



Insights

**Interviews
on the Future
of Social Media**

Edited by
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With Rebecca Blood

Exclusively for **ThinkUp** Members

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INTRODUCTION

By the time we log off for the last time, most of us will have spent three or four years of our lives with some sort of smart device in our hands. That's not counting the years of time we've spent at our desktop computers and laptops. And the one thing we do most often on all those devices is connect to each other through social networks.

This is a trend that transcends any one culture or language or geography. But we have precious few conversations about the *implications* of this huge change in society. When Gina Trapani and I set out to create ThinkUp, we started with the simple idea that we ought to take seriously all the time that we spend online connecting with one another. That mandate is too big to be contained simply in the realm of software, so we brought the conversation to you in one of the most old-fashioned forms of social media: This book.

Most conversations about social media take the form of a simple how-to guidebook. But we rarely engage with what's meaningful about these networks at an intellectual level. Yet those who use social media best do so *because* understand these networks at that level.

In these pages, with each interview, you'll find some of the deepest thinking from many of the smartest minds that have ever reflected on social media.

We're proud to have collected their thoughts, but even more we're inspired by the breadth and ambition of the ideas they outline for where this medium is headed. We can't wait to see what brilliant ideas these insights inspire for you.

Anil Dash, July 2014

danah boyd

Principal Researcher at Microsoft Research

Author, It's Complicated



Even for an academic, danah boyd has been unusually immersed in the subject of her study. She first became fascinated with the problems and possibilities of online connection as a high school junior—when those things meant Usenet and IRC. With the advent of Friendster (and the birth of dozens of other social networks) her path was set, and she has spent the last 10 years studying how youth navigate the online space. Her latest book is *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*.

We first started reading danah's blog [Zephoria](#) for her insights about social networks. We continue to read for the intelligence and empathy she brings to her subject. Far from being an outside observer, danah has distinguished herself as a

participant who is also a level-headed interpreter of the online space and the ways people there interact.

Given her years of deep thinking about online culture, we were excited to talk to danah about her online experience and her hopes and frustrations with social networking. Follow her on Twitter at [@zephoria](https://twitter.com/zephoria).

When did you first realize that social networks were going to change how you live or work?

In 2003, Jeff Heer and I scraped a bunch of Friendster and turned it into an interactive visualization for a rave. I remember watching as not-very-sober people started playing with their data, exploring how they were connected to others and having collective “aha” moments. Watching this unfold made me realize how much was going to switch as people understood themselves to be parts of networks, not just groups.

What moment or moments stand out to you as the most meaningful ones you've had online?

As a queer teenager growing up in Pennsylvania, the Internet was my saving grace. I talked to so many people around the world and was exposed to so many different perspectives. Yet, the most memorable for me was a conversation that I had with a transwoman when I was about 16. I cringe thinking about the foolish questions I

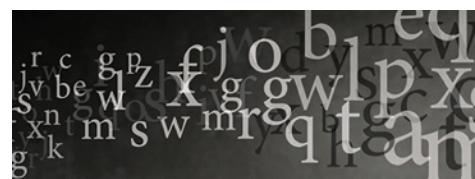
must've asked her but she helped me understand, deeply understand, gender in ways that I will never forget.

If you could know one thing about the people you're connected to online, what would it be?

I'd love to know how they're making the world a better place.

What do you wish the people you follow did more or less of online?

I wish they (we, really) were paying attention to more diverse voices. I worry so much about the homophily of those that surround me and, as a result, my own limited perspective.



danah boyd

It's Complicated

the social lives of networked teens

What's the big thing that's missing from today's social networks?

Because of the commercial nature of social media, most social



network sites are unable to really enable true publics and tease out the complex and messy nature of civic life. I wish that there was more space for us to really collectively and critically examine the interconnected world in which we live but that's hard for companies to focus on when they've got fiduciary responsibilities and financial stakeholders.

Harper Reed

CEO, Modest, Inc.

Former CTO, Obama for America



PHOTO: JACOB DEHART

First there are the war stories. Shortly before the 2012 Presidential election, Obama for America CTO Harper Reed put his team—assembled from Google, Twitter, Facebook, and others—through a full-day live-action roleplaying exercise in which all of their technical systems failed one after the other. He did this three times. During one exercise, a very real Hurricane Sandy made landfall, threatening to take down the campaign's technical infrastructure on the East Coast. His team was prepared. On another day, the campaign's entire server farm went down. The team was prepared. Election Day? No problem.

Then there are the products his team produced for the campaign. Over 200 apps and tools, designed and built to meet

the specific needs of dozens of teams working to get the President re-elected. All of it built in-house, and all of it built in just 18 months.

“I am an engineer who builds paradigm-shifting tech and leads others to do the same,” Harper says. We know him as an innovator and systems thinker with an eye for history and a passion for creating tools that are genuinely useful. Formerly CTO at crowdsourced design community Threadless, now he’s CEO of Modest (and they’re hiring).

When did you first realize that social networks were going to change how you live or work?

In the early 2000s as I experienced the magic that was slashdot, it became very obvious that the magic was not news, technology or anything that slashdot represented. The magic was the people who powered it. This was an amazing discovery for me. The fact that people are powering this software, this news site, this interaction.

In retrospect it is kind of silly, but it really solidified my views on how to build software (don’t forget people), how to build communities online (it is all about the people), and how to generally interact with technology (it is about the people).

What moment or moments stand out to you as the most meaningful ones you've had online?

There are a bunch:

September 11, 2001 on slashdot stands out as one of those moments I will never forget. It was this amazing group of people pulling together to post media, learnings, etc. Fascinating and haunting.

Another time that stands out is when Katrina hit and the Interdictor blog documented what it was like to be there at ground zero. Watching this reminded me of the book *When Sysadmins Ruled the Earth* but in real life.

There have been many other times I have had personally that mean a lot to me. But when asked “what are the most meaningful,” I jump to the times that people band together and worked/watched/experienced something in real time that could not have been experienced pre-Internet.

If you could know one thing about the people you're connected to online, what would it be?

What are they currently reading? And how they appreciate history.

What's the big thing that's missing from today's social networks?

People maybe should listen. But maybe not?

I don't know if I have any answers to the previous couple of questions. In 2 years, I can answer these questions about today. But today, I cannot answer them.

It is only in retrospect that judgements like these work. In the realtime that we live, it is very hard to say "I wish that people did X" or "the big thing that is missing is Y."

Steve Rubel

Chief Content Strategist, Edelman



Steve Rubel is one of those people who is always two clicks ahead of everyone else. We first heard of him in 2004 when he started Micro Persuasion, a blog focused on rethinking the venerable field of public relations through the lens of social media. He blogged there with great success until June 2009 when he announced that “blogging feels old,” and replaced his blog with a Posterous lifestream. Two years later he scrapped his lifestream for a Tumblr blog and an expert column at LinkedIn.

Now, at his day job as Chief Content Strategist for public relations firm [Edelman](#), Steve is looking into the future again. His new report on [producing sponsored content](#) outlines his latest

thinking on the opportunities and responsibilities the disrupted media landscape has brought to his field.

Given Steve's decade of writing in and about nearly every social media format—and his over 86,000 followers on Twitter ([@steverubel](#))—we were anxious to get his insights on social media's next steps.

When did you first realize that social networks were going to change how you live or work?

In 2004 I started a blog on public relations called Micro Persuasion. A year later, thanks to the connections I made through it, I found a whole new career. That was when I realized the impact social media was going to have both on PR and my life.

What moment or moments stand out to you as the most meaningful ones you've had online?

