

3-STEPS TO SATISFACTION

1. Discover Your Calling
2. Unleash Your Passion
3. Realize a Profitable Path

(+ SOCIAL MEDIA EVOLUTION)

The first (totally free) eBook by:

Mark Essel

What's Inside?

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Introduction

Greetings and salutations. First I'd like to take a moment to thank you for taking the time to download and peruse my first foray into publishing. Much of the material for this short eBook is freely available on my blog at <http://www.victusspiritus.com/>. But as an avid blog reader myself, I understand it's often easier to spend time carefully digesting material covering lengthy topics in a book like format. With that in mind, I've reorganized and edited some of my work over the past few months into an ebook.

3-Steps to Satisfaction has one central message from which several ideas branch from:

When our work is a manifestation of our greatest passion, quintessential value is a natural byproduct of perpetual enthusiasm and personal satisfaction.

I've observed a commonality among the many folks I have had the pleasure of meeting, learning from and working with over the years. This tell tale feature is shared by warm and humbling friends and family that have had a hand in guiding my sometimes eccentric personal views. Among all the people I've come across, in all the places I've been, those who pursue a path aligned with their internal passions are not only successful, but satisfied. Their enthusiasm is awesome, contagious, and inspirational. In fact they are the spark that lead me to begin writing, and share this simple message with everyone that was willing to listen.

Discover Your Calling



Groovy Image 1: from <http://www.flickr.com/photos/wili/>

A new journey

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: February 22, 2009

Each new path in life is marked by a decision. The choice inspires an entirely new future, and provides a fertile soil from which unimaginable networks of new possibilities arise. My deepest wish is that by sharing my humble perspectives, you, the reader, will gain a quantum of motivational energy sufficient to spark a powerful and positive decision and corresponding path for your own life

Be faithful to yourself, be genuine

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: February 28, 2009



In all of our lives there is one thing we can do that projects strength and leadership. It inspires those around us with a feeling of security, and sometimes just a little bit of awe. It is the quality of being genuine. Being true to oneself is having faith that we are worthy, that our [Atman](#) has value and deserves to be realized. It is curious that the Buddhist concept of [selflessness](#) appears in conflict to being true to an inner self, for that philosophy there is no intrinsic self.

As we grow from children into adults, and then adults into elders we find it natural to mimic those among us who are perceived as natural leaders, as great people. Various social interactions almost require us to act in ways incongruous with our inner voice. We have to learn to listen to and live as our inner voice guides us. The danger being, if we ignore it long enough, we'll forget we ever had one.

It's true in business, as well as our social lives.

You can't be anyone else nearly as well as you can be yourself.

5 Simple Steps To Change Yourself and the World

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: April 7, 2009

In many ways discovering a life calling is a task that escapes us as we busily chase our next paycheck, grasp at distractions, and race after errands just in time to start all over the next day. By allowing ourselves to become automatons others treat us as such, helping to further bury our spirits and our most powerful gifts. If we can only quiet down the outside noise for a few moments, and look inward, powerful potential is waiting to be revealed.

Here are five simple steps to help move you towards unleashing that potential:

1. Scour the canvas of your soul for a positive force that burns brightest
2. Concentrate your conscious actions towards cultivating this energy with all your faculties
3. Allow your passion the freedom to evolve
4. Take notice of a subtle shift in the way you and others perceive your path. What began as a fanciful enthusiasm has progressed into an ideal harmonic of what defines you. This epiphany is a sign you have discovered your calling
5. Share the nourished energy of your renewed focus with others via love, patience and compassion

There's too much beauty inside and around us to be blinded by painful mistakes or memories. So try not to take life too seriously. If you don't figure it all out immediately, persist and give it time to all come together. At least that's what I'm doing.

Serendipity, the perfect solution you never thought of

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: April 23, 2009



evoo73 photography

While enjoying a morning read of the [The Big Shift](#) a series of thought threads spawned when my eyes quickly scanned this comment, “Serendipity works best when we extend the edges of our social networks”.

From [wikipedia](#), “Serendipity is the effect by which one accidentally discovers something fortunate, especially while looking for something else entirely.” As long as you are seeking

something, you have the potential for creating what you never conceived of.

This intriguing word describes the pull of ultra popular crowd sourcing sites: Digg, Stumble Upon, Reddit, Yahoo Buzz, Hacker News. This may be partly responsible for the pull of other social media sites as well. It's not an uncommon occurrence to be casually browsing your favorite social site (YouTube, Squidoo, MySpace, Facebook, or twitter) and come across a completely unrelated yet fascinating web find.

What does luck have to do with finding and developing one's calling? What does serendipity have to do with self discovery? It may have a lot more to do than I first considered. If you know you are looking for something, finding it isn't a novel discovery. If instead you keep yourself open to new ideas and views, and continually interact with the world, be it nature, friends, or social internet "gatherings", you are stacking the odds in favor of discovering **the perfect solution you never thought of.**

Anyone, be they entrepreneur or artisan, will have a huge competitive advantage when they achieve mastery in the fine art of serendipitous discovery.

There's No How To Guide For "Being Remarkable"

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: April 22, 2009



Many of us have seen similar suggestions throughout motivational reading.

- Be Remarkable!
- Be Creative!
- Be Innovative!

One of my favorite marketing gurus Seth Godin does in fact just this in his post [How to be remarkable](#). While Seth makes some wonderful suggestions for defining what "being remarkable" is:

“4. Extremism in the pursuit of remarkability is no sin. In fact, it’s practically a requirement. People in first place, those considered the best in the world, these are the folks that get what they want. Rock stars have groupies because they’re stars, not because they’re good looking.

5. Remarkability lies in the edges. The biggest, fastest, slowest, richest, easiest, most difficult. It doesn’t always matter which edge, more that you’re at (or beyond) the edge.”

Even Seth has to admit that there is no manual or accepted wisdom to being remarkable:

“7. If it’s in a manual, if it’s the accepted wisdom, if you can find it in a Dummies book, then guess what? It’s boring, not remarkable. Part of what it takes to do something remarkable is to do something first and best. Roger Bannister was remarkable. The next guy, the guy who broke Bannister’s record wasn’t. He was just faster ... but it doesn’t matter.”

So what Mr. Godin has really given us is a list of the attributes in common to remarkable people. When I first read this post a few months ago, I got caught up on Seth’s comment on Extremism. When I was twenty years old I was pretty extreme about a number of things, but as the years have gone on, I find that the incredible energy and motivation I had back then has for the most part left me. Does that mean that I have nothing remarkable left to give to the world? **NO WAY!**

Given my recent discovery of rational blog analysis (I’m not just reading for fun, although I do enjoy it) and writing, I know there are great opportunities just waiting for me to suggest solutions to. It so happens this post further crystallized my ideal job: Idea Engine. I alluded to it in my earlier post, [When energy meets ideas, brilliant new companies are born](#). Although it would be nice if I could increase the perceived value those ideas (calling all energetic people).

There’s another message from Chris Guillebeau, an enthusiastic social entrepreneur, that also is asking his readers to make [“The Decisions to Be Remarkable”](#). This is something that I find more rationally appealing. Of course I’m biased because one of Chris’ suggestion resonates quite strongly with my own motivation for beginning this blog:

“4. **Find work that you love and do it well.** Depending on who you are, this requires up to two big changes in your life: first, you have to find work that you love, and second, you have to do it well. Do it better than expected and people will be amazed.”

Yet another suggestion was given by authors of [Blue Ocean Strategy](#). In this business text W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne lay out a framework for building value innovation into any business strategy. The silver bullet of value innovation comes down to “being creative” and reinventing the market space. This excerpt from my informal squidoo introduction page [The Profit Prophet](#) captures my frustration with the promise of the book:

While there were a number of logical methods introduced to build a successful strategy for future business, I’m still left wondering how their proposed strategy translates into “building a new market”. I believe the strategy is flawed due to one simple reality, there is NO

STRATEGY to building a new market. There are best business practices, and rational development tools but NONE of these systems will directly translate into building a new market. It's like trying to capture human creativity, and recreate it with a simple business system.

Although I don't believe anyone can follow a "how to guide" for being remarkable, creative, or innovative. **Each of us may choose a path that exemplifies a remarkable way of living.**

Unleash Your Passion

Wouldn't it be wonderful if our imagination could change the world?

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: February 25, 2009

I've often fantasized about the ability to shape the world I live in simply with my imagination. Even as a child I found my existence just a little too immutable, just a bit too concrete for my liking. I'd play games where I'd imagine traveling to new [amazing worlds](#), or transforming into [wondrous flying creatures](#) long before I ever read about dragons. One of the most difficult concepts for me to accept (even now) was how little my sometimes vibrant imagination could change my surroundings.

Our gurus and guides will inspire us by saying that we can change the world if it's important enough, if we put enough effort into the transformation anything is possible. As fate would have it, perseverance to change making has never been a strong trait of mine due to apathetic aspects of my nature. That doesn't mean that I can't imagine a better world, but there's usually not a critical amount of motivational *vita navitas* (life energy) to demand action.

The conclusion I've come to is that we are in fact the canvas, and the world is our artist. Our personalities, our lives, our appearance, and most importantly our life story is the product of our society, our world, of our reality. In cooperation, our world and our inner selves work in unison to manufacture and modify our lives. In effect, we can change the world, by self transformation. But that's not enough for me, and it shouldn't be enough for you.

