



**THE
SOCIAL
OPPORTUNITY**

**3 Ways To Leverage New Media
For Your Business**

Tim Sanders

The Social Opportunity: 3 Ways To Leverage New Media For Your Business

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If you have comments, suggestions or a request for updates, send a note to email@timsanders.com. Get more at my blog: [Sanders Says](#).

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Business is won through hard work, not luck. It's a highly competitive sport, and I want to help you get ahead using social media. Whether you are an entrepreneur, sales professional, or marketer, business is a fierce competition. You'll never win the race unless you fully understand the hurdles that stand between the prospect stage and the finish line.

From the purchase of real estate or cars to clothes or candy, every consumer purchase decision follows an unconscious progression. Even the most impulsive purchases follow the mental path I'm about to share with you. With this insight, businesses can elicit more impulse buys and less slow-motion conversions. In business school, they now teach the [25-200 Rule](#), which states, "When you reduce the prospect's time-to-decide by 25% sales volume increases 200%."

That's the power of smart branding and product promotion.

Think of every business transaction as a brand-driven event. If you lack a strong brand, you'll sell your product like a commodity and suffer from low profit margins. Brand can be defined as the promise of an outcome you install into the minds of your target customers. It's a shortcut: a great experience or problem solved. Example, "Coke is refreshing." This is where sales and marketing truly intersect. Marketing equals demand generation, and sales equals value capture.

In his book, [The Brand Mindset](#), author Duane E. Knapp lays out the path to building a winning brand in the mind's eye of your customers and prospects:

1. Differentiation - What makes you stand out from the competition?

People are attracted to the unique. Anything different will automatically

generate people's interest. They need to know what twist you add to the commodity. This helps you rise above the noise and stop competing just on price.

2. Esteem - This is now the second driver of winning business. Are you a person of integrity who can and should be trusted? Is your company a "good citizen" who will do the right thing for people, communities, and future generations? From the customer's point of view, "Is there a feel-good story connected with my purchase? In other words, do I get to solve my problem *and* make a difference with my dollars?" After all, in our modern economy where buying luxuries is taboo, this is the new ["buy one, get one free."](#)

3. Relevance - This is a function of the four P's: Product, Price, Position, and Promotion. Does the product best solve the problem? Is it the best value? What's your position in the current market? Do your promotions translate to sales? I've noticed that during economic downturns, relevance can leapfrog both Esteem and Differentiation (e.g., Wal-Mart or AirTran).

4. Awareness - Do prospective customers know you exist? Are they familiar with your product and its benefits? When they realize they need to solve a problem with a product, are you top-of-mind or buried in the pile? Believe it or not, this is the fourth most important attribute of a great brand or sales strategy. Take Greyhound for example. Everybody knows about this bus line, but few would ever choose to use it based on its inconvenience, inefficiency, poor user experience, etc.

A winning business will excel in each of these four attributes. It will stand out from the crowd (differentiation), have a positive reputation (esteem), fit with the current market (relevance), and have a strong presence in customer's minds (awareness). Advertising and marketing have been very helpful to accomplishing these four steps to winning business. They establish awareness through their reach, and then they drive the other attributes through creative execution and storytelling. For the last fifteen years, I've explored how interactive media can also be a business booster and brand builder. In these pages, I'll share the best of the best with you.

But first, let's begin this journey with a question: If I had asked you twenty-five years ago, "Can the Yellow Pages can help you win business?" your answer probably would have been, "Depending on what business you're in, and depending on your budget, it is a no-brainer that the Yellow Pages will win business for you."

And you would have been right.

But times have changed dramatically. The Producer/Consumer era began when the industrial revolution met the early advertising scene. It was likely ushered in by the Yellow Pages. Most historical accounts suggest they were discovered in 1883 in Wyoming, when a printer ran out of white paper for a client and substituted yellow instead. The result was a publication that was easier to read and highlighted graphics better than white paper. It was a perfect "technology" to market companies and services.

The first commercial directories, including Yellow Pages for business listings, were produced and distributed by R. H. Donnelley in Chicago. This was just a few years after Alexander Graham Bell acquired his patents. The phone companies paid for those books to be put into homes throughout Chicago to help early customers find local people, companies, and services. This, of course, got them on the phone!

In 1909, St. Louis introduced Yellow Pages containing discount coupons. They worked, as local businesses enjoyed incremental sales and drove awareness at the same time. Three years later, Chicago added classified ads and display ads, and the industry exploded.

By 1962, the expression “Let Your Fingers Do the Walking” was commonplace, like the long-distance slogan “Next Best Thing to Being There.” After deregulation of the phone industry in 1980, multiple phone companies produced their own directories, and the Yellow Pages became a mammoth twenty billion dollar industry.

In the very beginning, the Yellow Pages weren’t consistently effective in driving business. Initially, the user base was small, and the habit of using the Yellow Pages had to be developed. It was like the earliest days of the internet and eCommerce, not quite ready for prime time. Some companies bought space but invested scant creative energy developing compelling ads or promotions. Others bought too much space, thinking it was sheer size that mattered.

Most marketing historians believe this medium didn’t really deliver consistent results for the first few decades. In the beginning, most business felt like they had to be in the Yellow Pages, but it took a long

time for people to wrap their heads around how to effectively use those ads to win business.

Over time, business owners figured out that the secret was simple: You had to be very creative. You had to have great measurement tools, and you had to have the money (and gumption) to invest in them. This fundamentally drove effective advertising programs for decades.

This formula lies at the heart of the Producer/Consumer era of businesses—when companies created innovative products and leveraged interruptive ads to sell them to consumers. For TV, radio, and publications of all types, the Creative, Measurement, and Money formula led to predictable business results.

My own career path has mirrored this transition from traditional print marketing to online/social media marketing. When I left cable television back in 1997, I joined the interactive industry by working for Mark Cuban. I was one of the early stage employees at his Dallas based start-up (AudioNet, later broadcast.com), which streamed audio and video on the internet.

Often, our technology was hit and miss for early adopter clients. I worked with companies from Amway to Victoria's Secret to create historic events that helped both companies decrease traditional marketing investments and drive awareness as early adopters of new media.

After Yahoo! acquired broadcast.com in 2000, I transferred to their headquarters in Northern California and ran the company's think tank (The Value Lab), which studied how consumers react to online marketing. Later, after I was promoted to Chief Solutions Officer, my

team and I worked with hundreds of companies across the world to help them understand how to win business with a website and e-mail marketing. I eventually left the company to pursue a career as a consultant and author. Since then, I've seen a real change in the interactive landscape, punctuated by the explosion of social networks.

Social media finds its roots back in the late 80s, Listservs, a subscription service where you signed up to receive e-mails about topics you are interested in. You could participate in the conversation by just hitting the reply button. When email went mainstream in the mid-90's, it introduced the Forward button, making every message something you could distribute to your friends.

There were online forums and bulletin boards where you could get in on the conversation. Even instant messenger, which many of us have used since the mid-nineties, had the first status updates, the precursor to Twitter. You could post what you were doing, what websites you liked, and what products or services you used.

These four early social media applications were not connected to each other, so no social graph sprang up from them. They all lacked an engaging, user-friendly platform, keeping them from dominating the early world wide web.

Over the last decade, social media has grown up. Blogging went mainstream. Friendster gave way to MySpace, which signed up tens of millions of users in a few years. Then LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook came on the scene, passing MySpace. Every year, it seems, a new platform is launched, setting new records in user growth.

Today easy-to-use platforms enable us to participate in social networking on a global level, from our childhood friends to our business associates. The crowd has moved from produced content and interrupted advertising to shared experiences, where ads either go unnoticed or are eschewed by users.

The purpose of this short book is to reveal to you how to be successful in this new media environment. Today, people no longer just surf television or commercial websites. They graze on social streams and the commercial media they lead to. They trust and identify with the content more, and for business owners everywhere, it's a brand-new world.

So be there, in a big way.

Part One:

The State Of Social Media

Here's the latest news on the rise of social media in our culture. Edison Research Group did a [massive study](#) in mid 2012, analyzing social media usage trends. One of their most interesting findings was this diagnosis: Sixty million Americans have "the social habit," meaning they log in to social networking sites several times a day.

Just a few years ago, in 2008, only four million Americans were doing this, so this is a significant surge. Today social media penetration is actually increasing faster than the internet's rise at the turn of the century.

Here are some fast facts:

- 80% of active online users belong to at least one social network.
- Social networking is used three times more than Google.
- 25% of all time people spend online is on a social network.
- Social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) is the number one category of apps downloaded to smartphones and tablets.
- Someone joins LinkedIn every second.

Which social networks really rule? Here's how they rank in terms of usage: Number one is Facebook, with almost 50 percent market share. YouTube, a socially driven video sharing service, comes in second. It's also the second biggest search engine behind Google. It's become a resource where people go to learn how to do things. Companies have responded by using YouTube as a way of explaining complicated aspects of their business, demonstrating how to use their products, and training employees and partners.

Twitter comes in third with 150 million users. It's become a big part of the traditional media scene, often integrated into television and radio broadcasts as a feedback mechanism.

Coming in fourth is [Pinterest](#), the fastest growing social network in history. If you're not a member, I highly recommend you take a look at it. Functioning as an archive of online interests, it allows members to "pin" pictures to a virtual scrapbook, be they recipes, food, flowers, hobbies, book covers, you name it. Pinterest captures a new trend in social media, where pictures dominate the feed, giving rise to a visually based world of learning.

The fifth largest social network is LinkedIn. It's become a key resource for recruiting talent and/or finding professional opportunities. In 2011, they launched their news feed feature, which enables members to share articles with their connections. This has led to a dramatic increase in engagement on the network.

