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Social Media

Social media, where consumers communicate with each other across various platforms as diverse as discussion forums, blogs, wikis, social networks, and video-, photo-, and news-sharing sites, has witnessed explosive growth in recent years. By February 2011, Facebook had over 500 million active users globally who spent over 700 billion minutes per month on the site,¹ Twitter reached more than 175 million users worldwide within four years of its launch,² and people were watching 2 billion videos a day on YouTube and uploaded 24 hours of video every minute.³ The rapid adoption of social media can best be appreciated when put in the context of the adoption of other technologies (**Figure 1**). The telephone came to market in the year 1876, and it took 89 years to reach 150 million users. In contrast, Facebook reached 150 million users in less than five years.

The rapid growth in social media is beginning to have a significant impact on consumers' purchase behavior. In a comScore survey, almost 28% of consumers reported that social media had some influence over their holiday purchase decisions in late 2009.⁴ A Nielsen study found that 90% of consumers trust recommendations from other consumers, compared to only 56% who trust brand advertising.⁵ In a test market, BzzAgent, a word-of-mouth marketing company, found that word-of-mouth generated a 26% increase in sales of Dunkin Donut's Latte Lite compared to an 8% increase in markets without this effect.⁶

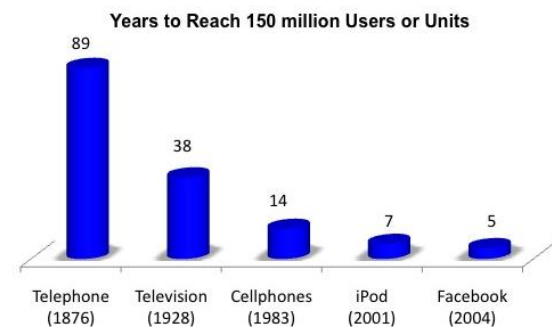


Figure 1: Technology Adoption

Source: Adapted from *Businessweek*, March 2, 2009.

In spite of the rapid growth in social media and its significant impact on consumer behavior, the marketing spending in this area remains relatively low. According to Forrester Research, U.S. online advertising spending in 2009 was approximately \$25 billion, or 12% of the overall advertising budget. Moreover, most of the online budget went to search and display advertising. Social media accounted for only \$560 million, or less than 3% of the U.S. online advertising budget in 2009, and is expected to almost triple to \$1.76 billion by 2013.⁷

Professor Sunil Gupta and Kristen Armstrong and Zachary Clayton (MBAs 2009) prepared this note as the basis for class discussion.

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Reluctance of executives to allocate significant resources to social media stems from their lack of understanding of how social media works and how they can harness its power for their brands. The organic nature of social media presents challenges to organizations accustomed to the more easily controlled realm of advertising. Managers who are getting accustomed to tangible metrics of search advertising feel more comfortable when they can measure results in terms of click-through rate or cost per click.

However, the increasing influence of social media is hard to ignore. Engaging consumers through social media is no longer optional. These conversations are changing marketing practices and adding complexity to decisions made by brand teams and agencies across a variety of industries. If used properly, social media presents tremendous opportunities for firms to better engage with consumers.

Leveraging Social Media: A Framework for Managers

The growth and importance of social media have not gone unnoticed. Many companies have started experimenting with new social media applications. Amazon drives purchases through customer recommendations and reviews. Dell tracks purchases made by its Twitter followers. Barack Obama raised two thirds of his campaign funding online. Old Spice used YouTube and Twitter to create a buzz around its brand. During the automobile manufacturers' campaign to receive a government bailout, the Detroit Three launched digital campaigns to lobby for federal aid. GM, Ford, and Chrysler launched micro-sites optimized for organic search keywords, purchased search and display advertising, created YouTube channels, used video blogging, and posted updates on Twitter.⁸

However, many companies are still struggling to get a toehold in this area. Those who have started experimenting tend to do so in an ad-hoc fashion. We propose a simple and pragmatic framework for managers to leverage social media (Figure 2).

