



Book Social Media Marketing

An Hour a Day

Dave Evans
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Recommendation

The “Social Web” – the weave of “Social Media” Internet sites – is the dominant environment favored by many young consumers, the place where they connect with one another. Contemporary marketing requires having a robust presence on the social Web, but its array of media choices can be confounding. The sites’ obscure names – Ning, Ping, Pluck, Plurk, Bebo, Orkut, Plaxo, Minggl – reveal little, and they seem distinctly unwelcoming to overt marketing and advertising. That means your company must handle its online promotion according to the social Web’s accepted customs and protocols. Plus, your program must have panache to engage network members. To promote effectively via the social Web, you need a knowledgeable guidebook. *BooksInShort* recommends this hands-on manual by social media marketing whiz Dave Evans. He expertly deciphers the social Web, and explains how to plan and implement a social media marketing campaign with a practical one-hour-a-day schedule. He even details what social Web marketers must not do. That’s a handy thing to know in the online jungle, where this insightful book can help you penetrate the social media marketing maze.

Take-Aways

- The “Social Web” represents the awesome “power of the collective.”
- “Social Media” marketing can create vast word-of-mouth advertising – its biggest benefit for marketers.
- “Netizens” – online community members – will talk about your company whether you are online or not, so you cannot ignore online media.
- Unlike traditional marketing, promoting your products and services online via social media does not involve interrupting – or irritating – an audience.
- You cannot control how people communicate back and forth about your products, service or firm, but you can influence it.
- How you present your online content is more important than what it offers.
- Effective social media marketing campaigns have firm business objectives and quantative achievement metrics.
- Companies often imitate each others’ successful social media marketing strategies.
- To use the social Web, listen to your customers, competitors and other commentators.
- Dishonest campaigns can turn netizens against you.

Summary

The “Social Web”

Learning about “Social Media” and developing a marketing plan to exploit online social networks, tools and applications can be a challenge for marketers. The field is new, and it offers very diverse promotional options and capabilities. Additionally, a social media promotional plan must incorporate a new, counterintuitive marketing

logic: You should not organize your marketing to generate impressions among audience members. They will see such tactics as interruptions.

“Based on the personal empowerment and liberation that the Internet offers, consumers are actively connecting with each other.”

Instead, work to influence the social Web’s citizens or “netizens” positively and convincingly. Then, theoretically, they will sway other people online in a felicitous cascade of word-of-mouth marketing. That’s the social network effect, which leads to another big challenge: failure to handle online marketing correctly can backfire easily. Any negative consequences will almost certainly go viral, so a flawed social media marketing program can work against your company and your product.

“In the process, they are either reinforcing marketing efforts or beating marketers at their own game by directly sharing their own experiences and thoughts on the Social Web.”

You have to get it right – and remaining passively on the sideline isn’t really an option. Your company’s lack of a social media presence is a negative statement in itself. People in online networks will converse – from 140-character “tweets” on Twitter to countless pages of personal blogs – about your products and services whether your company is participating actively or not. Thus, you must become a participant in the world of the social Web, but in the most intelligent, effective way by planning, developing and implementing the best possible social media marketing strategy. You stand to gain substantially from this effort, particularly in positive word-of-mouth advertising, including enthusiastic referrals from potentially millions of online users. The social Web represents the awesome “power of the collective.”

Defining the Terms

According to Wikipedia, the social Web is made up of “participatory online media where news, photos, videos and podcasts are made public via social media Web sites through submission. [Sites are] normally accompanied with a voting process to make media items become ‘popular’.” Wikipedia describes social media as a “many-to-many model, rooted in conversations” through various channels.

“The attraction of social media – as the name implies – has as much or more to do with how the content is connected and reinterpreted than it does the content itself.”