Finally, collectively coming in sixth, are socially enabled review sites. Yelp, Angie's List, and TripAdvisor are the fastest growing review sites, all offering users the ability to share their opinions on their favorite social networks like Twitter or Facebook. This gives each review legs, as they make their way around social circles, often leading to significant impact on each company's bottom line.

THE FACEBOOK HABIT

Let's dive in for more details on Facebook. For many of you, this may be the social network you're most interested in getting involved with. The social habit is extreme for Facebook users. Twenty percent of its users check their account five times a day, making it the new smoke break at work. Compare this only fifteen years ago, when we checked our e-mail about the same number of times a day. Think about how many times we check e-mail today, and you'll get the gist of how significant Facebook-time will be to our media life in a few years.

Facebook is becoming more relevant than ever to businesses because users have doubled their interaction with brands there. In the [Edison study](#), researchers found that a third of social networkers now follow a company or brand on Twitter or Facebook. Furthermore, the Edison study determined that most consumer-to-company interactions occur on Facebook, due to its unique environment, where users are less distrusting and more likely to share valuable promotions or products with their friends.

Not only do users interact with companies on Facebook, they admit it's having an impact on their purchase behavior from consumer to business products and services. According to Edison, in 2011 about two out of three respondents said social networking had no impact on their buying decisions. In research terminology, this is the "wall of resistance"—the river of denial that online interests affect real-life consumption.

Repeating the same survey in 2012, Edison determined that the wall of resistance fell abruptly; now only one out of three users claim to be immune from brand influence while using social media. The survey asked respondents to rank which social network most influences their purchases. Almost half of them picked Facebook. Twitter, on the other hand, influenced only five percent.

Take the sleuths—please. I’m referring to those buyers who pride themselves on their ability to uncover great values and expose rip-offs. They spend time on the web digging around like our parents did clipping coupons from the Sunday paper. According to Edison’s survey, almost half of these sleuths respond to retail offers on Facebook and Twitter. The research suggested they are twice as likely to find deals on social media than the general population. (This assumes the use of social couponing sites like Groupon.)

SOCIAL NETWORKS AREN’T JUST FOR KIDS

Here’s a shocker from [Edison’s study](#): The fastest growth in social networking is in users above the age of forty-five. Despite this finding, a lot of people ask me, “Isn’t Facebook a college thing?” After all, it came out of Harvard and originally spread to college campuses. They were merely the early adopters, which is normal for tech innovations.

In fact, almost half of Facebook users in the United States are over forty-five. Nearly half of them make \$50,000 annually, so they represent some of the best-heeled people in the United States, not a cohort of ramen-eating apartment dwellers.

But there's an interesting twist. Because Facebook is literally aging up in terms of their user base, now people aren't so quick to check in and say, "I'm out of town on vacation," on Foursquare or Facebook's check-in feature. The older we get, the more likely we are to have privacy concerns about our belongings and fears of being burglarized. These fears are well founded, as [reports suggest](#) the bad guys are listening in, and then acting on this new found intelligence to commit crimes against social media users.

It's also useful to look at Edison's research to break down social media usage by demographics.

- Adult women prefer Facebook.
- They watch more YouTube clips, but men watch them longer.
- Professional men prefer LinkedIn to Facebook.
- Millennials, like my twenty-six-year-old son, are moving to smaller networks, like Instagram or Path. Path is a new social network that allows you to have only 150 friends. The millennials are experiencing a newfound desire to maintain privacy, especially when it comes to their relatives and snoopy friends. What we're seeing is a huge trend here for Facebook to become an adult phenomenon.
- Influencers—the one-in-ten type who tells the other nine where to shop and what to eat—prefer Twitter for finding and sharing daily deals and coupons.

What about Google+? It has about ninety millions global users, of which seven out of ten are male. The most common profession is technical,

such as engineering. Almost half of its users are single. Google+ is valuable for technical businesses. If you're a business owner, Google will reward you if you develop a Google+ account, or a Google Places, by giving you higher results in searches. It's automatic. There may be some reason for you to get involved as a business, if nothing else to improve your ability to increase the leads you get from searches.

WHAT ARE USERS DOING WHILE SOCIAL NETWORKING?

This is the last point to cover on the state of social media: What are users doing on social networks? Surveys and reports vary in their findings, but pieced together, here's my educated guess: About 40 percent of the time, they are sharing a mobile experience. In many cases, it's pictures with pithy captions. Almost 20 percent of all social networking time spent is checking reactions to the last thing we posted. Seriously!

Almost 10 percent of usage now has to do with research, mostly on people and products. Many users make their social commentaries and profiles public, creating a snooping habit on the part of other users. This reminds me of the explosion of search activity on Google and Yahoo! back in 2001–2003. Another 10 percent of time on social networks is spent on user applications, like creating an event, helping a cause, or organizing or participating in a group.

So what about the final 20 percent? It's all about sharing, the central ethos of our modern culture. People feel compelled to use social media to educate their friends on everything from products to politics, and to pass along entertaining content. This was documented in the 2011 book

[*Zarrella's Hierarchy of Contagiousness*](#). In it, Dan Zarrella, a researcher at HubSpot, shared the formula for content that “goes viral,” meaning it spreads quickly online.

Using huge amounts of user data, Zarrella reveals that the reason people share things is because either they want to make themselves look smart, or they want to help someone who follows them, either to avoid or to enjoy something. This should be interesting to anyone developing content they want to be shared extensively.

BUSINESSES AND SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVITY

Wherever customers and prospects congregate, businesses are sure to follow so as not to lose touch with them. According to recent surveys, 53 percent of small businesses invest six hours a week or more in social media. For mid-sized companies, this same weekly participation rate is about 60 percent. For enterprise businesses, over three-quarters assign staffers to social media, often devoting eighty person-hours per week. Why so much time? These businesses are more bureaucratic and have a bigger challenge entering the social media conversation, which is geared away from big companies or government agencies.

Overall, 50 percent of medium and small businesses plan to jump up their social media efforts in 2012—not just in terms of how much time they spend but also the budgets they’ll put out to purchase media and solutions. With respect to direct marketing, 71 percent of small- or medium-size businesses will integrate their mail programs from offline to online and use unified messaging. This will make a big difference in

their ability to frequently contact their customers and reach hard-to-hit customers with offers.

Purchases influenced via social networks are categorized as *social commerce*. It's a sales category like e-commerce, except that it more often drives business to brick-and-mortar locations as opposed to cannibalizing them. That's pretty cool.

In 2008, social commerce did one billion dollars' worth of business in the United States. In 2012, it's predicted to crack nine billion. Experts believe that in 2013, it's going to swell to almost fifteen billion dollars. In just a few years, it has outpaced the Yellow Page era, the golden age of television, and the dotcom boom as a key driver of consumer and business-to-business transactions. That's why it's so critical for companies to develop and execute a social media strategy.

WRAPPING YOUR HEAD AROUND SOCIAL MEDIA FOR BUSINESS

As I travel around the world, I talk to business owners all the time who are disconnected from the business potential of social media. There are so many negative connotations to the word "social." We think people are goofing off online, socializing. At best, as in the case of LinkedIn, many people see it as a modern form of networking on the golf course.

I often tell business owners and leaders that social media is an oxymoronic marketing term. "Social media" and "social networking" were terms consistently used by early adopters like founders MySpace, LinkedIn, and Facebook.

According to a reputation advertising agency I work with, research suggests that users resonate with the terminology because like to think

they're networking, which is associated with building something of value. They also love to think they're being social, extending the fun and games from their school days.

In my personal experience, social media can actually lead to antisocial behavior. Just observe two people at dinner, when one person is more interested in what's on the screen in front of him than in his date. Is that the new definition of being social? As people start to give family and friends Facebook-time instead of face-to-face time, they gradually get less socially engaged.

Instead of social media, when it comes to business applications, **think shareable user-generated content**. It's content anyone can create, and because it's digital it can be shared with anyone at no expense, through a single click. This is in sharp contrast to the expensive and cumbersome publisher-created media, which dominated the producer/consumer era of business.

In his 2008 book, [*Here Comes Everybody*](#), futurist Clay Shirky predicted that there would be a time when the average user's publishing tools were just as good as the publisher's publishing tools. Past that point, he said, "It is a user's world." Likely, we are already past the point of no return.

Why is it significant to businesses that users have taken control of their content? User-generated media was created by the users and for the users. They express themselves, and they discover their world this way. Much like reality TV, they believe this more than they believe commercial content. They find it incredibly interesting, and that's why they spend time there. Companies aren't invited in, and their attempts

to interrupt the conversation like they interrupted a broadcast will be hidden (a digital form of shunning).

While users don't like to talk to companies, they love to interact with personality driven brands and real people that also do business. In other words, users like to talk with other human users, not robots or organizations. This translates into a key insight for your company's online presence: Be personal.

Beyond the fact that users run their social networks, there's a broader implication for any business: You don't have "customers" anymore. You have "users." They don't just use your products or your services. They use your interfaces and your systems. According to B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore in their landmark book [*The Experience Economy*](#), users are more loyal to an experience, in most cases, than to the benefits you deliver or the features you offer.

As you consider how you can maximize social media's benefits for your business, remember the importance of providing your users with a valuable personal experience. Branding and marketing are still vital, but beyond that, users must feel truly connected to you and your product. Our fast-paced technological culture has created untold opportunities to reach new prospects. But to be successful in this new world, interactive social media is essential to winning business.

Part Two:

**Three Simple Steps To
Success**

To be successful in the user-generated media era, you'll need three abilities: Time management, communication skills, and creativity. Master them, and you win business with social media, finding it easier than ever to reach prospects. The great news is that you'll soon find your efforts aren't nearly as cash intensive as they were in the days of purchased advertising.

