Filed under: International | Mapping | No Comments »

**Where did charity come from?**  
Posted on March 23rd, 2010 by Wendy Harman  
A new entry on [MetaFilter](#) offers various links searching for the origin of altruism.  
A new [study](#) suggests that humanity's sense of fair play and kindness towards strangers is [determined by culture, not genetics](#). Speculation: the finding may be directly related to the rise of [religion](#) in human history, as well as more complex economies ([Via](#)).  
On the other hand, perhaps we [learned it from dogs](#).  
Where does your sense of giving come from?  
[ShareThis](#)  
Filed under: Development | Volunteers | 2 Comments »

Figure 9-10. The American Red Cross's use of Repost and Comment

Retweeting on Twitter can be done either with Twitter's built-in mechanism or "by hand." In Figure 9-11, Tim O'Reilly uses both.

**Howtoons** Great Ideas For Science Fair Projects – here are some 'toons to help stir the imagination. <http://f4qx9.th8.us>  
about 17 hours ago via web  
Retweeted by [timoreilly](#) and 26 others

RT @TNWmobile World's First Android-Equipped Car in Production <http://tnw.to/15pxb> (via @monkchips)  
1:05 PM Mar 19th via Seesmic

Figure 9-11. Two ways to retweet

## Conversation Starters

**Tim Gunn: Official Page** Has everyone seen the new group of designers who will be featured on Project Runway Season 7? Any first impressions?

**Project Runway Season 7 – Official Network Site at myLifetime.com | myLifetime.com**

[www.mylifetime.com](http://www.mylifetime.com)

The official Project Runway Season 7 network site, featuring exclusive videos, designer portfolios, games, sweepstakes and more

5 hours ago · Comment · Like · Share · Report

45 people like this.

Can't wait  
5 hours ago · Report

:O!!!  
5 hours ago · Report

Me neither! :)  
5 hours ago · Report

FAB!!! But I hope they're better than the  
5 hours ago · Report

Figure 9-12. Tim Gunn posing a question to fans

### What

Pose questions, riddles, or topics for discussion. Let your followers post answers and carry on conversations, with you and among themselves.

### Use when

You want people to respond to you and other readers so that you can engage them. Your social media audience is capable of carrying on thoughtful discussions within the channel you’re using, and you are willing to moderate those conversations if necessary.

### Why

If you invite readers to participate, especially on a topic that interests them, they often will!

Once someone posts an answer to your conversation starter, he may come back and see the additional responses (or have the responses emailed to him, in some systems).

You may also get more readers or followers simply because your conversation starters are entertaining. You thus get more exposure for your social media channel.

In the best of cases, the readers' comments become interesting content in their own right. People talk to each other, debate each other, agree with each other, go off on tangents, and thus construct a conversational thread worth reading.

Conceptually, this pattern has some overlap with the idea of "crowdsourcing" problem solutions. For instance, a blogger may ask her readers for answers to a factual question or for stories on how they solved a problem that she is facing.

### How

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Understand which topics might get your audience fired up. Ask them to share their opinions, guesses, and stories by posing questions. Some questions might have simple answers that are easy for users to type quickly; others might evoke long and thoughtful responses. Choose topics that will get your readers talking to each other—but consider whether a controversial topic might turn into an unwanted flame war, or reflect badly on your site or brand.

As of this writing, Facebook seems to be the place where conversation starters work best. Short questions, sometimes with an accompanying link or photo, evoke answers from followers who read your updates in their news feeds, and Facebook is especially good at encouraging quick answers. (So is Twitter.)

Some blogs seem conducive to long conversations in the comments; others don't, perhaps because their readers haven't established a tradition of extensive commenting. But those blogs that do have an active readership may pose a question to those readers at the end of a post—and readers respond.

### Examples

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Whole Foods and REI are two brands that use Facebook to initiate conversations with the public. Food and the outdoors are topics that many people find inspirational; the participants in the conversations shown in Figures 9-13 and 9-14 are probably responding to that more than to the brand itself. In the Whole Foods example, people happily share information that other readers find valuable.

**Whole Foods Market** Alana Sugar shares her thoughts on how to lighten up with dairy alternatives. There is so much more than soy milk out there nowadays! What are your favorites?



[blog.wholefoodsmarket.com](http://blog.wholefoodsmarket.com)  
[blog.wholefoodsmarket.com](http://blog.wholefoodsmarket.com)

Any chance you've noticed the number of non-dairy milk, cheese and ice cream replacements available these days? The choices are soaring – even in conventional grocery stores! Plenty of people ...

January 25 at 10:39am · Comment · Like · Share · Report

91 people like this.

[View previous comments](#) 50 of 113

 Almond milk! YUMMY and easy to make your own if you want! (almonds and water, that's it)  
January 25 at 11:50am · Report

 Just tried some coconut milk-based "ice cream" yesterday. Passionate mango. Great creamy texture and amazing taste! I wouldn't worry about fat content too much. Everyone needs saturated fats, and many vegans/vegetarians may not be getting enough as is. I wouldn't recommend eating large quantities of coconut milk every day, but it's a nice little treat every now and then.  
January 25 at 11:55am · Report

 Hemp milk has been my new try... creamy and good!:)  
January 25 at 11:59am · Report

 WF carries the Purely Decadent ice cream made with coconut milk - it's awesome!  
January 25 at 12:00pm · Report

 I love Soy Milk because I'm lactose intolerance. Almond milk is out for me, because I'm allergic to all tree nuts. I would like to taste Hemo milk. I understand

Figure 9-13. One of Whole Foods' conversation starters

**REI** What resources do you use while finding your next outdoor adventure? Friends, books, web, etc?? In Washington I find [www.WTA.org](http://www.WTA.org) and NOAA invaluable!

January 20 at 5:17pm via Facebook for iPhone · Comment · Like

12 people like this.

[View previous comments](#) 50 of 67

 ATC maps and guide books for the Appalachian Trail!  
January 20 at 5:28pm · Report

 Japan - [http://www.jorudan.co.jp/e\\_english/norikae/](http://www.jorudan.co.jp/e_english/norikae/) That will give you directions by public transportation throughout all of Japan.  
January 20 at 5:32pm · Report

 If anyone's ever looking for Colorado 14er information these are the two best resources:  
January 20 at 5:32pm · Report

**REI** Can anyone tell me why this set of coordinates has something to do with the Norwalk River Watershed Association receiving a \$5000 grant from the REI? 41.103538,-73.433459.

January 12 at 10:16pm · Comment · Like

7 people like this.

 possibly those are coordinates to an undisclosed location... probably a locker in an airport, which contains \$5000?  
January 12 at 10:17pm · Report

 Perhaps it was the place where it was conceptualized?  
January 12 at 10:18pm · Report

 Because they closed the Linens and Things store and turned it into a water retention area  
January 12 at 10:19pm · Report

 It looks like a Nissan Xterra to me.

**REI** 37.772624,-122.403776 Puzzler for the day: there's something about this place that is the opposite of another post from a few weeks ago.

January 5 at 3:28pm · Comment · Like

7 people like this.

 lowest elevation REI location  
January 5 at 3:28pm · Report

 show off :)  
January 5 at 3:29pm · Report

 <http://www.bing.com/maps/?v=2&where1=37.772624,-122.403776&scType=1>  
January 5 at 3:30pm · Report

 San Fran?  
January 5 at 3:30pm · Report

 nyc!!!

**REI** Can anyone tell me why this set of coordinates has something to do with the Norwalk River Watershed Association receiving a \$5000 grant from the REI? 41.103538,-73.433459.

January 12 at 10:16pm · Comment · Like

7 people like this.

 possibly those are coordinates to an undisclosed location... probably a locker in an airport, which contains \$5000?  
January 12 at 10:17pm · Report

 Perhaps it was the place where it was conceptualized?  
January 12 at 10:18pm · Report

 Because they closed the Linens and Things store and turned it into a water retention area  
January 12 at 10:19pm · Report

 It looks like a Nissan Xterra to me.

Figure 9-14. REI's conversation starters

Blogs such as Boing Boing have very talkative readers. In Figure 9-15, one of the bloggers poses an open-ended question to the readership.

## Odd photo in ad for house refinance

MARK FRAUENFELDER ON FEBRUARY 1, 2010 9:34 AM

**Homeowners Fail to Refinance**  
 Only 85,000 homeowners have taken advantage of Obama's refinance plan. Calculate new payment. [Learn more](#)

I was reading an article in *USA Today* about how many US states will soon require people to obtain a doctor's prescription for cold and allergy medicine containing pseudoephedrine when I noticed this ad for a home mortgage refinancing service. The photo is odd. Maybe this was the advertiser's intention, as it caught my attention. I am curious about the origins of the photo. Anyone familiar with its provenance?