Ones where we all experience the same thing and yet different things as part of the same communal event. For example, when the plane landed in the Hudson River here, it was a shared experience yet an individual one for all of us.

If you could know one thing about the people you're connected to online, what would it be?

What they know (e.g. what they're expert in) and what they want to know (become expert in).

What do you wish the people you follow did more or less of online?

Generally I wish we could return to creating deeper, more analytical content. It seems that the rise of Twitter in particular has made the content more ephemeral and shallow. That may just be a function of our time.

What's the big thing that's missing from today's social networks?

A verification system that is predicated on expertise rather than a lot of followers or celebrity.

Jay Smooth

Host, Underground Railroad

Creator, Ill Doctrine



Jay Smooth is that rare master of media who's been a pioneer in two different formats. In radio, his weekly hip hop radio show, Underground Railroad has aired on WBAI for 22 years (yes, you read that right), and he was among the earliest to bring hip hop to the world of social media with his blog HipHopMusic.com and his breakout video blog [Ill Doctrine](http://IllDoctrine.com).

But what distinguishes Jay's work is not merely that it was early to these medium, it's that he brought a deep and abiding sense of social and cultural responsibility to his work, right from the start. There's a profound sense when we read or hear Jay's words that we're not just going to be entertained, but we will come out aspiring to be a bit better as people.

It's no surprise Jay's work is grounded in such lofty social ambitions; he sees his work online being as important as any of the face-to-face interactions we encounter in a day. According to Jay, "The biggest lie that's ever been told is: 'the Internet is not real life'."

When did you first realize that social networks were going to change how you live or work?

When I first got online around 1996, it was Usenet groups like rec.music.hip-hop, alt.music.prince and alt.asian-movies that first showed me how the Internet could help you find and join communities of like-minded people, to an extent that'd never seemed possible for me before. Later on (around 2000 or so) it was my experiences with the Okayplayer message boards, and most of all the network of friends I built on Livejournal, that really showed me the potential for building a vibrant and rewarding community through sharing your writing and personal expression.

What moment or moments stand out to you as the most meaningful ones you've had online?

Too many to choose, but I went to a wedding last month between two of my best friends, who met each other 10+ years ago through being mutual friends of mine on Livejournal.

If you could know one thing about the people you're connected to online, what would it be?

Do they still like me? I mean, I'm pretty sure they used to like me because they clicked “like” on that thing I posted, but that was 6 whole minutes ago.

What do you wish the people you follow did more or less of online?

Retweeting every time someone pays you a compliment. (Rappers, for whom joyful self-aggrandizement is a cornerstone of their art, are exempt from this rule.)

What's the big thing that's missing from today's social networks?

If I knew that, I'd be obliquely revealing it to you during a pitch for venture capital.

We loved Jay's recent talk at the XOXO Festival; It's a wonderful encapsulation of the philosophy that he's followed in more than a decade on the social web and more than two decades on the air.

Fred Wilson

Investor, Union Square Ventures



In the world of Internet technology, Fred Wilson is that rare person who is well-known not for being a founder or a famous CEO, but for helping fund the people who are. From Twitter to Tumblr to Kickstarter to Etsy to Foursquare, Fred and his team at Union Square Ventures have invested in many of the cornerstones of the contemporary web.

Fred's been a pioneer in social media since the earliest days of the blogosphere; His blog [AVC](#) was one of the first venture capital blogs on the web. But just as compelling is his Tumblr blog [fredwilson.vc](#), which mixes excerpts and quotes from interesting stories around the world of tech with an unexpected detour into Fred's musical tastes, offering a thoughtful and eclectic selection of songs he enjoys.

Perhaps most near and dear to our hearts, though, is the new [USV.com](#), the website for Fred's firm Union Square Ventures. The site relaunched as a community-driven site focused around posting links to the most interesting articles in the tech world. With a commenter community that's already active and engaged, it's quickly becoming an essential read for people who want to keep up with what's most interesting in technology, and especially the social parts of the web.

That combination of being grounded in community both online and in the physical world is exactly the kind of connection we're trying to encourage.

When did you first realize that social networks were going to change how you live or work?

When I started blogging in the fall of 2003 and the comments were great.

What moment or moments stand out to you as the most meaningful ones you've had online?

My son and I getting invited to a Phoenix Suns game by Howard Lindzon based on a blog post I wrote. That led to a lot more than a basketball game.

If you could know one thing about the people you're connected to online, what would it be?

What do they know that I don't (yet).

What do you wish the people you follow did more or less of online?

Nothing. If they do things that bother me I don't follow them (anymore).

What's the big thing that's missing from today's social networks?

Peer to peer transactions.

Chelsea Peretti

**Comedian and Writer
Actor, Brooklyn Nine-Nine**



Photo: Elisa Settimi

Chelsea Peretti isn't afraid work as hard as it takes to make you laugh. She's been a stand-up comedian, guest starred on *Louie*, *the Sarah Silverman Program* and many other shows, and has been a writer for everything from episodes of *Parks and Recreation* to articles in *Details* to that unforgettable web hit from a decade ago, [Black People Love Us](#). (If you're too young to remember, the NY Times will [remind you](#).)

But really, there's probably no better new character on TV this season than her role as Gina Linetti on [Brooklyn Nine-Nine](#), whose lines seem beautifully crafted to be captured and Tumbl'd as animated gifs. It seems like the role that's going to take her from merely a popular comedian to a real star.

Naturally, given the chance to talk to someone this funny, we thought it'd be great to ask a bunch of very earnest questions about the nerdy topic of social networking. She obliged! Enjoy.

When did you first realize that social networks were going to change how you live or work?

When I first played Hot or Not I was like wow the Internet is this great mechanism whereby people can judge other people incredibly quickly! "This is going to change how fast society judges each other forever," I thought to myself. I was right.

What moment or moments stand out to you as the most meaningful ones you've had online?

When Iyanla Van Zant responded to me.

If you could know one thing about the people you're connected to online, what would it be?

I wish I could know why the hateful people are so unhappy. Sometimes it helps to read their other tweets which are frequently angry replies to tons of people and/or tweets about getting drunk all the time and/or unfunny tweets that are trying to be funny.

What do you wish the people you follow did more or less of online?

I like food pics. There's a lot of unrest about posting them and social stigma around it but I think more could be good to help me figure out what and where to eat. I also follow a number of stripper and porn and reality show type women who post ass pics and then loving pics of their son. That is confusing for all parties. Less of that combo—maybe two separate accounts or something. I can't tell if I'm being sexist or feminist or a hybrid as usual.

What's the big thing that's missing from today's social networks?

Self restraint, thoughtfulness, patience, and kindness!
Kay bye.

John Gruber

Writer, Daring Fireball



photo: Ari Stiles

John Gruber is known as the unmistakable voice behind [Daring Fireball](#), one of the most important and influential technology blogs in the world, which looks at tech and culture through the lens of Apple. But what's less obvious is the insight it took more than a decade ago to realize not just that Apple would become a cultural force, but that a blog was the natural medium in which to articulate this view.

In the 11 years since Daring Fireball launched, John's been able to become a full-time professional blogger, among the first people to make that leap. And he's extended his opinionated view of the way technology should work to actually shipping apps himself; [Vesper](#), his collaboration on a note-taking app with Brent Simmons and Dave Wiskus, has seen considerable success since its launch in 2013.

Given his history as a pioneer of independent publishing, and how valuable we've found his unflinching positions on technology (even when we disagree), John was a natural perspective to seek out for his insights about where social media is headed.