In my work with companies of all sizes, I've identified three steps any business can take to jump through the hoops of change:

- 1. Tune In**
- 2. Connect**
- 3. Contribute**

They are listed in that order for a reason, as one leads to the next, culminating in organizational momentum toward return on your investment of time and (some) money.

If you ready to dive in, let's get started!

TUNE IN TO YOUR REPUTATION

More than ever, your users have two things going for them: transparency and tools. They know a lot about you because of Google, their social stream, and all the review sites. They also have publishing tools to share their experiences with their friends. For any business owner or manager, it is imperative to monitor the online conversation about your company.

If you are tuned in to them, these review sites can actually be a service to your business, even when the news is bad. You can now immediately discover when something is broken in your service chain, because you'll find the review, tweet, or Facebook posting.

It didn't always work this way. Consider the following story:

In 2001, Tom Farmer and Shane Atchison pre-booked a room at the DoubleTree Hotel in Houston, Texas. They were flying in from Seattle and knew they were going to arrive in Houston very late. Being seasoned business travelers, they called the hotel the afternoon of their reservation to confirm that their room would still be available. When they arrived at the hotel at 2:11am, they were informed that there was no room for them. Night clerk Mike had overbooked the hotel, using their reservation on a walk-in. He explained, "Most of our guests don't arrive at two o'clock in the morning."

They argued their case—after all, their room was credit card guaranteed. But Mike replied, "I have nothing to apologize to you for." Tom and Shane were furious.

After insisting Mike call other local hotels and find them another room, they ended up at a run-down "dump" that only had smoking rooms available. When they got back to Seattle a few days later, after stewing on it, they created a [funny yet stinging PowerPoint presentation](#) titled *Yours is a Very Bad Hotel*. This graphic complaint was sent to the general manager, the front desk manager, and several of their friends. Tom and Shane encouraged all recipients to share it widely.

According to a [2002 article in USA Today](#), the PowerPoint spread around the world, leading to thousands of supportive e-mails from

fellow travelers. *Travelers Weekly* did a story on it. Since then, hundreds of business schools have contacted Tom and Shane to arrange to use this phenomenon as a case study in the potential impacts of poor customer service in a connected world.

Inside DoubleTree culture, it's a cautionary tale. A good friend of mine, Dave Horton, was running the brand at the time, and he tells me how hard it was to correct all those bad impressions. He had to reach out to customers, employees, and other hotel managers to minimize the damage.

The problem is that, by the time he became aware of the incident, it was already news in trades and the talk of the web. Today, where all hotel brands are monitoring tweets and social media updates, Tom and Shane's ire would have likely surfaced on Twitter, as they were clearly technically inclined. Horton's team could have responded while Tom and Shane were still in Houston and flipped the script from a fail story into a success story.

There are several easy ways to monitor social media for the Toms and Shanes of the world your company may upset. First, be aware of the major review sites that impact your bottom line: [Yelp](#) (consumer services, like eateries or retailers), [Angie's List](#) (services, like contracting or auto repair), [TripAdvisor](#) (hotels, destinations), and [Jobitorial](#) (the top site where employees review their employers).

Do these reviews matter? Does anyone read them? According to a 2011 [Harvard research project](#), a single one-star (poor) review for a local or an independent company, can lead to a 5 to 9 percent drop in

sales initially, and a nagging drag on the bottom line for months. A [rigorous study](#) conducted by University of California Berkley researchers measured the impact of Yelp reviews and restaurant reservation levels on [OpenTable](#), a popular online restaurant reservation system. They determined that even a half star improvement on Yelp (e.g., 3.5 versus 3.0) boosts the number of times a restaurant sells out by almost 20%!

According to staffing professionals I know, Jobitorial is a must-monitor site, as the word has gotten out to job candidates that this is the “Yelp” of the job hunting space. Bad reviews there can undo a mountain of recruiting efforts.

While most review sites allow anonymity, almost all of them offer users a shortcut to the registration process: signing in via Facebook or Twitter. This enables you or your staff to locate them, contacts them, and try and resolve the issue. You can also use Google to find a reviewer who uses their real name. That’s the key to success: interaction!

When you respond to a writer of a negative review, don’t open guns a-blazing, threatening he or she with legal recourse. Don’t bicker with he or she in public (by debating them in the comments area of the review sites). Converse in a positive way, as a business owner or leader, and always express the sentiment “I want to make things right.” In a significant number of cases, negative reviews have been modified or taken down by their authors after a successful resolution of their complaint. In some cases, these detractors were knocked out by the responsiveness of the business and became raving fans through the

process.

Beyond solving this marketing problem, your monitoring can help you improve business operations. When you spot a negative review about your company, try and trace the experience to the employee, the process, or at the very least the circumstance. You might find something broken in the system you can quickly fix. For every customer mad enough to write a negative review, likely there are probably dozens who simply grouse to their friends or share privately via their Facebook feed.

This will change the culture of your company too. When your employees know that you are reading every review, they will likely take it into account—and avoid letting a customer to leave unhappy.

I learned this from Mark Cuban's example. After broadcast.com was sold to Yahoo!, he bought the Dallas Mavericks, and then a few years later he built the American Airlines Center in Dallas. Being customer obsessed, he posted his e-mail address and encouraged event attendees to contact him with any complaints.

And contact him they did. Cuban would filter the responses down to management and even vendors. Today, this arena is one of the top-rated NBA facilities in terms of service excellence. That's what happens when you have this kind of transparency and customer interaction.

TUNE IN TO THE MARKET CONVERSATION

In his landmark book, *Gonzo Marketing*, author Christopher Locke declares, "markets are conversations." They go on between people and concern attitudes, beliefs, and experiences. Your market's conversation

involves your entire value chain: prospects, customers, partners and employees. It concerns the problem you address, your company, and the competition. Except for private accounts on Facebook, it's publicly displayed for anyone, including you, to read.

This is the positive aspect of the all-is-exposed modern media landscape. Sure, customers and prospects know more about you than ever from each other, review sites, blogs, and search engines. But now, you can flip it around and know more about them than ever. Transparency is good for you, too.

Mark Zuckerberg has a theory. They call it "Zuckerberg's Rule," and it's largely true. It goes like this: Every year users double the amount of information they share about themselves. Because of that, there is an ever-growing focus group going on right now, and you get to stand behind the glass and observe. For free.

There are several ways for you to get started. First, utilize various search engines—such as Google, Bing, and Yahoo!—to set up alerts anytime there is a mention of your company, local activities, competitors, your product space, etc.

Next, use social search, such as at <http://search.twitter.com>. For example, suppose you run an accounting firm in Grand Rapids, Michigan. You could put "accounting" or "taxes" and "Grand Rapids" into Twitter's search engine, and you'll find a string of postings, many of which will either give you insights or ideas—or maybe a lead!

There are tools out there, which can give you a dashboard view of the conversation, allowing you to track a multitude of terms so you can tune

in effectively without having to conduct manual searches. Free tools include [TweetDeck](#) and [HootSuite](#). For those with a budget to invest, there are sophisticated solutions such as [Lithium](#), [Meltwater Buzz](#), or [Radian6](#).

Once tuned into the conversation, consider the chatter as useful business intelligence to help you build a better mousetrap—based on unaided comments from your prospects and customers. This is what the users truly care about: solving their problems. You'll also discover gaps and gaffes in your competitors' approach, as well as emerging needs no one in your space is currently addressing.

This first step, tuning in, will likely become an addictive experience for you. You'll be amazed at how useful social media has become, even if all you did was lurk, listen, and respond to detractors. But you can go further now.

Take the next bold step. Jump into the conversation.

CONNECT!

It's time for making connections, the next logical step. As mentioned before, people on social media believe online content is generated by the user and for the user. Publishers (companies, hierarchies with editors, etc.) were not invited! You have to make a personal connection with them first before you try to market to them or sell them anything. Fortunately, there are many different connection points for you to make as a solution provider.

Connect with your customers. Dallas-based Kindermusik offers music lessons of all types. A few years ago they were seeing a big drop-off in students from younger ages (5–8) to older groups (9–16). According to the parents, once their kids reached fourth or fifth grade, they no longer had the time for lessons, now that there were other activities such as homework, sports, hobbies, clubs, etc. What they ultimately realized is that parents didn't value music lessons over other elective activities. This was their business problem to solve, as you can't keep kids young forever!

Kindermusik [responded by creating a Facebook-led campaign](#) in which they connected with their alumni, specifically those who had continued their music lessons through junior high. They asked the alumni to post their experiences and talk about how much value they got by sticking with their music education.

Next, Kindermusik created contests, quizzes, and videos that were also posted to their Facebook page, and many of them generated significant engagement with their growing following.

By 2011, for the first time in the history of the company, enrollment for older students exceeded the enrollment for young students. Through the connections, Kindermusik established a value proposition, which helped them win out over the other activities vying for their students' time. While they could have tried an advertising approach to sell the value of their music lessons, nothing resonates like alumni giving first-hand social proof.

AJ Bombers, a burger restaurant in Milwaukee, offers another case study in customer connection. Owner Joe Sorge opened the restaurant right about the time Twitter started to catch on, so social media was part of his marketing arsenal from the beginning.

For the first few months, he just used search on Twitter to monitor the buzz on AJ Bombers and his competitors. It gave him great insights and also created opportunities for him to interact with customers and local leaders.

Next, he started to actively engage his customers on Twitter by retweeting their comments, especially pictures of food they'd shared. He'd promote local causes, as well as customer projects looking for exposure.

His level of connection was so high that eventually customers started the practice of writing their Twitter handles on the walls of the restaurant, which of course, led to more interactions with Sorge—and a greater following for AJ Bombers.

Then Sorge took things a step further with a promotion called "Foursquare Day," named after the social networking check-in site, [Foursquare](#). A wooden boat was setup outside AJ Bombers, and

customers who stopped by could check in on Foursquare and earn their “I’m On A Boat!” badge. Then customers would tweet it out to their followers, and more online conversation would ensue. It was a hit!