Learning about social media is like learning a new language, so the first step in the process is for managers to **immerse** themselves in this media. They connect this knowledge of social media with an

Why Some Brands Are Reluctant to Use Social Media

- **Cost and time.** Companies fear that social media may require too many creative staff and too much time.
- **Knowledge risk.** Senior managers are less familiar with new media, so they avoid it.
- **Incentive structure.** Advertising firms with traditional media expertise have strong incentives to maintain the current fee structure.
- **Measurement.** Gross rating points and click-through rates are more comfortable measures than page views or engagement.
- **Loss of control.** Marketers are accustomed to taking a top-down approach to brand positioning and fear losing control of their brands.

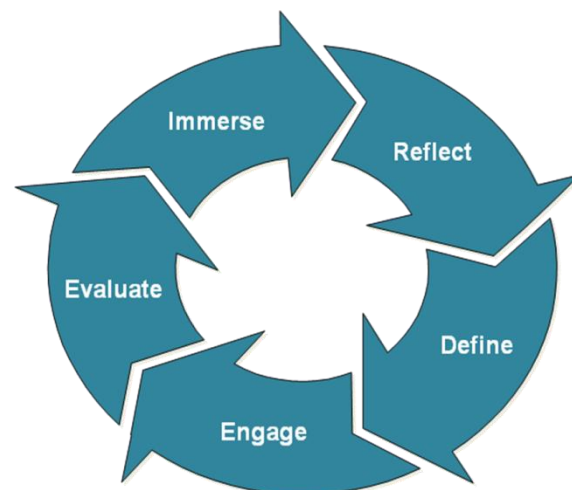


Figure 2:
A Framework for Leveraging Social Media

organization's strategy in the **reflect** stage. Because social media may encompass human talent recruitment, product development, branding, or a direct sales channel, it must be tightly aligned with the overall corporate strategy. In the **define** stage, the organization sets reasonable objectives for its social media strategy and agrees upon measures of success. Subsequently, an organization will **engage** consumers by creating content that is *relevant, personalized, interactive, integrated, and authentic*. This content must, of course, be distributed across appropriate channels. Finally, an organization uses the **evaluate** stage to determine measures of success, gauge progress, and modify tactics. Rapid advances in technology and an ever-increasing flow of information mean that managers must engage in a continuous process to assess the relevance of current applications and look to future trends.

Step 1: Immerse

Invest sufficient time to learn the language and tools of social media.

Most senior managers recognize the need to encourage social media initiatives within their organizations; however, they rarely use social media personally. They are busy and they see no reason to “waste time” on Facebook or Twitter, destinations they associate with young people who have spare time on their hands. Consequently, they end up delegating social media tasks to junior people in the organization. However, senior managers need to learn firsthand what these new alternatives have to offer and what opportunities and challenges they present for their businesses. Managers must ensure that this learning occurs both at a personal level and an organizational level, and there is no better way to truly experience the joys and frustrations of social media than to immerse oneself in it.

Personal Learning

Personal learning begins with immersing oneself in social media, which requires a significant time commitment and a willingness to see why different social media applications appeal to different groups of people. Managers need to nurture relationships by both listening to and contributing to online conversations on a regular basis.

While participating in social media can be rewarding, it can also be extremely unfulfilling if a user feels like no one is listening. The objective of this step is to be truly open-minded and to listen and learn. While **Figure 3** provides a guide for participating in social media, it is better to simply start experimenting with it. Just as Starbucks CEO/president Howard Schultz personally visits more than a dozen stores per week to observe the customer experience, senior managers should use social media as an opportunity to listen to their customers.

Organizational Learning

As important as it is for individuals to learn the social media language, it is equally important for organizations to learn it collectively. The easiest way to start is by using social media within the comfortable bounds of the organization. Employees can begin practicing social collaboration by utilizing message boards, wikis, and social networks. This can help change the mindset of employees and drive real business results, as it did for Best Buy. In 2006, Best Buy decided to embrace social media internally by creating Blue Shirt Nation, a social network for the company's employees. By 2009, the site had approximately 25,000 regular users. Blue Shirt Nation improved communication between employees and management and provided better, more consistent access to customer feedback, which then Best Buy could learn from and incorporate into its practices. Employee turnover among Blue Shirt Nation users is approximately 10%, in comparison to 50% turnover for non-users.⁹