6 [retweet](#)
[f Share](#)
[✉](#)
13

Figure 9-15. Boing Boing's conversation starter

## Inverted Nano-pyramid

**Tom Hanks** tomhanks Mar 11, 2010, 12:51 pm  
 Veterans. Heroes. Boys in Old Men clothes. Honored on the Mall in DC.  
<http://twitpic.com/17y5s6>

Figure 9-16. Short but informative tweet

### What

Write short, dense status updates and headlines. The first few words are most important; they should catch the interest of the right readers, and transmit the most information.

### Use when

You post updates to Twitter, Facebook, or other microblogging channels, or you write headlines for blog posts and articles.

### Why

People skim updates and headlines quickly, to determine what's worth their attention. Take full advantage of the small amount of space and time you have.

Long tweets, status updates, and so on can't be quoted or retweeted as effectively as short ones. You want followers to repost your updates and get your name out there in front of more people.

**How**

Traditionally, print journalists have used the “inverted pyramid” for news reporting. The most important information is front-loaded into the first sentence and paragraph of a story. Secondary information comes next, and so on until the least important information ends up at the bottom. Since many readers won’t go any farther than the first few sentences, you should give them the essence of the story right at the beginning.

Twitter’s ruthlessly low character limit forced us to learn how to write in a very short format. Every word counts; every character counts. So use the pyramid form—the most important points in front—but shrink your messages down to the size of a tweet or status update! Here are some ways to write them well:

- Choose words that accurately represent the topic and scope of what you’re talking about. Use words that are specific, not general; make each word carry its weight. To help focus your thinking, consider whether people will understand you if your tweet or headline is taken completely out of context (as though it were a search result, for instance).
- Strip out words that don’t carry their weight, especially linking words such as *the* and *have*, but don’t be so cryptic that you can’t be understood.
- Use abbreviations sparingly; don’t sound like a text message written by a 10-year-old.
- Make one single point. If you need to make two points or describe two links, use two tweets or status messages.
- If you use a long word, try to find a shorter substitute. But if the longer word has character and specificity, you might choose to keep it to draw attention.
- For phrasing, consider using one of the eight types of headlines described in Robert Bly’s *The Copywriter’s Handbook* (Holt Paperbacks). These are: direct, indirect, news, how-to, question, command, reason why, and testimonial. For a good online summary of these types, with examples, see Copyblogger’s summary at <http://www.copyblogger.com/how-to-write-headlines-that-work/>.
- Be patient as you write. Short content requires more thought and iteration than you might expect.

**Examples**

The tweets shown in Figure 9-17 tell ultra-short stories. You can’t help but read them.



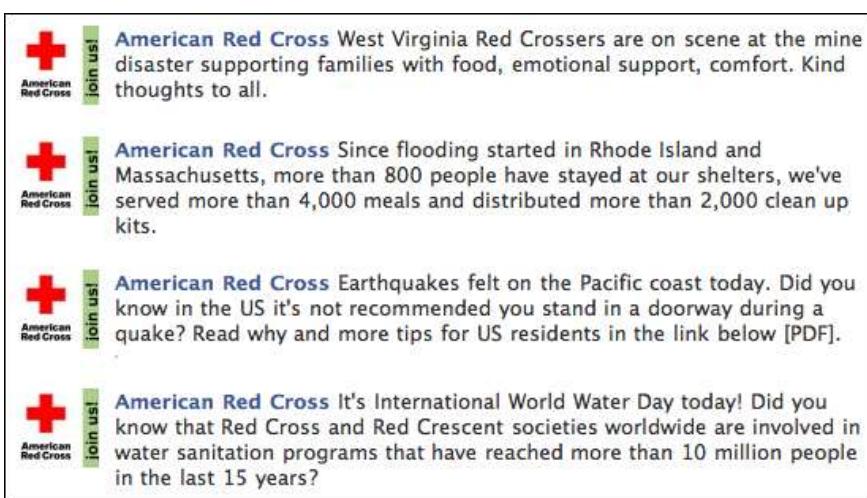
**Figure 9-17.** Ultra-short stories

The news headlines shown in Figure 9-18 were designed to tempt readers to click through the link.



**Figure 9-18.** News headlines designed to tempt readers to click through the link

As shown in Figure 9-19, the American Red Cross uses Facebook status messages and links to both convey information and persuade the reader to learn more (links not shown).



**Figure 9-19.** The American Red Cross's Facebook status messages and links

## Timing Strategy

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**Figure 9-20.** Possible social media timing for an organization

### What

Pace your social media posts according to the expectations of the channels you use; some channels require more frequent posts, some less. Cross-post the best pieces, and consider when in the day or week you make your posts.

### Use when

Anyone who uses social media should develop and follow a [Timing Strategy](#).

### Why

Overusing a social media channel can overwhelm your followers with too much chatter. Followers may drop you, or form a negative impression of your organization. Don't irritate people.

On the other hand, underusing a channel is an opportunity cost: you won't have your name in front of followers as often as you could.

Users of Twitter and Facebook in particular have expectations about how often they hear from nonfriend entities (such as company pages) in their personal news stream. The mechanisms of the channels themselves dictate some of this; tweets are shorter and more rapidly consumed than Facebook updates, for instance. These expectations may change as the technologies mature and shift.

**How**

The most important thing is to understand users' expectations about these channels. If you post too frequently, your updates clutter followers' personal news streams to the point of being annoying, and they may unsubscribe from you.

However, the advice here is only a starting point. You should watch the numbers of followers change as you use social media, listen to followers' feedback, and be willing to adjust your timing strategy on the fly if followers leave.

As of this writing, here are some of the posting frequencies that I have observed.

*Facebook pages* tend to be updated only once per day, or less. Most of the successful and active pages I studied had a post rate of roughly once every two days, though some had two per day (such as Wired) and others had much fewer. Exceptions are sometimes made for time-sensitive events, concentrated outreach efforts, and crises such as major earthquakes—followers will tolerate short bursts of frequent posting if the cause is worthy. Your mileage may vary.

*Twitter posts* can be much more frequent than Facebook updates. The organizations I studied posted between three and 15 tweets per day, on average. Also, these posts were usually made between noon and 8:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, with a lower rate on weekends. This is important because tweets should go out when the most people are online and listening—Twitter users (unlike Facebook users) tend not to scroll back through time to find interesting material. Note that many tweets from some organizations are direct replies to individuals; those can run up the count quickly.

For organizations that use multiple social media channels, *blog posts* range between 0.5 and 2.5 posts per day. This is where long-form writing takes place: essays, stories, interviews, and other content longer than one or two sentences. Sometimes these blogs "feed" the Facebook and Twitter efforts—selected blog entries (usually not all of them) are reposted as links in these other media, along with a one-sentence description. Lively conversations about the blog posts are more likely to take place on Facebook or Twitter than on the blog itself.

*Email* should be infrequent. If you send email more than once every few days, you may get labeled as spam by some of your followers.

I found no evidence of timing strategies for media repositories such as Flickr and YouTube. This is probably because they don't normally "push" content out into followers' personal news streams, as others do.

### Examples

The chart in Figure 9-21 shows the timing strategies for several companies and organizations that have strong social media presences. The data was collected over two months at the very beginning of 2010, in January and February. The numbers represent the average number of posts per day on each of three social media channels: Twitter, Facebook, and the organization's main blog. (Not all of these sites had a main blog.) Clearly, the Twitter numbers are higher than the others, reflecting its more ephemeral nature.

The last two companies, the American Red Cross and Partners in Health, are charities. Over the time period that I collected data, these two organizations were conducting intensive news and fundraising efforts related to the Haiti earthquake. Their usage of Facebook skyrocketed in January, and then faded back to something more normal in February; this shows up in the averages as slightly elevated Facebook numbers.