I've discovered that there is something else we can easily do that can transform our world. We can inspire! We can write about and share our deepest hopes and find others who share these dreams. We can connect with those among us who have the motivation, and the energy, to help change the world for the better. They are all around us, waiting for a powerful cause that moves their soul. Not just the next generation, our children, but the youthful life energy that is within all of us old and young.

First we can change ourselves, then we may inspire others, together we will transform the world. Let's make it a beautiful place for those who inherit our imaginations.

Navigators To Truth

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: April 20, 2009



This is a story about the power both the heart and mind have in influencing others. In this case, the one influenced is me. We rely on the most generous of souls to help us find our way.

It all begins with a short email I receive from a friend of mine back in early December 2008. I had just began my leave of absence from my full time work (systems engineer of 13years). Aakin has been one of my “brother like” friends for many years and a personal guru of unconventional forms (rpg games, iced coffee runs, and conversational walks). [Aakin](#) mentioned that Seth Godin was giving a 6 month business program. He was offering an abbreviated yet unique MBA experience not too far from my home in Port Jefferson Station, NY. After looking Seth up my first instinct was that he was a marketing hype slickster who was about to get some free labor out of super dedicated/enthusiastic people. It was also just a couple of days before the deadline and I had no idea how to proceed even if I was interested.

After a couple of weeks of exploring my new found freedom from a regular work schedule I came across some videos on [Open Forum](#). I [watched Richard Bransen](#) sharing some of his wisdom earned by growing Virgin. The interview was with this Seth Godin character once again. This time I listened to some of Seth’s video’s on Open Forum and was impressed by how much his ideas jived with my own internal common sense/market view. This was a guy worth listening too, so I subscribed to [his blog](#)’s RSS feed in my Google Reader. Since then I discovered the joy’s of [Squidoo](#), a fast growing web community started by Seth and some of his good friends. I’ve found the time to write up [a few lenses](#) for this platform and I’m sure

I'll make the time to write more. Squidoo is a powerful tool in the hands of a motivated web author.

In a recent post Seth suggested his readers explore [Chris Guillebeau's](#) website. Trusting Seth's suggestion I happily browsed to The Art of Non-Conformity. I'm very glad I decided to read some of Chris' ideas. He's offering wonderful tools to help align your perspective on the goal of self employment (for free!) and life path seeking. Within his first mini eBook World Domination he suggests we watch a short YouTube video from a professor diagnosed with pancreatic/liver cancer.

That brings us to the end of today's story. Randy Pausch was generous enough to offer us all this Last Lecture series [Achieving Your Childhood Dreams](#). Randy talks about discovering and realizing our dreams, and enabling the dreams of others. He shares a heart felt look at how his dreams affected him, and discusses the lessons that really stayed with him, especially when the dream never came to fruition. He shows us that the power of dreams is realized in our dedication to them. In their pursuit Randy draws our attention to the "head fake" indirect learning that becomes the true prize.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ji5_MqicxSo&feature=player_embedded

Although Randy passed away June 25th, 2008 he left all of us with his [enduring legacy](#). Thanks Randy, the power of your story continues to provide others with hope.

Breaking the Slave Clock

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: April 19, 2009

Your eyes open groggily, the comfortable last figments of a dream are shattered by a wave of perceived pressure that forces you out of bed. Turning off your alarm clock five minutes before it goes off at 4:30am you begin your day.

Running full speed through a crowd with a briefcase or bag in tow, praying that you will catch the next subway/train/flight.

Your boss gives you an updated deadline that you don't think you can meet. After explaining what vital sections of the project you can get done in time, it's as if they missed the message and tell you to get it done.

How many of us live with an imagined stopwatch chasing us every moment? Do you?

If you've ever wondered where the system of time pressure originated, you're not alone. It's core is analogous to the concept of time management in digital design. A slave clock is controlled by the master clock's signal. It's a design concept for [synchronous systems](#). Subsystems are all passed a system clock. Our society has evolved a similar efficient system for getting work done. The key to understanding this integral social control is to recognize it as only one possible solution.

The perceived pressure of tight deadlines dictated by project leaders can cause workers to cease up. Instead of motivating a team to work additional hours with unrelenting focus, shortened deadlines can inspire the opposite effect. They may utterly ruin any work flow

accomplished, and undermine the long term effectiveness of a work group. In spite of this, some of the most effective employees work well under pressure. These exceptional few don't have the same [stress response](#) as most individuals. Unreasonably tight deadlines are simply a byproduct of how the customer/business relationship is managed. Program managers are constantly at odds with providing customer value, and helping staff understand what needs to be accomplished. Although most of us respond negatively to unforeseen time constraints, there's still a need for a shared clock.

Why do we need Deadlines and shared clocks?

- Deadlines and shared clocks can be used to force decisions and actions. This is obvious to anyone who has played chess. Without clocks, the valuable resource of time isn't equalized.
- Deadlines act as milestones for long range project planning. They aid in resource allocation and to judge effective expenditure of resources.
- Deadlines allow complicated systems to change their focus.
- Deadlines allow for an expected product.

The master and slave clock system is fundamental to large corporations. Larger businesses have their resources tied up in maintaining huge distribution networks and global solutions. But our society and economy is evolving once again. Small focused teams are asynchronously developing innovative solutions at an astounding rate both offline and online. The new entrepreneurs aren't concerned with the complicated web of schedules fueled by corporate deadlines. They are only worried about getting one idea working or one product line completed before they need to pursue more funding (another deadline) or scrap the project. Their customers are just now finding out about what they have to offer, and telling their good friends about great discoveries.

Although necessity requires us to manage our time, we can all decide on how to do so. Whether it's working for an employer on a mutually acceptable set of terms, freelancing to multiple customers, or choosing our own business, we are fully capable of managing our own clock. I challenge you to break the slave clock, and redefine your own schedule.

What to do when your gurus are light years ahead of you?

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: April 15, 2009

We'll probably never be as brilliant at understanding startups as [Paul Graham](#) or as adept at marketing acumen as [Seth Godin](#). These gentlemen have developed great mastery over their respective fields. Yet somehow these luminaries manage to distill their virtuoso visions into simple enough messages that someone like myself can appreciate the concepts and intellectually gorge upon their shared thoughts. While we may never be as good as today's greatest entrepreneur's at what they do, the good news is we don't have to be.

Throughout history time and again innovators enriched their cultures (and themselves) with creations designed to satisfy needs they perceived. Simple hunters were empowered by the invention of the spear. Artists were provided with tools and inks to help leave cave paintings for thousands of years. Cities were enabled out of the imagination of the first farmer. Architects were applauded by kings for their designs of monolithic tombs. Steam

engines capitalized on a need for power. More recently the internet exploded with information, with it there came great demand for organizing the ever growing content. Search engine companies capitalized on this need.

This isn't another revelation on [being genuine](#). We have in our power, at this very moment, a path to building our own empires. We each have our own perspective of our own neighborhood, our own slice of reality. Our daily activities, social groups, and prior knowledge are all we need. We live in a continuum of dynamic change where new needs and opportunities swarm about us all the time. Here are some general guidelines to begin tapping into that "resource":

1. Narrow your focus on a particular need you (and maybe some friends) recognize and can best address.
2. Your initial pursuit will alter your perception just enough to discover other even greater needs.
3. By tackling these needs in novel ways, you completely change the landscape.
4. This evens the odds between you and the gurus, so you won't have to compete directly with the geniuses that have succeeded before you. We'll all be starting from scratch.

Ode to all tasks unclean, in particular "Dirty Jobs"

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: March 2, 2009

So a guy (and his [production crew](#), don't forget those intrepid souls) gets to climb through and handle all manner of things unclean ([Nurgle](#) would be hard pressed to dwell in some these places). What's so special about [Dirty Jobs](#)?

This post was instigated by one helluva [Fast Company article](#) based on a brief story of [Mike Rowe](#) and his career. If you look beyond his humble and humorous presence, his story boils down to a personal transformation. An evolution of work for the sake of a paycheck to a labor of love. Talk about victus spiritus, look no further!

Mike's TV career started much like most of our 9-5 jobs, something that he did to pay the bills back in his late night QVC hosting days, to something he has a passion for. He went out of his way to make sure his name was in the credit line of [Dirty Jobs](#). The strong connection he has for the material of the show is rooted in how he perceived his grandfather, a man who performed all manner of hands on dirty jobs. It reminds me of my own Grandpa Joe, the old hootin'!, who was a physical labor machine even moving a massive curio cabinet for my mom in his later years.

When asked about following one's dreams, here's a response [on Mike's blog](#) and it bears repeating:

"I've mentioned before that one of the things I learned from doing this show was the idea that following your passion is not nearly as important as bringing it along for the ride. I've talked to more than one entrepreneur who laid out this basic same strategy -

1. Step back and look what direction everyone else is heading.
2. Go the other way.

3. Look for something that no one else wants to do.
4. Start doing it.
5. Get really good at it.
6. Find a way to like it.
7. be happy.

I can't tell you how many people I've met who wind up dirty and successful as a result of this approach. It's a bit mercenary, to be sure. But there are many roads to a happy career, and this is one not often taken.

Mike"

Interested in a brief explanation about MikeRoweWorks check out [my descriptive site](#).

When you're ready to witness [the real mcco](#)y (an ongoing web creation inspired and fueled by Mike Rowe's ideas) enjoy [MikeRoweWorks](#) (give the site a chance to load, try [The Office](#) to get a more standard interface).

