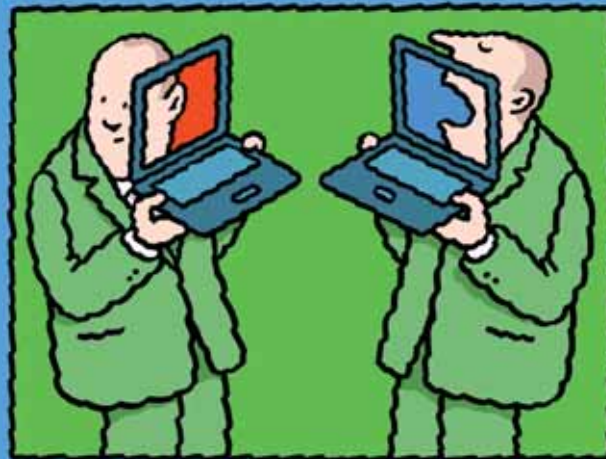
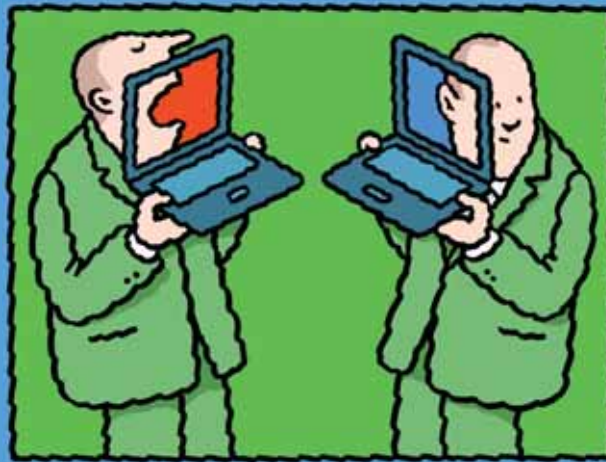


# LET'S TALK

## Social Media for Small Business



Written by John Jantsch of *Duct Tape Marketing*

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### A note from the sponsor...

When used properly, social media can be a great tool to help your business reach untapped, potential customers and stay connected to current ones. But there are a few things you'll need to know to help you get the most out of social media as well as your online presence in its entirety. Microsoft Office Live Small Business sponsored the creation of this eBook in an effort to help break social media down into easy-to-understand pieces, so you can make sense of and make use of this powerful resource in a way that grows your business. Let's talk.



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## What is Social Media?

Well, that's a good question, and the complete answer could fill pages without really delivering the clarity that a small business marketer might desire.

So here's the simple definition for the purpose of this document. Social media is the use of technology combined with social interaction to create or co-create value.

In a way, the definition doesn't really matter nearly as much as the application and changing role of marketing in a social media world.

Social media—and by that I'm lumping together blogs, RSS, social search, social networks, and bookmarking—presents the marketer with a rich set of new tools to help in the effort to generate new business.

## Why does it matter?

It used to be all you needed to be on the Web was a Web site. Today you need to think and act in terms of a total Web presence. And that means if you're not participating in social media, you're not really online.

## What's changed?

Well, c'mon, just about everything, right?

If you studied marketing in the textbook world, you likely covered the 4 Ps of marketing: you simply created a **Product**, figured out how to **Price** it, got it **Placed** in the market, and **Promoted** the heck out it.

Today's approach to marketing, the approach infused with social media, leans much more heavily on the 4 Cs of marketing. Tons of relevant, education-based, and perhaps user-generated **Content** that is filtered, aggregated, and delivered in a **Context** that makes it useful for people who are starving to make **Connections** with people, products, and brands they can build a **Community** around.

Content + Context + Connections + Community = Social Media Marketing

## The Hierarchy of Social Marketing

I think one of the things small business marketers struggle with concerning the entire topic of social marketing is trying to jump into the next, new thing without enough analysis of what they should focus on. This is an important, evolving, and essential area of marketing for small businesses, but there's a hierarchy to it. In other words, there is a logical progression of utilization that comes about much like Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Nature.

As Maslow theorized, the ultimate potential of your marketing or human self-actualization cannot be achieved until the most basic human psychological needs such as breathing, eating, and sleeping are first met. In fact, safety, love, and esteem all come before transcendence. Now, before I edge too close to the deep end here, I'm simply comparing what I think is a bit like progressing up the social marketing hierarchy.

I recommend small business owners look at the following progression or hierarchy as they move deeper into social marketing tactics. So, jump in, but do it in this order and don't move on until you have the basics of each stage down and working for you.