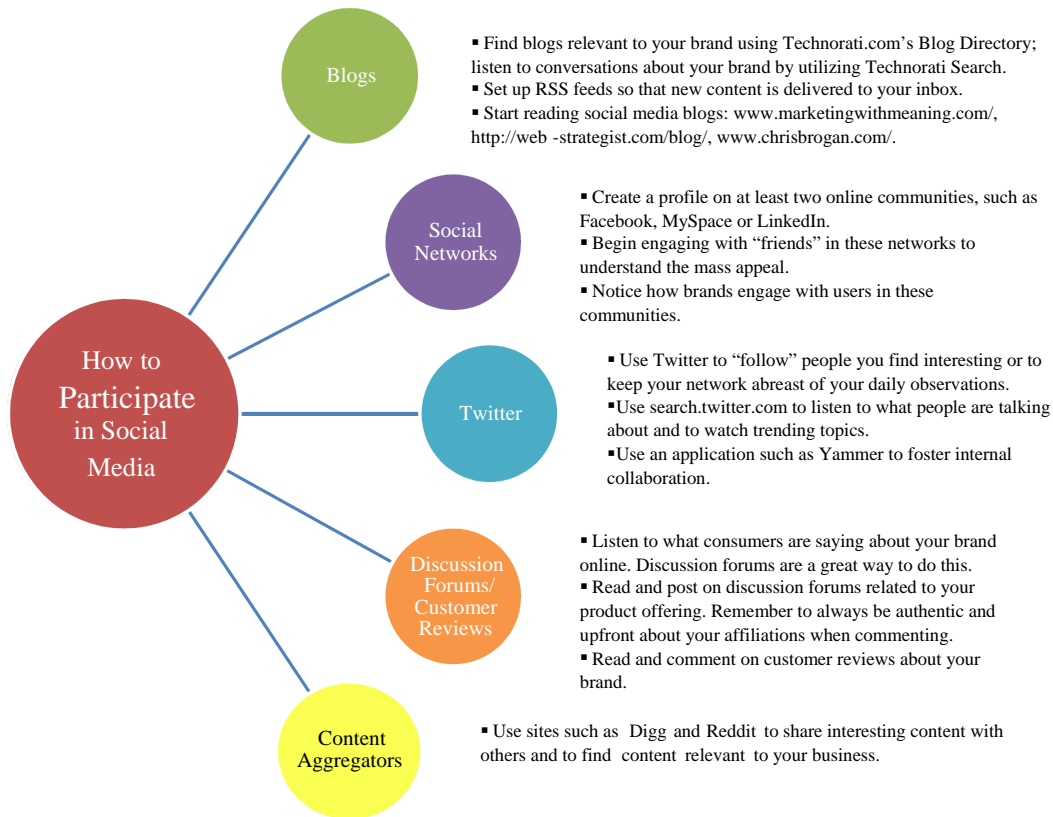


Figure 3: Different Ways to Participate in Social Media

Unilever and Procter & Gamble (P&G) used the following approaches to accelerate social media learning within their organizations:

- **Immersive experience.** Unilever's CMO, Keith Weed, initiated a trip for his top executives to Silicon Valley, where they met technology leaders at Facebook, Google, Twitter, and other companies. The goal was to encourage senior executives to see and experience the excitement associated with the new technology.
- **Reverse mentoring.** Unilever initiated a "reverse mentoring" program where the company paired young employees with senior executives. This served a dual objective: young employees would teach their senior colleagues about the nuances of digital technology, and the senior executives would then incorporate social media into the company's strategy.¹⁰
- **Employee swap.** In 2008, P&G and Google swapped two dozen employees for several weeks. One of the first outcomes of this collaboration was an online campaign inviting people to make spoof videos of P&G's "Talking Stain" TV ad and post them to YouTube. Jim Stengel, then-CMO of P&G, commented, "This never would have happened previously."¹¹
- **Digital night.** In March 2009, P&G paired 40 digital media and agency executives with 100 of its North American marketing directors in a contest to sell Tide t-shirts for charity using

only social media. This led to fierce competition, an intense experience, and tremendous learning about the opportunities and limitations of social media.¹²

Step 2: Reflect

Connect knowledge of social media with your organization's strategy.