Realize a Profitable Path

Marketing your time

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: February 23, 2009



From [wikipedia](#) “Marketing is defined by the [American Marketing Association](#) as the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large”

The fundamental resource that you can market is your own time, your very life. Never underestimate how precious your experience is, or how valuable your unique outlook is to others.

If you have any need of monetary wealth, and most of us do, you’ll be marketing your time in exchange for wealth on some level. For shorthand let’s call the ideal time/wealth exchange *RITE*, standing for Revenue Ideal Time Exchange. Somewhat analogous to [Heat exchange](#) the transfer will be from potential value from the individual, to perceived value by society at large.

I foresee a future where Adam Smith’s views on [the division of labor](#) have evolved into something [Henry David Thoreau](#) would be proud of. Although far from religious, I have faith that there is a harmony between

- our individual natures and the benefits they yield to society
- and the common wealth of our society

If we follow the herd, our time is devalued and we’re funneled into full time jobs that will pay us just enough so that we can maintain a meager existence. Most of these positions are

fairly labor intensive and the system of these businesses have been designed to profit from your time. Chances are you'll be told what to do, how to do it, and when to do it. Assuming that your skill set is extraordinary or you work extra hard, you may find that society will value your time just fractionally more, giving you the opportunity to save minimal resources for the future or live slightly above the norm.

How does one market their time more effectively?

The key is to identify a profitable passion. For some it's trivial, for others it's much more complicated. The pursuit of your current passions is founded on the culmination of your life experience, and there are likely unknown interests in your future.

You must discover a connection between your

- passions: the pursuits of your true self, or what you would do with your time had you no need for wealth and
- what society has deemed (or will deem!) high value

One of the obstacles to this form of self discovery is identifying your fundamental interests. What activities of your choosing do you spend the most time doing? At least one of these must strike a chord within you. Now imagine how others would benefit from your expertise on this subject. Can you imagine a better product for this market? Can you better organize available information on this subject? Can you teach, coach, and interact with others who share this same passion? What are your strengths in relation to this passion, what will you need help with? Steve Jobs founder of Apple told graduates a few years back ["You've got to find what you love"](#).

In regards to ["high value"](#) information, the world wide web is providing a framework for free information flow. How will media and information be valued even a few years from now? I suspect the substance, organization, and free access to electronic media of all forms (music, tv, film, books & magazines) will be related to it's fiscal value. Information sites will prosper by allowing free access with ads, or opt in subscriptions to avoid advertisements ([Seth Godin's the guru on this subject](#)). Web-zine articles and blogs (hopefully even pretentious inspirational ones) will help make sense out of the ubiquitous deluge of ever growing information available at our finger tips.

At any given time, even at this very moment, there exist numerous *RITE* methods for you to market your time. Out of fear of missing "the greatest" opportunity you may find yourself pursuing many paths but never getting over the hump in any one of them (much like myself). Trust in your instincts to aid in finding the *RITE path* for you, at the right time. And don't be afraid to ask for help from your mentors, friends, or even seek out advice online. The information is out there.

In order to succeed at finding and following a *RITE*, you'll have to pursue a hunch and a dream and have enough faith in your own judgment, and enough wits to modify your vision, to keep you moving. Fear not, once you are on this bold path, both your vital energy and conviction will gain in strength, propelling you towards a rich and *RITE* future.

Economic Slowdown Inspires New Entrepreneurs

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: March 14, 2009 | [Edit](#)

Now you really can chase after “windmills” and lay the foundation for your financial dreams. It turns out [Don Quixote](#) wasn’t just an old delusional retiree. He was a person who became so inspired and passionate about chivalry that it consumed him. There was a nobleness to the fabricated visage he conjured. Quixote embodies a number of marvelous character traits for the budding entrepreneur, or “free lancer”: Imaginative, Motivated, Courageous, Dedicated, Leadership, Romantic, and even a touch of Madness. I boiled the list down to seven, but I’m sure if we looked deeper we could find more.

We witness it happening first hand all around us. Friends, family, acquaintances, your neighbors daughter, nearly everyone has a story for how they are starting their own business. Each and every one of us has our own message or story to tell. Blogs and the internet are helping to spread that information faster than printed newspapers ever could. Laid off employees, early retirees, and kids that have graduated or left school have all joined the fray. Instead of (or in addition to) trying to find high paying jobs, they are focusing their energies on branding themselves. Somewhere, they have found the time to pursue their dreams. They’re building their own businesses with greater ease, and less time than anyone thought possible just a few years ago. The friction to making your business dream real is lower than it’s ever been, and will continue to decrease. So why not give it a go? A special report on entrepreneurship, [“An idea whose time has come”](#), from Economist.com goes into some of the causes behind this business renaissance.

Most modern entrepreneurial ventures require a community. These folks become the engine of the idea and help develop, market, or purchase and use a product. There’s been incredible success in web applications that allow for users to create the content, and connect to other people: [Plenty of Fish](#), My Space, Facebook, YouTube, and my personal favorite [Squidoo](#). The power that an interested community can bring to an idea is immeasurable, so do your best to find a way to leverage our common interests in sky rocketing your business growth.

10 (Far Out) Methods to Creating Effective Web Content

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: March 26, 2009 | [Edit](#)



The design methods introduced are by no means hard and fixed. Some are impractical from a financial view for any single generation. They are simply one authors suggested guidelines to begin answering a hypothetical question:

“What I can do to create effective content, be it media or written text?”

1. Plan
2. Relevance
3. Timelessness
4. Specialize
5. Filter
6. Golden Rule
7. Refine
8. Collaborate
9. A Common Language, yup I think I jumped the shark here too
10. Adaptability

Unless already famous or well connected to powerful media channels, we then have to

engage in a marketing campaign (hopefully it will be part of your long term plan).

When I originally wrote this post I hadn't considered creating media for entertainment purposes even though entertainment represents a large fraction of the media we consume. I'll have to come back and write another post titled, 10 (Far Out) Methods for Creating Entertaining Web Content. Of course there are some truly gifted media creators who both inform and entertain, and I humbly applaud their mastery.

For the sake of this post I consider the fairly broad concept of "effective" to translate into a more generic hypothetical question (without branching off into an argument of [epistemological](#) versus artistic creation):

"How can I best contribute to improving the overall knowledge and understanding of humanity?"

Plan

Having a goal is not the same as having a strategy. The Achilles Heel for any brilliant project, being trapped by a plan. Without a plan we have no measure of whether or not we are making progress towards our goals. The plan should be openly designed to evolve as needed. The plan need not be laid out in detail before hand, but over time it should naturally come together. It becomes a template you can share with others for funding or advice. Our visions of making progress to the goal of valued web content, require at least some long term planning. Ideally we should go beyond planning quantum web creations, and coordinate long term strategic collections of media.

Relevance

A constant concern of any web content creator, "Is what I'm doing relevant?" Will anyone ever be impacted by your creation? It can be most discouraging to witness a potential magnum opus become irrelevant a short time later due to changes in technology or a wide spread dominance of a competitor.

Timelessness

Certain aspects of knowledge and understanding are unaffected by the sands of time. We must always endeavor to identify and call attention to these qualities when recognized. These are key principles that should guide us in the identification of primal tenants of knowledge.

Specialize

Most of us must choose a single focus at a given time, although a select few are brilliant in multiple disciplines. As individuals we can't chase every trend and hope to become an expert. We can't possibly log onto every website, blog or domain related to even our single favorite topic and make any meaningful contribution. There's little reason to join every social network when we hardly have time to engage in one or two. We're forced to make decisions, and lay claim to our own virtual backyard. This can be accomplished by carving

out information canals from the digital river of web media back to one place (feed readers/aggregators), and having a few broadcasting channels (a blog). We may then leverage that information to increase our individual knowledge and ultimately our collective vision for the future. We do this not only by reading, but by interacting with authors, experts and hobbyists. The information flow between content authors and readers refines our overall understanding.

Filters

As time progresses the measure of human created unique information is ever expanding, and although much of it may be pertinent to our collective success (and satisfaction) an even greater portion is peripheral noise. Filters enable us to make sense out of the flood, to reject the clutter. But alone they aren't enough, considering the foundation of the media. More often than not, we only find great value after digesting a work of art, novel, or film. We ponder it for a time. Discuss it in person, over web streams or emails, and even sleep on it for a few days to allow our subconscious to process our observations and thoughts.

Golden Rule

When creating any content, we must consider our potential observers. Are we writing simply for ourselves, or is there another group that may benefit from our work? I'm not suggesting one should be a slave to their audience (or customers). But we can craft more valued and enjoyable media when we consider other users.

Refine

Don't be too hasty to share incomplete works or thoughts. In many cases we have very little control of our time (our most valued asset) schedules, but it almost always best to leave time for editing, testing, and touching up a rough draft.

Collaborate

A wonderful way to help refine your content is to open up discussion to test observers, or co-creators. Let them enjoy some of the unpolished ideas and continually add to the product increasing it's value. If you sense a great untapped utility for an existing technology, by all means rework it's concepts into something you perceive as more valuable.

A Common Language

There are advantages a common framework (language) would have over our current segmented communication system. The cost would be several generations of persuasion, and acceptance. One of the goals of such a language would be to enable us to more rapidly create and digest information. A more realistic goal may be a [portable translation device](#)

although any benefits to improved cognitive ability would be lost. The template itself must be open to revision as our collective understanding of design matures. Our current [human languages](#) developed over generations from isolated groups and communities. Programming languages were created by separate groups to function as translators from high level syntax into machine instructions (with different design objectives). An example of the unification of the products of varied languages can be witnessed in the brilliant network we know as the internet.