- 1) **Blogging** – the foundation of the pyramid – read blogs, comment on blogs, and then blog. This is the doorway to all other social marketing.
- 2) **RSS** – Aggregate and filter content around subjects, and use RSS technology as a tool to help you repurpose, republish, and create content.
- 3) **Social Search** – Often ignored in this discussion but I think it's become very important for small business owners. By participating, you can stimulate and manage your reputation here.
- 4) **Social Bookmarking** – Tagging content and participating in social bookmarking communities can be a great way to open up more channels to your business. It can also generate extra search traffic, but it takes work.
- 5) **Social Networks** – Branching out to take advantage of the potential prospects you might find on sites like Facebook or MySpace will frustrate—at least as a business tool—if you don't have many of the above needs met. These networks take time to understand and thrive on ideas and content. You've got to have much to share if you wish to build a business case.
- 6) **Micro** – I've lumped some of the more experimental social tools into the edgy trend of micro: social, real-time communication that will likely only confuse most small business

owners. The confusion is not because they can't figure out how to make them work, it's just not obvious why they should spend the time. I believe Maslow suggested that self-actualization is a place most might never reach. In social marketing terms, [Twitter](#), [Plurk](#), and [FriendFeed](#) might be some sort of sick transcendence.



## CASE STUDY

### They don't use social media in my industry



Many small business owners still think they can take a pass on the power of online social media tools, particularly if they reside in seemingly low-tech industries like plumbing, fishing, or lawyering. I want to share a quick interview I had with Jason Brown, 23-year-old cofounder of [Brown Lures](#). That's right, they sell fishing lures to guys and gals that probably don't call hanging out at Web 2.0 conferences a good time. (I'm just guessing on that though.)

Brown credits his blog with changing the way people find him. He created a podcast that gives him great "fishing stories" and loyalty from guides up and down the Gulf Coast. He uses RSS and content tagging to automatically produce fresh blog content, and e-mail marketing to blow his competition away at trade shows.

Using social media in industries that are still slow to adopt it is the killer competitive advantage.

In Brown's words:

*"We have been running waiting lists for products for about a year now, and no one has any clue how we are doing it without spending big advertising money. I love this stuff..."*

Alas, I can still hear the cries from the cynics—*We don't need no stinkin' social media, we just need more sales.*

## THE NEW TOOLBOX

### Blogging – The front door to social media



As proposed in the hierarchy of social media on page 4, for most small businesses blogging is the first step into the world of social media. It is the best way to take advantage of a set of powerful tools while also gaining some of the most immediate return on time invested.

#### What is a blog?

In simplest terms, a blog is software that allows anyone who can type to post content to a Web site or blog home page. The content is generally displayed much like a journal might be written, in chronological fashion.

This content can be anything the author chooses to write or *post*, as it is referred to in blogging terms.

Now, on the surface what this means is that anyone can update a Web site that has this blogging software installed, and that's a great thing. Web sites benefit from change and blogs make it easy to change, update, and add content.

But, there's much more.

Blog software also allows:

- Readers of the blog pages to make comments and add their own content.
- Readers of the blog to subscribe to the content so that they are automatically notified whenever the content is updated.
- Search engines to receive notice or pings whenever the content is updated.

All of the above items happen automatically once the software is configured.

Blogging is such a great tool because it allows you to more easily accomplish many of the marketing objectives today's small businesses must address.

A blog is your ticket to creating:

- Content
- Context
- Connections
- Community

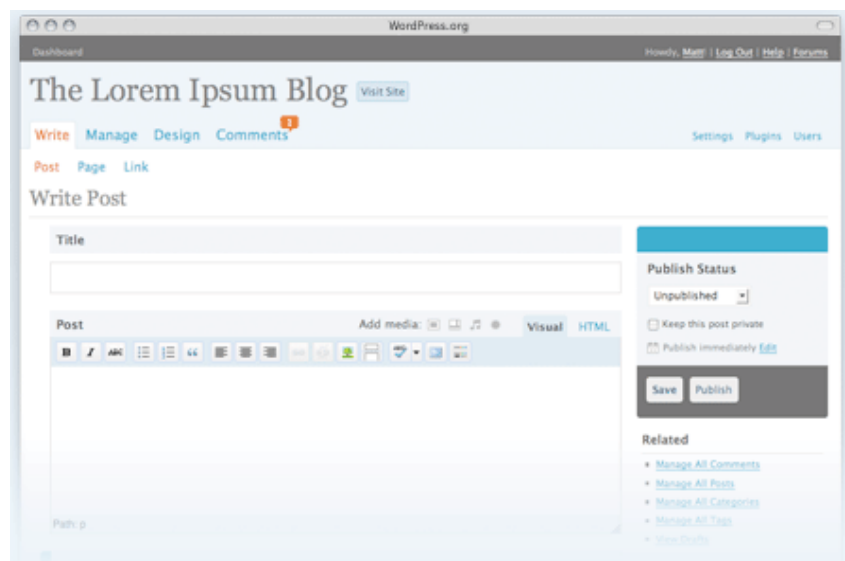
And if that isn't enough, know this—**search engines love blogs!** If for no other reason, consider creating and frequently posting relevant, keyword-rich content to a blog, hosted on your domain, because it will dramatically improve your chances of ranking well in the search engines.