After immersion builds an understanding of social media tools, reflection involves aligning an organization's overall strategy with its social media strategy. An organization must contemplate how social media might reinforce, modify, or disrupt its overall strategy. While social media allows a firm to create a higher level of engagement with its customers, it is also accompanied by a loss of brand control (**Figure 4**). Managers often find it difficult to make this tradeoff because they are reluctant to lose control of their brands. There is an inherent fear of the negative things that consumers may say about the brand.



Figure 4: Trade-off between Control and Engagement

Dove created a high level of engagement with its customers through the company's use of multiple social media tools, especially Facebook and Twitter. Dove's extensive use of social media exposed the brand to negative criticisms and mockery (like the "Real Beauty" spoof video on YouTube).¹³ This lessened Dove's control over the way the brand is perceived by the public; however, the reward for relinquishing control of a brand is the ability to engage consumers more deeply. In Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty, Dove used both traditional marketing and social media marketing to invite consumers to participate in open dialogue about its "real beauty" positioning. With this invitation came a loss of control over the brand—but this campaign also earned Unilever multiple awards and significant buzz and PR. For every \$1 spent on this campaign, Unilever received an estimated \$3 in return. By the end of 2005, sales of Dove in the U.S. increased by 13% and market share in the Asia-Pacific region jumped from 19% to 26%.¹⁴ The success of Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty hinged on the brand's willingness to sacrifice control for higher consumer engagement and buzz.

Budweiser has also established a high level of engagement with its customers, but it captures conversation largely through “brute force” saturation advertising. In the last five years, Anheuser-Busch spent over \$100 million on Super Bowl advertising for its Budweiser and Bud Light brands alone.¹⁵ These extensive advertising buys are expensive, although they keep the brands top-of-mind to consumers and offer Budweiser a high level of brand control.

The Home Depot has made some efforts to connect with its customers through establishing a presence on social networking platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, but the company does not sufficiently engage on these platforms. For example, negative comments about price and quality are often posted on Home Depot’s YouTube channel, but employees rarely respond with additional information to engage the critics. By not participating in its own community, Home Depot has abdicated control and suffers from a low level of positive engagement.

In contrast, the health insurance provider Unicare has made no efforts to build a social media presence. Unsurprisingly, it has low levels of positive engagement with social media users. However, while the company may consider its avoidance of social media a strategic choice that preserves control of its message, consumers are still expressing negative opinions about Unicare regardless of whether the company joins in on the conversation. Although the company has no Twitter account, it is still mentioned on Twitter: for example, @melodyservice tweeted, “Because **Unicare** dropped Chicago, had to find a generic brand for my prescription . . . Went from paying \$120 to \$9. We’re being robbed.”

There are three things to consider while reflecting on this issue:

- **Lack of control over your brand.** Consumers are talking about your brand whether you actively engage them or not. Unilever ex-CMO Simon Clift observes, “Brands aren’t simply brands anymore. They are the center of a maelstrom of social and political dialogue made possible by digital media.” Clift continues, “Brands are now becoming conversations . . . [and] of course, the conversation is no longer one-way or 30 seconds.”¹⁶
- **Symptom of a deeper problem.** If the fear of negative feedback stems from a lack of confidence in the product or service, there is a bigger underlying problem that has been surfaced through the social media discussion. Commitment to learning from negative comments can relieve the lack of confidence in one’s products or services.
- **A sandbox where consumers can play.** If managing a billion-dollar brand seems challenging and risky, how about managing a campaign for the presidency of the United States? Barack Obama started a grassroots movement fueled by social media. How did he manage to leverage social media and give up control of his campaign in an arena in which people have strong opinions and can easily distort a candidate’s positions? Perhaps the key to his success was a well-articulated and well-defined position: “Change We Can Believe In” and “Yes We Can.” Obama’s campaign in effect defined the sandbox in which it allowed people to play and be creative. People embellished on this theme, but the main message remained the same.

Step 3: Define

Set clear objectives for your social media strategy.

As with any traditional marketing campaign, it is important to define objectives before launching a social media campaign. When setting objectives, managers should recognize that the social media

approach differs significantly from traditional media methods (**Figure 5**). Three typical objectives include market research, brand building, and driving purchases.