For the first time in human history our collective work can be shared by all mankind. Powerful efforts have been successfully enacted to translate content into a viewer friendly language. But they are far from complete. The [Internet Protocol Suite](#) (TCP/IP) was created as a universal translator between sub-networks via layered protocols, yet still lacked important design criteria. The missing design principles are related optimal abstract information flow and aggregation over generations. In order to more rapidly understand thoughts, perspectives, feelings, programs, and bits of information swarming throughout the global information network, we need a universal language. Not just one language we can speak and write, but one that is also optimal for transmitting over the internet. One that is near optimal for information content exchange, as well as continual refinement of overall knowledge.

Adaptability

Both our language, and our information must also be adaptable over time. Our language so it can evolve to maintain the qualities it was designed for, and our information so that it maintains relevancy for enough time to justify the effort in it's development

The Walker

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: March 5, 2009



It was probably back in 2003 when a good friend and mentor at work (John) got me into walking. We'd squeeze in a walk before lunch a few times a week. Then every day we'd shave off some time until much later we had a 2.4mile route down to thirty minutes (that's a very brisk pace ~5mph, as I added distance my pace evened out at 4mph). As the months rolled by my good friend Jim joined us. I continued walking daily at work, often on my own, and added in some hikes after work. Walking had become my guilty pleasure of choice by 2005, and I was traveling 50miles+ per week on foot (weather permitting). My

walking time/distance peaked in 2007 at 100miles+ per week during the spring/summer/fall months. I found it grounding to be out moving about on foot for hours, as I was having some difficulties finding enjoyment in my day job.

Cut to the present, now in the winter months of 2009 it's challenging for me to cover 40-50miles per week. It appears my acclimation to the cold is fading with age, even the low twenties with a slight wind makes being outdoors for prolonged periods discomforting. Last week there was a large snow storm in the north east (I live on Long Island, NY), so my walk a couple of days ago was harried by slush and cars zooming past over snow covered roads. Yesterday I decided to go to my favorite park, there's a wonderful 11-12 mile loop if you walk along the periphery of the reserve. I underestimated the snow depth, and made a BIG mistake in my planning.

About 5 miles into my hike some ice had melted around my ankles and dripped into the tops of my walking sneakers due to an error in the way I was wearing my socks (the sneakers have always been waterproof). At about the same time I pulled a muscle at the top of my right leg, in the front where the leg meets the hip due to the way I had to move through the deeper snow drifts (pulling my feet up before moving them forward). It was a mild strain, and as an avid walker I knew what I could deal with injury wise before needing to call for assistance. Either way, I was deep in the park so it would be difficult to get any help at that location.

My pace was slowed to about 2miles per hour. Each step was pained, especially through the deeper snow when I was forced to keep pulling my right leg up, before moving forward. My fears began to manifest as I began losing feeling in the front of both my feet. I kept flexing my toes with each step, but the water that had leaked in had gotten colder over time due to prolonged periods in deep snow. For the next two hours I focused on each step, and with each step I was getting closer to my car. My mind drifted to thoughts of what I would do as soon as I made it to the vehicle. It was just an hour away I told myself.

I didn't have much time to worry, the soreness of my leg muscle and numbness in my feet were all that I was concerned with. My world began and ended with each step, nothing outside of that mattered. I was never concerned as to whether I would make it back to my car. I knew I could make it regardless of damage to my feet. I forced myself to get angry in order to increase my heart rate. I jogged for thirty seconds to increase blood flow to my legs and feet. I did everything I could, hoping that the insulation in my sneakers would be enough to prevent frostbite. I cursed my poor planning, and dwelled on the small leg muscle pull that was becoming increasingly painful, and how it could potentially be the precursor to me getting severe frostbite.

My breathing was somewhat strained, and I began coughing. The stress of the cold on my legs and feet was no longer isolated, and was taking its toll on my body. Still I moved forward, one step at a time. All there was and ever would be is one more step, always moving forward. I recognized a turn in the trail, and the sounds of small streams as I approached. I escaped the deeper snow and moved very quickly over the plowed blacktop by the entrance, I had MADE IT BACK! As soon as I got in the car, I stripped off my sneakers and wet socks and blasted the heat on my feet. I kept flexing my toes and warming them with my hands, the top parts of both feet were very cold but I could feel them. Life was slowly returning to them. My [new balance hiking sneakers](#) had somehow

kept my feet warm enough the entire time. Note to Self (and other walkers): wear extra socks and pull them out out of the hiking sneakers/boots over your pants! I know better, but I got lazy and it almost cost me dearly. It took twenty minutes of driving before I gained full feeling back in the edge of my toes on my right foot but there was no permanent damage, I counted my blessings. After a mild fever and cough last night, a good nights sleep seems to be all I needed for a full recovery.

I think we would all benefit if we can leverage that survival instinct to our financial endeavors. If we can bring that same focus and drive to our work or business, even extraordinary problems can be overcome. By focusing on taking one step at a time, by [living within that single step](#) we are able to move past all the other concerns and distractions that make taking that step otherwise impossible. At the end of each step we are reminded of our goal (in my case yesterday a warm dry car). In our work lives this goal may be [financial independence](#), [discovering a new calling](#), or [finding real value](#) within our existing businesses. String enough steps together and you'll be taken to places you never even imagined.

But don't forget, or allow your goals to obfuscate the simple truth that there is a universe of satisfaction in each step.

Stress makes programmers dumber?

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: April 12, 2009

That's the hypothesis put forth by Alan G. Carter in a brilliant web series found at "[The Programmer's Stone](#)". It begins as a critical examination of the effect of stress on creative solution finding. What the author refers to as juxtapositional thinking is a method of holding multiple opposing proposed solutions in one's mind at the same time. This type of advanced conceptual problem solving forms the basis of effective and intelligent design, programming or otherwise. Discover how our body's response to stress is to focus on frontal lobe thinking which is predictable and methodical but highly concentrated. The Programmer's Stone continues by suggesting solutions addressing the issue of stress for individuals and organizations. In addition to mitigating the effect, techniques for inducing advanced cognitive states are given for those who are stuck in procedural or stressed mental conditions. Some of the ideas are fairly advanced (to readers like myself who are new to the concept) so the brief but dense series may require a careful (re)read and time to digest.

Some of my own thoughts to add to the topic:

- Connect to other designers who are dealing with the same difficulties as yourself through [social media](#) (programming or otherwise)
- regular exercise does a great job of resetting my bodies stress system
- determining the magic stress threshold that optimizes our cognitive performance is unique to each individual. A simple hypothesis is that any individual interested enough in a topic won't require **ANY** outside stress to achieve superior design performance
- ~~antidepressants that block stress receptors could actually improve cognitive ability~~

~~when under tight schedules or managerial pressure~~ (I wouldn't try it, update: there are side effects related to modern antidepressants that inhibit optimal thinking)

- an incredible amount of great scientific research has been done on lab rats cognitive impairment when under stress, we need to apply these findings to our daily work environments to better utilize our work force (and our own time)
 - no we're not lab rat's! But under stress we have a similar drop in cognitive ability
 - of course we need to balance work + out of work life

Need more reasons to stay clear of stress in the workplace? How about because

- [stress stops your brain from producing new neurons](#)
- [stress is ruining our best CEO's and leaders](#), read more on [how this happening](#)

A related article, [Tough Choices: How Making Decisions Tires Your Brain](#) discusses how sequential thought processes can affect decision making quality. It goes on to explain how the exhaustion of the executive decision making process of the brain can negatively effect later decision making.

When energy meets ideas, brilliant new companies are born

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: February 26, 2009



We've all had our share of wonderful ideas (or at least we think so). It's quite astonishing to see your ideas made real years later by a company. I recently had this experience while reading a [Wired Blog Network post](#) by Dave Demerjian.

It turns out that [Super Smoker](#) is actively marketing a smokeless cigarette. The "electronic cigarette delivers nicotine through tobacco-flavored vapor without the annoying smoke of a true cigarette, which means "this device can't be placed under the smoking prohibition" that bars smoking on flights". When I originally envisioned this product, it was going to be loaded with nutrients and vitamins, making it a healthy cigarette alternative. In addition the nicotine levels could be lowered over time, or replaced with a non-addictive stimulant.

So what? I'm convinced that [ideas have very little value](#) and their implementation has ALL the value. Ideas are easy, ideas are cheap. Implementing an idea takes effort, coordination, planning, and vision. Great ideas appear to be incredibly valuable when there's an amazing pipeline that turns them into reality. Just look at the super CEOs of the mega corporations, their ideas sound brilliant when you're holding a new [Kindle](#) or playing

with a [Netbook](#) or [Apple MacBook](#). But we forget that these aren't ideas we're holding, these are the results of thousands of hours of engineering, testing, and hard work.

When we come up with ideas, we have to have the energy to convince others to help make them into products, to help [make them real](#). It's the act of going from the vague blueprints of our imagination, our [fantasies](#), into a communicable or real product that gives an idea its value. This takes a great abundance of energy, of enthusiasm. I can't help but think about Apple when it comes to this union of ideas and energy. While web [articles & blog posts about Steve Jobs](#)' are dominated by his recent six month leave of absence from day to day activities, I like to focus on all that the company has accomplished. We are all witnesses to the compelling evidence of what happens when Steves' ([don't forget Woz](#)) brilliant ideas are matched to a wide band energy pipeline, now thirty five thousand+ Apple employees.