### The best way to start blogging

If this document has convinced you to jump in and start blogging, let me advise you that the best way to start is not to start. I know that's a little counterintuitive so let me explain.

Here's the three-step process for getting started. Note that step 3 is to start blogging.

- 1) Monitor a group of relevant blogs.** Use a blog search engine and RSS reader to locate and subscribe to a dozen or so relevant blogs. You should evaluate blogs in your industry, competitors, experts, and so on to learn how people blog, what they write about, and how they engage their readers.
- 2) Comment on a group of relevant blogs.** Visit some of your chosen blogs, add relevant comments, and engage in the conversation going on inside these blogs. This, by the way, is an important part of online networking and may help get your blog noticed down the road.
- 3) Create your own blog and start posting content.** Only after you've engaged in steps 1 and 2 for a couple weeks do I advise entering the blogging pool.





## Blogging Software Primer

As mentioned previously, blogs are run by software, so one of your first chores is to determine what software you want to use and get it set up.

A quick search for blog software will turn up dozens of options, but we are going to focus on just a few choices:

[Windows Live Spaces](#) is a free tool that allows you to set up a blog you can easily add to your Office Live Small Business Web site.

[WordPress.org](#) offers a free, open source blogging tool you download, configure, and upload to your Web host.

[WordPress.com](#) is a hosted version of the WordPress software that allows you to easily create a blog hosted by WordPress.

[TypePad.com](#) is another hosted service with many features and a simple start-up process.

## Blogging Best Practices

The following tips will help you get the most from your new blogging practice.

**Read blogs.** You should continue to subscribe to and read blogs even after you start your own blog. This is a great way to get inspiration and ideas when you feel writer's block coming on.

**Post often.** In order to get the proper momentum and build some reader loyalty, commit to posting between three to five times a week. These don't have to be 1,000-word articles, you can simply point out other posts, answer questions, or make a short observation. The key is to develop the habit.

**Network.** Continue to network with other bloggers and make comments. This is an important aspect of building your own readership. Don't post spam. Make relevant and useful comments and you will begin to see some traffic and links coming back to your blog.

**Encourage community.** Write in a way that encourages comments. Ask for readers' opinions, ask questions, and question trends—these are all effective ways to engage your readers and invite them in.

**Link out.** Make sure that you are linking out to lots of relevant content and other blogs.

## How to get more blog readers

**Network and link out.** Making relevant comments on other blogs and participating in forums, social networks, and portals is a great way to start exposing your blog content to others. Many bloggers pay very close attention to other blogs that link to their content and may return the link.

**Submit to RSS and blog directories.** There are a number of search engines that specifically index blog content. It's an important step to submit your blog or your blog's RSS feed to many of these directories to make it easier for people to find your content.

**Make it easy to subscribe.** Clearly giving your reader a way to subscribe to your blog's RSS feed has become a very expected practice. Use a tool like [AddThis](#) to make it a one-step process.



**Get Sociable.** Blog content is just begging to be passed around to other blogs and social bookmarking and networking sites. Make it a one-step process for social media types to pass your content via e-mail or by bookmarking it on sites like Facebook by using a blog plug-in such as [Get Sociable](#).

## How to get more blog comments

One of the best reasons to blog is to open up an interaction channel with your customers, prospects, and contacts. The fact that your readers can comment and add relevant content to your site via blog comments is a major breakthrough in the communication process. It's why everyone is talking about social media these days. Blog commenting was one of the first mass one-to-one conversation starters and made people hungry for even more advanced forms of social interaction.

Active commenting is one of the first signs a blog has some real life—with it comes more readers, so put in the work it takes to grow this important tool.

Small business owners can easily take advantage of this tool now that so many people know what it is and know how to interact. Do a few effective things to stimulate this interaction and draw more conversation.

- 1) Ask for comments.** Sometimes just creating a post and inviting your readers to add comments can be just what you need to get them flowing. Commenting is a habit you need to help build in your readership.
- 2) Ask questions and seek opinions.** From time to time, ask your readers what they think of something, what they have done that works, or how they have addressed a particularly challenging situation. You don't need to have all the answers.
- 3) Comment on comments.** When readers comment, you can encourage additional conversation by responding and showing that comments are welcome—even if the comment calls something you said into question. I'm guilty of ignoring this far too often—I'll get better, I swear!
- 4) Show some humanness.** No matter what your blog topic is, readers like to know that the author is a human being. It's okay to let that show and to add personal thoughts. Only you can determine how far to go with this, but I know that your readers will connect the more they know your story.
- 5) Stir the pot from time to time.** You don't have to be a celebrity gossip blogger to stir up a little controversy. Often some of my best interactions come from topics people are decidedly passionate about.
- 6) Make comment participation a game.** Keep score and reward your most active commentators.
- 7) Make sure commenting is easy.** Publish your comment feed and consider adding a Subscribe to Comments plug-in so that people are notified when someone else comments on a post they are active on.