[According to Sorge](#), it was the single best day of sales in the history of the restaurant. What was interesting, though, was the ripple effect “Foursquare Day” had on his business. Yes, that Friday was the restaurant’s best day ever, but the Saturday that followed it was the fifth best day ever. That Sunday was also unusually busy. Sorge’s business experienced a cumulative effect of connecting with customers and differentiating his restaurant, while at the same time, driving awareness about its existence.

Connect with prospects. Entrepreneur and bestselling author Carol Roth in Chicago first discovered the company Desk Elf last year because they were following her on Twitter, and they started to retweet some of her best, most relevant content. In fact, they would tweet her messages, giving her specific positive feedback on what she was saying that was working for their business or their clients.

Carol said, “I could not help but click over to their profile. I loved their logo. I clicked over to deskelf.com and learned that they provide virtual assistance and outsourced research. Less than two months later, when my staff was completely overcommitted, that’s the first people I thought of. I hired them. They did incredible work.”

In addition to acquiring Carol as a client, Desk Elf received a boost in exposure. She continued, “A few months later I was on a television show for small business in Chicago, and who did I recommend to the over-

tapped executives at local businesses? That's right, deskelf.com." When she wrote about it, she concluded while Desk Elf was looking for a spender, they found a sender, and by engaging with her, they grew their business beyond a single sale.

While Desk Elf connected to the media via a happy customer, it's possible for you to connect with them directly. Small Wall provides a [good example](#) of how to do this with tact. This small business was created by Julie Boney based on an invention enabling decorators to paint a tiny board and then attach it to the wall like a Post-it note. Instead of having to paint a piece of the wall, this "sample swatch" board does the trick quickly and easily, without marring the wall.

Julie's marketing consultant told her that she didn't have the money for a traditional advertising approach but could effectively get the word out, targeting influential decorators and relevant publications. If Julie would engage with them and provide value, it would be a win-win situation over time.

One of Julie's targets was *Woman's Day* magazine, which often provides home-oriented advice to readers, including tips about remodeling and painting. First, she liked their Facebook page and then began to interact with articles and share their content with her friends. When she read one of their Facebook-posted articles about home decorating, she found a golden opportunity to chime in with suggestions about swatch preparation, as well as suggesting her Small Wall invention as being a real time-saver.

Within one hour of Julie's post, the editor-in-chief from *Woman's Day* contacted her and requested samples. Small Wall was soon featured on *Woman's Day's* website. A feature on the product appeared in the January 2011 print edition of the magazine, giving this small business an influx of new customers.

Julie [says](#), "This is exposure we never could have afforded through traditional advertising methods. It made me a believer in the power of the social web for small businesses." If you're smart, tenacious, and interactive, you can experience the same phenomenon Julie did, just by using social media for your business.

Finally, connect with the themes of the day. West Cafe is an upscale Portland-based restaurant in the university district. When the recession of 2008 hit, they suffered a huge downturn in their business. Since they relied on students and staff from Portland State as the majority of their clientele, their price points soon became an issue. Their response is an excellent [case study](#) in being scrappy and innovative when faced with adversity.

Owner Doug Smith feared they were going to go out of business. They had no money to invest in advertising, so they created a free blog. Once the blog was up and running, they began to post daily specials. Then they joined Twitter and used it to drive traffic to their blog and connect with customers.

In October, using Facebook, Smith launch a promotion called "The Five-Point Plan" to help Portlanders deal with the economic crisis. Items ranged from a ten-dollar "bail-out menu" to a daily Dow Drink Special,

which was based on the direction of the market (think sweet to sour). Their head bartender would blog about a new drink he'd created, and then readers would tweet it out to their following.

Traffic to West Cafe's website increased dramatically, driven by their social media outreach and the resulting search engine traffic. Even better, sales went up 100% in September, 12% in October, 32% in November, and 26% in December—and continued to grow through 2009. Their turnaround story is driven by the strong narrative they built, turning the crisis of the day into a cool drink for Portland.

These success stories all share one factor: savvy use of social media. This is not a coincidence. As a direct result of harnessing the power of social media, these businesses drove their sales up and created lasting positive reputations in their communities.

Connecting with your customers and prospects is addictive, once you realize how much it can help you win business. At some point, though, you want to go a step further and start using your platform to add value. After tuning in to social media and connecting to your consumers online, you are ready to take the final step and start contributing to the social stream.

CONTRIBUTE

More than ever, content is king. It's the key to making your social media properties sticky, referable, and resonant with prospects and clients alike. Business people ask me all the time, "What should I blog about? I have a Facebook business page. What should I post? What should my content strategy for social media be?" To that, I always give the same reply: "Be visual. Be helpful." Serve a feast for the eyes, and deliver verbal content which inspires or informs.

Why is it so important to contribute visually appealing content? Years ago, when I first started blogging, a consultant shared this tip with me: "The internet rewards what the internet likes." And wow, do people love pictures and video in their social streams.

The reason Pinterest grew so fast over the last year and a half is because a picture is now worth a thousand updates. Realizing the rise of the visual era in media, Facebook spent a billion dollars to acquire Instagram, a twelve-person start-up in San Francisco that enables anyone to share stunning photos of their mobile experiences.

It's not just the users who are going gaga over pretty pictures, either. Facebook is using software to reward visual over verbal as it makes editorial decisions on which updates will be dropped into users' "Top News" feed, which is the default view when one logs on. The algorithm is called EdgeRank, and much like Google's PageRank system, it is designed to ensure users receive quality content that keeps them coming back day after day—or multiple times every day.

Let's say you're a business, and you have one thousand people who like your page. When you put out a post, that doesn't mean you reach one

thousand people. In many situations, you'll reach a fraction of them, unless the EdgeRank algorithm decides your post should get wider distribution. Much like search-engine optimization, this is the key to reaching your target customers and prospects with your content.

(If you'd like to fully understand this simple formula, I've provided a detailed explanation, along with useful tips, in Appendix Two.)

Here's the bottom line: The type of content you post matters. Photos and videos are, by far, the most rewarded content by EdgeRank. It's estimated that for business Facebook pages, photos or videos will get five to twenty times greater distribution to your following than links or words. If your business is visual (or can be represented visually for the purpose of social media), this can be a breakthrough in your Facebook marketing strategy.

Additionally, research suggests users are more connected with visually supported content and are likely to have a stronger reaction to it in terms of sharing, liking, or commenting. Whether it's your blog or your Twitter profile, the time you take to add visual oomph is well worth it in terms of your reach and relevance.

Many businesses produce products that are visually impactful, so it's a natural for them to succeed in social media. I'll share a few case studies to illustrate this, starting with business-to-business company, [SteelMaster Building Systems out of Virginia](#).

Most might wonder, "What's so visual about erecting prefab steel buildings?" Nothing, really, but in the case of SteelMaster, there's more than meets the uninformed eye. They take a lot of pride in their design,

execution, and cleanup after installation. Many of their clients are wowed by the gleaming structures that SteelMaster delivers to them. A few years ago, they started to post photos, with permission, of customer installations. Then they created videos, chronicling the construction process, as well as how to maintain these buildings over time.

Customers loved this content—and shared it widely. Prospects differentiated SteelMaster based on the visual documentation of their quality and professionalism. Today, their Facebook property is a significant source of the company's inbound leads.

Here's a connected example: River Pools and Spas. Co-owner Marcus Sheridan [reported to HubSpot](#) that, like most business owners, the bulk of his online marketing efforts over the last decade were devoted to a static website. It really didn't make much of a difference to the sales or leads generated by his total marketing plan. Sheridan then realized how beautiful his finished products turned out and how proud his customers were of their new pools, spas, and water toys.

Just as SteelMaster Building Systems had done, Sheridan used Facebook and his blog to publish pictures of finished installations (with customer permission). He also leveraged YouTube to publish videos he produced of the installation process, as well as instructions for how to care for the pools and spas over time. The maintenance videos were especially helpful, as they offered time- and money-saving tips to the viewers. The program resonated with customers, who liked and shared the content with their friends.

Prior to his social media efforts, Sheridan reports he was spending an average of \$150,000 a year on traditional marketing, including Yellow Pages ads, radio ads, and direct mail. In 2011, he was able to slash marketing expenses by over 60 percent, and at the same time, he increased the size of his business by 15 percent.

Sheridan's time contribution isn't trivial, as he reports he and his staff invest an average of ten to twenty hours a week producing and distributing content and interacting with followers. But while other pool companies go out of business due to the poor economy, River Pools and Spas is enjoying a 400 percent spike in inbound leads—proof positive that marketing innovation can help a company win business in the most difficult of situations.

San Francisco-based Umi Sushi provides another case study to support the power of visual content. Their owners take pictures of their fish, their creations, and daily specials and then tweet them out to their local followers. They are consistent in feeding their stream (pardon the pun) with consistently appetizing content.

As their Twitter following grows, so does their bottom line, and today they get approximately five incremental diners from their efforts. Given the price points for sushi, that's several hundred dollars a day, likely enough to offset a significant portion of their rent!

PRODUCE HELPFUL CONTENT

Beyond pictures or videos, the idea here is that every piece of content you post has a beneficiary. It could be a customer, when the content solves a problem. It could be a community, when the business lends its status and following to a cause. It could even be a casual viewer, who is entertained. Much like Yellow Pages display ads did in days gone by, social media marketing must deliver usefulness and not just interrupt the show with “a word from our sponsors.”

South Carolina-based Palmetto Cheese illustrates the power of posting helpful content combined with connecting with customers. Husband-and-wife team Brian and Sassy Henry founded their company in 2006. When they started using social media, they posted pictures of their pimento spreads, which produced some interest. But according to [this interview](#) with Brian, “while this was a great place for us to start, it didn’t bring in a lot of followers, because it wasn’t creating a dialogue.”