	Twitter	Facebook	Blog
Dell	3	0.3	0.6
Whole Foods	14	1	1.4
Coca-Cola	10.5	0.5	0.6
Red Bull	5.3	0.5	
Starbucks	10	0.2	0.6
REI	3	1	
Volkswagen	2	0.5	
American Red Cross	3	1.3	1
Partners in Health	2.7	2.5	2.4

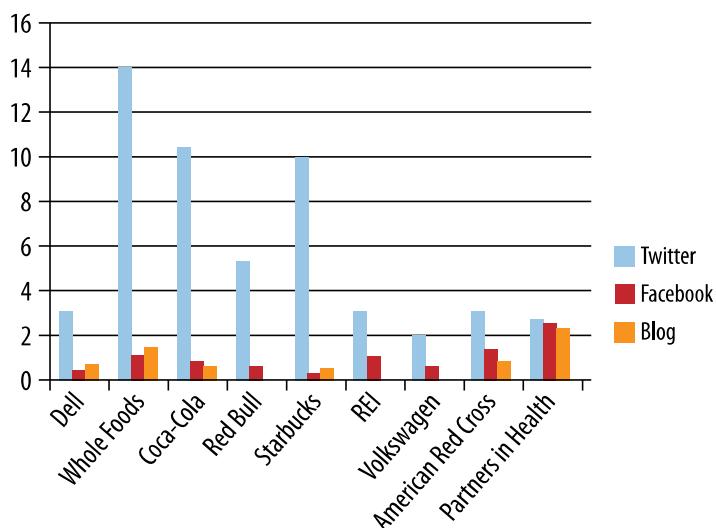


Figure 9-21. Actual post rates for nine sites

## Specialized Streams

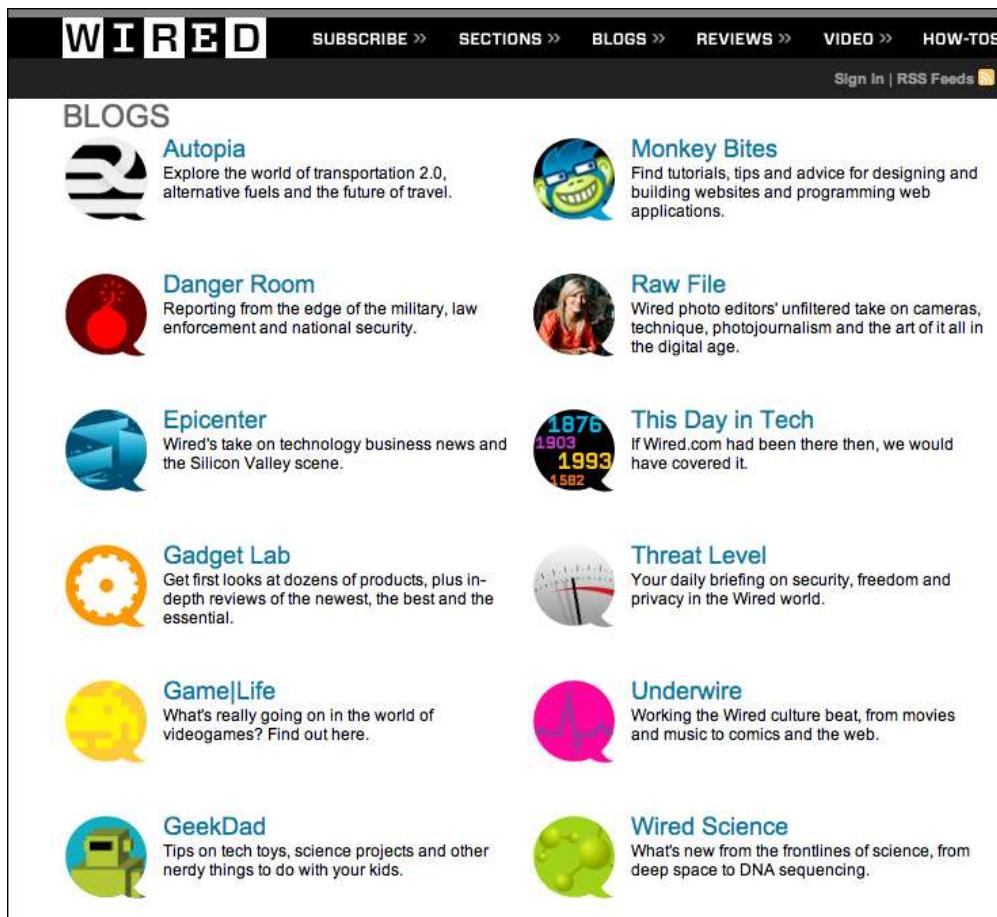


Figure 9-22. *Wired blogs, specialized by topic*

### What

Divide your content stream into many different channels, each with a different readership and different “feel.” Use multiple Twitter identities, Facebook pages, blogs, and so on to steer these items to the right audiences.

### Use when

Your organization generates a large number of status updates, news articles, blog posts, or other items that are socially distributed. You can categorize them easily by subject or some other factor (such as frequency or author). You have a large readership, but many readers are only interested in one or two of these categories, not all of them.

**Why**

If you dump all of your organization's updates into one huge stream, that stream might overwhelm its followers. For instance, a Facebook page shouldn't be updated many times per day, lest its readers unsubscribe because of too many updates.

With several discrete streams or pages to follow, people can easily pick and choose among the topics you offer, thus tailoring their own experience.

**How**

Categorize your updates according to your followers' needs. Consider the following ways to segment a readership, and see if any of them can work for you. (Not all will be suitable for your organization, of course.)

*By product*

Do you sell different products to different types of customers, for instance? What are the common needs and perspectives of a product's users? For example, users of smartphones will have one set of needs; users of desktop systems, quite another.

*By topic*

If you publish a lot of news articles or opinion pieces, how do you segment your market according to subject?

*By professional role*

See the Google example in Figure 9-25; some of its blogs are aimed at a general audience, some at managers, and some at developers.

*By social media usage style*

How often do your followers read their news stream? Some people practically live on Twitter; they may have a high tolerance for chatter. Other people will only want occasional updates, and those updates had better be worth reading. CNN has several news feeds that operate with different [Timing Strategies](#) to serve these different markets; see the example in Figure 9-23.

Within the social media services that you've chosen to use, create different channels or streams. Each should be labeled clearly with your organization's name and logo, and visually branded appropriately—there should be no question that this stream is an official part of the organization's social media strategy.

Direct people to those streams at the right points. Put links to them on your front page, or from your main presence on the social media services. For instance, if your organization has a main Facebook page, link to the [Specialized Streams](#) from that page. If you spend effort to build them, you might as well tell people about them.

Consider using selected content from the [Specialized Streams](#)—not all of it, of course—in your main blog, Facebook page, or Twitter feed. Reference the [Specialized Stream](#) from that content so that interested readers can find it and subscribe.

## Examples

Updates are CNN's business, and it generates a lot of them. CNN has a main Twitter feed that it updates every few hours with general-interest news stories, but as of this writing, "cnnbrk" (for breaking news) has almost three times as many followers. "cnnireport" is CNN's third main Twitter stream, and the CNN site directs readers toward all three. However, for the skilled and motivated Twitter user, there are even more streams to be found! Entertainment, weather, technology, money, international news, and other topics all have their own specialized CNN Twitter feeds, though they're not easy to find. Figure 9-23 shows some of CNN's Twitter feeds.