## **Multi-author blogging as a referral tool**

Creating a blog and then recruiting a group of authors who have strong strategic referral partner potential is a killer local marketing idea. Every time I mention this tip in small business workshops the light bulb goes on for one or two marketing-focused owners. Just going out and recruiting potential strategic referral partners with this approach will get you much further than the typical “hey, send me some business” pitch.

Blog networks are all over it, but few local businesses are taking advantage of this play. If the right referral partners got together and contributed the occasional post to a blog focused on a local target market, they would own the search terms for their town and generate lots of leads for each other. Think about the power of a plumber, electrician, lawn service, and heating and air company creating a local blogsite aimed at providing tips for local homeowners. That group would dominate the local home repair searches that have become the norm for homeowners frustrated with trying to find good help. There really isn’t any reason an insurance, legal, accounting, marketing, and management team couldn’t come together and blog about local business.

The power of this as a formal referral group is enormous. This group could eventually start putting together all-day workshops and seminars based on the multi-author blog format, much like a magazine.

## Blogging Customer Stories



There are so many good reasons for small businesses to use blogging as an essential marketing and communications tool that I can only hope my occasional examples turn the light bulbs on for those who still don't yet see the value.

[Lincoln Sign Company](#) in Lincoln, New Hampshire, is a company that makes and installs all manner of custom signs, and not exactly the first kind of business you think of when you think Web 2.0. Lincoln Sign has been blogging for several years and is a great model for what a small business can do with this tool.

One of the things they recently initiated was a way to use the blog as a way to tell the complete story of a sign as it is being made in their shop.

*Our new strategy can be summed up as follows; "We are not using our blog to sell signs, we are using our blog to sell the EXPERIENCE of getting a sign."*

*As we create a sign in-house, we blog about it throughout the process, and it enables us to interact with our customers in a new way. We also use it as a selling point.*

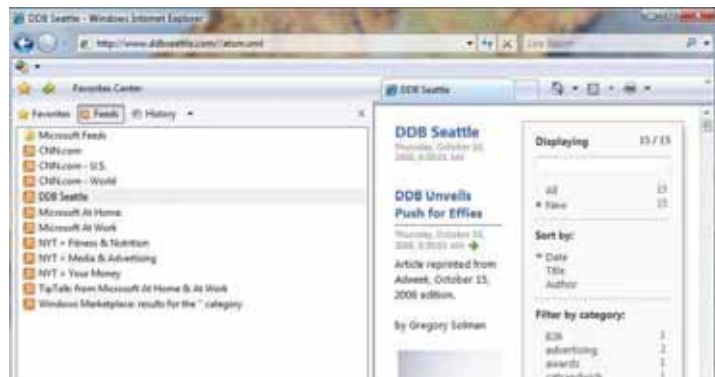
*At the end, you get more than a sign, you get a sign AND the story of how that sign was made.*

*We have also just started providing our customers with "Memory Boxes." Basically paint samples, scrap materials, handwritten notes, etc. The flotsam and jetsam of making a sign.*

This is such a smart way to use content as a marketing strategy. They get great buy-in from the customer as to the value of the process (my guess is they aren't the cheapest around), they create a story that can be used over and over again, and they automatically create Web content that brings them search engine traffic.

## RSS

I am a bit of a nerd when it comes to RSS technology. I just get really excited about all the things you can do to automate your learning and marketing, and gain access to filtered content any place you want it.



I don't think small business folks can hear this enough: Don't get too concerned about what it is or how it works—it's just plumbing—get excited about what you can do with it.

Even if you have no clue what RSS is, there's a good chance you've consumed an RSS feed one way or another by way of blog content. Every blog comes equipped with the programming to write to RSS feeds. This can be in the form of a main blog feed, category-specific feed, or even a comment feed.

RSS technology is everywhere now, and it is the secret to allowing you to filter through the flood of information you need to be tracking just to stay competitive. And, there's more.

In the course of a day, I use RSS to check out what's being said about Duct Tape Marketing, post content that I bookmark to Web pages, update event calendars, publish blog snippets to three other Web sites, monitor several industries, keep tabs on projects, send personalized data to customers, update product pages, track the weather where my kids live, discover new music, update my extended family on happenings and photos, find vegetarian recipes, and keep track of MLB. That's just on a slow day. Once the routines are put in place, much of the blur of info processing and publishing is done automatically.

### **A calendar list of events feed on your Web site**

If you've ever wanted to easily publish a schedule of upcoming events, deadlines, or even birthdays as a dynamic list rather than a calendar-style page, here's an RSS trick for you to use. (This can be done on a public or private page.)