Market research. Barry Judge, the CMO of Best Buy, maintains a personal blog that he uses to keep readers abreast of news at Best Buy and to solicit feedback on the company's marketing tactics.¹⁷ Starbucks launched mystarbucksidea.com to receive new ideas from its customers. By February 2011, it had received over 60,000 new product ideas, 25,000 experience ideas, and 16,000 ideas for community involvement.¹⁸

Brand building. Often firms avoid social media because they consider their brand "too boring" to be suitable for this media. However, the insurance company Liberty Mutual, a seemingly "boring" brand, made great strides in this area by creating an online community, the Responsibility Project, to discuss moral decision making.¹⁹ Liberty Mutual engages consumers with short videos about tough situations and then invites consumers to comment on how they would respond to the story.

Using print magazine advertisements, Procter & Gamble pushes consumers to tell their story about the Gain smell at www.ilovegain.com.²⁰ This site contains hundreds of consumer videos and letters about their "first sniff" of Gain and their affinity for the product. In this campaign, P&G enhanced a social media strategy with traditional marketing practices such as television and print ads to deepen engagement with consumers. The campaign generated hundreds of individual customer promotions, which are more likely to influence a buying decision than an ordinary brand advertisement.²¹

Driving purchases. On Twitter, Dell keeps its "followers" abreast of promotions at its online store. Dell then tracks users who click through to the website and complete a purchase. Dell has generated \$6.5 million in revenue from Twitter over the past two years, and Dell asserts this is just the beginning of its Twitter strategy.²²

	Traditional Media	Social Media
Market Research	Surveys or focus groups conducted infrequently with limited customers	Continuous, detailed feedback from customers using online communities
New Product Development	New products created by R&D with limited feedback from customers	Customers contributing new product ideas to brand team on regular basis
Customer Interactions	One-way marketing from the company; two-way dialogue occurred in the store	Customers expect brands to listen and engage with them on a regular basis
Brand Positioning	Brand positioning created with agency and dictated to consumers	Brand positioning created and shared with most engaged, loyal customers
Targeting	TV ad created for the masses, some minimal targeting via program selection	Digital campaigns reach consumers in an entirely personalized manner
Creative	Campaign created with agency and executed over six-month plan	Campaign constantly evaluated and evolved based on real-time data

Figure 5: Traditional versus Social Media Approach

Step 4: Engage

Create engaging content that generates excitement and buzz.

A successful social media campaign hinges on great content that creates excitement and buzz among consumers. Excellent content has five characteristics—it should be relevant, personalized, interactive, integrated, and authentic.

Ford used a campaign centered on user-generated content to generate buzz and interest around the U.S. launch of its Fiesta model. The company let 100 individuals test-drive a Ford Fiesta for six months and had them document their experiences and travels in the car on social media networks. The content created was personalized and authentic, since it came from actual users of the vehicle. Through the promotion, Ford generated a 50,000-member e-mail list that it used to further promote the car's launch. Furthermore, the participants spread overwhelmingly positive messages about the car on social networks, leading to more buzz about the Fiesta.²³

Innovative Campaign by Old Spice

When P&G acquired the Old Spice brand in 1990, the brand was stagnating and its image was old and tired. It was associated with the older generation and its main competitor, Axe, was making significant strides with the young audience. P&G refocused the brand on performance, ditched its sailor ad and targeted males in the age group of 18–34. Its TV ad with Isaiah Mustafa caught the attention of consumers, but what really sparked the brand was its innovative use of social media.



In July 2010, P&G made personalized videos for fans where the Old Spice Guy, Isaiah Mustafa, answered fans' tweets through YouTube videos. For example, when Digg founder Kevin Rose tweeted that he was sick, the Old Spice Guy created a video telling Rose that he never gets sick since his body is "98 percent muscle." The video took Rose by surprise and he tweeted, "HOLY SH*T, best get well video EVER from the old spice man! <http://bit.ly/dpSeOs>," followed by "OMG . . . the old spice guy is stalking me . . . ha'!! <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O44C765UiMw>."²⁴

Other funny videos were created for actress Alyssa Milano, Olympic skater Apolo Ohno, actress Justine Bateman, and even ordinary guys like Gabe, a twenty-something social media user. In less than a week, Old Spice created more than 180 such personalized videos that generated 5.9 million views and 22,500 user comments.²⁵ In January 2011, just before the Super Bowl, Old Spice announced that it would create a personal ad for a superfan—for an audience of one! The brand would seed the ad to this superfan to disseminate within his or her social network. On February 3, 2011, the Old Spice Guy selected the winner and posted a video on YouTube that said, "My latest commercial is available to watch. That is if you're a 16-year old man person named Chris Gatewood. He's the only person who has it. If you'd like to see it, you'll have to ask Chris."²⁶ Chris Gatewood has his own YouTube channel under the name ShakeAndBakeGuy and had performed as the Old Spice Guy at various events and parties.