When did you first realize that social networks were going to change how you live or work?

In the early years of Twitter, the Fail Whale era, Twitter would regularly go down during Apple keynote announcements. You can probably measure Twitter's reliability by when that stopped happening.

In some ways this is just a historical curiosity—in the early years of Twitter, a relatively significant portion of the overall Twitter user base was comprised of the sort of technology enthusiasts who follow along *live* during Apple product announcements. But for me professionally, it was frustrating, because it was so obvious that I could better understand the truth of what was being announced if I could follow along with the collective wisdom of my Twitter timeline.

In short, it was obvious to me that Twitter made it possible to better understand breaking news and announcements. But what made it obvious was having it broken by the Fail Whale. The utility of Twitter creeps up on you; you had to have it taken away to truly

appreciate how remarkable it is, how unlike anything that came before it.

In the same way that having been flat broke at some point in your life can (or at least should) make you better appreciate having money, it was the Fail Whale that made me appreciate having Twitter as an essential component of my work at Daring Fireball.

What moment or moments stand out to you as the most meaningful ones you've had online?

Election night 2008, when Barack Obama was elected President.

2011, when Steve Jobs died.

Very different events, very different emotions, but both stand out to me as vivid memories of a shared, collective experience.

If you could know one thing about the people you're connected to online, what would it be?

Nothing more than what they're already sharing.

What do you wish the people you follow did more or less of online?

Less tweeting about live sporting events. Wait, sorry, that's me.

Thinking about this, I generally unfollow people who I wish did less of something.

What's the big thing that's missing from today's social networks?

If I had a good answer to that, I'd probably be trying to build it. I don't. I certainly don't believe we've seen the end of social network innovations, but I'll be damned if I can think of a good one.



Steve Case

**Chairman and CEO,
Revolution**

**Chairman, The Case
Foundation**

Co-Founder, America Online

What can you say about Steve Case that doesn't sound like hype? As CEO of America Online (AOL) he brought the Internet to the people by charging a flat

monthly fee for unlimited Internet access—a game-changing innovation when you realize that his competitors charged by the minute. With AOL's focus on features like chat rooms and instant messaging, he pioneered social media before that was a concept. Now, as Chairman and CEO of Revolution, he's funding companies that seek to empower consumers in the fields of transportation, healthcare, and education, especially those found outside of Silicon Valley.

When did you first realize that social networks were going to change how you live or work?

The first time I realized the Internet was going to change the world was when I read Alvin Toffler's book The Third Wave in 1980. He talked about a wired world and

introduced the idea of “an electronic cottage” that would connect people in new ways. Even though it was just a concept at the time, I knew it was inevitable, and that insight has guided my work for the past three decades.

A second insight was when our team at AOL (then called Quantum) launched our first service, in 1985. Quickly it became apparent that the “killer app” was social—people interacting with each other, via our People Connection chat rooms, and via a new twist we introduced called instant messaging.

A third breakthrough moment was in 1993 when it became apparent that these communication tools were moving mainstream. I remember hosting AOL chats in 1993 with newly elected President Bill Clinton (the first President to use the Internet) and Billy Graham (in partnership with Time Magazine, which also was embracing the digital future for the first time, as we jointly hosted a live chat with Reverend Graham to coincide with Time putting him on their cover as he celebrated his 75th birthday).

AOL’s rise in the 1990s to become the leading Internet company was fueled by our focus on what we then called “community” (and what is now more commonly referred to as social media). Indeed, over half of our usage during these growth years were our

communications features (email, chat, instant messaging, message boards, etc). Decades later, the killer app remains people interacting with each other. I suspect that basic human desire to be connected will never change, even if the terminology we use to describe it continues to evolve.

Gavin Purcell

Producer, *The Tonight Show starring Jimmy Fallon*

When Gavin Purcell started producing *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon*, he decided to try something new. For starters, he got his boss onto Twitter—and brought late-night television into the future. His previous gig producing *Attack of the Show!* had been heavily tech-focused, obviously, but bringing a major network television show into social media proved to be a game-changer.

This pioneering approach—integrating blogging with the show, using social media as a direct connection with the show's fans, and continually engaging with the audience—has hugely influenced the show's continuing popularity. So much so, that in February, Jimmy Fallon got a promotion: he began hosting *The Tonight Show*. We were excited to talk to Gavin about social media both on the show and in his private life. Follow him on Twitter [@gavinpurcell](https://twitter.com/gavinpurcell).

When did you first realize that social networks were going to change how you live or work?

I'd been on Twitter for six or so months and I was a decent user of it. I had a few followers but most of them were people that I knew (or at least had met) in real life.

Then, I started working on *Late Night*. We were way pre-launch and we knew that we wanted Internet/social media stuff to be part of what we were going to do and

wanted to make Jimmy accessible to people in a way that other show hosts had never been. So Jimmy and I sat down and signed him up for Twitter in December of 2008. It was weird at first because it was clearly different for him than it ever was for me.

First and foremost, there were a lot of people who were interested in what he wanted to say. Me, not so much.

But second, it showed me how this was clearly the future of how people could connect to media figures in a really new and engaging way. Jimmy could respond directly to comments from people and could really listen to what real people were saying in real time. Also, we could use Twitter as a kind of sounding board for ideas about stuff we might do. That was a big deal.

If you could know one thing about the people you're connected to online, what would it be?

I'd like to know exactly what it was that made them want to follow me.

I always find it fascinating how I've made these weird connections myself and it's such a jumble of my interests and people I know or admire or, at times, just want to keep tabs on.

To be honest, half the time I'm not even sure why I follow certain people. At least a couple times a week, I

see an interesting tweet or something and I'm like "Who is this person? Why do I care about them?" That's kind of the magic of Twitter.

What do you wish the people you follow did more or less of online?

I'm mostly happy with people that I follow.

In general, I'm a positive person and I follow positive people. That helps a lot. I don't see people do stuff I don't like because I don't follow those people.

Overall, I wish people did less hating online. It's clearly the worst use of social networks and makes people behave less like human beings.

Catherine Bracy

Community Organizer, Code for America



Catherine Bracy has been bringing the grassroots spirit of community organizing to the world of technology for her entire career. In her current role at Code For America, where she's Director of Community Organizing, she's leading a community that's determined to improve the way our cities and governments work.

But even her earlier roles were grounded in the same mindset; During the 2012 presidential campaign, Bracy led the Obama campaign's on-the-ground effort to engage with the technology community. Instead of merely fundraising from, or feeding the egos of, people who create technology, Bracy asked them to serve and participate.

Given her profound and long-held commitment to harnessing the power of technology to make our communities run better, we of course wanted to get Bracy's insights into where these social technologies are headed. It was particularly gratifying to see how personal her vision was, especially when talking about the most fundamental things that social networking and social media enable.

"It's not an original thought but I'm really amazed by the possibility of being forever connected to, or in contact with, anyone you've ever met in your life. There's no such thing as 'losing touch' anymore. It's super awesome and super scary at the same time."

When did you first realize that social networks were going to change how you live or work?

I remember being super skeptical of Twitter when it first came out. One night in the end of 2006 or 2007 I was having a conversation with John Bracken and Ben Walker at the Charles Hotel in Cambridge. Ben bet John that he wouldn't be using Twitter in a month's time. I was on Ben's side. Then, another friend who was with us came back to our table excited that he'd just seen Ben Affleck and Jennifer Garner in the lobby of the hotel and I remember thinking, "Oh my god, if I were using Twitter I would totally have run out to the lobby, taken a picture of them, and posted it." I realized that this tool I

thought was completely inane was also something I would totally use myself to post meaningless crap. Needless to say, Ben lost the bet to John and here we are, six years later, still posting inanities with gusto.