- 1) Create a free shareable calendar with Windows Live Calendar or another calendar application and slug in all the dates on the calendar.
- 2) Share your calendar to create an RSS feed for your calendar—take this URL and create a free [Feedburner](#) account.
- 3) Optimize the feed using the Event Feed option from Feedburner.
- 4) Publish the feed using Feedburner's BuzzBoost option—lots of options for display.
- 5) Paste the code Feedburner produces for you on the page you would like your list to show.

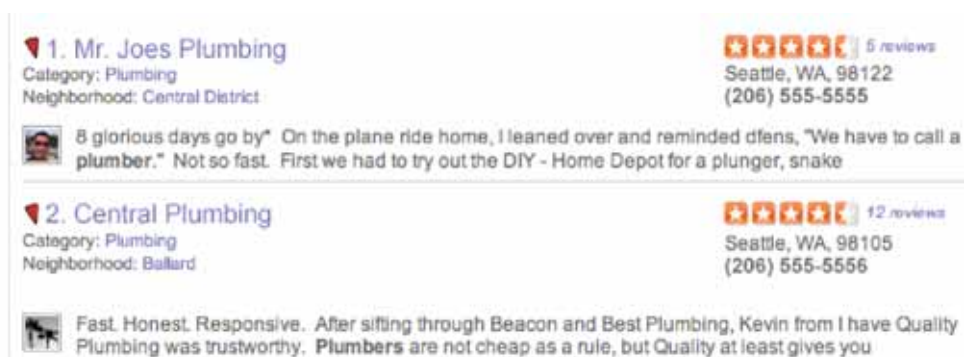
Using this formula produces a dynamically changing list of events that will run from the first up to the last, automatically drops events that have passed, and automatically brings in future events per your settings. Now, anyone with access to a Web browser and your calendar account can update and edit your events list.

## Social search

One of my favorite small business search topics is something called *social search*. A social search engine is one that lists small businesses and allows people to rate and review them.

I guess we can call these types of sites *directories*, but what was clear from the discussion is that people aren't really looking for directories; they are looking for answers, recommendations, and user experiences. Social sites ask members and visitors to rate their experience, good and bad, with a business and post that information for others to view. Depending upon who you listen to, actual purchases made over the Web only make up about 3% of all commerce, but buying decisions are made every day through research on the Web.

Prospects are turning to sites like [Insider Pages](#) to find sources for everything from plumbers to piano tuners in almost every community in America. Highly rated small businesses appearing on social sites are starting to get noticed! This is a great new medium. There is no cost involved and the benefits far outweigh the little bit of work you may put in to start building your online reputation. Smart small businesses are starting to encourage online reviews. (Merely point out to your happy customers that they might want to share the love.) Other businesses are printing and using their online reviews offline. Businesses with the most ratings and reviews seem to do the best. Coupons and offers are a great way to get noticed too!



You need to start exploring this avenue now, if for no other reason than to manage your online reputation. Some businesses fear the impact of a negative review. I mean, you can't make every customer happy, right? Most of the social directories have processes in place to fight spam and

competitive revenge-type reviews, but nothing works like a good offense. Make sure you are building reviews from happy clients. Send offline customers online and teach them how to use a site like Judy's Book.

Some of the more popular social/local directories include:

[Craigslist](#)

[Judy's Book](#)

[Insider Pages](#)

[SmallTown](#)

[Yelp](#)

## Social bookmarking

This is a great little trick for creating "In the News" pages or for gathering company or industry mentions to repurpose to a Web site. I use it to post news mentions I get and mentions of my book from around the Internet, but you could easily use this technique to create custom content pages for search purposes, or even create highly personalized newspapers for customers and prospects. Once you get this set up, anyone surfing the Web for you can build these highly personalized pages.

- 1) Create a free [Delicious](#) account (this is a bookmarking service that allows you to tag any page with a category and then share this publicly if you like).
- 2) Start surfing the Web for content and tagging it on Delicious.
- 3) Once you do this, your tag can be republished as an RSS feed. Anything you tag, such as *small business* for example, could be republished to any Web page you like.
- 4) Create a free Feedburner account and use your tagged Delicious RSS feed in BuzzBoost to create the HTML code you need for your Web page.

## Social networks

[Facebook](#) is certainly one of the most widely recognized names in what is called *social networks*. Social networks allow people to join, friend members, or invite others to join and then share and exchange information.

The tools that run social networks have some tremendous business applications when you understand what's behind them.

Networking has always been an important marketing skill and online networking bares some similarities with a set of power tools. A lot has been publicized about social networks used by teens and dating services, but it's the application of the tools that you need to focus on to understand the business value of participating in a network like Facebook.