My suggestion, if you have a great idea: Don't abandon it because it's too hard. Dig deep and find the energy to convince others of your vision. Make it real, so we can all enjoy it!

Social Media Evolution

How to Web Market and Use Social Media

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: April 24, 2009 | [Edit](#)

What steps can you take to increase your number of readers?

First make yourself comfortable with the idea of tooting your own horn online. If you don't shout out that you have something worth reading, it's unlikely that anyone else will discover it anytime soon. If you can join a small community of like minded individuals it makes spreading your ideas even faster. Not only will you have the constructive criticism and shared views of other interested marketers, but you'll have people willing to review your material on crowd sourced social web sites.

- [Learn the Basics of Web Marketing and SEO](#) - What is "Web Marketing"? It's the virtual soap box you have to stand on to get an audience. While many writers become authors because they feel a need to write, without readers your words will have little impact. Since it's my deepest hope to inspire people, to instigate critical thinking and focus I for one am working to find readers.
- [Make Sure Your Content is Excellent](#) -The design methods introduced are by no means hard and fixed. Some are impractical from a financial view for any single generation. They are simply one authors suggested guidelines to begin answering a hypothetical question: "*What I can do to create effective content, be it media or written text?*"

Why be concerned with social media?

- [Social Media Is the Meeting Point of the Viral Spread of Ideas With Social Content Generation](#) - Much like the rapid growth of radio, then TV in the 20th century, social media is now experiencing explosive growth across the internet.

Social Media University



How to begin using social media:

- [Use Twitter to Keep Track of what's going on](#)
 - In case you just landed on Earth, [Twitter](#) is a tool that feels like part chat room, part news feeder, part network marketer. Seriously try it out with a browser add-on, and check the public channel to find interesting tweets.
- [Take this Short Twitter Tutorial](#)
 - This twitter tutorial page is designed for entry level twitter users, or folks who have never used twitter before. It will cover the basics of signing up, grabbing an easy to use interface, and much of the lingo and basic functionality of twitter.
- [What can be accomplished with twitter?](#) -
There's a strong correlation with our deep biologically programmed need for belonging and social networking on the internet. We are much more willing to accept advice from a trusted friend than from a search algorithm about where to find pertinent information.
- [Social Media isn't new to Infosaur Robert Scoble](#) -
Mr. Robert Scoble, known to many in the online community as the Scobleizer, is one of the trailblazers in a new field I like to call *Virtual Omniscience*. He's basically monitoring the pulse of the world via the internet, or at least a sizeable slice of human experience. By applying twitter and friend feed with his personal dynamic quality filters he keeps pace with what's happening and is connecting with an interested audience of thousands of individuals.
- [Intelligent Advertising for Microbloggers: Who will be first to swim in the riches?](#) - The utility of twitter as a profit engine has been a growing concern for Evan Williams. Other social services are quickly adapting to the popularity of microblogging within their own social media structures (Facebook, FriendFeed). While I have posted on the potential of twitter before, the real value is in the datamining application of microblogging.
- [It more than makes sense for Google to acquire twitter, it makes money](#)
 - It appears I jumped the gun some time ago with my post "[twitter is on the verge of eating Google for breakfast](#)", here's why. Google is well aware of it's "breakfast" and is more than likely to make a YouTube like deal with twitter. Google is actively tweeting

with it's account, "acknowledging" the service (Oprah's tweeting why not). Here are just a few reasons why it's a match made in heaven.

Social Media Will Be the Dominant Design Focus of the 21st Century

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: March 29, 2009 | [Edit](#)

Much like the rapid growth of radio, then TV in the 20th century, social media is now experiencing explosive growth across the internet. We as a species have yet to realize the enormous potential of a fully connected real time network of global human consciousness and electronic data. Social design requires a very open framework between contributing parties, therefore tools that are open source are likely to receive the most benefit from a heavily connected network perspective, and the corresponding gigantic problem solving ability. Leveraging that creative potential into focused pieces of work has proven to be incredibly challenging in some areas, and quite natural in others.

The working definition for social media from [wikipedia](#) in respect to the post "Social media is information content created by people using highly accessible and scalable publishing technologies that is intended to facilitate communications, influence and interaction with peers and with public audiences"

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jpEnFwiqdx8&feature=player_embedded

(the above video can be found [here](#))

Now consider some of the breakthrough recent design developments. In the gaming industry the ceiling of entertainment was literally torn off by Massive Multiplayer Online gaming (Ultima Online, Everquest, World of Warcraft) or for smaller network games (Counterstrike, Halo, Call of Duty). The value of these types of software was enormously increased by the ability to connect to other people with similar interests and share in the experience.

How about online video? YouTube video sharing is with little doubt one of the most potent video platforms second only to Google in web page link following. The power of YouTube is more than just free hosting. It connects people to content they are interested in, personalizing the message to what the viewer is seeking.

Social networking via blogging, myspace, facebook, twitter, friendfeed, linkedin all have social media incorporated to their powerful connection tools. The value of any social network only increases with size. Power in numbers.

Still think social media is a fad? Well you may be right according to Matt Dickman's article, [When everything becomes social, what is "social media"](#). His vision is one where social media is ubiquitous throughout all products, precisely why it will be the dominant design tool/focus.

Free information and one media solution that I'd subscribe to

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: March 2, 2009 | [Edit](#)

[Books, magazines, and even entire libraries](#) are becoming freely available online. What would happen if all information was free? How would this change what you read, watched, and listened to?

The value would come in how novel, interesting and useful the media experience was to us. The company that best matched the media to me would be the most successful, and should be the most profitable. While there are wildly popular books, magazines, and films and these generate huge profits for their publishers/producers, how would this novel media system generate revenue?

We're tired of ads. We automatically filter out any advertisements that are not pertinent to what we're seeking, so advertisements would have to be brilliantly threaded into the media product for them to be most effective. So although ads are annoying, they can make media free. Don't care for ads? There's a simple solution, subscribe with a monthly cost.

One media solution would provide everything I need to stay connected, global web access, free web phone, free music selection, free tv & films, and free books/magazines/blogs. For maintaining an optimal network (or perhaps one of several competing physical networks) they would receive a share of the advertising revenue or media subscriptions.

While this may appear to be a far off potential future, the web moves faster than anyone would have first imagined when it comes to evaluating potential media. Think about how fast Netflix evolved with it's system of DVD mailing, to instant downloading and how quickly Blockbuster adapted to remain competitive. It is my belief that this systemic business evolution foretells the future of media marketing and monetization.

Kindle 2 moves control of text-to-speech feature from user to publisher

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: March 3, 2009 | [Edit](#)

(update the [Kindle DX](#) will be available soon)

While it's a lovely device due to the readability, storage, size, and efficiency. The [Kindle 2](#) is still subject to the whim of the [large book publishers it seems](#), and therefore any information that

flows through the device will be ruled by a consortium of folks with an outdated view on media ownership and control. Here's an excerpt of the news [post from CNET](#):

“On Friday, Amazon announced it would reconfigure the Kindle 2’s systems to allow publishers to disable the text-to-speech function for titles of their choosing. However, the retailer made it clear in the announcement that it believed text-to-speech did not violate copyright.”

Publishers will control the text-to-speech feature.

This type of feature change after the release of a product is frightening or at the very least damaging to Amazon's market position for it's Kindle Books, which makes it harder for [web marketers and information merchants](#) to pitch the device to potential customers.

It amazes me that we are finding new ways to value information for it's pertinence, quality, and timeliness on the internet but our vast riches of older written information must suffer in it's availability due to old thinking.

I suggested a [simple solution](#), one media rule that rewards any media authors based on the popularity of their works as well as sociably redeeming qualities. The capitol can be generated via ads to free users, or by subscriptions to those that prefer to avoid ads.

Use Twitter to Keep Track of what's going on

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: March 18, 2009 | [Edit](#)

In case you just landed on Earth, [Twitter](#) is a tool that feels like part chat room, part news feeder, part network marketer. Seriously try it out with a browser addon, and check the public channel to find interesting tweets.

I suggest grabbing [twitbin](#) if you use Firefox. It creates a side window that's getting a constant stream of updates. Unfortunately, I'm still new so I'm learning tweeter netiquette. You can follow me at [VictusFate](#) I'll follow you back 😊 (and I'll keep following as long as you don't spam me about how to get rich via flying carpet sales and black magic)

UPDATE

[Twitter Netiquette](#)

I added some of my favorite Twitter tools/applications/websites to [my web marketing tutorial](#)

Of course I just came across this twitter segment from the Daily Show:

[Twitter Frenzy from the Daily Show](#)

What can actually be accomplished with twitter?

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: March 19, 2009 | [Edit](#)



My first instinct, and I'm sure I'm not alone in this, was the childlike king of the mountain rush to get as many followers and popularity as I could. It was only for a moment before I abandoned this path (mostly), before I thought about what I would do even if I could gain an instant of interest from the entire community.

After several hours of using twitter, specifically my web browser and TweetDeck, I've been getting a feel for the type of information flow available. It all comes down to the type of people you follow and the tools you use to sift through the data. If you follow intelligent, insightful individuals/companies you are likely to get introduced to some fantastic web content that you may have missed from other paths. The feel of twitter is a mashup of instant messenger (but on a slower time scale) with status updates (Facebook) and a human powered web catalog (much like Digg, Stumble Upon, Reddit, etc). It's easy to follow suggested links and quickly lose track of time as you continually discover fascinating new perspectives and stories about the world we live in, and fantasies of [what it may be](#).