What moment or moments stand out to you as the most meaningful ones you've had online?

Every birthday on Facebook is simply awesome.

I absolutely *love* Twitter during Presidential debates. When I was working on the 2012 Obama campaign I remember being completely immersed in Twitter for every single one of them, from “9-9-9” to “horses and bayonets.” For the first debate of the general election when President Obama had a horrible performance, I had my back to the TV and my head buried in Twitter. I knew before anyone else in the room that this was a disaster for us; everyone who was just watching and listening without the benefit of the backchannel didn’t have nearly the level of dread that I had when it was all over.

If you could know one thing about the people you're connected to online, what would it be?

The last book they read that changed their life and how.

What do you wish the people you follow did more or less of online?

I wish people had more of a sense of humor. Good rule of thumb (for Twitter especially): consider the possibility that the offensive tweet you're reading is actually snark/satire before you send an indignant response.

What's the big thing that's missing from today's social networks?

Scratch and sniff.

We were totally inspired by the social and civic perspective Bracy offered to the tech industry in her talk earlier this year called What Techies Need to Know About Politics. It's a must-watch for anybody that cares about either technology or politics.

Marco Arment

Developer and entrepreneur

Marco Arment has spent his entire career making the Web cooler than it was before he arrived. It started with social publishing site [Tumblr](#), where he served as lead developer and “idea editor,” helping to realize founder David Karp’s vision for one-click content creation and sharing. Then in January 2008 he launched a “little side project”—[Instapaper](#), a read-later app that quickly became known for its great design and social sharing. Oh, and he founded [The Magazine](#), a best-in-show periodical that is helping to redefine publishing at a time when traditional publishers are foundering. We can’t wait for the release of his podcasting app, [Overcast](#).

Long story short: Marco makes things that make it easy to find and share great content. Of course we wanted to talk to him. Catch up with him at his personal site www.marco.org.

When did you first realize that social networks were going to change how you live or work?

As with most market shifts, I realized slowly, and after everyone else. I reluctantly created my Twitter account in 2008 to test an integration feature I was writing for Tumblr. Over the next year, I slowly started using Twitter more and more as I realized that almost all of my professional peers did—it became very clear that if I

didn't use it, I'd be missing out on the pulse of my entire field.

What moment or moments stand out to you as the most meaningful ones you've had online?

I'm fortunate to have a lot of followers, so most congratulatory events—the birth of our child, launching new products, selling old ones—have been met with tidal waves of encouragement, support, and well wishes. It's an incredible feeling. My followers are also hilarious, so I get a lot of joy out of retweeting the funniest responses to my everyday tweets.

If you could know one thing about the people you're connected to online, what would it be?

I'd love to have more context about people's lives. People on social networks are reduced to a username and an avatar, and you really don't know anything else about them or their lives. Meeting someone in person for five minutes can give you a better idea of their life and personality than following them online for years, and I bet there's more we could do to reduce that gap.

What do you wish the people you follow did more or less of online?

I'd love to see less attention paid toward negative actions such as trashy articles on clickbait publications. Attention online just brings more profit and encourages the creation of similar content, so directing attention at trash is actually glorifying it and causing more trash to be produced.

What's the big thing that's missing from today's social networks?

To address my request for more context, I think rather than profile background images, people should be required to upload a picture of themselves eating an everyday breakfast at home. (People who don't eat breakfast can substitute lunch.) Think of the amount of context you could get from that. Where is this person coming from? What's their view of the world? What are their everyday challenges and pleasures?

Seth Godin

Author, speaker, and entrepreneur



Seth Godin hates mediocrity. Or rather, he thinks it's unnecessary. "I've never met anyone...anyone...who needed to settle for being average. Best is a slot that's available to everyone, somewhere," he wrote on his blog in 2007. The idea that just a few are chosen for greatness, and the rest of us just need to put our heads down and do our jobs is a lie, he insists over and over again in books like *The Dip*, *The Linchpin*, and his latest, *The Icarus Deception* (which he funded with a Kickstarter campaign in just three hours).

Make something remarkable, he tells us again and again, all the while making—and doing—remarkable things himself. Keynote speeches. 17 best-selling books. [Squidoo](#), a website for people to share their passions. And of course [his blog](#). It's Seth who got the world onto permission marketing, well before his stint as vice president of Direct Marketing at Yahoo.

In other words, for the last two decades, Seth has been uncovering, studying, and expanding the possibilities that are latent in the Internet and social media. We are delighted to include him here.

When did you first realize that social networks were going to change how you live or work?

When I started using email in 1976, but I was wrong, and then it happened again in 1992.

A few years later, long after AOL was done being my biggest client, I logged back into a long-ignored AOL account. Less than ten seconds later, a chat window popped up, with a former AOL VP saying hi. He had me set on some sort of chat tickler alert button that I had no idea existed. That was the day I knew for reals.

What moment or moments stand out to you as the most meaningful ones you've had online?

I'm thinking really hard, but I have to say that I've never had a meaningful moment online. I have meaningful moments in my house, my office, my work, and most of all, my head. I've read something or met someone and it changed the way I think.

But when I'm "online," I don't feel that way. I am gathering or responding, not really living in the online world.

If you could know one thing about the people you're connected to online, what would it be?

Who they are in real life, in a way that causes them to actually own their actions. I feel the same way about telemarketers and customer service reps.

What do you wish the people you follow did more of online?

Publish work they're proud of for the long term.

What's the big thing that's missing from today's social networks?

Social. Social as in, connections that matter.

Steve Martin

Comedian, musician, writer, and actor



We all know Steve Martin is a comedy legend, but for years he's created an unexpected and profoundly resonant range of quieter works. He's earned raves for his books like *Shopgirl* and *The Object of Beauty*, accolades for his work as a producer and playwright, and a hallowed place on our iPods for his musical efforts, exemplified by the joyful heartbeat of 2013's *Love Has Come For You*, with Edie Brickell. (Do check out "Siamese Cat" from that record; it's the kind of complicated love song that can only come from music being made by actual grown-ups.)

That mastery of media as diverse as stand-up, live TV, novels and the banjo makes obvious why Steve Martin's been able to effortlessly transition to social media: This guy is just good at connecting with people. A few years ago, Steve used an early

version of ThinkUp to gather together many of his most popular tweets, along with particularly funny replies from his fans and followers. The result was *The Ten, Make That Nine, Habits of Very Organized People. Make That Ten*, which, in addition to being delightfully impossible for people to mention by name, became a bestseller.

We've been inspired by Steve's use of social media since he started, so it only made sense to ask him a few questions about where he thinks it's headed, and what matters most.

When did you first realize that social networks were going to change how you live or work?

I never believed in Facebook for my personal life (I knew I was never going to post photos of me frolicking on the beach), but for my professional life I knew it was important. After a few months on Twitter, however, I felt it was a wonderful creative outlet, and later, it became a contributing professional ally, too. After about a year, I posted photos on Twitter of me frolicking on the beach.

What moment or moments stand out to you as the most meaningful ones you've had online?

I get as much enjoyment on Twitter from reading responses as I do from writing tweets. I often find myself running to another room to read to my wife what someone has written to me.

If you could know one thing about the people you're connected to online, what would it be?

The extent of their sincerity.

What do you wish the people you follow did more of online?

Learn about spelling and grammar. Writing is now so essential to our lives online, and sometimes it's the only thing people see of us.