## The profile



Your *profile* is the starting point for Facebook. Think of it as your front door. It's very important that your front door on Facebook be in sync with the front door of your brand. Just because you can put all kinds of cute things on your Facebook profile, you still must ask yourself what makes sense in terms of your business and your business objectives. It's common sense really, but it's easy to take your eye off the ball with all the toys and applications available once you learn how to navigate Facebook.

Create a profile that helps tell your business story and then enhance it with tools and applications that allow you to branch out and connect with like-minded individuals.

## Friends

Friends in the world of Facebook are simply people that are also members who grant you permission to view their profile and contact them directly. This is really at the heart of the networking aspect of Facebook. Without any friends your Facebook efforts won't be as useful.

The first step is to connect with people who already know you and then you can start to connect with friends of friends and other recognized thought leaders in your industry.

Don't forget to send friend requests to journalists in your industry as well.

Once someone accepts a friend request, you can begin to share information with them and view the information they make available. A word of warning here: The Facebook culture, as is the case in many social network environments, frowns on direct promotion. The connections you make should be much more about networking and building trust.



## Facebook groups

Anyone who joins Facebook can also create his or her own *group* and invite others to join a group. It is very common for people to start groups around a specific industry or expertise.

## Blog and ping Facebook-style

When blogging first began, the idea of writing a blog post and then pinging the RSS and blog directories to notify them of the update was standard operating procedure. The fact is, it still is, but it has become automated by services like Feedburner.

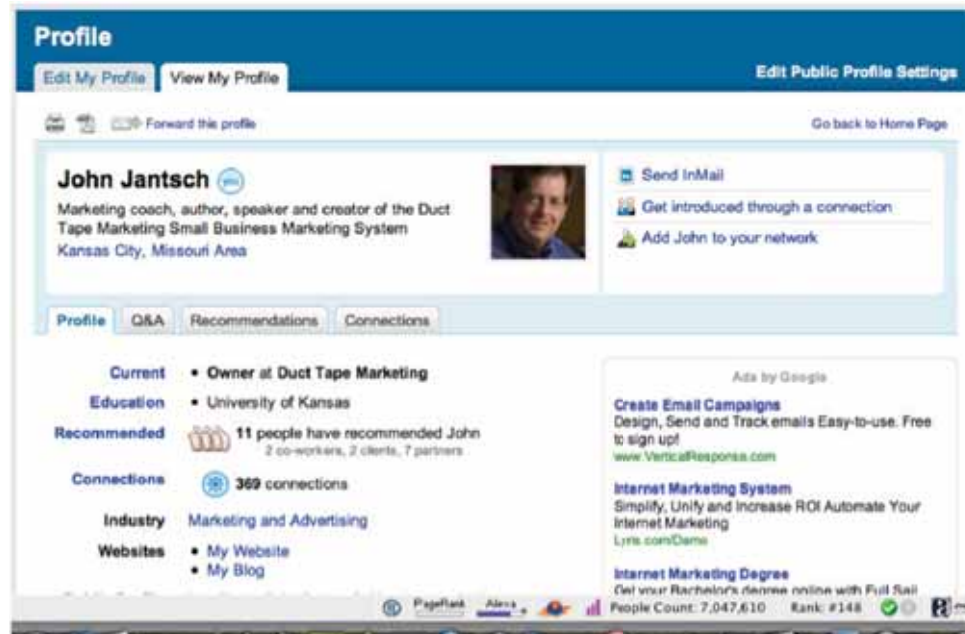
Now that social networks like Facebook have begun to enter the small business mainstream, users are looking for practical ways to extend their conversations and open up new access points through the many features and functions available. Part of the trouble with this is that it can be a bit overwhelming. The cool thing about Facebook is that it can do so much. However, lots of choices can also lead to paralysis for the newcomer.

One very simple and powerful way to get more mileage out of your Facebook presence is to *note* and *tag* (the blog and ping equivalent). There is a default Facebook application simply called Notes that is terribly underutilized. The Notes application allows you to write a note. There's nothing too sexy about that, right? Here's where I think it gets interesting. You can also automatically create notes using any RSS feed. So, if you have a blog (please tell me you do) you can republish your blog content right into your Facebook Notes application. (Of course you can also add a Delicious feed or a custom RSS news feed of any sort.) This does several things. You get automatic content creation for your new outreach and your profile gets updated with every new blog post or note. In addition, Facebook friends can comment on the notes much as they might on your regular blog posts.

One of the core marketing strategic objectives of social networks is to expand your reach and open up new avenues of networking. Adding tagging to the above Notes strategy really helps this objective along. Once you post a note you can tag anyone on your friend list in the note. This causes them to get a notification that they were tagged in a note and it posts the fact that they were tagged into their profile for all their Facebook friends to see. Now, first the disclaimer: Don't use this as a way to spam your friend list. Write legitimate blog posts and notes that have some relevant or direct mention of your friends and then tag them. Pointing to their blog posts or media mentions and writing a note is a fine use of this tactic. (Tagging photos and videos in this manner has the same impact.)