Following the example of SteelMaster Building Systems and River Pools and Spas, the Henrys began posting recipes and pictures of picnic spreads provided by their customers. This immediately produced engagement and sharing on the part of their growing group of followers. Next, they produced and posted their own recipes, along with party planning tips and entertaining stories. They created trivia contests around cheese and gave away T-shirts. Currently they conduct Q & A sessions on how to properly store and serve cheese at parties.

For Palmetto, the business results have been nothing short of remarkable. According to *USA Today*, before they started their social media efforts, they were selling approximately five hundred thousand

containers of cheese a year. By 2011, without increased investments in marketing, their sales surged to two million containers a year. Today, their greatest marketing asset (besides the product itself) is their twenty-five thousand person following on Facebook.

From the world of insurance, here's one final example, gleaned from my days consulting with Farmers Insurance Group. While working with the company, I advised them on their program to support independent agents and leverage social media to drive their business. Of all the participants, Ohio-based Joe McKinnon stands out as someone who understands the value of connecting and contributing to his followers.

A few years ago, Joe decided to expand his business from commercial to personal lines of insurance products. He lacked the budget for a traditional marketing program to introduce it and help it gain traction. But because it was a consumer or personal product, he had an "aha" realization that Facebook—the most personal of places—and would be a perfect platform to branch out his business. And for him, the price was right: a lot of time, effort and imagination.

His credo on Facebook was "I don't sell things here. I just try to show people who I am." He made a bet that making a personal connection with the citizens of Philadelphia, Ohio, would pay off over time. He followed existing customers, friends, and of course, their friends. He liked community organizations. He interacted with their content, be it a like on a funny post or by sharing using web links. He issued "hat tips" to other businesses as well as the local sports teams, including Ohio State's football program.

He wasn't serious all the time, either, because he believes that on Facebook, "Stupid works!" He posted funny (and harmless) jokes and cartoons, and even made light of himself occasionally.

Contests are a high-engagement staple in his Facebook strategy. Leveraging social psychology, he'd post a quiz and reward the winner with a gift certificate to eat at a local restaurant (which he has tagged, and by doing so, notified them of his support). This accomplished a two-for-one as Joe made a contribution to both the quiz winner and the restaurant.

In one contest, he posted a picture of a jar full of M&M's, inviting followers to guess how many were in there. The winning follower received a ten-dollar gas card. The contest was hugely popular, getting almost one hundred entries, many by friends-of-friends.

Joe leveraged the tools Facebook offers, including building a quote finder feature right on his Facebook page. On a rare occasion, he'll post something related to insurance, but when he does, it has a personal touch. Once he posted a picture of his three young children, with an authentic caption talking about how they help him understand the value of making sure his life insurance is up-to-date. Over fifty people interacted with this tender posting, liking, commenting, and sharing it.

He's built up several thousand followers in a small town, giving him more presence than a double full-page display ad in the Yellow Pages. His followers are converting into customers, too. In fact, Joe says about one out of five quote requests come directly from this Facebook page.

FINDING THE TIME TO WIN

At this point, I know that for many of you, this has to be overwhelming. The whole concept of managing social media might be intimidating, and the process may sound too time-consuming. You've got to tune in to your reputation as well as the conversation about your market. You've got to interact with all your fans as well as your detractors. You need to make new connections and then contribute impactful content on a regular basis.

Top marketing consultant John Jantsch calls this "feeding the beast." You're probably wondering, "Where do I find the time?" because in fact, in this new world we live in, it's time more than money that matters. But your time is money, and I understand you don't likely have an extra ten or twenty hours lying around to invest.

There are two ways to make this doable: *Streamline* and *Delegate*.

USE TOOLS TO STREAMLINE THE ENTIRE PROCESS

Fortunately, there is an entire ecosystem of products and services to help you shave off time when it comes to your social media programming.

To keep up with all the review sites and chatter about your products and services, you'll need tools so you won't have to visit same set of websites daily. Online services, such as AreWeRated.com, [Reputation Ranger](#), [ReviewPush](#), and [Chatmeter](#) all offer timesaving tools. The trick is to set up a service, flow alerts to the right people at your company, and develop a policy of how you will interact with reviewers.

In the Tune In chapter, I mentioned tools like TweetDeck and HootSuite, which you can use to create a dashboard view of a set of items you want to monitor. [HootSuite](#), as well as [SocialOomph](#), also offer scheduling services, allowing you to compose most of your tweets or updates for the day in a single session. This gives you the ability to spread out messaging (reduces annoyance to the end user), without having to interrupt your work eight days times a day to post something new.

For example, consider Butter Lane, a New York City-based cupcake maker. Their business is very visual, so they're active on Facebook and Twitter. Interested in reputation management, they watch Yelp like a hawk for reviews (good and bad) and have their own Venue Page on the site to make new friends. They've run a Tumblr blog, mostly pictures of their cupcakes. They also run coupon campaigns on LivingSocial, and they're creating promotions on Foursquare. Whew. That's a lot of social media work.

Owner Maria Baugh tells marketing blog [Mashable](#) that her solution is a service called [Postling](#), a management tool for all of her social media activities. "It has a dashboard where we can see on one screen the most recent tweets, Facebook posts, and Yelp reviews. And simply click one button to reply to any post. Very convenient." For small business owners like Baugh who don't have much time to spare, services like Postling are lifesavers, creating an easy-to-use platform for interacting with customers all in one place.

DELEGATE TO YOUR DEPUTIES

In most cases, even with great tools at your disposal, you still can't find the time for all my prescribed activities. In this case, I suggest you deputize an employee to complete various portions of your social media programming. Look for an employee with a sense of maturity and business acumen, combined with an enthusiasm for social media. Create a policy for social media content (including posting guidelines, replying to comments, etc.) For numerous examples of social media guidelines, take a look at the [Social Media Governance web resource](#).

You'll still need to check up on your deputy's work to ensure effectiveness in tone, community goodwill, and most of all, business impact. But you already do this for quality, customer service, and other activities you trust employees to execute. Apply the same supervision to social media programming.

There's another upside to letting an employee in on the fun: You'll transfer their enthusiasm for social media to enthusiasm for working at your company. I've visited businesses where several employees have specific social media tasks, taking only a few hours of working time per week, but driving up their job satisfaction and performance in their regular roles.

Finally, if you can't deputize, then hire a social media or marketing consultant (like Small Wall and others have). You'll need to make sure they understand your brand, your ethos, and your goals and are prepared to measure the results, not just help you produce content.

In the long run, you'll find that even though you've created a new category of work in your business life, the results can be so impactful

that you'll be able to hire out or stop doing other traditional marketing activities. You might even discover, like Joe McKinnon or Joe Sorge, that social media can be some of the most rewarding work you'll ever do to drive your business.

HOW SOCIAL MEDIA LEVELS THE PLAYING FIELD

Here's an inspirational thought. In the new world of user-generated media, do the small- and medium-size businesses stand toe to toe with the giants? As I've discovered over the last few years, the resounding answer is "yes." It just may be the greatest leveler of the business landscape we've seen since the industrial revolution began.

Consider what it took to be successful in the Yellow Pages era. You had to have money to create the ad, and pay to have it placed in the phone book. After deregulation, when every new telephone company had their own book, you had to increase your investments to reach the same number of people. Frequently, the successful businesses were able to buy the biggest ads in the book, giving rise to the old saying, "Them that's got, gets." For new companies, a free listing or a tiny postage-stamp-size ad was all they could do.

For broadcast media, be it radio or television, the cash requirement is even steeper and not necessarily more effective. Direct mail, classified ads, and special events all require first and foremost significant capital to get started. No amount of creativity could accomplish much without it.

Today, as I've illustrated, time and creativity plus effort equals business results. The cost to create social identities is paid with your time. But for many of you running small businesses, which can't compete financially with larger companies, you probably have more time than money. With all this talk about how easy it is to start up a company and run it "in the cloud," you should think of social media as the same common set of resources anyone can leverage.

Being a small business used to be considered a liability, because your influence and success was limited by your financial resources. But today, small size can actually be an advantage. When it comes to direct competition between brands on social media, the little guy has the crowd behind him. More than ever, people are less likely to believe claims made by big companies. They feel safer participating in your promotions. They feel more socially responsible sharing your content and promoting your business over those of the corporate giants.

Here's another reason social media levels the playing field. The users are, most of all, human. They only like to connect with other humans, and they expect brands to be very personal when communicating with them. To win their business in this "for the users, by the users" commons, you need to be playful, responsive, and most of all . . . casual. Dude. This is hard for big companies, where every update or promotion must be run through the legal department first for approval or editing.

Often, the resulting work is clinical and mechanical—and flops. Many of the case studies I've mentioned before would have been stopped in their tracks by the natural bureaucracy, which springs up around big companies. It's like social media has put leg weights on them as they attempt to outrun their smaller, nimbler opponents in the race for the customer.

ACCOMPLISH MORE DEVELOPING AN INTEREST IN OTHERS

I'll close with story should inspire you to believe that, with modern tools, you can accomplish anything. It was first shared with me by one of my mentors, the late Stanley Marcus Jr. This story proves that even when you don't have much money to spend on marketing, if you'll be helpful and responsive enough, networking will make all the difference. Elmer Letterman is considered one of the greatest networkers in the history of Manhattan. He and his partner opened up a life insurance company back in the late 1920s and suffered through the stock market crash of 1928 and the resulting Great Depression.

It was a really difficult time for them in their business. They faced much larger competitors and could not compete with their expensive trolley car advertising, sponsored radio programs, and the birth of direct mail.