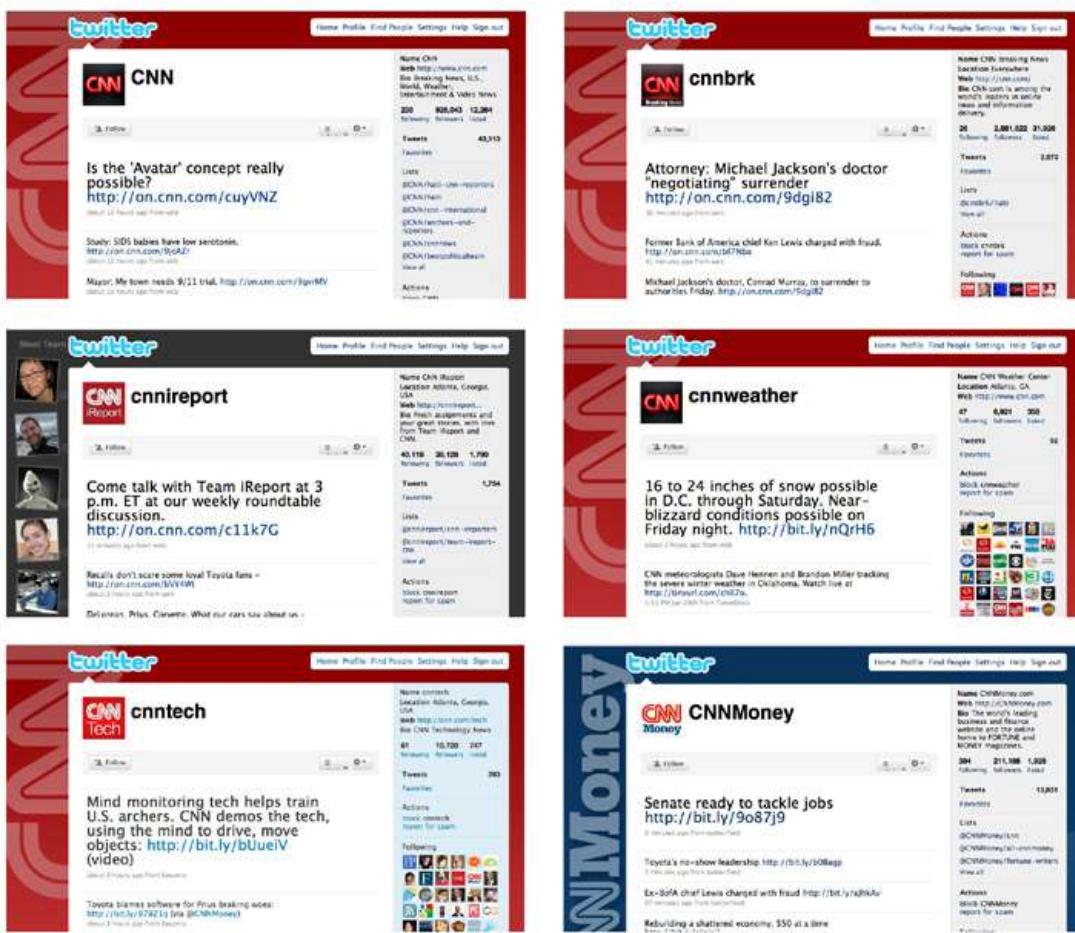


Figure 9-23. Some of CNN's Twitter feeds

Likewise, Wired divides its numerous updates into Twitter feeds that are specialized by topic. Many of these primarily tweet links to posts in Wired's corresponding blogs—see Figure 9-22, which shows some of those blogs. One nice thing Wired does is post a long list of specialized Twitter feeds in its background image, as shown in Figure 9-24. (Even though they're not clickable links, they still convey information.)



**Figure 9-24.** WIRED's main Twitter feed, with Specialized Streams listed in the lefthand margin

Google has built many products, each of which has its own constituency (casual readers, developers, domain experts, etc.). It also serves many regions of the world, and evokes interest worldwide in many aspects of its operation. Google therefore sends out its updates via a diverse set of corporate blogs (see Figure 9-25). Its main blog publishes general-interest stories, but it sometimes runs entries that are cross-posted from a more specific blog.

Blog Category	Description	Link
The Official Google Blog	Insights from Googlers into our products, technology, and the Google culture.	<a href="http://googleblog.blogspot.com/">http://googleblog.blogspot.com/</a>
Public Policy Blog	Google's views on government, policy and politics.	<a href="http://googlepublicpolicy.blogspot.com/">http://googlepublicpolicy.blogspot.com/</a>
Public Sector Blog	Developing products and ideas to help the public sector	<a href="http://googlepublicsector.blogspot.com/">http://googlepublicsector.blogspot.com/</a>
European Public Policy Blog	Google's views on government, policy, and politics in Europe	<a href="http://googlepolicyeurope.blogspot.com/">http://googlepolicyeurope.blogspot.com/</a>
AdSense for Feeds	Helping publishers analyze, publicize, and monetize their RSS feeds	<a href="http://adsenseforfeeds.blogspot.com/">http://adsenseforfeeds.blogspot.com/</a>
Google Merchant Center Blog	The latest news, tips, and resources from the Google Merchant Center team.	<a href="http://googlemerchandise.blogspot.com/">http://googlemerchandise.blogspot.com/</a>
Blogger: Blogger Buzz	The Official Buzz from Blogger.	<a href="http://buzz.blogger.com/">http://buzz.blogger.com/</a>
Book Search: Inside Google Book Search	News from the Google Book Search Team.	<a href="http://booksearch.blogspot.com/">http://booksearch.blogspot.com/</a>

**Figure 9-25.** Some of Google's blogs

Microsoft has a vast number of social content streams on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, MySpace, Delicious, forums, and blogs. Some are listed in Figure 9-26. They are aimed at customers for particular products, in particular roles; some are very specialized, and some are general with very large audiences. (Credit for this table goes to EngagementDB, at <http://www.engagementdb.com/Company/77.>)

<b>Social Networking</b>		<b>Image/Video/Audio Sharing</b>	
MySpace	Microsoft Windows on MySpace	YouTube	Windows YouTube
MySpace	Windows on MySpace	YouTube	Office Live YouTube
Facebook	Microsoft Research	YouTube	Bing YouTube
Facebook	Office Live on Facebook	YouTube	Internet Explorer YouTube
Facebook	Microsoft MVP Award Program	YouTube	Microsoft Surface on YouTube
Facebook	Internet Explorer on Facebook	YouTube	The Office Channel at YouTube
Facebook	<b>Microsoft Windows on Facebook</b>	YouTube	Windows Mobile
Facebook	Microsoft Surface on Facebook	YouTube	UK Developer and Platform Evangelism Group
Facebook	Microsoft PDC	YouTube	Bright Side of Government
Facebook	Bing	YouTube	Internet Explorer Videos on YouTube
Facebook	<b>Microsoft Certified Partners with a Learning Solutions competency</b>	YouTube	Microsoft Windows on YouTube
Facebook	<b>Microsoft Federal Partner Group</b>	YouTube	Microsoft Bing on YouTube
Facebook	Windows Mobile	YouTube	Microsoft Office on YouTube
Facebook	BizSpark	YouTube	Internet Explorer on YouTube
Facebook	Internet Explorer	YouTube	Microsoft Dynamics Partner Community
Facebook	Windows on Facebook	YouTube	The 60 Second Business Insider
Facebook	<b>Microsoft Windows on Facebook</b>	Flickr	Microsoft Surface on Flickr
Facebook	Windows on Facebook	Flickr	Microsoft Research
Facebook	Windows Home Server		
Facebook	Windows Home Server		
Facebook	Windows Essential Business Server		
Facebook	<b>Windows Small Business Server</b>		
Facebook	Windows Home Server		
Facebook	<b>Windows Essential Business Server</b>		
Facebook	<b>Windows Small Business Server</b>		

Figure 9-26. A partial profile of Microsoft's social presence

## Social Links



Figure 9-27. Ten ways to follow Huffington Post

**What**

On your site's home page, put a group of links to your social media presences.

**Use when**

You are putting effort into supporting one or more social media channels—blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Delicious, and so on—and you want to drive people toward those channels. If they're self-contained services, like Facebook, you don't mind visitors going to those sites instead of remaining on your own site.

**Why**

If you're already investing in various social media channels, you might as well tell people about them. Visitors to your home page may find those links quite useful, especially if they're specifically looking for your social media presence.

Widgets that let visitors follow you give them a convenient way to put your updates into their personal news stream. That's valuable to you and to them, and it shows visitors that you are wise to the latest social technologies.

**How**

Create a small area containing well-labeled links to social media sites and public repositories: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, Delicious, your blog, and so on. RSS feeds often are found here, too. Some sites put their email sign-ups into this section.

Brand icons will stand out more than ordinary links—you may want this for ease of findability. They are out of place in some designs, however, and simple text links in a “written invitation” may be refreshing. See the upcoming Slate, Whole Foods, and Copyblogger examples.

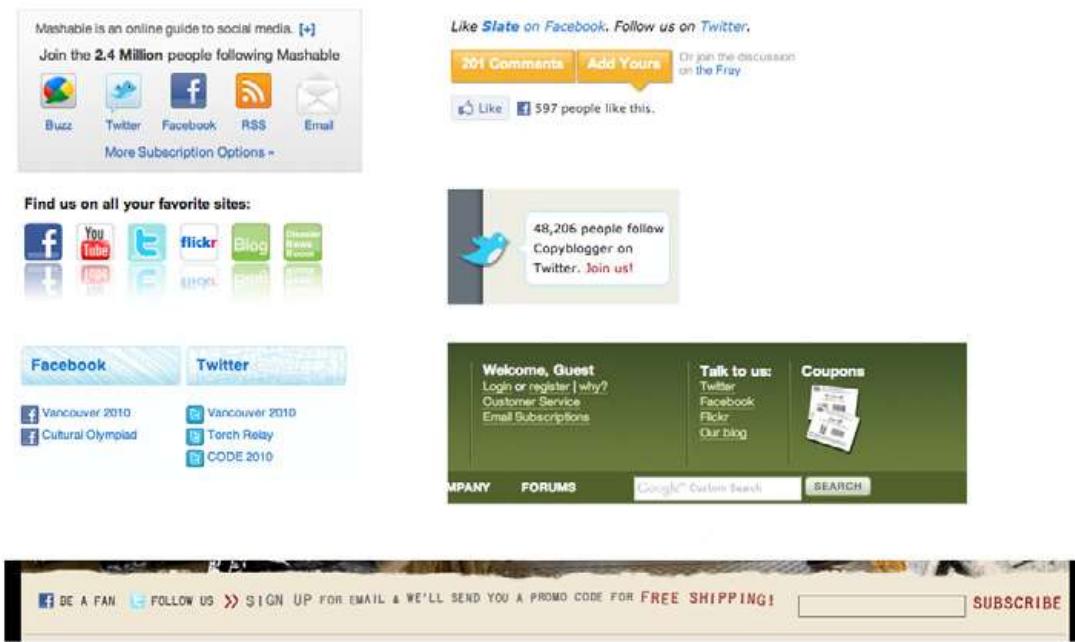
A disadvantage of a [Social Links](#) section is that it may send your visitors to a different site, and they might stay there instead of continuing to peruse your own site. Social network sites, especially, have a long “dwell time”—once someone goes there, she tends to stay for a while and not come back. (Many news-based sites with strong social presences, such as CNN and Wired, do not have [Social Links](#) on their home page.) One way to avoid this problem is to change the links in the [Social Links](#) section into buttons. A Facebook button may bring up a widget to make the user a fan, for instance, rather than taking him to Facebook itself.