Of course one of the keys to making this work is that you have people in your network that you have reason to tag in a blog post or note. Reach out to journalists, authors, speakers, and other industry and high-profile folks and send them friend requests so that you can utilize this powerful feature. They won't all accept, but many will and if you then start utilizing this practice in a sincere and meaningful way, you will find that your network will begin to respond to your communications. If you've been holding back because you didn't know why you would do this, now you do.

## LinkedIn for connectin



[LinkedIn](#) is often billed as the largest network of business professionals. It certainly has a much more focused business participation than many social networks and is a great place to network and do research on specific organizations and opportunities.

Probably the biggest difference between Facebook and LinkedIn is the focus on introductions. Ingrained in the LinkedIn culture is the ability to see who knows who and who can make an introduction.

As is the case with any social network, it's important that you take a little time and get to know the culture and the accepted norms. This is often done by lurking a bit. Use the time to build your profile and your network of current friends so you can see firsthand some examples of how people connect and reach out on your chosen network. From there you can begin to contribute and seek out connections with demonstrated leaders within the network.

For the business professional, there are some pretty good reasons to make LinkedIn a part of your overall social media outreach:

- 1) Find clients, help, and deals.** For some industries, LinkedIn is a great place to locate prospects and network partners. Many individuals openly promote relationships and deals that they are in the market for.
- 2) Build up buzz.** Once you've established a following within LinkedIn you can begin to promote specific happenings around your organization.
- 3) Hire professionals.** Often people think of social networks only in terms of making marketing connections. LinkedIn has become a great place to network and find great associates, partners, and vendors.
- 4) Get feedback and research.** One of the most effective ways to tap your newly built social networks is to use them as a resource for research and feedback. Simply putting questions out to your group is a great way to get a feel for areas where you want input.

## LinkedIn profile

The *profile* section of LinkedIn is a great place to showcase what you're all about. Make sure you have a great photo and descriptive information about yourself and your organization. This is an ad for connecting. Reach out to current friends and connections and get a few recommendations as these appear in your profile.

## LinkedIn groups

LinkedIn allows you to create *groups* and this can be a great way to pull together like-minded folks with an aim toward networking more formally. This can function a bit like a networking club might in the physical world.

## LinkedIn Q & A

For my money, this is one of the real powers of LinkedIn. Posing questions to your network and the at-large community is a powerful way to get some of your core messages across. You can also use this feature to get feedback on specific issues or even potential blog posts.

## Micro

### Using Twitter for business—What is it?

In simplest terms, Twitter is a free service that allows anyone to say anything to anybody in 140 characters or less—it's the "what are you doing right now" kind of micro-blogging that permeates online social communication.

So, now the question is—is that all? Well, no, not exactly. While many use it to tell no one in particular what they had for lunch, millions lean on Twitter pretty hard as a way to network and communicate with contacts new and old. Twitter is outfitted, like most social media tools, with the ability to subscribe, share, friend, or follow as many Twitter feeds as you like. In addition, developers are swiftly creating tools that allow users to bend and twist the feeds in creative ways. More on that shortly.

### How do I use it?

First thing, sign up for an account. It's very painless—<http://twitter.com/account/create>

Your next stop should be the Twitter help guide—<http://help.twitter.com/index.php?pg=kb.book&id=1>. This is where you get all of your basic how-to questions answered. Read it, it will save you some time and anguish.

Once you create an account, you will be given a home page and a profile page—e.g., my profile is <http://twitter.com/ducttape>. So my Twitter handle is @ducttape. From these pages you can find other Twitter streams to follow, post your own messages, and even watch the entire public stream of comments flow by. (I don't recommend that unless you are really, really bored.)



It's a good idea if you are going to jump into social media sites that allow you to build profiles to create a 100 x 100 pixel image, or *avatar* as they are called, to use on your profile and often with your activity.

### Why would I use it?

Now that is the real question, isn't it? Many people look at Twitter on the surface and conclude that it's just one big waste of time. I can't say I disagree completely, but like all social media and marketing tactics, before you can determine if something makes sense, you need to analyze your objectives. So, instead of asking why you would use it, ask how it might help you achieve some other already stated objectives.

- Would you like a way to connect and network with others in your industry or others who share your views? *It's a good a tool for that.*
- Would you like a way to get instant access to what's being said, this minute, about your organization, people, products, or brand? *It's a good tool for that.*
- Would you like a steady stream of ideas, content, links, resources, and tips focused on your area of expertise or interest? *It's a good tool for that.*
- Would you like to monitor what's being said about your customers to help them protect their brands? *It's a good tool for that.*
- Would you like to extend the reach of your thought leadership—blog posts and other content? *It can be a good tool for that.*
- Would you like to promote your products and services directly to a target audience? *Not such a good tool for that.*

Before you really jump into a service like Twitter, it's important that you identify at least, and initially only, one objective from the list above and focus your efforts on learning how to use the tool to that end.