As with any tool, you have to determine what you want to get out of twitter, and then use it appropriately. If you make well thought tweets about engaging topics you're likely to grow your follower list. But what are you going to do if every person on Earth follows your 140character one liners? Are you going to sell them something? Or is there the faintest chance that something super cognitive and **real** can come out of the masses of status update minutia? Artificial intelligence spawned from a swarm of natural intelligences, the possibilities are fascinating and nearly endless.

Here are just a few compelling reasons for using tweeter now:

1. The first application feeds into how twitter can monetize it's addictive network. I'm beginning to think there is great potential in sorting through the information that people tweet about (the collection). The post analysis could do much to improve our knowledge of how information flows in [swarm intelligence](#). This information could

be sold to big marketing companies with an excellent premium/monthly subscription, and it would be dynamically updated.

2. It's like a real time white board where your community of chosen leaders can pass along their most precious information. Initially I believed twitter would have a greater market impact if the number of tweets per day were limited, but realize now that over tweeting will just result in a natural decline in followers. At the very least each user would more carefully choose what he would share with his followers. Either way more powerful filters and more frequent updates could both be beneficial in unison.
3. Marketing, marketing, marketing! In a rapidly increasing web space, making a connection with a potential interested customer can be a great way to spread ideas about your company or product. An ongoing relationship between consumer and company can strengthen both the happiness of the customer, and the wealthiness/healthiness of the business.
4. Feedback from the customer to the company. You can get real time information about what people like best about your current product, and what would be most desirable in the future.

One of the major drawbacks of twitter is that there is information overload. As much as I try, I can only concentrate on a few concepts at a time. There is a need for twitter addons/tools to help segregate the information into bite sized pieces. Luckily there's an ever growing list of people building products to help us sift through the mountain (I listed a few of them [here](#) along with some great reference pages). There is also a growing number of articles/bloggers dedicated to helping you make the most of your twitter experience (I suppose I'm one of them now, although a neophyte).

- [Twitip](#)
- [Mr. Tweet](#)
- [Official Twitter Blog](#)

I'm in the process of using TweetDeck to organize those that I follow into categories...
*update I just catch up by doing a twitter search or going to a few friends twitter homepages.

Don't forget [twitter search](#) (the Summize guys started this, I think?)

And of course to leave off with some twitter fun: [from SuperNews](#)

twitter is on the verge of eating Google for breakfast, here's why

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: March 22, 2009 | [Edit](#)

The web landscape is constantly changing, and with it our navigation tools are advancing. To support the hypothesis it's important that we first review a brief history of the internet. Initial communication networks were hubs set up with mainframes controlling information and terminals allowing access to that information. Separate localized computer networks developed and finally adopted a common network protocol merging information flow into what is now known as the Internet (From [wikipedia](#)) .

Internet search tools, our navigators through this new virtual landscape of information, have their own, non-discrete evolutionary history. Long ago I used Lynx to browse the text web on a green and black CRT in college manually crawling websites. At that point I used Jump Station or the WWW Worm to navigate the web, but became frustrated with the difficulty to find useful sites. It wasn't until years later that Yahoo and graphics made the internet a helluva lot more pleasing to the eye and mind. There were a few popular search engines popping up (nothing memorable before Yahoo), but Alta Vista had the best match from my keywords, to what I wanted to read about. Somewhere along my web visits I dropped Alta Vista to try Google and I was hooked to their matching algorithm (based purely on the quality of search results).

The search engine development history:

- it started with simple keyword matching
- then people deciding the best pages and placing them on directories
- next moved to a powerful algorithm which is “centrally” controlled
- and now is shifting back to millions of users helping to maintain a quality score for websites

The social collective directory scoring is achieved by submitting sites, and grading those sites within social tools like twitter (Digg, Stumble Upon, Reddit, Hacker News, etc.).

So search had it's roots in crawlers that indexed (JumpStation) then merging this data with advanced directories (like Yahoo), then link following methods (Alta Vista and eventually Google) transformed the potential for search by having a massive database and powerful search algorithms. But there are times when we don't know the right questions to ask (keywords) or how to judge the quality of information we're being overloaded with. Hierarchical social networking can help us quickly find the guru's and experts in specific fields and allow us to connect with them in real time about what's going on in their fields. We can communicate with them about how we may best benefit from those developments or simply review their findings.

The last few days I've been on a terrible [twitter](#) bender. I know it has untapped potential as a tool for increasing human interaction and knowledge (as long as the program speed can keep up with user volume). There's a strong correlation with our deep biologically programmed need for belonging and social networking on the internet. We are much more willing to accept advice from a trusted friend then from a search algorithm about where to find pertinent information. I suddenly can follow hundreds of thousands of potential advisers for content. The challenge is in filtering that data and finding the smaller number of trusted sources for what I most appreciate. Google hasn't customized to my search desires (yet) like a plethora of people.

With twitter we can find what's interesting and feel like we belong at the same time, something Google hasn't figured out yet.

As far as belonging, [John Donne](#) was an expert on the human connection following are a few quotes from his work [Devotions upon Emergent Occassions](#):

“All mankind is of one author, and is one volume; when one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language; and every chapter must be so translated...As therefore the

bell that rings to a sermon, calls not upon the preacher only, but upon the congregation to come: so this bell calls us all: but how much more me, who am brought so near the door by this sickness....No man is an island, entire of itself...any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."

If the above reasons aren't compelling, here are six more reasons why twitter is going to superseed Google in [Gyutae Park's article](#).

Intelligent Advertising for Microbloggers: Who will be first to swim in the riches?

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: April 9, 2009 | [Edit](#)

The utility of twitter as a profit engine has been a [growing concern for Evan Williams](#). Other social services are quickly adapting to the popularity of microblogging within their own social media structures (Facebook, FriendFeed). While I have posted on the potential of [twitter before](#), the real value is in the datamining application of microblogging.

The [Twitter Gold Mine & Beating Google to the Semantic Web](#) by Nick Bilton got me thinking about targeted advertising. What I commented on (and Nick didn't touch on), was that the profit engine in microblogging isn't necessarily the service. Sure you want your microblogging service to have a sizable community. But what you really want to provide is the best set of tools for user intent comprehension. **It's likely that the most powerful fully semantic data miner tools will be our first look at Artificial Intelligence.**

Imagine a virtual personal assistant that tracked all your activities (microblog entries in this case). It can create pertinent products or activities by analyzing a combination of historic data from your past and collective data from others who share your current status. The "others" that comprise your data group could be people you follow, you are friends with, or are in the same geographical vicinity. For example, you're visiting Columbus Ohio to meet some customers. While chatting after the meeting your virtual assistant conveniently texts your portable media device with the name and address of the most locally popular hibachi grill restaurant (because you love Hibachi while traveling). The algorithms will have to discern meaning from the microblog entries, hence the focus on semantic knowledge and A.I. They can then be processed by any number of estimation algorithms (clustering, matched filtering, other correlative techniques).

The software developers that can best deliver this function will earn titanic profits (from users and advertisers).

Ad Money Will Play “Follow the Leader” to the King of Links

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: April 21, 2009 | [Edit](#)



What any advertising campaign ultimately wants to achieve is an improvement in company profits.

Historically this has been done with banners to interrupt and saturate potential customers with brand recognition. A small percentage of viewers will feel compelled to purchase the product. In the modern (ever changing) business landscape this is usually achieved by being in the right place, at the right time. Say I'm web browsing for great [fishing rods in San Francisco](#), if you showed up at the top of Google you're in a prime spot to further your business goal of making the connection between your business and me (an interested and willing buyer).

Increasingly, the flow of web links is being made between individuals via social media sites. Your good fishing buddy who knows the Bay area, shares a link to his favorite supply store. As focused communities become populated across geographic barriers, local quality referrals become more likely. But what if you want to know what store fishermen prefer in San Francisco? You could simply use twitter search for [fishing san francisco](#). In real time you could send a message to several individuals who are interested in fishing in that region. Successful social media will judge individuals by the quality of their referrals, the best will be known as field experts. This expertise will garner increased customer reaction and social pull, as well as equivalent advertising dollars. **Social networks that reward (profit sharing) their strongest referrers (crowd sourced link voting) and content builders will succeed, while those that try to hoard income will be abandoned like ghost towns.**

A quick background for those unfamiliar with web advertising:

In the current web advertising system there are several cost structures for paid ads.

- CPM or Cost Per Thousand Impressions
- CPC or Cost Per Click
- CPA or Cost Per Action

Advertising dollars naturally flow to those services which yield the best (lowest) cost per action. A complication is that each marketing case (company/product/website) will have it's own dynamic conversion for impressions to clicks to action (i.e. a product purchase).

So what defines the link leader?

Easy, whoever “owns” the most referral links shall inherit advertising dollars. Right now it's the best search engines (Google for much of the world, Baidu for China and some of South East Asia).

But there is a change taking place. Users are proving that they don't need one company to tell them where to go. Social bookmarking sites are “self organizing” much of the real time internet. Digg, reddit, Delicious, twitter, and Facebook are some of the crowdsourcing website leaders. Email of course is another major social link sharing source.

People are being supplied great, desired content before they perceive a need to search for it. What this means for search monetization is that it will have to adapt to how people use the internet to find products.

Where is the opportunity space of tomorrow?