How Nike Engages Consumers

The Nike+ community provides another excellent case study in the effective use of social media.²⁷ The Nike+ community allows users to track their runs and challenge friends to distance and timed running competitions. In February 2011, it had more than 2 million members who logged in over 336 million miles. Nike+ also sponsors the Human Race 10K, an annual coordinated running event held in 27 cities in 16 countries that has hundreds of thousands of participants.²⁸ Coordinating events such as the Human Race enhances Nike's community and adds value for its consumers. The company also succeeds in creating content and events that are relevant and personalized to the community members and their interests—in this case, running (**Figure 6**). The investment in the Nike+ online community has helped Nike retain customers and capture additional market share. Per SportsOneSource, a market research firm, Nike's share of the running shoes market increased from 48% in 2006 to 61% in 2008.²⁹

Relevant	Personalized	Interactive	Integrated	Authentic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community is centered around consumer's passion for running. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customized home page tracks a runner's individual progress and statistics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenges, forums, and Facebook feeds allow consumers to connect with each other. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nike employees are active participants in the community through blogs and forums. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community is consistent with Nike's overall brand positioning.

Figure 6: Characteristics of Good Content that Engages Customers

Coke and the Beijing Olympics

As the official sponsor of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, Coke used an innovative way to engage its customers and enhance its brands. On March 24, 2008, Coke launched the Olympic Virtual Torch Relay on China's QQ Instant Messenger. The initiative allowed Chinese citizens to celebrate their first Olympics and also reinforced Coke's brand message of "pass on happiness."

To participate in this campaign, customers were asked to buy a Coke, find a code under its cap, go online, and enter the code. They were then given a specific time when they would get the virtual torch to pass on to the next consumer. Within two weeks of its launch, 17 million people participated in the Virtual Torch Relay. By August 2008, this number grew to more than 60 million.³⁰

Barack Obama's Campaign

In the 2008 U.S. presidential election, Barack Obama's campaign raised \$500 million online from 3 million donors who contributed 6.5 million times, collected 13 million email addresses, and gathered 6 million Facebook friends.³¹ Campaign manager David Plouffe has stressed that the Internet was at the center of Obama's marketing efforts.³²

The Obama campaign certainly created abundant content; however, its efforts to promote this content across the Web were particularly distinctive.³³ The Obama Online Operation was determined to engage activists, supporters, and undecided voters wherever it could find them. The Obama presence extended to mainstream social media sites such as Facebook, as well as to niche sites such as BlackPlanet (African Americans), Faithbase (religious), Eons (seniors), MiGente (Latin Americans), and others.

The campaign engaged people by empowering them. My.BarackObama.com, the campaign's own social network, allowed members to create a profile and connect with others in the campaign organization. An "activity index" rated completeness of member profiles and catalogued a member's participation in supporter activities, including fundraising, calls made, and events attended. Members could blog, creating additional long-tail content that would enable connections across the membership. Rather than attempt to put boundaries on the experience and engage people in the Obama brand solely on the website, the campaign actively linked to external media about Obama and groups that supported Obama. Participants viewed their efforts as an attempt to shape the conversation about the candidate across the Web.

Step 5: Evaluate

Determine measures of success, gauge progress, and modify tactics.