## Who do I follow?

In Twitter terms, *following* someone simply means that their posts, or *tweets* as they are called, show up on your home page (or text messages via the mobile phone option.)

To make Twitter more useful for many of the objectives above, you need to follow others and begin to have others follow you. Some people take very aggressive and often time-consuming leaps into this and try to follow and be followed by everyone on Twitter. Again, back to the objectives, most often quality over quantity is best.

While you can upload your current contacts (a good place to start) and search for people you know on Twitter, I would suggest that you take a look at two sites that will help you locate people with focused interest.

**Twellow**, <http://www.twellow.com/>, is like a Twitter phone directory that sorts people by industry. This can be a great way to find people in your industry.

Another directory can be found here: <http://twitterpacks.pbwiki.com/>. The nice thing about **TwitterPacks** is that you can also add your Twitter links to their directory if you aren't afraid to edit a Wiki.

## What do I say?

Another tough question. Whatever your answer, it needs to be 140 characters or less. So, let's go back to the objectives, shall we?

If, for instance you want some immediate feedback on things, you may choose to pose some questions. This often stimulates conversation but it can also do a great deal in terms of helping you make a decision—a bit like a poll. I have received some great ideas for blog content and often cross-post a response or two from Twitter in a blog post.

If you want to promote an event or post an idea don't simply link to it, add a twist, ask if people have any thoughts, pose an interesting thought.

To post your own tweets you can simply visit the Twitter home page, but you might also consider these tools:

**Twitterrific**: <http://iconfactory.com/software/twitterrific/>

**Twirl**: <http://www.twirl.org/>

## Watching

One of the most important and frequently underutilized objectives for Twitter is that it serves as a way to monitor your brand and reputation. Anytime anything is being said about your company, products, people, or services you can track it and respond instantly. You can also use a set of

readily available tools to track what's being said about any search term you like. This is another way to find people with shared interests.

**Twitter Search:** <http://search.twitter.com/>. This little tool allows you to monitor anything you can search. I use it to see what's being said back to me @ducttape and then do searches like "duct tape marketing" or "john jantsch"—now for some this may feel a little vain, but this is a great way to stay in touch and even network with folks who have an interest in your products and services.

Some large organizations such as **Dell** use Twitter very effectively to communicate with customers—happy and sad alike. This has become a major customer communication tool for them because they can respond immediately.

Lastly, Twitter search allows you to create RSS feeds from your search results so you can have them sent directly to your RSS reader or you can republish a stream of content on your Web site or blog and add the collective Twitterverse to your content creation.

## In the end

As you can see, when technology is leveraged to facilitate and enhance social interaction, a great deal of value can be created. But tread carefully. This savvy audience can be turned off if approached in the wrong way. Use these new tools properly and they'll prove to be invaluable in your effort to strengthen existing customer relationships and capture the hearts and minds of new consumers.

## About the author

John Jantsch is a marketing and digital technology coach, award-winning social media publisher and author of *Duct Tape Marketing – The World's Most Practical Small Business Marketing Guide* published by Thomas Nelson, with foreword by Michael Gerber, author of *The E-Myth*, and afterword by Guy Kawasaki.



He is the creator of the Duct Tape Marketing small business marketing system and Duct Tape Marketing Authorized Coach Network.

His Duct Tape Marketing Blog was chosen as a *Forbes* favorite for small business and marketing and is a Harvard Business School featured marketing site. His blog was also chosen as "Best Small Business Marketing Blog" in 2004, 2005, and 2006 by the readers of *Marketing Sherpa*.

His "Hype" column can be found monthly in *Entrepreneur* magazine along with his podcast on Entrepreneur.com.

He is a presenter of popular marketing workshops for organizations such as the Small Business Administration, American Marketing Association, Kauffman Foundation, Painting and Decorating Contractors of America, Associated Builders and Contractors, National Association of the Remodeling Industry, and the National Association of Tax Professionals.

## Let's get social

If you would like to connect with me on one of the following social networks, here are my profiles:

Plurk - <http://www.plurk.com/user/ducttape>

LinkedIn - <http://www.linkedin.com/in/ducttapemarketing>

Facebook - <http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=740360803>

StumbleUpon - <http://jjantsch.stumbleupon.com/>

Flickr - <http://www.flickr.com/photos/ducttapemarketing>

Twitter - <http://www.twitter.com/ducttape>

YouTube - <http://youtube.com/jantsch>

Slideshare - <http://www.slideshare.net/ducttape>

Digg - <http://digg.com/users/jantsch>

Friend Feed - <http://friendfeed.com/ducttape>