Future business opportunities will lie in optimizing the connection between potential consumers and companies. As this connection becomes stronger, it will push the best companies and products into larger shares of competitive market spaces. Outside of direct advertising, why do users promote a business within social media? Having excellent content, a compelling story, and being trusted are the pillars of a successful web business. A companies story has to be remarkable enough for me to share (or at least the best in it's neighborhood). Newcomers visiting the site have to trust it enough to take action (i.e. making a purchase on a website or signing up). Scam artists erode our trust in human referrals, so any successful social advertising business will have excellent tools for identifying and removing them from the system.

This post inspired by

- Fred Wilson's [The Power Of Passed Links \(continued\)](#) and
- Ian Kennedy and Udo Szabo's thoughts [Facebook, Twitter send more traffic than Google](#)

Infosaurus Robert Scoble “the Scobleizer” Redefines Internet Information Flow

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: March 24, 2009 | [Edit](#)

Mr. Robert Scoble, known to many in the online community as the Scobleizer, is one of the trailblazers in a new field I like to call *Virtual Omniscience*. He’s basically monitoring the pulse of the world via the internet, or at least a sizeable slice of human experience. By applying twitter and friend feed with his personal dynamic quality filters he keeps pace with what’s happening and is connecting with an interested audience of thousands of individuals. I can only imagine the tools we’ll have at our finger tips 10 years from now thanks to he and his colleagues’ trendsetting.

Some power players send direct messages to Mr. Scoble to alert him of significant change (new products, companies, venture capitalists, etc.). He’s among a select few elite information/marketing gurus (maven) which include but aren’t limited to Chris Brogan, Scott Hanselman, Guy Kawasaki, Leo Laporte (nice chaps), and Prague Bob. Heck even MC Hammer is trying to follow ~26k users, and Stephen Fry 55k in their “wide band” twitter streams. These guys are different from the tech leader geniuses like Tim O’Reilly in that they sift through more real time data (Tim probably uses other information channels more heavily for his input and probably has a team of sharp information experts).

How Robert reads tweets <http://www.kyte.tv/ch/6118-scobleizer/357808-how-i-read-tweets>

Here are some links to some of the gentlemen I’ve mentioned:

- [Robert Scoble](#)
- [Chris Brogan](#)
- [Guy Kawasaki](#)
- [Scott Hanselman](#)
- [Leo Laporte](#)
- [Tim O’Reilly](#)
- [Robert Morrison \(Prague Bob\)](#)
- [MCHammer](#)
- [Stephen Fry](#)

Of course this is all the result of a sidetrack from an article I was going to write on social media’s changing influence on web marketing. Thanks again evil twitter stream (I’m compelled to follow all the interesting sounding links, oh no I’m falling behind!).

Here’s an overview of the major tools of any web marketing campaign:

- Social Media
- Web Article Authoring
- Directories
- Back Links from Influential Sites
- SEO (Search Engine Optimization)

SEO is an encompassing tool that is reinforced by some or all of the methods of web

marketing, but it's results are measured by rank for relevant searches for your business or information topic.

[Traffic Cafe](#) with Jonathan Gunson is an excellent way to move your business forward with web marketing when you're ready to pay for expert advice. I enjoyed his video tips while reviewing twitter this morning so a link back is a simple way for me to say thanks Mr. Gunson.

I'll save social media for last (the best usually is privy to that position outside of boring presentations, and firefights) which brings us to web article authoring. They're a wonderful way to begin planting the seeds for your "message" whatever that may be. I personally chose [Ezine Articles](#) and have even gotten a few posts approved. I have plenty more to do, sometime soon I should think. So don't follow my lead and procrastinate, submit, submit, submit!

You could submit your posts, articles, and web pages to web directories for a link. I can't imagine this is very helpful these days but it's better than doing nothing at all. If you have any wild skill or luck in connections it's possible to get a back link from a power player site in a particular market. One link vote from a big site can do wonderful things to your page rank and visibility.

The design of a page can be preconceived in such as way as to have beneficial key words, titles and structure. You don't want to create web content that appears like junk to search engines and people alike. There are a variety of tools for measuring the most effective keyword combinations, but unfortunately I grow bored whenever I begin using them. What fun is it if I can't even create my own keyword combinations while writing?



Then there's the Giant Gorilla: social media marketing. Getting in front of thousands of pairs of eyes and allowing them to judge the utility and quality of your writing is the aspiring author's dream. Well actually getting incredible feedback to help hone one's writing skills and pursue a life long passion of significant social value is my personal dream. Some of the big players include Reddit, Digg, Stumble Upon, YC Hacker news, and now the super hot twitter. All twitter needs now is a Facebook looking front end to suck in the mainstream audience.

It more than makes sense for Google to acquire twitter, it makes money

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: April 18, 2009 | [Edit](#)



It appears I jumped the gun some time ago with my post [twitter is on the verge of eating Google for breakfast, here's why](#). Google is well aware of it's "breakfast" and is more than likely to make a YouTube like deal with twitter. Google is actively tweeting with it's account, "acknowledging" the service (Oprah's tweeting why not). Here are just a few reasons why it's a match made in heaven:

twitter is becoming a powerful competitor in real time link sharing and search

Pro's like Fred Wilson are trying to understand the value of [The Power Of Passed Links](#) when it comes to conversions. The growth of social media for link sharing and converting is much larger in his ballpark figures than the growth of search. Google has to understand the strength of controlling a vested interest in social media.

Google has some of the best semantic interpretation tools available, or has the best people to develop them further

Google has been developing arguably the most powerful database in the world.

Google is also the best in the world at understanding what people are looking for when they type in search terms. It doesn't take a huge logic leap to perceive the financial power of [contextual advertising](#) applied to microblogging. **The significant way for twitter to monetize** is through contextual personalized advertising, and for this to happen they'll need powerful semantic interpreters and some pretty snappy data mining on the fly.

Google is able to purchase twitter now while it's still small (compared to Facebook which has aligned itself with Microsoft)

From a business standpoint, the timing couldn't be better for Google to align itself with twitter. Facebook has grown rather large and expensive for an acquisition, besides the fact that it already has a pretty strong ties to Microsoft (to the tune of \$200 million a year). Alternatively twitter is small and on the rise, and is a high value purchase, precisely because of what Google can bring to microblogging.

Google may want to consider purchasing [friendfeed](#) as well while they're price is relatively cheap.

Thanks to Fadi for his post [Is it time for Google to start tweeting?](#) , and Michael Arrington from Tech Crunch, [Sources: Google In Talks To Acquire Twitter \(Updated\)](#).

Sick and tired of paying extra for voice and SMS text message data!

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: April 10, 2009 | [Edit](#)

What spark will ignite companies to bypass the wireless broadband providers choke hold? It's time to focus our national resources (in this case bandwidth) on innovating high speed internet for the entire nation. All parts of America need some good "old fashioned" free information internet. It can be started with government subsidies, some strong legislation, and dozens of innovative companies. The excuses for segregation or coloring data because it's voice or SMS text are simply ludicrous. The typical usage of our spectrum is atrociously inefficient and under utilized. In addition the excuses for locking down the EM spectrum transmission frequencies to narrow channels is equally illogical.

The Excuses:

- A spokesperson from T-Mobile "Our goal is to provide an optimal wireless experience for our entire customer base, and if it's determined that a customer's use of a third-party application may lessen this experience for our other customers, we will take the necessary precautions to protect and maintain an excellent customer experience on our network," a company spokeswoman said by email.
- AT&T responding to Skype's petition to open things up "When one wireless user has a less efficient handset than the rest

of the network, the entire network suffers. By subjecting all wireless users to the experimentation of the few subscribers interested in alternative devices, application of [such] connection rules to the wireless world acts to the detriment of all users.”

That’s it? That’s the best they can come up with? Those are the type of arguments holding America back from hi speed wireless broadband. If I could grow more hair to pull out I would. Does anyone actually believe these ill conceived comments? At the very least our big telecom corporations need some better spin doctors and marketers. Can anyone “in power” do something about it? Unfortunately it may be some time before our legislators catch up with our growing demands for technology and ubiquitous hi speed internet for all devices.

For anyone else interested in this topic I highly suggest the following pertinent (and more knowledgeable) articles:

- [What Is An “Aggressive Tech Agenda”?](#)
- [More On Open Spectrum](#)
- [Open Spectrum is Good Policy](#)
- [Google’s Brilliant Proposal](#) by Tom Evslin
- [A letter from Google to the Federal Communications Commission](#)
- [More on Frequency Regulation - It Matters by Tom Evslin](#)
- [Open Mobile Internet Now!](#)
- [National Broadband Plan? Dream Big, Feds, Very Big](#)
- [Net Neutrality Advocates Call For Fast, Universal Access To The Net](#)
- [Apply Net Neutrality to Skype on Smartphones, Group Asks Feds](#)

Social Emergence Asynchronous Management (SEAM)

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: April 6, 2009 | [Edit](#)

Earlier today I sent out an email to a couple of friends about a potential large scale project that I’d like to spearhead. The idea is to develop a simple framework for a community to access and manage just about any sized project. If you’re reading this, you’re more than welcome to contribute to the development team for any open source part of the project (which may be open extensions to a base framework, or some other pieces of the project).

What defines the type of social media collaborative project I’m interested in:

- connected by a fairly powerful underlying database
- and an easy to use/update front end:

Some examples of social designs or group media efforts. The overall collaborative goal is improving the web domain whether or not the users care.