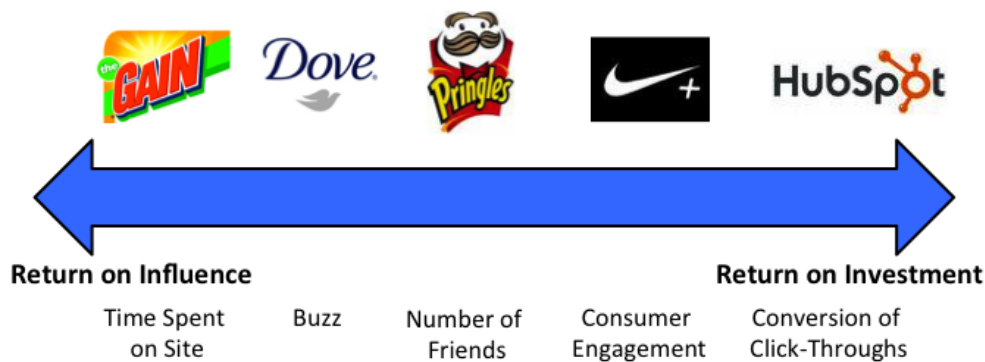


Figure 7: Measuring the Success of Social Media

Unlike search advertising, it is generally difficult to get precise estimates of return on investment (ROI) for social media activities. Given the small investments needed for social media, some managers believe that precise metrics are not even necessary for this media. Instead, most managers use "Return on Influence" metrics such as page views, buzz tracking, or survey data to measure success (**Figure 7**). For example, the Gain campaign looked at time spent on its site as one measure of success. The Campaign for Real Beauty focused on generating buzz, and Pringles measured its success on Facebook by the number of fans it counted. Some firms, such as the software firm Hubspot, have succeeded in tightly linking social media activities to ROI.

Hubspot, a business-to-business (B2B) software provider, estimates ROI for its social media efforts. CEO Brian Halligan's initial focus was building Web traffic through blogging. "We constantly worked to get on Digg or Reddit," he says. In time, the company broadened into other channels that leveraged new media: Twitter, stories in online publications, Facebook, LinkedIn, and more. Hubspot precisely tracked the results of its online activities: it accumulated 500,000 "website grader reports," 90,000 opt-in e-mails, 6,000 blog subscribers, 8,000 Twitter followers, 11,000 LinkedIn members, and 1,500 Facebook members. These "followers" could be tracked from origination until the point at which they indicated interest in a product demo, qualifying them as "leads." Hubspot then segmented each marketing campaign to see how individuals were introduced to Hubspot. For example, 16% of blog visitors expressed interest in the product; of these, 0.75% purchased it. Meanwhile, 24% of e-mail subscribers became leads, but only 0.25% of these leads purchased the

product (**Figure 8**). This real-time data feed allowed Hubspot to calculate ROI on each marketing channel and reallocate resources to the most profitable activities.