Photo: Rachel Esterday

Christina Ray

**Principal, Christina Ray
Consulting
Founder, Conflux Art
Festival**

When Christina Ray moved to New York, she decided to found an art collective. That led to a web-based magazine

and a monthly salon. Which led to founding Conflux Festival and the Kesting/Ray Gallery. And now a consulting business.

Busy? Sure. But we're more impressed with her early recognition of social networking as a powerful tool for connection and collaboration to create so many awesome things for the rest of us to enjoy. With discussions about social networking often dominated by technologists, we think it's valuable to hear the perspective of someone as grounded in curation as she is in entrepreneurship.

When did you first realize that social networks were going to change how you live or work?

I became a beta tester for Typepad in the early 2000s, a few years after moving to New York. As I began

publishing blogs, I realized that the community I was becoming a part of online overlapped with the groups of artists and technologists in Brooklyn that I was just getting to know in person. It became clear that developing a strong social presence online could facilitate and quickly amplify the potential for creative collaboration offline, whether in galleries, at festivals or in public space.

What moment or moments stand out to you as the most meaningful ones you've had online?

Learning about and participating in net.art and tactical media communities in the early 2000s; joining Flashmobs and big urban games, which were often announced online and then led to participatory urban adventures; the awesomeness of being able to share photos (particularly of street art) with Flickr; watching artists adopt Google maps and GIS tools for location-based projects; using Twitter at SXSW in 2007; the early days of Dodgeball (that one wins for most fun).

If you could know one thing about the people you're connected to online, what would it be?

What are you like offline?

What do you wish the people you follow did more or less of online?

The people I follow online are the ones I tend to think are really smart...but online in general it's always great to see more creating of small, useful networks. More tools and solutions applied to actual problems. Less inventing of features and products that don't address real-world needs.

What's the big thing that's missing from today's social networks?

Findability. Social noise filters. Clutter-erasers. Direct routes to people you can help or who can help you.

John Maeda

Design Partner, Kleiner Perkins



Today's best products aren't just defined by inventive use of technology, but by thoughtful design. An artistic sensibility must influence the creation of these works from the beginning.

Who better to talk to about the future of the social web than John Maeda? A brilliant thinker whose own work ranges from his background in software engineering at MIT to his artistic works that form part of the permanent collections of institutions as august as the Museum of Modern Art.

Today, after a groundbreaking tenure as the President of the Rhode Island School of Design, John splits his time between leading the design practice at Silicon Valley's legendary Kleiner

Perkins and informing design at eBay. He's also a masterful user of Twitter, where his messages from [@johnmaeda](#) seem as artfully designed as any of his other works. That same sense of discipline and thoughtfulness shows through in his work on *Redesigning Leadership*, which applies design thinking to the challenge of running an established institution, and even more fundamentally in *What Is Design?* which documents reflections on design from leaders in a broad variety of disciplines.

When did you first realize that social networks were going to change how you live or work?

It was 2003 while I was at MIT. I was teaching a class of 30 or so students and supervising the research of 6 or so graduate students and started to blog about my emergent thoughts on simplicity. Soon it became evident to me that hundreds of people were engaging me through my blog, and I started to wonder about how I spent my time and where that time could best achieve the maximum impact. Do I access less people? Or do I access more?

What moment or moments stand out to you as the most meaningful ones you've had online?

When I have come in touch with a living author I have admired (like Alain de Botton), or a person who I had never heard about before (which is at least five new wonderful thinkers on Twitter every day).

If you could know one thing about the people you're connected to online, what would it be?

Why are they spending so much time online?

What do you wish the people you follow did more or less of online?

I am just happy they are out there.

What's the big thing that's missing from today's social networks?

Food. Free food.



Jason Fried

Founder, Basecamp
Author, Remote

Jason Fried believes in accomplishing more by doing less, and he has built a company around that counterintuitive principle. He's the co-founder of 37signals, renowned among customers for software that intentionally does less than its competitors, but better; and among programmers for

Ruby on Rails. In keeping with his philosophy, Jason recently re-branded his company Basecamp, tightening its focus to that single product.

We started reading his company blog, Signal vs Noise, way back in 1999. And we've been impressed with the thinking, documented there and in three books, behind his approach to building things. A clear-eyed focus on the essential detail has been Basecamp's hallmark in product development, workplace design, and in Jason's speaking and writing. His newest book is REMOTE: Office not required.

When did you first realize that social networks were going to change how you live or work?

For me it was Twitter. The first time I used it I knew something had changed. I'd been blogging for years and I thought that was the easiest way to get the word out about something. But nope—Twitter was. And not by a little, but by a huge margin. I kept thinking "For all these years, I've been IMing with people—sharing links, photos, whatever.... But so much of it would have been better if it was public. More people would see it, interact with it, respond to it, etc."

What moment or moments stand out to you as the most meaningful ones you've had online?

All of them, really. The fact that I can do what I do, communicate with anyone around the globe publicly or privately, run a business with a team spread across 25 cities, etc.

From the authors of the *New York Times* bestseller *Rework*



It's all too amazing to pick out one moment.

If you could know one thing about the people you're connected to online, what would it be?

I'd like to know what it looks like out their window.

What do you wish the people you follow did more or less of online?

Less criticizing, and more celebrating. Twitter (especially) makes it so easy to throw a jab at someone or something. But it's also the easiest way to link up something great, call out a clever idea, or point people in the direction of something wonderful. I wish more people I followed used it for that purpose.

What's the big thing that's missing from today's social networks?

Substance. I don't know if that matters, but it's the one thing I always feel is missing. Social networks feel more like small talk to me. They seem to be designed for quick hits, passing comments, smiles, or frowns. But maybe that's what they should be, so maybe it's OK. Just an observation.

Eugene Mirman

**Comedian and writer
Actor, Bob's Burgers**



Photo: Brian Tamborello

Eugene Mirman's absurd humor comes in many, many different forms. He's a stand-up comedian, wrote a not-very-helpful self-help book *The Will To Whatevs*, pops up on the [StarTalk Radio podcast](#) with Neil DeGrasse Tyson, and hosts his eponymous comedy festival, now in its sixth year.

And oh yeah, he's the voice of Gene on *Bob's Burgers*, one of the most inventive and consistently funny shows on television.

But alongside the comedic genius is a nuanced and inventive use of social media to tie all of these disparate efforts together. The Eugene Mirman Comedy Festival this year was made possible through a [Kickstarter campaign](#) where some of the rewards of backing included being listed in the festival guide as

a “Classist, Privileged Dickhead.” In small print! (Only \$22, cheap!)

When did you first realize that social networks were going to change how you live or work?

When Friendster first came out, it made spreading the word about shows much easier. My friend Bobby Tisdale and I ran a weekly comedy show in the East Village called Invite Them Up and we never had a great way to let people know about last minute guests and in general about the show, but with Friendster, you could post information to friends and it helped build an audience. The same thing became true of MySpace and then Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.

What moment or moments stand out to you as the most meaningful ones you've had online?

I'd say probably keeping up with friends and family who I can't see as often. If you post a picture of a stew you're making with a pig's head, it lets people in your life know that you're doing okay and vice versa.

If you could know one thing about the people you're connected to online, what would it be?

Their birthday.

What do you wish the people you follow did more or less of online?

Posted less pictures of kids and more pictures of weird shit on the street.

What's the big thing that's missing from today's social networks?

A way to turn people who follow you into pure money that you can eat or live on.