- YouTube
- squidoo
- twitter, myspace, facebook, friendfeed, gmail, etc

I'd like to have a framework/tool for any project organizers/managers. They can specify their own design goal.

What the working software will provide

- Anyone can initiate a project, and may dictate the terms for others to join/contribute to that project
- Once an individual contributes, their efforts are documented and remain part of the project history
- Project management teams and leadership can be passed or coordinated by the project initiator or a board of supporting individuals
- graphic interface for standalone and web based versions
- open Application Programming Interface (API) for extension via stand alone programs, web browsers (add-ons), html (scripts), widgets, etc.
 - provide an RSS Feed to show current categorized updates for specific projects or user specified sub/supersets

Basic Requirements:

- scalable
- customizable
- fast/efficient
- run or be easily accessible on all common Operating Systems (windows, linux/unix)
- easy to understand & use
- will need to be able to communicate information between accepted networking and feed tools

What would SEAM do

1. simple user interface to a heavily connected database network
2. objects in the system may contain many links to other objects and the links are given contextual information or tags
3. the BIG database may be organized or displayed in many different (user specified) ways
 1. so anyone could see who is responsible for making an abstract plan more concrete
 2. who else is working with/for them
 3. lists of objectives/milestones (+deadlines/due dates)
 4. and links to how to measure them/mark completed tasks
4. a simple set of rules for adding things to the database and for adding additional links to other parts of the database as time goes on (hence emergence, a complex database emerges from a collaborative community using simplistic user interface)

Some related readings

some future movement of the web evolution

- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emergence>
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semantic_web
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linked_Data

- <http://www.w3.org/DesignIssues/RDFnot.html>
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giant_Global_Graph
- <http://dig.csail.mit.edu/breadcrumbs/node/215>

Related software/sites/communities:

- <http://sourceforge.net/>
- <http://esw.w3.org/topic/SemanticWebTools>
- <http://www.openair.com/home/solutionsProjMgmt.html?leadsource=oag1>
- <http://www.dmoz.org/about.html>
 - organization of web information, a little out of our immediate scope

Similar Software

- <http://openproj.org/openproj>
- <http://www.redmine.org/>
- <http://www.mediawiki.org/wiki/MediaWiki>
- <http://www.dotproject.net/>

The Impact of Ashton Kutcher's reaching 1 million followers before CNN

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: April 17, 2009 | [Edit](#)

It makes no difference.

Here's why:

@aplusk (Ashton's twitter ID) is merely tapping into the unidirectional broadcast side of a powerful social media tool. For his 1 million plus followers he listens in to under one hundred. And unlike @cnbrk (CNN breaking news) he's not providing as much information utility. This is fine by Ashton as he has stated he understands the system and the power to listen in is ultimately in the hands of the user.

There are some powerful positive repercussions of his follower victory. Unlike in the story of John Henry, the individual is proving more powerful than the machine. There is also a new rush of media attention to twitter and social media which is great news for the creators of twitter and likely other social media startups.

The donation of 100k to fight Malaria would have been covered by CNN, and either way media attention was brought to the platform. It begs the question, what would you say if you had a potential million listeners tuned in?

VCs building sand castles that float

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: April 16, 2009 | [Edit](#)



Mo Koyfman's post ["First Destruction, Then Creation"](#) challenged my imagination of the ideal information business. In it he briefly discusses the large gradients of change in today's economy. The needs of our society are being fulfilled by changing business models. Fundamentally different systems are being formed in the new market space.

The following are key concerns raised by Mr. Koyfman for any emerging entrepreneur or company:

"We have to start by asking what does the consumer or customer *really* want? How can we deliver it to them as efficiently and effectively as possible? What is the least it can cost us to deliver? What can we fairly charge for it?"

I included my initial comments from his post with some extended answers:

1. We have to start by asking what does the consumer or customer *really* want?
 - *Consumers want the truth, entertainment, and sometimes to be lied to. I'd like to work on the first two.* I just honed in my comment on a slice of the consumer market that desires information. There is a (thankfully) small sector of the market that really does require spin doctoring, but I'm not interested in that business. Most people want honest information from a trustworthy source, and they'd like to enjoy the experience of getting that information. Hence, truth and entertainment.

2. How can we deliver it to them as efficiently and effectively as possible? What is the least it can cost us to deliver? (I grouped these two questions together as they're related)
 - *How much of your time are you willing to sacrifice on optimizing & market tactics? As I like to envision myself an "idea guy" I'd prefer crafting novel tools instead of endlessly reworking broken ones. Obviously, that doesn't get me too far unless I can find an army of energetic workers to help make my abstract concepts become concrete.* The majority of our businesses are focused on keeping momentum going, and maintaining products rather than innovating. That's why I'm pretty psyched about the role VCs are playing. They are ultimately after profit, but they are doing it by funding small groups with big ideas. Sounds like a pretty fantastic job (I guess it has to be if it's going to require 70-80 hour work weeks to juggle all the responsibilities).
3. What can we fairly charge for it?
 - *More than it's worth, but less than people are currently willing to pay.* It has to be a profitable product or service, and it has to be high value to the customer by being priced at a lower level than they are willing to pay. Some would say you should charge precisely what a customer is willing to pay, but I'd prefer my customers always feeling like they got a bargain by shopping from me.

Another venture capitalist's (Fred Wilson) post illustrates an example of a company that is poised to thrive in the emerging media market, [Facebook](#). His entry [When You Are A Public Company Without Being Public](#) discusses the fairly open nature of Facebook's finances, some rumored revenue numbers and a forecast of Facebook going public.

One commenter, [MartinEdic](#), drew attention to the fact that Facebook has grown into a ubiquitous social beast:

"I am middle-aged and have 160 active friends on Facebook, most of whom have joined in the last six months and are not techies. Virtually none of them Twitter for example (I have posted guides to Twitter at the request of some). What does this mean in the real world? Facebook, as a platform, has crossed the chasm. No other social media platform, including blogging, has done this. This means the market they are creating is not demographically techies, young people, niche interest groups- it is everyone.

When you are reaching everyone your revenue models don't have to be earthshaking innovations. They not only reach a broad swath that is growing, they have a lot of data about everyone- much more, for example, than Google has. They not only know our demographics and interests, they know our range of people who share those interests. Our 'influence' in other words. From a marketing POV, we only need to focus our Facebook buys on the influencers and we exponentially increase our reach with relevance. This is huge."

And my response:

Great viewpoint Martin (breaking out of the tech market), you just have to sell the tops of the social trees in facebook to create massive need for your product(s). But any social media is going to have to keep users engaged. That's a tough job. Facebook

has to make our social lives not just easier, but better for it to keep people coming back.

My opinion on the direction of social media:

What I think many folks want is a big virtual hub where they can hang out and catch up with friends. Text and images only go so far. Sharing a game together can be fun (mmorpg) but can get stale. Even voice conferencing has it's limits for large group back and forth interaction.

I perceive winning social media companies sharing deeper: People need to be able to share not just a brief picture of a restaurant they went to for dinner, or a family gathering. In order to really connect we need to share deeper. I'm talking about sharing fears, hopes, dreams, future plans all the stuff that makes us who we are in a virtual environment. It's hard to feel comfortable opening that much of ourselves to the public (and we probably shouldn't).

This simple blog entry can't capture the gratitude I have for all the hard working venture capitalists that make our world better one company at a time. Hope you fine ladies and gents know that your tireless efforts don't go unnoticed.

Will Google win the RSS Feed Wars?

By [Mark Essel](#) | Published: March 29, 2009 | [Edit](#)

The short answer: yes, it probably will although it will have to share market with alltop and friendfeed amongst others.

The long answer:

There's a struggle going on right now between social media companies who are vying for your attention. Their corporate leaders are competing to leverage your attention into profit. While the financial path has yet to be revealed we can expect product promotions (contextual ads) and software sales (social games). The way humanity is communicating over the web is evolving as all languages do. Social media companies want that interaction to occur on their specific platforms. I envision a near future where a dominant open architecture social media will cover it's maintenance cost via network knowledge, business enhancement, and revolutionary design methods (natural language processing & [intelligent advertising](#)).

Tangent to and social media in their own right are [RSS feed](#) readers or aggregators. These are umbrella software platforms/websites which are designed to be the one place you go for your information on a regular basis. What they are trying to capitalize on is the fairly common method of browsing feeds from a single page, as opposed to visiting each of our favorite information sites.

A "short" list of the popular feed readers follows, most of these tools provide some additional utility to distinguish them.

- [Google Reader](#)

- [friendfeed](#)
- [Alltop](#)
- [twine](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)
- [Ning](#)
- [Attensa](#)
- [Bloglines](#)
- [feedlounge](#)
- [Gritwire](#)
- [NewsAlloy](#)
- [newsgator](#)
- [blogs.com](#)
- [NewsBeet](#)
- [Matoumba](#)
- [feedshow](#)
- [feedkiller](#)
- [voyage](#)
- [toluu](#)

Google Reader allows commenting, and can update you with alerts to changed streams or responses/comments on material you are following. Friendfeed integrates many other social tools into it's display and you can choose to follow many of your friends internet activities or have conversations. Alltop has several top level indexing pages ([check out my alltop](#)). The article preview page with mouse over is a wonderful utility.

Who has time to try out all the other feed readers? Once you find one that works it's easier to stick with it than to setup another account/reader.

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Thanks to all the folks at flickr who have shared their pictures with an attribution license allowing me to link back to their profiles. This enables me to fit visual metaphors to my varied post topics.