Their company was the underdog, just trying to survive in a tough economy. Things didn't look good. But one day, Letterman had an epiphany. His big idea was to leverage old-fashioned lunch networking to make a personal connection with his prospects and clients and contribute something useful to their lives.

Every Friday he would host a networking lunch at the Manhattan Four Seasons. He would recruit during the week to find three people who "should meet." Maybe he'd invite an entrepreneur with an idea for a restaurant, a banker, and a construction executive with a stellar reputation for finishing on time and on budget.

During the lunch, he would identify the opportunity, lend credibility to each party, and stoke a conversation. He would encourage his lunch

mates to find a starting point and then get to work making something happen. When prospects said, “I’m interested in getting a life insurance policy,” Letterman would shrug it off, explaining that this lunch was about creating a venture but promising, “I will have my partner give you a call.”

Letterman wasn’t there to sell anything. Much like modern-day insurance agent Joe McKinnon in my earlier case study, he genuinely wanted to help people. He was just there, during a very challenging time, to become part of the solution for Manhattan. It was very time-consuming for him, and picking up the lunch check week after week added up. But he kept at it, believing his approach would pay off someday.

According to Ivan R. Misner in his book [*Masters of Networking*](#), Letterman’s business blossomed, and he retired a multimillionaire. When Mr. Marcus shared this story with me, he said, “To understand how Elmer became so successful, all you have to do is the math of good will. You help three people about fifty times a year, you compound that number over ten years, and you’ll have endless referrals and unbreakable customer loyalty.”

At the time I heard this story, I was working in Dallas at broadcast.com, where the buzz was all about creating marketing stunts which spread overnight around the internet. In Mr. Marcus’s sage view, he connected Letterman’s approach with the current times when he told me, “Doing the right thing at the right time with no expectations is the original viral marketing.”

My closing question to you is this: If Elmer Letterman could do so much with a simple weekly lunch, what can we do with all of our social media tools? How many people can we help by connecting with them and contributing value to their social streams?

It's no surprise that Letterman's neighbor in Manhattan, a YMCA instructor named Dale Carnegie, once penned the following bit of wisdom:

“You will accomplish more developing a sincere interest in people, than trying to get people interested in you.”

Appendix 1

Recommended Reads For Social Media Intelligence

[*Here Comes Everybody*](#) by Clay Shirky

[*The Brand Mindset: Five Essential Strategies for Building Brand Advantage Throughout Your Company*](#) by Duanne Knapp

[*Trust Agents: Using the Web to Build Influence, Improve Reputation and Earn Trust*](#) by Chris Brogan and Julien Smith

[*Groundswell: Winning In A World Transformed By Social Technologies*](#) by Charlene Li.

[*Likeable Social Media: How To Delight Your Customers, Create An Irresistible Brand, and Be Generally Awesome On Facebook*](#) by Dave Kerpen

[*Socialnomics: How Social Media Transforms the Way We Live and Do Business*](#) by Erik Qualman

[*The Zen of Social Media Marketing*](#) by Shama Kabani

[*Social Media ROI: Managing and Measuring Social Media Efforts In Your Organization*](#) by Olivier Blanchard

[*Content Rules: How To Create Killer Blogs, Podcasts, Videos, Ebooks, Webinars and More*](#) by Ann Handley

[*The New Relationship Marketing: How to Build a Large, Loyal, Profitable Network Using the Social Web*](#) by Mari Smith

Appendix 2

Raising Your EdgeRank Score

Facebook their proprietary EdgeRank algorithm to ensure that with forty billion updates a day, they can show any user the most relevant content. The Edgerank formula is quite complex as an algorithm, but is best summarized in the following formula:

Affinity: What is the strength of the connection between the user and the content creator. Are users liking, sharing and commenting on it?

Weight: How robust is the content? Video is considered the heaviest, pictures next, web links after that and verbal posts (words only) are the lightest.

Decay: How long ago was the content posted? Are users still interacting with it?

Recent changes make Edgerank more important than ever, especially for users of Facebook who only visit a few times of week. You'll need to be Top Story whenever possible. Also, the new changes look much harder at Time Decay, which means if you don't keep up the interaction with your following, your Edgerank from last week can drop steeply!

Nine Ways To Boost Your Edgerank score:

1. Post Manually, Direct To Facebook

FB frowns on third party postings such as HootSuite, TweetDeck and will lower their rank or ignore them entirely. You can post longer, with links, directly from facebook.com

2. Post Frequently To Ensure Freshness

The newest changes to the news feed (Top Stories) on Facebook emphasize recent ones over dated ones. More than ever the Time Decay part of the formula matters. This means you will need to post at least once a day or perhaps twice to maintain the high rank. This is also a great way to capture the new Ticker feature in

Facebook, a Twitter like feature, which scrolls updates as you are looking at your news feed. The more often you post, the more you can be discovered out of their stream.

NOTE: Don't over post and later, when you test your update strategy for EdgeRanking, take note of when you've done too much. And, make every update the highest quality possible, because irrelevant or pithy updates may cause you to lose followers.

3. Emphasize Pictures, Videos and Links

Edgerank rewards your updates by weighting them. The most rewarded type of posts are Pictures and Videos, then Links and finally text updates.

Make sure that one out of five of your posts is rich media to ensure high rank. Whenever possible capture pictures or videos, either of client situations (achievements, meetings, etc.) or local events you've attended that your following might care about.

*Research links on local websites that your following might care about, including reviews of local establishment, breaking news (only positive) or helpful advice related to your industry or market space.

4. Post During Prime Time

You'll get the most engagement by showing up at a time when people are likely to actually see your post through either the ticker or their Recent News feed. Remember, Top Stories will only be at the top of the feed if it's your first time today or so. If you are a frequent user, you'll only see Recent Posts if they reach the Edgerank threshold.

*So, if your audience is a working-but-online-at-work audience, you need to post during business hours M-F. If your audience is more housewife, or non-Internet accessing working population, concentrate posts evenings and weekends when they can log on.

5. Encourage EdgeRank Friendly Interaction

Edgerank most of all rewards it when one of your followers clicks on the Mark As Top Story link at the right hand corner of your updates as they show up in their news feed. So, if you have a great

update that you know is relevant, have a MARK AS TOP FEED headline before the post.

You could also suggest comments or questions or even ask people to Share or Like an important update that's worth sharing forward. You won't get what you don't ask for. Research suggests that asking for comments, Likes, etc., will not hurt your credibility or cause your followers to unfollow you. Just don't beg!

6. Convert statements into questions

Comments are more helpful than likes to your Edgerank – so turn statements into questions. You can say, “I think that Hugo’s is the greatest Mexican food place in Wichita. What is yours (please help your friends!)?”

*Program in at least one comment-provoking question a day.
Don't be afraid to ask a multiple-choice question using the Facebook Questions tool.

7. Answer comments to any of your updates or posts

When you answer a comment, the commenter often gets an email notification, pulling him/her back to your wall to continue the conversation. These additional comments will raise the Edgerank of the update and you as a Page. The additional benefit here is when people's profile shows multiple comments to your page; this can lure their friends to visit your wall to see the conversation. When people visit your page, this raises your affinity score, which is a boost!

8. Get users to post pictures or videos on your page

When followers post pictures and/or videos on your wall, this drives up your affinity score and can also trigger their friends to comment on these pictures, compounding the effect!

*Encourage them post local pictures (schools, historic sites, pictures from events or concerts).

*Ask your friends post pictures of you (and them).

*Incentivize them post short videos talking about local issues they care about

9. Get users to visit the page (boosts affinity)

Utilize the app/tab builders to create features for followers, then use updates as a way to get them to visit your wall or the links to the apps. This will dramatically raise your affinity score especially compared to other pages or friends competing with you for space. Almost 90% of all Facebook interaction is with the News Feed, mostly Top Stories and not page or profile walls!

For much more, read this useful article:

[Facebook EdgeRank: What Marketers Need To Know](#)

An Interview With Consultant & Author Barry Moltz

Tim: How do you define marketing?

BARRY: Well, before you can define marketing you always have to go through and define the principles of sale. I think that people have the wrong idea about what selling is. People have to understand that customers will only buy from you when they're in pain, have money to solve the pain. We just need to be right there when people are ready to buy. Marketing is really creating those trust relationships you always talk about, so you're there when people are ready to make that buy decision.

Tim: Describe your consulting business for small businesses.

BARRY: Well, again I try to focus on the small business owner's pain, the pain of being stuck. Many of us tend to start companies, because we had a passion around helping customers in a particular area and then most of us had no idea of what it was really like to run them. Somewhere along the line we got stuck, sales went slack; we couldn't hire the right people. Maybe cash got to be a problem or we lost our passion for it. Through strategy, I help small business owners get unstuck and enjoy growing their business again.

Tim: Give me an example of helping businesses get unstuck.

BARRY: Here's an example regarding talent: One of the problems with a lot of folks is that they want to build the business, but they don't know how to really hire and manage people. Years ago I consulted with this woman who ran a business for twenty years, that topped two millions dollars in annual sales. Why? She could never seem to hire the right people. When one would join, she'd fire them or they would quit. Didn't take long to realize she was micro-managing everything and everybody. Every decision had to come through her. It made her feel really good and important, but it really doomed her to failure. Through care steps, she's implemented not only a more hierarchical approach, but she has empowered her employees to make 95% of decisions. Unless you empower your employees, you'll never get any leverage in your business and you'll only have just built a job and you've never ever really built a company.

Tim: What software tools do you suggest to help business manage client relationships?

BARRY: Well, one of my favorite tools I use around this whole idea of being there when people are ready to buy is I use a free tool from 37signals called [Highrise](#). It's a customer relationship management tool that in my opinion is really stupid proof. There's a lot of customer relationship management tools that are just way too complicated and what this tool allows you to do is enter a prospect or

customer contact information, note down what you talked about, when to call them back and the best part is the reminder emails me that tell me when I should call that person back and what I should be talking to them about. That enables me to create a consistent relationship with the people around me and really be there when people are ready to buy.