Some sites have more than one Twitter stream or Facebook page to reflect different aspects of their organization; see the [Specialized Streams](#) pattern for more discussion. Those streams may show up here. The Vancouver Olympics example in Figure 9-28 shows one way to handle this.

Consider adding “hooks” to pique the viewer’s interest. For instance, Copyblogger uses its [Social Link](#) widget to tell the viewer that 48,206 people follow them on Twitter. That’s brilliant—it’s appealingly specific, it uses gentle peer pressure to convince you to follow them, and it puts a smile on your face. Similarly, Mashable shows how many people all together are following them, aggregated over several services (Twitter, Facebook, RSS, etc.).

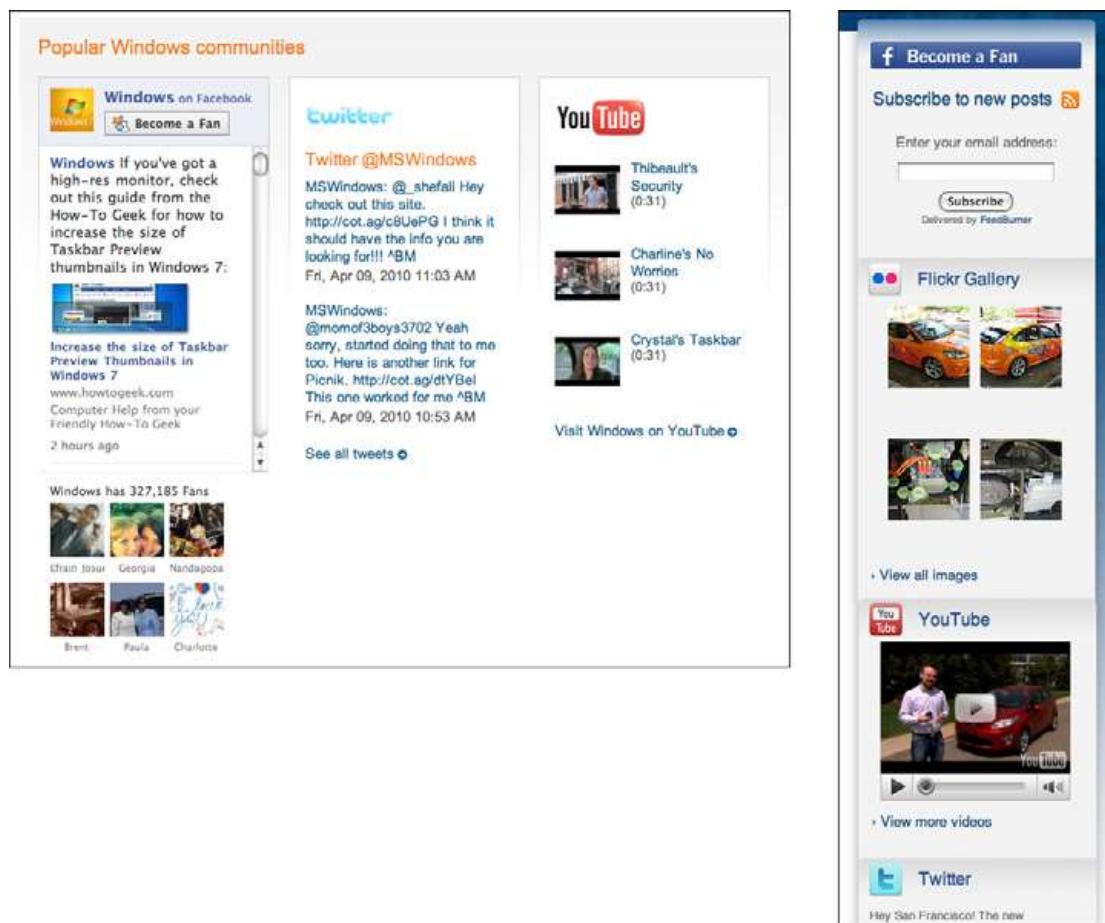
### Examples

Figure 9-28 shows the [Social Links](#) widgets on various home pages.



**Figure 9-28.** The Social Links widgets on the home pages of (counterclockwise from upper left) Mashable, the American Red Cross, the Vancouver Olympics, Levi’s, Whole Foods, Copyblogger, and Slate

In the examples shown in Figure 9-29, Microsoft and Ford use the greater space available on their sites’ inner pages. They show clickable samples of the latest social activity at each service they list. These live examples may make the social presences more alluring for people who are interested in the topic. (The disadvantage of such a treatment, of course, is the amount of space it consumes.)



**Figure 9-29.** A Microsoft Windows–related product page and one of Ford’s press release pages

## Sharing Widget



**Figure 9-30.** Slate’s end-of-article sharing widget

### What

Beside your articles, videos, and other pieces of content, place a set of controls that let viewers easily share that content with their own close ties and social followers. These often link to social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

**Use when**

[Sharing Widgets](#) are used almost everywhere now. If you post original content of any kind, you would do well to have one of these, even if it's rudimentary.

**Why**

It's convenient for viewers who may really want to share this cool piece you wrote. It helps them do [Repost and Comment](#), which supports their own social reputation.

Your viewers will then disseminate your content for you through their own social contacts. An article recommended by a personal contact—especially a close tie, such as a family member or close friend—is more likely to be read than an article found randomly on the Web. See the [Personal Recommendations](#) pattern in Chapter 1.

Some sharing tools let you track what gets shared, thus giving you data about which of your posts get disseminated broadly. You can then use that data for your own analysis and to display [Content Leaderboards](#) for the most-shared items.

**How**

You can build your own [Sharing Widget](#), or you can use a third-party site such as ShareThis to construct one. Populate it with the sharing channels that you think will be most used by your followers, but don't clutter it up with too many items. (At least find numbers on the relative popularity of social networking sites and bookmarking sites; you should always include the biggest ones. Facebook and email had the highest usage as of this writing, while Twitter was lower but rising rapidly.)

You might consider putting the following services on your [Sharing Widget](#):

- Social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace
- Microblogging mechanisms such as Twitter
- Public bookmarking sites such as Digg or Delicious
- Email, which is still preferred by many Internet users
- Sharing via an SMS message
- Other, nonsharing tools, such as printing, commenting, or thumbs-up/down

If you have space, you may also show counters for each sharing service: how many people have shared a particular piece of content via this channel? This gives readers an immediate sense of how “hot” this content is. (If the numbers are consistently low, you may not want to show them.)

Place the [Sharing Widget](#) very close to the content to be shared. The top and bottom of an article are traditional places to put this, and some articles place it as an inset within the article (with the text flowing around it). You're trying to keep the widget within the gaze of

someone reading the content. Also, before you put the **Sharing Widget** into a drop-down or anchored toolbar, think about accessibility—how will someone using a screen reader use this? And what about people who don't have good mouse control? They may have an easier time with an area directly on the page.

If you offer a Facebook sharing control, make sure your HTML page is structured correctly for Facebook's linking tools to present it well. Verify that Facebook picks up the title, summary, and thumbnail correctly. (Check other social sharing mechanisms as well.)

### Examples

Many sites create multiple **Sharing Widgets** for different contexts, as shown in Figure 9-31. A widget containing the top three services might appear near the top of the content, for instance, while a more complete widget might appear at the end. This complicates the design, but it might work well if you have a lot of services to show and not much space at the top.