Juliana Rotich

Executive Director, Ushahidi



Juliana Rotich is one of the quiet heroes of the modern Internet, proving that the social networks often derided as trivial or silly can have a significant impact on society. Over the years, she's built a groundbreaking and thriving open source platform, crowdfunded a critical piece of infrastructure, and pioneered the global blogosphere for almost a decade.

Juliana's work as Executive Director of Ushahidi is where we first crossed paths. The organization's namesake platform is one of the great successes of social media analysis, having become an indispensable tool for activists, social organizations, and communities.

But even after years of seeing Ushahidi grow and blossom, spreading from its roots in Kenya to use around the world, and

seeing their new tools like [CrowdMap](#) take off, we were completely taken by surprise by one of Ushahidi's newest projects: [BRCK](#). A supremely clever bit of hacking produced "reliability in a box," to provide power and connectivity to anyone, in any circumstance. Even more impressively, BRCK blew past its already-ambitious \$125,000 goal on Kickstarter, proving a huge audience was focused on the importance of its mission.

Given that pedigree, we were excited to talk to Juliana about her insights into what she's learned from years of imaginative use of her social networks.

When did you first realize that social networks were going to change how you live or work?

When I started my blog and connected with other Africans online who were just as geeky as I was, as optimistic about the world, and as action-oriented as I aspired to be.

What moment or moments stand out to you as the most meaningful ones you've had online?

Reporting into the Ushahidi prototype in early 2008. That the information I had come across, the blog posts I had written about Eldoret which at the time was not part of the online conversation (most engagement online was about major cities and what was going on there). That it could be insightful to others and useful for greater

situational awareness.... It gave me hope that I could be a part of something positive at a very difficult time. The same feeling came back unequivocally when the team came together after the recent terrorist attack in Kenya that lead to the creation of The Ping App.

Discovering Global Voices Online. The moment when I could get a summary of what was going on in Kenya and other African countries, but through the eyes of bloggers who saw things very differently. I got the sense that the narrative of Africa was changing with input from diverse voices and mine was one of them. Volunteering to make that more so in coverage of environmental stories was deeply meaningful to me.

If you could know one thing about the people you're connected to online, what would it be?

What inspires them. What sort of lessons did they draw from whatever adversity they've had to deal with.

What do you wish the people you follow did more or less of online?

I wish they would be more optimistic. There has got to be more good out there. I have had to move people I follow (on Twitter) into lists as their general demeanor online is energy-sucking and not constructive. The state

of the world is already quite depressing, negativity and vitriol is not helpful.

What's the big thing that's missing from today's social networks?

Authenticity. It is unwieldy. I miss the time when the web felt like it was mine too, that it was my home too, with a door open to the communities I was a member of. Today it feels like there are pre-ordained owners of it in silos that I am just but a very tiny dot in. In the early days I viewed the the social networks we created through blogs like how astronauts saw the earth as a pale blue dot. A commons, an organism that intimated unification. Now it is so fragmented that I do not feel like there is a soul to it and its more like shattered glass held together by tiny strands of familiarity/acquaintance controlled something other.

Any closing thoughts?

I am guided each day by these three questions.

What are you fixing?

What are you making?

Who are you helping?

The web affords me the chance to answer these questions with an amazing global team of software and

hardware engineers. I hope it can be a source of collaboration for others who are not part of an open community, to consider joining/supporting something that gives back to the world.

For a deeper look into Juliana's clarity of vision about how communities can be well-served by technology, be sure to watch her [TEDGlobal talk](#) from earlier this year, introducing the BRCK and speaking to Ushahidi's ambitions of bringing reliable connectivity to everyone in the world.



Joi Ito

Director, MIT Media Lab

Joi Ito's resume is ridiculously impressive. He's the Director of MIT's Media Lab and board member of numerous world-class organizations, among them The MacArthur Foundation, The Sony Corporation, and The Mozilla Foundation. He's also the Guild Custodian of a World of

Warcraft guild, a PADI Master Scuba Diver Trainer, an Emergency First Responder instructor, and a Diver's Alert Network instructor. Clearly someone you'd want standing right beside you during, well, almost any type of event.

We love him for the heart and soul he puts into everything he pursues. One look at that resume reveals Joi's immersion in online culture began long before he and his Digital Garage co-founder created the first Japanese homepage in 1994. He was an active proponent of and participant in social media well before that term was coined, so we were excited to hear his insights on the technology today.

When did you first realize that social networks were going to change how you live or work?

When I started hanging out on PARTI on The Source.

What moment or moments stand out to you as the most meaningful ones you've had online?

Meeting hackers in the first really MMORPG MUD at Essex University in the 80s and learning how to “gain access” to the various university computers connected to the pre-TCP/IP networks so I could talk to and play games with people everywhere. Receiving the torch from Law Professor Lawrence Lessig for running Creative Commons in Second Life. When I took my first online course for credit at The New School in 1985.

If you could know one thing about the people you're connected to online, what would it be?

Of the people I like, who is free and nearby.

What do you wish the people you follow did more or less of online?

I wish fewer people asked me to do things like fill out surveys. ;-)

What's the big thing that's missing from today's social networks?

Strong privacy and security.

Chris Gethard

Comedian



Photo: Zac X. Wolf

Chris Gethard is the mastermind behind public access talk show *The Chris Gethard Show*. He describes the show as “a creative home for many comedians, filmmakers, artists, musicians and general weirdos in New York City” and it’s rapidly becoming the worst-kept secret on the Internet.

Grounded in Chris’s experience as an improv actor with Manhattan’s Upright Citizens Brigade, the show is famous for its audience participation and interaction. During the show’s second episode, a confused viewer called in to ask what was

going on. Gethard's response? To invite her over and make her a regular panelist for the next four months.

We were impressed when Chris used Twitter to book Sean "Diddy" Combs to perform with him—and again when he used social media to book a cross-country trip staying with his fans. Crazy? Maybe. Inspiring? Well, yeah. And when we meet someone who's successfully pulled off an online stunt that we never even thought of—well, you know we want to peek inside their head.

When did you first realize that social networks were going to change how you live or work?

As a comedian, YouTube was the first indicator that the Internet was changing the game. Self-distribution was new and huge and meant that agents and industry didn't need to come to see you at some show you put up that may or may not have an audience and may or may not be you on your best night. Derrick Comedy was an early group that I watched make videos to great acclaim and career building. It was a real eye opener for a guy who had been doing it a while.

Social networking seemed to be a natural extension of that. Twitter in particular is such an easy, no frills way to interact with fans and distribute short bursts of plugs and creativity. The rise of Twitter also seemed to coincide with the blossoming world of "comedy nerds"

that follow comedy like the previous generation followed music. It all lined up nicely.

What moment or moments stand out to you as the most meaningful ones you've had online?

When I used Twitter to book Sean “Diddy” Combs to perform a show with me in a supermarket basement, I realized two things–1) Social networking was for-real powerful and 2) I could mold social networking to fit my own artistic voice. The message I put out behind the Diddy project was that it would speak to the world being a cool place if a guy like him spent a night hanging out with a guy like me. I’ve since used social networking to do two different projects where I traveled cross country meeting fans, staying in their homes, and connecting with them in a face to face way, as well as use the Internet as the basis to spread word on all my work. Diddy was like a Rosetta Stone that unlocked this potential for me.

If you could know one thing about the people you’re connected to online, what would it be?