Tim: When you sit down the first time with a client, and you talk about social media, where do you start?

BARRY: I tell them that social media is really just part of the Four P's of marketing: price, product, place and promotion. Obviously it's promotion, so I like to talk to them for the first hour about what role does social media really play in promotion. How is it going to help you grow your relationships with your prospects, with your customers, your influencers.

We're not going to talk about Twitter, Facebook or Pinterest, or any other specific platform yet. First we must figure out how social media is going to compliment what they already doing well. Then we need to figure out what the expected return on investment will be over what period of time. I

Tim: Do you see businesses getting stuck because of new technologies or medias that come on the scene?

BARRY: Absolutely because a lot of people are stuck actually with social media. You have to understand that the World Wide Web can be a worldwide waste of time. What many business owners and marketers do is spend a lot of time on social media frantically trying things out without any real strategy. Then later, when it doesn't do anything they say, "well I didn't see a return."

Tim: Give me a case study here where a strategy saved time, and worked out as a winner.

BARRY: United Web out of Bartlesville, Oklahoma wanted to connect with their folks on the web. They deliver linens, uniforms and cleaning supplies hotels. As a business-to-business company they were trying to figure how can they could connect with customers via social media. What they ended up doing was two things

Their strategy centered around two things: First, they got involved with the community through their social feed, posting local sports scores and results and pictures from events. Then they served customers with it, for example, if there is a delivery schedule change, they posted that on social media. They also created a twelve party series on YouTube on how to fold a napkin and it got rave reviews. I always challenge those people that say, "I cannot do social media because there is nothing visual about my business, and there is no way I can connect with them its B2B." I

always share with them that there are countless companies like there's that actually did it and found success.

Tim: Do you have any case studies from your own consulting business?

BARRY: I started doing a lot of work with one of my major customers just when they started to notice I was talking about small business. They then started re-tweeting what I was saying. I then said I would really like to interview you for my radio show, I got them on the radio show and that now two years later has developed into a big relationship. How I worked for a lot of their customers at their events so when people say that there really is no return on social media that's not true.

Tim: For a lot of small business owners or managers, social media is more time consumptive than it is cash consumptive, so to speak, say like compared to the yellow pages era. What advice do you give to them about how to find the time for this?

BARRY: One thing you have no choice. First of all, you are no longer selling a commodity. Pretty much all the services and products we offer are available so many places, so customers have a lot more choices. That means you have to go back and you've got to realize... as you always say people buy from whom they know, like and trust. They've got to

create that relationship, relationships take a long period of time and your goal is through doing social media is to make sure that you get in the maybe pile.

To make sure you are one of three people they are considering when they're getting ready to make that buying decision. Going back in time, what I would do is set your goals clearly and what they're going to be and then set aside a certain amount of time to be in one place on one platform consistently. The worst thing that you can do is try to use too many different platforms and be there inconsistently because that really won't accomplish anything. You won't create relationships by people not knowing if you are going to show up or not.

Tim: Let's dig into that just for a second. In your experience, what kind of time are we talking about?

BARRY: Again, I don't think it is necessarily time related. If you only have 15 minutes a week, you should spend it in a very focused place, on very focused discussions within your community. If you have a narrow week, perhaps you can expand it there. Again, what did I accomplish during the week rather than how much time. I'm really a big believer, Tim, when I look at productivity that we really need to focus on tasks, not necessarily a time.

Tim: Got it. If you had a customer and they said, Barry, I just figured out how to blog. I was thinking about doing a Facebook page and now my wife is telling me that our bakery needs to be on Pinterest.

What advice do you give to a business owner and he is analyzing this new platform. What do you do when you hear that?

BARRY: First go on that platform, if you can, right? If you have additional time into the platform where you are already at, if you have time go on there and put in various search keywords and see if your customer prospects or connectors are actually talking about the subjects that you solve on that tool. If they are then become part of that conversation after you listen for a while, but never blindly go to a new platform just because it's the new, new thing. As you know, Tim, there's always going to be a new, new thing, right.

Tim: That's right, so when you go there and listen to see if there is a conversation going on about your solution or your problem, how do you do that? How do you listen?

BARRY: What you do is see if people are asking various questions and than you also can listen by actually helping people. If people have a certain problem, let's say you are a bakery and they've got a problem about how do I know how many products to produce in a single day because my demand is

variable? If you can offer some advice to that person on that particular subject, you then join the conversation and you're bringing added value to that relationship. The biggest problem that a lot of people face when they approach social media is they think they're there to sell and they are really not. You wouldn't go to a cocktail party and you wouldn't automatically say, well listen I do life insurance would you like to buy one of my policies? You'd go there you'd form a relationship first before you'd ever try to sell anything. We have to remember social media is not about you, right. It's not about you selling something it's about you forming a relationship with that person, so you can be there when people are ready to buy.

Tim: Suppose I'm a real rookie and I go okay Barry I get that; find the questions, get involved in the conversation. How do I find the questions?

BARRY: Right. What you do is... let's say for Twitter or for Facebook you can actually put some of the key words that you are interested in, in the search engine and see what comes out. For Twitter, let's say you are interested in... we are talking about the bakery product. Let's say you're interested in how do I know how much to produce every since day, right? You might put in supply verse demand bakery and see if there are any kinds of conversations going around that. I am continually surprised, Tim, the most obscure subject I'll

put in the search engine and guess what? There are conversations going on about that.

Tim: You can even narrow that down to a locale, say if you are interested in great cupcakes Boston?

BARRY: Absolutely, absolutely. There's also... if you go on Google there is also many ways that people categorize various Twitter handles by the subjects they are involved in. You also can find out the right people to follow. Once I find someone that is really talking about the subject that I am really interested in I go see who those people are actually following and it's also good clues for other people to listen in on.

Tim: Then, if you find those people that are relevant and you follow them and you're experienced, what is the follow back ratio?

BARRY: For me, I would say that it is over 50%. I think that a lot of people automatically follow back, but again, I want to emphasize it's not the number of followers because of course you can go out there and for a hundred dollars in the market place, you can actually buy 20,000 followers. You want to know really engagements, how many people are really listening to what you are saying? How many people are talking back to you? Are you having conversations with these people, not are they listed as a follower on your list?

There was a wonderful statistic that I think now that Facebook has been public. I don't remember exactly what it was, but something like 10% of all the Facebook profiles are fake.

Tim: When it comes to managing social media, just in your experience, what are some of your favorite tools to streamline the process?

BARRY: I personally use Hootsuite and [Social Oomph](#). I use TweetDeck because it really allows me to really listen to the people that I want to listen. It's very difficult with a big Twitter stream and a big set of Facebook followers. Really to try to listen to the conversation you particularly want, so for example through TweetDeck I can listen on conversations that are happening around just small business or just customer service or just small towns or I have a list of the top 500 people that I listen to.

I really want to know, guess what every single time you have something to say, I have a special list for my customers and my prospects because I want to know what they are saying. These types of add on tools allows you to do that. I use Social Oomph for not only analyzing what is going on, but also being able to schedule tweets or post when I may not have the opportunity to do that on a regular basis. The more that you can choose one or more of these add on tools,

it really will be able to enable you to see things a lot more clearly.

Tim: In your view how does social media change the playing field for smaller companies?

BARRY: Tim, you're totally right. I remember 20 years ago when I was starting my first business I wanted to appear larger than life. We all want to appear like we are a big successful company and now since consumers that you were saying are really value the human voice they care a lot about earned media, what other consumers are saying about your company. Now, what's really cool is that even large companies that are actually trying to appear small.

I have a button now that says go small or go home and I wrote about this in my newest book called "Small Town Rules", where the entire country, because of social media really is like a small town. When every customer, Tim, can talk to ever other customer your reputation is really key and that lasts forever. It really is like we all live in a small town, so it really gives an advantage to the small business owners. Survey showed time and time again because consumers feel that small businesses give a lot better customer service than larger business do. Then, what they really want to do, they'd much rather do business with a local small business. It's really put them on a much even playing field or even a little bit above. I really think that we

are living now in the time of a small business owner's revenge.

For so many years we wanted to be large, right now people don't brag about how large their companies are. People brag about how small they are, right? They are able to work anywhere. They're able to work with a series of contractors to keep their costs variable. People are really enjoying that lifestyle, so a lot of folks want to be small rather than be really, really big.

Tim: What would be some timeless advice that you would give someone in this category of social media? Advice that you would say five years from now, this approach would still work?

BARRY: I think I can still be reminded what my wife keep telling me, Tim. That it's not about me and I think that when you approach social media you have to remember it's not about you. Now, whatever tool you use, you got to use it with a purpose and keep thinking about how does it help you achieve your goal of building relationships with customers, prospects and influencers? You've got to go and find out where those people are and make sure that you don't sell your product, especially early in the cycle.

Tim: What blogs or books do you recommend your clients keep up with?

BARRY: I keep up with Seth Godin every week. I really enjoy the short advice that he offers. I enjoy Keith Ferrazzi, and the insights that he offers. There are some great newsletters that come from [SmartBrief](#) on a variety of subjects. I read BusinessWeek every week and I have to tell you if I were ever going to be on a desert island with only one periodical it would have to be Wired Magazine.

Tim: Let's say that you run a small business, where you provide a business important vital service, whatever it is, you can make it up. Let's say you just took over the small business, okay. Knowing everything you know, what would be some of the first things you would do regarding your social media plan? What would be some must dos?