Your social media marketing campaign should incorporate individual elements from each of the social Web’s three separate arenas:

1. “Social platforms”

This category includes personal social networks such as MySpace; white-label social networks, online communities created by individual companies and other organizations; and wikis, which include collaborative Web sites, such as Wikipedia. Countless people already contributed more than “100 million hours” toward building this open, participatory online encyclopedia.

2. “Social content”

This includes blogs, microblogs, photo and video sharing, and audio podcast sites.

3. “Social interactions”

This category covers e-mail, short message service (SMS) or text-based messaging for mobile devices and other social feeds; calendar and event services; and status notices (for example, updating network members about an online account change). Such personalized feeds keep you posted on relevant data from the Internet.

Tips and Techniques

Your online content must be interesting, intriguing and involving, but how you present it matters even more than what it offers. Social network members take a proprietary interest in the groups they join. If you violate their accepted protocols, they will quickly vanquish you. If you are a newcomer, learn each site’s customs and rules before you become active. A vast number of channels have evolved to create a viable social media presence, giving new social Web marketers many factors to consider. To get your campaign going, start with these social media marketing guidelines and tools:

- **Use the “social feedback cycle”** – Your marketing must be congruent with the social media feedback cycle – the way consumers use word of mouth to spread recommendations and advice to other potential customers. You must offer information that fulfills consumers’ belief that they can confirm anything valid that they “hear, read or find on TV, radio, or in a magazine or newspaper” on the Web.
- **Make sure your “touchpoints” work well** – Tend your “touchpoint map,” all the instances (in the store, on the phone, during a service call) where customers and prospects have direct contact with your firm. If these touchpoints are not positive experiences for the consumer, your social media marketing will be counterproductive.
- **Link marketing and operations** – Social media marketing should compliment, not replace, your traditional promotional activities, and should reflect the way you do business. As with any marketing plan, set firm objectives for each online endeavor. Members use the social Web to converse back and forth on every subject, including your company’s products and services. You can have great Web outreach, but if you don’t back it up with great commercial offerings, netizens will quickly turn against you. Don’t market on the social Web unless you offer customers a fully rewarding experience.
- **Combine outreach and listening** – For marketers, the social Web involves conducting two basic activities: outreach (“blogging, photo and video sharing, and podcasts”) and listening (online customer forums and microblogs).
- **Mine the social Web for market intelligence** – The social Web is an outstanding marketing research methodology (tweet, anyone?). To benefit, just get in the loop. Companies that effectively exploit the social Web pay close attention to what others say about them and their products online. They also monitor conversations about their competitors. Use the invaluable market intelligence the social Web provides to improve your company and its products.
- **Be transparent** – The greatest mistake you can make on the social Web is to try to deceive online users about your identity or purpose. Never join an online discussion about your company and attempt to pass yourself off as a disinterested party. Never pay someone who is supposedly independent of your company

to blog or comment favorably about it. Sooner or later, you and your paid puppet will get caught, with dire online ramifications. In 2005, Wal-Mart made this mistake with a “fake-blog campaign” entitled “Wal-Marting Across America.”