I like using platforms that are catered to anonymity and short contributions to unearth who people are, really. I’m very happy that I’ve done projects where I wind up meeting followers of my social networking platforms

face to face. As these platforms grow and mature, my belief is that they'll be used less for anonymity and more towards people presenting and curating the best versions of themselves to the world. Getting that sense from people and realizing that while you might not be able to meet all these people in real life that there are kindred spirits and people with similar struggles to you, is a powerful thing. There's so much press about online bullying now and I think it's necessary to call out the evil of that—but the inverse of that level of aggression and darkness is a vast potential for positivity. I don't think the generation of people that grew up with social networking as a part of their lives has matured to the place that this has reached even close to its full potential yet. I want to know the generous, human, vulnerable sides of people.

What do you wish the people you follow did more or less of online?

I wish people spent less time being cynical and critical, and more time supporting each other and finding the communities that they do thrive in. I think the Internet has a culture where mockery reigns, sarcasm drives hits, and meanness can attract throngs of people like sharks to blood in the water. I think that's far too easy. One thing I constantly marvel at about the Internet is how

vast it is, and how much that means you can simply ignore things you don't like. You don't have to cut things down. You don't have to shatter the confidence of people contributing things to their own online world. You don't have to spend your own energy creating negativity. It's so, so easy to just move on to the things you do find compelling and interesting, and I wish people would focus more on that.

What's the big thing that's missing from today's social networks?

As a kid who grew up going on BBS systems and who has watched online worlds get bigger and broader, I sometimes miss the days of small boutique communities. They are out there and find-able, but it seems like social networking's primary goal is to get more followers, more attention, more retweets, more favorites, etc. I wonder if in the future there will be a more streamlined way for the broadness and constant need for growth among social networking to convert some energy from that broadness and craving for size into an ability to isolate and lock in an audience that's ok being small but passionate. It's hard on the larger and more influential platforms to not feel like your efforts to curate something specific quickly grow out of control the more successful you get at it. Basically, it seems to

me that on social networking, the idea of “less is more” has not yet found a surefire way to survive and thrive. I hope it does.

Jason Kottke

Writer, kottke.org

Developer, [Stellar.io](https://stellar.io)



We first met Jason Kottke online in 1998 with his personal site Osil8. Soon after, he began blogging on kottke.org. We're still reading.

And while longevity in such an ephemeral medium is impressive, it's Jason's commitment to his craft that intrigues us most. Over the years, Jason has experimented with everything from journal-style writing to pure link-blogging, experientially mastering the craft of both finding the good links, and then persuading people to click through to read them. To put it another way—for 15 years, Jason has built an impressive audience by sending readers away from his site. It's a neat trick if you can pull it off.

Jason's latest project, [Stellar](https://stellar.io), allows users to aggregate the best content from their friends' social media feeds—rather like that

personal newspaper futurists promised us a few years back. Given the depth and breadth of Jason's experience with social media and its antecedents, it was natural we should seek his insights on the current state of living on the Web.

When did you first realize that social networks were going to change how you live or work?

Even back when a social network was a collection of personal web sites, mailing lists, and IM contacts held together with baling twine, it was apparent that people connecting with each other online was a powerful thing. When Facebook, Twitter, etc. packaged all of that functionality together under one umbrella (or several large umbrellas), more people were able to participate in a tightly-coupled way.

What moment or moments stand out to you as the most meaningful ones you've had online?

I met almost all of my friends online, so there's that.

If you could know one thing about the people you're connected to online, what would it be?

I think we already get plenty, don't we?

What do you wish the people you follow did more or less of online?

Less posturing and more thoughtful reactions. My favorite tweeters are themselves...they're not playing a game or in character or whatever. I have never been a big fan of Facebook, but in some ways I prefer it these days because people tend to write normally about themselves and their day.

What's the big thing that's missing from today's social networks?

Algorithms used by social networks tend to encourage sameness. "People who follow Person A might like Person B" and "People who watched Video C might like Video D." Men are encouraged to follow other men, women are encouraged to follow other women, Hispanics are encouraged to follow other Hispanics, etc. Not so great for connecting to, learning from, or empathizing with those who are not like us.



Kathryn Finney

**Founder, [digitalundivided](#)
Author and blogger, The
Budget Fashionista**

When Kathryn Finney joined a startup incubator program, she was pretty confident about her chances for success. She was an honors graduate from Yale and Rutgers Universities. She had already turned her blog, [The Budget Fashionista](#), into a full-time profession. She had a best-selling book, and she

had appeared in national media dozens of times. Most importantly, she knew her community, and she had a solid business plan to extend her TBF brand into a product line.

But the tech world, as one potential investor put it, didn't do black women.

Kathryn let that sink in. Then she changed it.

Now, through [Digital Undivided](#) (DID), Kathryn is helping members of the urban community (especially women) develop

the skills, savvy, and connections they need to turn ideas into successful startups. DID hosts tech workshops in urban communities, monthly meetups around the country, a weekly **#DIDTECHTALK** on Twitter, and **FOCUS100**, “The Most Diverse Tech Conference on the Planet.”

The result? Twenty percent of DID’s FOCUS Fellows have raised angel and venture funding (compared to less than 1% for black companies in general). And in 2013, Kathryn received the Champions of Change Award from The White House for her work increasing inclusiveness in tech. Done and done. We are thrilled to share her insights here.

When did you first realize that social networks were going to change how you live or work?

I first realized the impact that social networks were going to have on my career when I published my first book in 2006. At the time blogging was relatively new and hadn’t reached the masses. I had requested 25 books from my publisher to send to

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE
TO LOOKING FABULOUS FOR LESS

How to Be a Budget Fashionista



KATHRYN FINNEY

Creator of TheBudgetFashionista.com

"A fun read that inspires you to shop smart!"
—LLOYD BOSTON, style contributor for NBC's Today show

fellow bloggers and was told that bloggers weren't considered "media" (again this was 2006).

After a few weeks of trying to no avail to convince the publisher that bloggers were in fact "media" and through the use of affiliate links not only would we get press, but the blogger could also benefit as well, my agent and I decided that I would just purchase the books myself and send it to my fellow bloggers. We sent a book to every blogger who requested one and my fellow bloggers wrote about the book. The result is that 7 years later the book is now in its 9th printing and sales continue to be robust because those blog links are still live *and* because of the Amazon links the book was positioned for the turn over to ebooks.

What moment or moments stand out to you as the most meaningful ones you've had online?

Our weekly #DIDTECHTALKS are always great moments for me because each week it is a "safe" space for black women techies to chat about issues that impact our lives. Twitter as a social medium has allowed marginalized communities, like my own, a place to engage in meaningful public discourse with ease.

If you could know one thing about the people you're connected to online, what would it be?

Why did they get online. What are they hoping to achieve by having a presence.

What do you wish the people you follow did more or less of online?

Less selfies and definitely less pictures of food.

What's the big thing that's missing from today's social networks?

In person meetings and connections are still valuable. There's great value to meeting face to face and I wish social networks would facilitate more of those face to face meetings.

Brian Solis

**Principal analyst, Altimeter Group
Author, What's the Future of Business**



In 2012, Brian Solis ([@briansolis](#)) was included on *Billboard's* Twitter 140: The Music Industry Characters You Need to Follow —even though he isn't in the music industry. He also made Mashable's 25 Twitter Accounts That Will Make You Smarter (alongside Elon Musk, Melinda Gates, and NASA). We weren't too surprised. Brian has spent the last fifteen years developing and sharing his insights about social media through speaking, writing, and in his work as Principal Analyst at [the Altimeter Group](#).