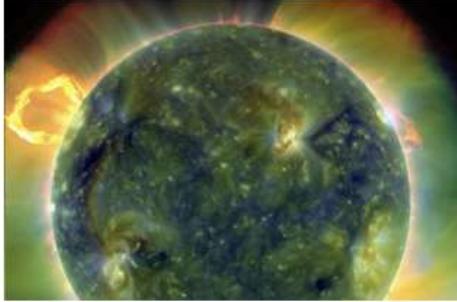
Figure 9-31. Sharing widgets from Wired, Boing Boing, Technorati, and Pandora

Pop ups and drop downs to show the “long tail” of social services are a common way to implement progressive disclosure—the user doesn't see the numerous other sharing services until she clicks on a button—but again, these hide functionality and are not as accessible as items shown directly on the page.

Mashable, shown in Figure 9-32, uses three different strategies: a small **Sharing Widget** beside a news snippet on the front page, a slightly expanded widget on the page containing the article (it now has an Email feature and a Share button), and a pop up shown when the reader clicks the Share button.

TRENDING STORY

## NASA Releases Amazing New Footage of Our Dynamic Sun [VIDEO]



**TECH** NASA has been wowing us with beautiful imagery from Mars and of our own planet's volcanic activity, and now the space agency has released some spectacular photos and videos of our sun; we've included a few below.

The recently launched [Solar Dynamics Observatory](#) has been taking some unique portraits of our solar companion using four telescopes looking at the sun in different wavelengths. The results are unusual and beautiful, fulfilling the mission's goal of exploring "solar activity..."

 About 17 hours ago [Barb Dybwad](#) 17 

 Like 341

**1072 tweets**  
**retweet**

**739**  
 Share

 **37**  
**Buzz**

## NASA Relea Dynamic Su



**1073 tweets**  
**retweet**

**739**  
 Share

 **37**  
**Buzz**

 email

 share

## NASA Releases Amazing Dynamic Sun [VIDEO]

**Most Popular Services**

 Email	 Facebook	 Twitter	 Google Buzz
 Stumbleupon	 Delicious	 Slashdot	
 LinkedIn	 Reddit	 Technorati	
 FriendFeed	 Buzz Up!	 Sphinn	
 G Bookmarks	 Y! Bookmarks	 Mixx	

See what your friends are sharing Sign In:        

 email

 share

Figure 9-32. Mashable's Sharing Widgets

In other libraries

[http://www.designingsocialinterfaces.com/patterns/Share\\_This](http://www.designingsocialinterfaces.com/patterns/Share_This)

## News Box

**Red Cross News**



*Posted in News, 02/24/10*

**Children Pitch In to Support Red Cross Relief Efforts in Haiti**

Elementary, middle school students raise funds to help people of Haiti. » [More](#)



*Posted in News, 02/24/10*

**Red Cross Volunteer Brings Medical Aid to Haitian Boy**

Abrupt change in plans as volunteer recognizes medical emergency. » [More](#)



*Posted in The Blog, 2/25/10*

**Weekly Worldwide Wrap-Up**

Welcome to the Weekly Worldwide Wrap-Up, in which we consolidate the international Red Cross and Red Crescent news into one list of bite-sized links for you. It's a non-comprehensive sampling of the larger and/or more intriguing aspects of our global work... [The place names link to maps so that you can get a quick idea of [...] » [More](#)

» [More Red Cross News](#)

Figure 9-33. American Red Cross News Box

### What

On your site's front page, show your latest news items, blog posts, videos, and other time-sensitive content. Each item should attract the viewer with readable headlines, summaries, links to read more, and possibly thumbnail images.

### Use when

Your organization regularly produces news items, original content about topics that are interesting to your site's visitors, or "social objects" that gather comments and discussions. You want to encourage visitors to read those items.

### Why

A **News Box** gives your visitors content that can hold their attention. Without it, a visitor may come to your site, glance briefly at it, see nothing interesting, and leave without lingering. With it, they may stay for a while and learn about your organization.

It's also informative. Visitors to your site may come with the intent of finding out about recent news or events, so give it to them.

Your website will get updated with new content on a regular basis. It's considered a best practice to regularly refresh the content on a front page. Visitors can see that things are happening here—your site is not a ghost town, and they may even want to come back later to see what else happens.

Once a visitor clicks on a news link, the “jump page” can have all kinds of other features: links to related stories, other blog posts, a [Sharing Widget](#), reader comments, and other things you don’t have room for on the front page. All of these draw visitors in and keep them on your site, learning more and engaging more.

The topics, words, and images you choose to display in a [News Box](#) all contribute to a first impression of your organization. A visitor will indirectly learn about your organization from the scope of the topics covered, the tone of voice used in the text, and other signals.

## How

---

Place the [News Box](#) on your home page; it doesn’t have to be above the fold (though many sites put it there when they don’t need the whole home page to explain the site’s value proposition). Make the [News Box](#) large enough to contain a handful of news items, each of which has a generous amount of space—at least several lines of text. You may wish to divide the [News Box](#) into subsections for different sources or media types (such as photos or videos). Some sites create a subsection to show additional, smaller items—usually just linked headlines—in addition to the larger links to featured articles.

Each item should have:

- A headline, which is also a link to the main article.
- A short description that “sells” the article to the reader.
- A “more” link to the main article. This should look like a link, with underlining, chevrons, color, or other obvious visual cues.

They may optionally have:

- A thumbnail image. The most attractive [News Boxes](#) generally have these.
- The date on which the content was released.
- The source of the item—blog, news page, press release, YouTube, and so on. If your link sends viewers to a different site, it’s polite to tell them so.
- A [Sharing Widget](#) and a link to reader comments. These are more commonly found on the destination page, where the whole article can be read.

Every word counts in these headlines and summaries. Use the [Inverted Nano-pyramid](#) pattern to write the headlines, and eliminate all extraneous information (such as bylines or locations) in the summaries. If you can, have someone custom-write the summaries; don’t use the first line of the article. The tone and voice you use in these pieces of text help define your organization, so make sure they reflect its values accurately: informal, authoritative, humorous, youthful, silly, ironic, and so on.

If you're pulling content from media repositories such as Flickr, they might have widgets you can install directly on your page. Make sure they don't cause your home page to slow down or break.

### Examples

Red Bull sponsors athletes in many different sports. Though its product is a drink, its [News Box](#) is full of news items about the athletes and events, as shown in Figure 9-34. The overall impression of the pictures and words is one of action and speed. Notice the rhythm of the layout, the brief but effective writing, and the clarity of links to articles and videos.

**THE LATEST FROM RED BULL**

[Subscribe to All Content](#)

[All Content](#) [Videos](#) [Photos](#) [Articles](#) [Events](#)

**LEAVING IT IN LAS VEGAS** Mar 1, 2010

When it comes to the NASCAR Sprint Cup's Red Bull Racing team, maybe it's not such a bad thing that what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.

[Read Article](#)

**MILLSAPS AND CANARD HOT IN ATLANTA** Feb 28, 2010

Round eight of the 2010 AMA Supercross series hit Atlanta's Georgia Dome on Saturday night, with Honda Red Bull Racing riders Trey Canard and Davi Millsaps finishing on the podium.

[Read Article](#)

**FANNING DODGES TSUNAMI** Feb 28, 2010

Mick Fanning impressed in the opening round of the Quicksilver Pro Gold Coast, but he has to wait for his next match-up as the East Coast of Australia was handed a tsunami warning.

[Read Article](#)

**SPEED FINDING HIS WAY** Feb 26, 2010

As the Sprint Cup arrives in Las Vegas for the third race of the 2010 NASCAR season, Scott Speed looks to reap the rewards of the lessons he learned in his rookie year.

[Read Article](#)

**PROJECT AIR GROMS** Feb 26, 2010

The Groms get their chance to work on their airs and surfing skills during Project Air in Australia. Some of them are already going huge in the skate...

[Watch Video](#)

**Figure 9-34.** Red Bull's *News Box*

Whole Foods seeks a very different audience and emotional “feel,” but its [News Box](#) is similar to Red Bull’s in its clarity and rhythm (see Figure 9-35).

**HEALTHY TIP: GO WILD**  
Wild rice isn't really rice but it is a whole grain and that's what matters! Enjoy fiber, protein and B vitamins in wild rice along with nutty, earthy flavor.

**NATIONAL RECOGNITION FOR LOCAL PRODUCERS**  
The local producers we work with sometimes get national recognition! Take a look at the press on a few of our [Local Producer Loan recipients](#).

**CHANGING THE WORLD, TOGETHER**  
Now through March 31st, help raise \$1.5 million for impoverished people around the globe where we source products. Give to the Whole Planet Foundation's [Prosperity Campaign](#).