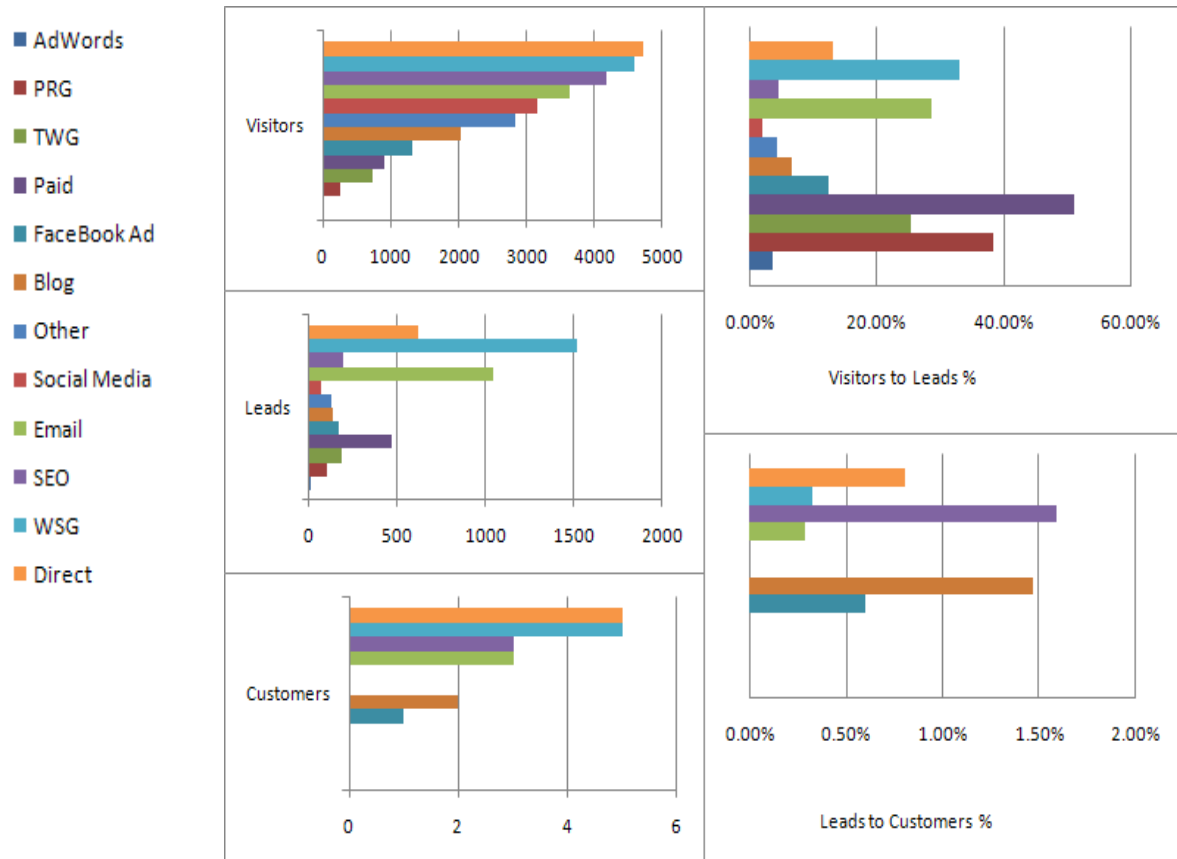


Figure 8: Effectiveness of Various Media at Hubspot

Conclusion

Many decades ago, television enabled companies to reach wider audiences with more engaging content. Today, social media allows marketers to deepen interactions with customers. Social media facilitates the creation and distribution of more targeted, interactive, and personalized content, and it significantly accelerates the feedback loop between brands and consumers. However, embarking upon and sustaining a real social media program doesn't mean simply setting up a Twitter account and then hoping that it generates incremental sales. It requires commitment and organizational change to learn how social media impacts strategy, not just in marketing, but also across the organization.

Glossary of Social Media Terms

Blog – An online journal maintained by an individual or individuals who upload pieces of content intended to inform, express opinion, and encourage discussion.

Blog post/entry – A piece of content (e.g., article, picture, or video) that is published on a blog.

Blogroll – A list of blogs recommended by another blog's author, usually displayed as hyperlinks on a sidebar.

Comments – Thoughts or opinions posted in response to a specific topic on a blog or social networking website.

Content aggregator – A website that collects and categorizes information from various online sources.

Forum – A website on which individuals can contribute to online discussions by posting thoughts and questions related to particular subjects.

Hashtag – A symbol (#) inserted before a word in a Twitter post (e.g., #hashtag) that allows users to search for posts containing the same keyword(s).

Micro-blogging – A form of blogging where posts cannot exceed a certain number of words or characters (letters, numbers, symbols, or spaces). Examples of micro-blogs include Twitter posts and Facebook status updates.

Podcasts – Audio recordings published on the Internet and available for download or online playback.

RSS ("really simple syndication") feed – A system that periodically collects new content from websites selected by the feed subscriber and publishes the content in a standardized format (e.g., Google Reader).

SMS ("short messaging service") – A communication service that allows the exchange of short messages between mobile devices. The messages are commonly referred to as "text messages" or "texts."

Social media – Online tools that enable the production, publication, and sharing of user-generated content. Examples of social media include blogs, micro-blogs, and video-sharing websites.

Social networks – Websites comprised of online profiles belonging to individuals and groups that distribute content to others. Facebook and MySpace are the two largest social networks in the U.S.

Tag/metatag – A keyword associated with a piece of content on a blog or website, used to organize content and enhance the content's search engine optimization.

Thread – A collection of blog posts that are grouped together by category and displayed in chronological order, from newest to oldest.

Vlog – A blog that publishes mostly videos (e.g., Gary Vaynerchuk's "Wine Library TV").

Webinar – A lecture, presentation, workshop, or seminar transmitted over the Internet.

Wiki – A collaborative website on which users can create and edit informative content through their Web browser.

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