- **Take a piggyback ride** – Let established social media marketing firms help you promote your products online. Web companies, such as friend2friend, which used Facebook and MySpace for its ProductPulse promotion, can help you establish a notable presence on the social Web. SocialVibe is also a helpful online marketing application.
- **Watch the competition** – Keeping an eye on your rivals is remarkably easy on the social Web. Just register for their promotional e-mails, newsletters and news feeds.
- **Measure your results** – The results of your online promotional activities are minutely measurable. You can evaluate content (online conversations), relevance (how important the conversations are to you) and impact (net benefits of your campaign activities). The available tools include Techrigy, DIYDashboard and BlogPulse, which let you track the “specific words or phrases, like your company’s name...within the blogosphere.”
- **Develop prospect lists** – Social networks with a business flavor include LinkedIn and Jigsaw. Use these sites’ data-search functions to develop great B2B prospect lists.
- **Build a white-label social platform** – The social Web hinges on forming communities. Your company can develop its own community online, such as a customer support forum (great for controlling tech support costs). A “white label solution,” like Lithium, allows you to affix your brand as if it were your proprietary service. It is immediate, but may not be as customizable as you wish. With the right software, your firm can, in effect, create its own MySpace.
- **Use photo and video sharing websites** – YouTube, Photobucket, Flickr and similar Web sites are hugely popular on the social Web. You can adopt a traditional marketing approach and purchase banner ads next to certain types of heavily viewed photos and videos. However, new filters and blocking devices that keep out promotional messages are making such content passé on the social Web. Instead, develop and upload videos and photos that your customers will come looking for, like instructions on how to use your products.
- **Join the blogosphere** – Developing and publishing a blog is an easy way to communicate information about your products. Because a blog establishes an open-ended two-way communication channel, your customers can use it to tell you their concerns.
- **Fit your message into 140 characters, but do it often** – Marketers can use microblogs like Twitter to chat with consumers, send out a stream of information and monitor marketplace activity. A microblog is a real-time application that is ideal for both outreach and listening.
- **Prepare podcasts** – The content of a podcast can be audio or video, or both. Studies show that podcast advertising is very effective. Subscribers enjoy podcasting because it gives them control when they access your content. Thus, your podcasts empower such users, enhancing their engagement.
- **Mind your evangelists** – Treat the members of your social media network extremely well. Pay attention to them, include them in special feeds and get them excited about your company and its products. Special treatment can help transform some of them into evangelists who will actively promote your company to their social network contacts.
- **Showcase your events** – Use social media applications like Eventful and Upcoming to plan, schedule and publicize your company’s special events.
- **Gather the right people** – Quality employees make all the difference. Your younger employees probably belong to social media sites such as Facebook or MySpace. Get them to help you develop and maintain an active presence on the social Web. Recruit the most promising young people to work for your firm and they’ll get positive conversations humming online.
- **Always underpromise** – When you present your social marketing plan to your company’s executives, be conservative. While the social Web is an awesome entity, it can be confusing, even off-putting, to those who do not regularly work with it. Be conscious of this when you seek approval for your marketing plan. You will be better off if you underpromise but overdeliver.

Brave New World

Because the social Web is new and has unique (although not always explicit) customs and rules, it can be a daunting promotional environment. If you violate its protocol by being too overtly pushy, irate users will punish you quickly.

“My hope is that you’ll find this book useful, if only as a guide to help your clients understand the importance of your counsel on the critical issues of participation, transparency and quantitative measurement. With those three right, the rest of the pieces tend to fall into place.”

To proceed with your marketing efforts, carefully watch and learn from the communities that are already marketing online. Benefit directly from their activities and achievements. Do what they do, but avoid their mistakes. The social Web includes startlingly innovative media, with fascinating developments almost daily, but the environment is in such flux that making a mistake is easy.

“Social media...it’s about smaller numbers, added up, rather than larger numbers done all at once.”

Start slowly. Ask visitors to your Web site to rank, review or recommend relevant items. Don’t worry about a few bad reviews. They lend credence to the good ones. Make site registration a prerequisite for commenting. Then, construct a simple customer forum or blog. These initiatives put you on the path to building your own online community – the basis of establishing a presence on the social Web.

“This is an exciting time and opportunity is everywhere. Be a part of it.”

Before you take the plunge, study the comprehensive information that is already online about social media marketing strategies and activities. Pay attention to the methods other firms are using to achieve their business goals online. After all, the social Web depends on information sharing. Investigate the online marketing counsel available from advisory Web sites by typing “social media marketing” into your search engine. You will get more than 200 million hits. Sometimes, the best way to build a better online mousetrap is simply to copy what others have already done.

About the Author

Dave Evans formerly worked on NASA’s Voyager deep space exploration program. He founded Digital Voodoo consulting, has a column on ClickZ, and sits on advisory boards for the Word of Mouth Marketing Association and ad:tech.