**WE'RE NOW OPEN IN MAUI**  
A warm aloha to our newest store now open in Kahului, Maui, Hawaii.

**WHOLE STORY BLOG**

- [Spring Dilemma: Seeds or Starter Plants](#)
- [Turmeric – Absolutely To Dye For](#)
- [Most Definitely a Different Banana](#)
- [The Great Parmigiano Reggiano Wheel Cracking Extravaganza](#)

Figure 9-35. Whole Foods' News Box

Ford's [News Box](#) contains items of varied size and emphasis (see Figure 9-36). The visual hierarchy clearly shows which articles Ford wants you to see first; the large images and text attract your eyes upward and left first, but the smaller size of the "Latest Headlines" heading allows more of them to be packed into the available space.

**Transit Connect Goes Electric**  
An all-electric version of the Ford Transit Connect debuts at the 2010 Chicago Auto Show.  
[Learn More](#) [Share](#)

**2010 Geneva Motor Show Preview**  
Ford will debut its next-generation Focus and more at the March show. Get a sneak peek.  
[Learn More](#) [Share](#)

**More Top Safety Ratings for Ford Motor Company**  
Ford knows safety is on the minds of most car customers.  
[Learn More](#) [Share](#)

**Drive Quality**  
World-class quality is at the foundation of Ford Motor Company.  
[Learn More](#) [Share](#)

**LATEST HEADLINES**

- [MORE FORD C-SEGMENT VEHICLES DEBUT AT GENEVA MOTOR SHOW](#)  
Mar 01.10
- [CHANGAN FORD REPORTS BEST-EVER FEBRUARY SALES FOR FOCUS AND MONDEO, HELPING DRIVE 37.5% GROWTH](#)  
Mar 01.10
- [NEW SET OF AGENTS TEAM UP TO BRING FORD FIESTA LOCAL WITH FIESTA MOVEMENT CHAPTER 2](#)  
Mar 01.10
- [NEW ENGINES FOR MUSTANG HELP REV UP ORDERS \(THE FORD STORY\)](#)  
Feb 26.10

[View All News & Announcements](#) [SUBSCRIBE](#)

Figure 9-36. Ford's News Box

But make sure you don't make your headlines and summaries too short or cryptic. The news items in the Sierra Club's **News Box** don't explain themselves well enough to entice someone to click through (see Figure 9-37).

The screenshot shows a section titled "Our Latest Blogs" with three entries:

- Climate Crossroads**: Sierra Club India Environment Post: India, Ramesh Push Climate of Opportunity. Includes a link "[comment here]".
- On Track**: Astronomy: In Like a Lion. Includes a link "[comment here]".
- The Green Life**: Daily Roundup: February 26, 2010. Includes a link "[2 comments]".

Figure 9-37. The Sierra Club's News Box

## Content Leaderboard

The screenshot shows a "Most Popular" content leaderboard with the following data:

Rank	Article Title
1.	iPhone U.S. Monopoly May End
2.	Obama Gets Aggressive
3.	Opinion: Rude for Reid
4.	Manure Raises a New Stink
5.	Opinion: Norman Podhoretz: In Defense of Sarah Palin

Below the list is a link to "Most Read Articles Feed".

Figure 9-38. From the Wall Street Journal

### What

Show a list of the most popular articles, blog posts, videos, or other content pieces. Use social media-based metrics such as most shared, most emailed, and most blogged.

**Use when**

Your site generates a large amount of content, authored either by your organization or by other participants. You may already have an organizing principle for all that content (e.g., [News Stream](#); see Chapter 2), but you also want readers to see what other readers found interesting. You have enough readers and sharers so that clear leaders can emerge among the content you publish.

**Why**

This is a way of crowdsourcing a “top 10 list” for your site. Metrics for sharing and emailing show what a readership likes—or at least what those readers think their own followers will like. If the readers have excellent taste, they’ll pull the best-quality pieces from your content; if not, they’ll at least find the wackiest or most dramatic ones. (You may not agree with their taste!) Either way, your other readers are likely to be interested in the same kinds of things.

**How**

Gather data about which items have been shared, emailed, and so forth. If you haven’t already, make sure a [Sharing Widget](#) of some kind is shown beside each piece of content so that readers can easily share things in the first place.

Show a list of the most popular items for that day (or week, if the pace of your site is slower). The items in the list should be links to the original posts. Sites that track multiple such lists—emailed, blogged, and so on—often put them together into [Module Tabs](#) (see Chapter 4).

[Content Leaderboards](#) are usually displayed as small sidebars on the home page and internal pages. Most sites primarily present content according to some other priority, such as freshness or editorial choice; leaderboards don’t usually belong in [Center Stage](#) (see Chapter 4).

**Examples**

The *New York Times* has an archetypical [Content Leaderboard](#) that you’ve probably seen (see Figure 9-39). It contains four leaderboards tabbed together, one of which shows search terms and not articles. When you read an article in a particular section such as Business the leaderboard changes to show the most popular articles in that section.

Engadget uses an eye-catching leaderboard, shown in Figure 9-40, to display the most heavily commented posts. Compare this very bright display to the more neutral content leaderboards in Figure 9-41. Note also the different tab names, which reflect the different criteria these sites use to determine the “hottest” articles—though we can’t tell what criterion Mashable (at the top right) uses.

### MOST POPULAR

E-MAILED BLOGGED SEARCHED VIEWED

1. Frank Rich: The Rage Is Not About Health Care
2. David Brooks: The Sandra Bullock Trade
3. For Photographers, the Image of a Shrinking Path
4. Next Year in the White House: A Seder Tradition
5. Maureen Dowd: A Nope for Pope
6. State of the Art: iPhone App to Sidestep AT&T
7. Overqualified? Yes, but Happy to Have a Job
8. Militia Charged With Plotting to Murder Officers
9. Paul Krugman: Punks and Plutocrats
10. 9 Teenagers Are Charged After Classmate's Suicide

[Go to Complete List »](#)

CUSTOMIZE HEADLINES  
Create a personalized list of headlines based on your interests. [Get Started »](#)

### MOST POPULAR - BUSINESS

E-MAILED BLOGGED VIEWED

1. For Photographers, the Image of a Shrinking Path
2. For a B&B That Doesn't Exist, the Online Reviews Keep Coming
3. Retain Your Records No Longer Than You Must
4. Judge Invalidates Human Gene Patent
5. Stocks Soar, but Many Analysts Ask Why
6. Payback Time: State Debt Woes Grow Too Big to Camouflage
7. Take a Few Hours and Unlock Some Cash
8. Advertising: In a Test of Sales Savvy, Selling a Red Brick on YouTube
9. CNN Fails to Stop Fall in Ratings
10. How to Self-Diagnose Your Financial Health

[Go to Complete List »](#)

Figure 9-39. Content leaderboards on the New York Times' website

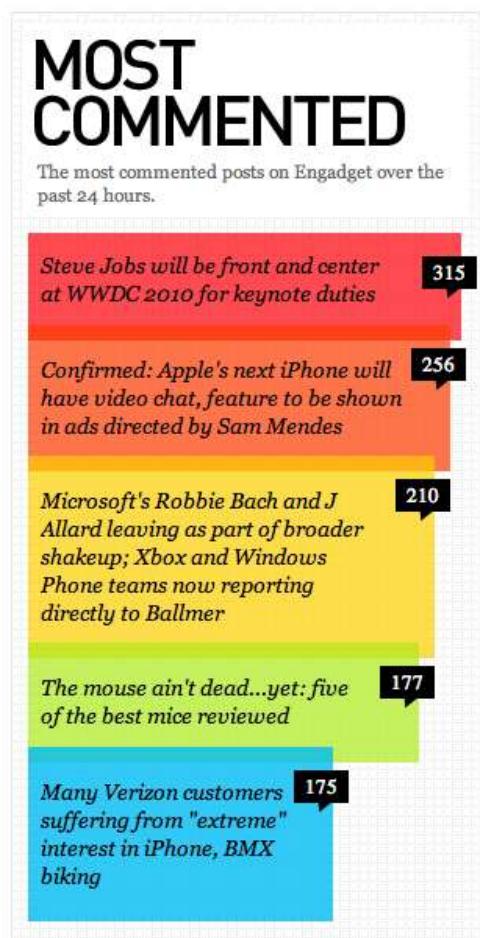


Figure 9-40. Engadget

**Most Commented**

**Shared**

- 1. Gravity Emerges from Quantum Information, Say Physicists
- 2. Ultra-Efficient Gas Engine Passes Test
- 3. Revealing the Source of Ritalin's Brain Boosting Benefits
- 4. HTML 5 Could Challenge Flash
- 5. Toyota Applies the Brakes
- 6. New Charging Method Could Slash Battery Recharge Times
- 7. Loan to Kick-start U.S. Solar Thermal Industry
- 8. Smarter Chargers for Electric Vehicles
- 9. China Spends More on Clean Energy than the U.S.
- 10. Using Peer Pressure to Cut Energy Use