We first met up with Brian through his blog. Now we're intrigued by his newest book, [*What's the Future of Business \(WTF\), Changing the way businesses create experiences*](#) which explores the need for businesses to create shared experiences for connected consumers. We were delighted when he took some

time to talk to us about his hopes and dissatisfactions with social media.

When did you first realize that social networks were going to change how you live or work?

As a kid, I would spend time exploring bulletin boards. I thought it was cool. But as a teenager, I assumed it was something everyone did. In the mid-90's however, and as a young man, I realized the importance of connectedness and engagement. Forums, boards, and early blogs transformed my perspective of how information travels and how people are influenced. I grew up both analog and digital and as a result, I saw the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities with both traditional and social media. Working in media and marketing at the time, I believed that understanding social media would set me on a path where I could make an impact in a new realm. In February of 1999, I started FutureWorks, a company dedicated to social media. I ran that company until I joined Altimeter Group in March 2011.

What moment or moments stand out to you as the most meaningful ones you've had online?

For the first several years of venturing into social, I was a consumer and a student. I studied relentlessly to learn

how to add value and build community for a variety of industries I worked in at the time. I link this to also being an introvert in real life. Somewhere in the early 2000's, I decided to share everything I had learned and was learning. My goal was to do so using only new media. I remember feeling a sense of validation, that others also found value in my perspective, and also a sense of acceptance, that sharing with friends and strangers allowed me to connect without the anxiety of stepping out of my comfort zone. Perhaps online interaction helps someone earn confidence to become a bit more outgoing or approachable in everyday life.

Each time I publish, it's my intention to deliver value and also invite discourse. With every interaction, I learned and grew. This drives me to this day.

If you could know one thing about the people you're connected to online, what would it be?

This might sound strange, but I would find it incredibly useful if every network provided a personalized portion in each of your connections' profiles that shows you how they know you or why they follow you. As networks expand and contract, it becomes almost impossible to remember the source of the link you share with someone. I'm often embarrassed and to some extent troubled when someone from my social network

approaches me in the real world with a sense of expectation that I will readily remember who they are and how we know one another... “Hey, it’s me!”

What do you wish the people you follow did more or less of online?

In the barrage of updates that showcase food, activities, humble brags, famous quotes, selfies, politics, et al., I would love to know what they do and don’t get out of social media. I think the value system of it all is evolving in a direction that needs realignment. I don’t believe in information overload. Networking isn’t a reciprocal exchange. Active filtering is our responsibility to maintain value in our social streams. Additionally, it’s our responsibility to invest value in the streams of those who are connected to us.

But back to the value system for a moment. I wish people shared less of what they think is going to spark “engagement” and focused more on what will spark meaningful dialogue and interaction. There’s a difference and I think it has everything to do with why we think we need to constantly monitor our social streams and why and when we should.

What's the big thing that's missing from today's social networks?

I wonder sometimes about the dimensionality of the social web. What I see online reveals one or more sides of someone but has yet to portray the true character and holistic nature of someone. I guess to expect such is unrealistic. When an online relationship is consummated in real life, there's usually a surprising flood of personality, ethos and perspective that unfold in any given situation. However, I do think that what we share also has an impact on the dimensionality of what others see and the impressions they form as a result. I believe we should be a bit more intentional about what we share to add color, depth, and perspective to our digital persona and how it aligns with our real world identity.

Tim O'Reilly

**Technologist
Founder, O'Reilly Media**



Photo: Joi Ito

People often talk about Tim O'Reilly like he's some kind of hippie. In articles about him, references abound to poets and philosophers, bracketed with offhand mentions of the cows and fields on the land around the offices of his eponymous media company. So it's easy to miss the fact that this guy is one of the most universally respected voices in the entire world of technology, with a level of access and influence that would be intimidating in almost anyone else's hands.

And he's put it to good use. From being the most important book publisher in the earliest days of the personal software industry, to hosting seminal conferences and events like Web 2.0

and the Emerging Technology conference, to convening summits that were fundamental to the open source and open government movements, Tim has played a key role in many of the most important social changes that have been driven by technology.

Today, in addition to O'Reilly's formidable event and media businesses, he is a strong advocate for Code for America which, as he puts it, "is doing amazing work helping government work better in the 21st century." And with characteristic generosity, when prompted for which projects he's excited about, he was as eager to promote [DIY.org](#) for rethinking how kids learn and share what they learn, despite it not being his own work.

But it's just as valuable when we see Tim shift from his affable demeanor to an equally comfortable, and even more important role in the tech industry: A credible critic. For example, when we began asking him questions about the effect that social media has on our lives, he offered up an unprompted, and sharply critical, questioning of its impact:

"There are times when I feel that social media is a disease, and that we'd all be a lot happier without it. It can be an addiction. It shouldn't be, but too often, it is."

Obviously, Tim still derives a tremendous amount of value from his interactions in the medium, and we bet you'll find the insights from his interview as valuable as we did.

When did you first realize that social networks were going to change how you live or work?

I think it was when I looked at Twitter after not having really been active for a while, and discovered I had tens of thousands of followers. I felt an obligation to give something to them. At times, that became a real burden, and I regretted that I'd ever taken it up. I'm still not sure that it's really not a distraction. But in a lot of ways, I find Twitter to be my equivalent of what deli.cio.us used to be—except instead of saving bookmarks, I'm sharing them.

What moment or moments stand out to you as the most meaningful ones you've had online?

I've loved being able to put a spotlight on people whose work I value. One of the privileges (and the obligations) of having lots of followers is the ability to give visibility to people who have something important to say. It's more what I'm able to share than what I consume that I find compelling.

I remember someone blogging once about “the @timoreilly bump” in their followership when I retweeted them. That’s when I formulated my idea that Klout et al are all backwards. It’s all about increasing

your influence, when the real goal of social media should be to increase the influence of others.

With personal friends. I love being able to keep up with friends and family members via Facebook, Google+, Instagram, and Twitter. It definitely keeps me more in touch with people.

If you could know one thing about the people you're connected to online, what would it be?

What they care about that I wouldn't otherwise know.

What do you wish the people you follow did more or less of online?

I really hate it when people I follow stop talking about interesting stuff and start live-tweeting football. That being said, I recognize how there is a subset of their circle that just loves that.

What's the big thing that's missing from today's social networks?

I'd love to have a social network that was based on the people I call and email with. The people I communicate with directly are a better indication of my network than some random set who I've connected with on a shared social network.

I'd also love better tools for remembering who I meet, and in real time promoting or downgrading them in my stream.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book was created as an exclusive reward for backers of ThinkUp in the fall of 2013. The interviews documented here took place over the span of several months, but have been edited as lightly as possible to best capture the energy and inspiration of the interviewees.

The book's first goal is to help members get more value out of using ThinkUp. More deeply, we hope these interviews reveal the thought involved in creating technology that is meaningful, built on ideas that emerge over years or even decades of work.

If you're a ThinkUp member, we are truly thankful for your support and hope you find this book to be a useful resource. If you are not yet a ThinkUp member, we hope you'll find yourself drawn to the idea that underpins this entire book: We can be more thoughtful about the time we spend online, and in doing so, we can make all the time we spend a little bit more meaningful. If you haven't already, we hope you sign up for ThinkUp at thinkup.com.

Finally, we offer our sincere thanks to Rebecca Blood for her work in editing this book; our ThinkUp colleagues Matt Jacobs, Michelle Jones, Greg Knauss, Chris Moyer and Adam Pash for their tireless contributions; our interviewees, who have inspired not just the words in this book but countless other creations across the Internet; and finally to our backers, for making this book possible but also for believing in the importance of the ideas it contains.