**TOP 6 TODAY**

1	2	3	4	5	6
<a href="#">Apple to Launch Two New iPhones, One for Verizo...</a>	<a href="#">5 Essential Apps for Your Business's Facebook F...</a>	<a href="#">10 Must-See Google Street View Sightings</a>	<a href="#">Lady Gaga + Sesame Street = Out of this World M...</a>	<a href="#">Top 10 Funny Videos on YouTube</a>	<a href="#">Top 10 Funny Dog Videos on YouTube</a>

LATEST BLOG POSTS
MOST POPULAR ARTICLES
HOTTEST WEB LINKS

**1** [Reader Photo Gallery: Your Desk Celebrates Hubble's 20th Anniversary](#)  
04.23.10

**2** [High-Tech Underwear for Adventurous Geeks](#)  
04.21.10

**3** [Air Force Launches Secretive Space Plane; 'We Don't Know When It's Coming Back'](#)  
04.23.10

**4** [Wow! Celebrate Hubble's 20th With Best Space Image Ever](#)  
04.23.10

**5** [Hands-On: Left 4 Dead 2 Mutates With The Passing](#)  
04.23.10

**6** [Video: Ride Along With Ferrari's New King of the 'Ring](#)  
04.23.10

**7** [Chevrolet Volt Gets a Bigger Brother](#)  
04.23.10

Figure 9-41. Content leaderboards from Technology Review, Mashable (top right), and Wired (bottom)

## Recent Chatter

### recent comments

"I'd like to speak up for the Hymenopterans invoked multiple times in this thread. Do not feel compelled to destroy a hornet nest when you see it. Be advised that harassment of said hornets or their nests, with or without a stick, is inadvisable. My clients would like to inform you that stinging is a risky business and that the production of venom is costly. They would prefer to be allowed to go about their lifecycles without interference from humans. If you'd just leave the nest alone, things would go mo..."

SOUTH PARK'S MATT & TREY RECEIVE DEATH THREATS, REVOLUTIONMU

"i'm with [REDACTED], was definitely hoping the bird would turn on the dad... this is great...."

ENRAGED OSTRICH ATTACKS CHILD ON A PONY

"I've given this some thought over the last few days, and decided I completely accept and agree with your point of view on the matter. Thanks for setting me straight...."

RICHARD DAWKINS AND CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS ARE PLANNING TO HAVE

### recent comments

[REDACTED] commented on cheap private schools: "VickyS, that sounds like the YMCA except that parent has replaced teacher for certain subjects and..."

[REDACTED] commented on math and literacy vs other subjects in: "I'm assuming that both the math and the reading involve content."

[REDACTED] commented on cheap private schools: "Here is my idea for the homeschooling community: a homeschool center that operates during the day,..."

[REDACTED] commented on cheap private schools: "Even loss of an income, if it comes to that, is sometimes not as significant it may seem to be at..."

[REDACTED] commented on cheap private schools: "Coming late to the discussion, as usual, but in answer to Beth's question -- academics..."

[REDACTED] commented on math and literacy vs other subjects in: "I'm not

**Figure 9-42.** Recent Chatter on two blogs: Boing Boing and Kitchen Table Math

### What

Show the latest reader comments, tweets, contributions, or other community activity in a sidebar.

### Use when

You want to explicitly encourage participation—it's fine if people read your pieces or follow you, but you want them to actually take that next step and contribute.

You have a lot of social activity going on around the content you publish, and the comments are of a high enough quality that you're comfortable showing snippets of them on your home page.

### Why

Readers know that your site is not a “ghost town.” They can see that there are other people here, actively taking part in conversations. This appeals to people, and may encourage them to contribute their own thoughts.

Readers can be drawn into conversations if they’re shown snippets of dialog—they may want to respond to a particular comment, for instance.

### How

Create a widget that shows a list of the latest activities in reverse chronological order. It doesn’t need to be placed above the fold; often these are in an inconspicuous place on the home page (or internal page).

Decide which social activities you want to show. Comments are probably the most common thing to show, and they’re interesting to other readers; so are tweets on a certain topic. You could also display favoriting or voting activities (such as Vote to Promote in the Yahoo! pattern library), or sharing, but make sure these don’t swamp the comments, which are more appealing.

In the list of recent chatter, show these pieces of information:

- What the activity was, and a snippet of it if appropriate
- The name of the reader who initiated this activity
- The title of the affected content, and a link to it
- Possibly a timestamp or relative time (e.g., “10 minutes ago”)

Some blog software, including Blogger and WordPress, makes this very easy to do. There’s almost no cost to it, other than the screen space that a [Recent Chatter](#) area takes up.

### Examples

As you can see in Figure 9-43, some sites feature different types of public contributions. Yelp shows reviews (“Fresh Lists”) and over-the-fence chatter in two different sections. MyStarbucksIdea shows the latest ideas posted by readers, but with titles only. Technology Review is a more traditional news site, and its [Recent Chatter](#) section is more understated than the blogs shown in Figure 9-42. Note that without direct quotes, MyStarbucksIdea and Technology Review have a less personal, more formal feel than Yelp or the blog examples shown in Figure 9-42. (This may be exactly what you want, of course.)

Yahoo! News, shown in Figure 9-44, updates its [Recent Chatter](#) widget whenever someone “buzzes up” an article, which happens very, very frequently. It certainly shows activity, but because you don’t see people’s actual words, it isn’t nearly as engaging.

### Fresh Lists

The newest of our users' favorites

	boss town the food, at least, is growing on me.
	Dining in Bedford Where to eat lunch in the Lexington/Bedford area. In order of best to worst...
	Boston [Sweet] Tea Party It's true, I've been migrating north of the Mason-Dixon. Boston is becoming my home away from home!
	South End EAT/DON'T EAT
	Befriending Boston I must admit, when I found out I was coming to Boston for a few weeks I was a little bummed. Not only was it December and already a really cold...

**Today in Talk**

	2 minutes ago Gay/Trans-friendly shopping in Boston?
	4 minutes ago Fighting a speeding ticket that I got on the Lowell...
	5 minutes ago Why Can't We Have Leaders Like This?
	6 minutes ago red sox fans are insane
	8 minutes ago Looking for a new Optometrist

### Most Recent Ideas

9 Min(s) Ago	water is cheap
16 Min(s) Ago	Read Melody's Blog
21 Min(s) Ago	Bring back ice cream bowls
54 Min(s) Ago	Track longtime customers
1 Hour(s) Ago	Reese's Peanut Butter Flavored Latte
1 Hour(s) Ago	White Coffee- lightly roasted bean with nutty taste
1 Hour(s) Ago	Ban heated breakfast sandwiches from Starbucks!
1 Hour(s) Ago	Starbucks "scrip" program for Cerebral Palsy League
1 Hour(s) Ago	Fresh coffee prepared in a moment
2 Hour(s) Ago	Coffee that is a slushy

### Community

Active Discussions

- Wi-Fi at the Speed of Light | 23 Comments  
Latest post: 03/30/2010 12:21 PM By me5schramm
- SAVE the Space Shuttle | 8 Comments  
Latest post: 03/21/2010 09:30 PM By Gaetano Marano
- Ultra-Efficient Gas Engine Passes Test | 53 Comments  
Latest post: 03/21/2010 08:23 PM By david78209

Readers Favorites

	Putting the Web in a Spreadsheet
	Drag-and-Drop into the Cloud

[More »](#)

Figure 9-43. Recent Chatter at Yelp, MyStarbucksIdea, and Technology Review

## Y! Updates

[Manage My Updates](#)

My Connections
Everyone

**Invite your friends to Connect** to start sharing things you do on Yahoo! News.

Today

- Allison buzzed up:** Bowersox again wows 'American Idol' judges (AP) 1 minute ago
- Denize buzzed up:** Study: Last Supper paintings supersize the food (AP) 1 minute ago
- Kate buzzed up:** Disputed isle in Bay of Bengal disappears into sea (AP) 1 minute ago
- Case Closed buzzed up:** Mexico: Widow IDs slain husband as arrested man (AP) 1 minute ago
- RAYN buzzed up:** Oprah Winfrey settles headmistress' US lawsuit (AP) 1 minute ago

Figure 9-44. Buzzing up at Yahoo! News