BARRY: The must do first is that I would figure out what my strategy really was. What pain did I solve for customers and who has the money to solve the pain and where are they talking about their pain, social media will just be one thing. They might be talking about it through some kind of forum, they might be talking about it at trade shows, and they might be talking to so other bulletin board kind of thing. Find out where people are talking about the pain that you solve and get involved in those conversations. For me, that's why I am always tracking issues that people are talking about on small business. That's the first thing I would do even before

I thought about which tools I was going to use. I'd see where those conversations were happening on which tool.

Tim: Last question, in your experience do certain social platforms work better for certain vertical markets?

BARRY: They do, you've got to think about again what your business really is, so for example we were talking previous about Pinterest. Pinterest obviously is pinning or posting pictures, right. Is there a visual component to your business and Pinterest by in large is mostly women. The male equivalent is called Gentlemint, right, which you might also want to check out. Are you doing something visual? You might want to do Facebook or YouTube.

You have to think about what kind of problem are you really solving and you don't even have to make the decision yourself. The first thing you have to do is find out where the conversations are happening, and go to that.

For more by Barry Moltz, visit his [web site](#).

An Interview With Social Media Consultant & Author John Jantsch

Tim: John, what a pleasure to have you here today. Give me your reaction to the constant buzz about social media as if it was its own little island.

John: Well, I understand it to a degree. It's the new stuff; it's the foreign stuff; it's the stuff that all the experts are making a living now, being able to tell people how to use, so I get it, but in the end, it's always been about the customer; it's always been about, what are our marketing objectives, and I think any new tool that you look at, and the entire online space in general, I think the question always has to be: how can we use these tools or these new strategies or tactics to meet our already stated customer and marketing objectives?

So, thankfully, I think we are finally rounding the corner and people really understand that, hey, this stuff is not going away; it's not that new anymore. It's a behavior that our customers expect and have adopted and let's figure out a way to integrate it.

Tim: How do you define marketing?

John: My definition of marketing is getting someone who has a need to know, like and trust you and I think that's in regards to what we make, ship, fix, so that's the game we're all

playing. I've been using this definition for ten years, and it's never been more true than today.

Tim: What problems do you tackle with your clients?

John: I think the biggest one that we tackle is that, again, most of my clients are small businesses and, a lot of times, the founder of that is so focused on what the business does, they lose sight of how they're going to differentiate that business. Do aren't in touch with the higher purpose for that business and all the things that really create the story that customers are attracted to. Unfortunately, too many people think that one remodeling contractor is just like every one until you tell them a story that piques their interest.

Tim: Talk to me a little bit about the importance of story in the marketing mix and how social might fit into that?

John: I really think that the market responds to the different. Think about even the most mundane things you buy like a TV. You look at a couple of them, and in comparing them maybe price is one of the factors, but we always look for and reward that difference.

I think, when we're trying to make a decision, the story line that you share can make you different and makes all the difference. Show them, "here's how we got to where we were; here's what we believe in," and you'll create elements

of differentiation. It's hard not to like someone once you know his story, and I think that that's such a great element of marketing.

I remember when I first started talking to small business owners. It was such a foreign concept. Wait a minute, I'm not going to let my hair down and tell them a personal story of tragedy, of why I started this business; nobody wants to hear that, etc. Now I think people realize that absolutely people want to hear that and if you're not mining it and finding it and sharing with your customers, you're missing a great opportunity.

Tim: So what are some of your favorite case studies where a business used social media to win business or solve their own business problems?

John: I'm going to go back to a real brick and mortar, nuts and bolts kind of a business, a modeling contractor that I worked that did really high-end work. They believed that their message was craftsmanship and just the quality of their work and we actually went out and talked to their customers and the customers repeatedly told us, yes, they do great work; we expect it but they're expensive.

Here's what they did that made them unique in their field: They cleaned up the job site, eliminating all the evidence of the remodel for their clients. We made it their entire story

and all of a sudden it became their message online; it became their message in their e-mail; it became their message when they were blogging, and certainly, as we moved them into Facebook, it became their overriding message, and I think that it was a combination of those tools that allowed them to really reach this higher-end client that they were after, because that a message that truly was what they cared about.

And I think that's a really important combination for any kind of a case study. It's not just simply how many likes did we get and how many Twitter followers do we have. A good case study should measure how potential customers have connected with that message in these new outposts and how it impacts profits.

Tim: So if you aren't using vanity metrics like followers or likes, how do you measure social media success, then?

John: I think what you have to do with those vanity metrics, there's no question that more can be a good thing if you're driving those more—and this is why it's so important to understand this idea of integrating—if you're driving those more to a blog post or to an event or to some form of content that they want to get, like an e-book, and then you're capturing that lead so you can continue to market to those folks or they give you permission to continue to

market to those folks, I think that's the part that you have to really look at.

So many people get really caught up in, hey, let's run this content on Facebook and it will triple our likes, but then those likes just sort of vanish into thin air because you haven't really captured them in a way that can start to build trust and maybe even let them try a product and then obviously give you—then earn the permission to actually just flat-out sell them. And I think if we're not doing that, we're missing the boat.

Tim: Now, one of the things I loved about your [free eBook](#) on social media for small businesses, you talked about feeding the beast and what it really revealed to me is the big difference between the Yellow Pages era where it was really about a little creativity and a lot of cash, and the new era of marketing that we have now is that it's very time consumptive and it's very time-focused, not just creativity but a lot of time. My question for you is, how can owners or managers of small business find the time to effectively integrate social media into the mix?

John: Well, I think the first thing is they're never going to find the time, right? You can't make time necessarily so it always comes down to priorities. I always use the example, we can't find the time to get our taxes organized until April 14th and all of a sudden we find all the time it takes, right, because it

becomes a real high priority, and I think that that's true with marketing in general, is that business owners have to understand how important it is, that it has to become a priority and what I typically try to do is change behavior, is to say, make it an appointment, so you can't do—if you can't hire a full-time social media manager, then you have to put that hat on once a day for 20 or 30 minutes and the absolute best way to find time, if there is a way to find time, is to then also use all of the technology and the tools to help you automate.

Tim: So, what are some of those favorite streamlining tools that you like?

John: First, I use [TweetDeck](#), a desktop application that allows me to monitor various search terms on Twitter as well as any activity around my various properties there. Another favorite tool I recommend is called [Rapportive](#). It's a browser plug-in where if anybody sends me an e-mail, even if I don't know them or they've never contacted me before, if they're using that e-mail address publicly, it will show me their LinkedIn profile, it will show me the last things they said on Twitter, on Facebook, so it really gives me some great insight.

So I often tell people that tell me they don't have time is just focus on using these tools to build deeper, faster

relationships with your existing customer base and you'll actually find yourself saving time in the long run.

Tim: Do certain social networking platforms, e.g., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, work better for certain vertical markets?

John: I think they all have their own sort of personalities and I think they also have their own value. For example, if you are in a business to business market, LinkedIn is where you should be playing because it's—people that are on LinkedIn have come there because they understand it's about networking and sourcing business solutions.

Facebook is a great platform to invest time in. It's something more of a business to consumer, but you have to understand that it's not about doing deals necessarily; in some ways it's about entertaining. It's about showing your personal side; it's a little more about the sharing things that you find and that you then kind of build on those relationships to maybe to move them to something else like over to your event or your webinar or your e-book that you're giving away. So I think they have to understand those dynamics.

Tim: Let's say that you were just asked to take over a family business. It's a small business. It could be a restaurant; it could be a local home and modeling company, whatever. What would be some of the must do's for your marketing plan, integrating interactive?

John: Well, first, I would gather up eight or ten of my best customers and ask them why they buy from us; why they keep buying from us, what they like, what they don't like about doing business with us.

Then I'd ask what would they search for if they were looking for a business—including keywords they use in search and social networking platforms they belong to.

With regards to starting our social media activities, the very first step is claim all of the real estate that's out there, the Twitter profile, the LinkedIn profile, the Google Plus profile, plus the local Google Places profile. These are all of free real estate.

Tim: Do you think that social media or interactive media levels the playing field to some extent for smaller companies?

John: Oh, I think there's absolutely no question that it levels the playing field when used correctly, because it gives the little guy the speed advantage. I still run across large organizations that, if a person in marketing wants to post a tweet or launch a Facebook promotion it has to go through legal first and then through various hoops.

For more of John Jantsch, visit his website: [Duct Tape Marketing](#).

An Interview With Social Media Consultant Phil Gerbyshak

Tim: Define marketing from your point of view.

Phil: Marketing is telling your story. It is finding a way to get your story out there in a compelling way that your customers, that your audience, that the people that you want to hear it to hear it. You have to get the story in front of them; you have to build up that awareness and build a market of people who get your story, hopefully to then share your story, either traditional means or more new means using social media to get that out there.

Everything that you're doing is marketing, whether it's the customer service that you do to the people that are your customers or it is the customer service that you do if people send you a tweet and it's everything in between. So you're almost always marketing and for many people, everything is marketing because that might be the only interaction they have with your brand.

Tim: Talk to me about what problems you help your clients tackle.

Phil: The biggest problem, first of all, is finding the stories that really resonate the most and helping my clients tell them. Sometimes they're how to stories; sometimes they're stories about the company and how it was founded. Sometimes

they're stories about customers; sometimes they're stories about products; sometimes they're stories about service.

The biggest problem that I work with businesses to overcome is the fact that they don't think their story is interesting. So helping them see that it is interesting and breathing life into that and making it more human and less robotic and less marketing speak, if you will, and more human speak; like, how you and I have a conversation, having it more like that and less like what's kind of drawn all the air out of stories in traditional marketing over the years.

Tim: Give me some of your—talk to me about some of your favorite case studies of problems solved.

Phil: I worked with a company last year that's an automotive remanufacturing company that does after market transmission rebuilding and they had a problem where they weren't talking enough with the people who are actually purchasing the units. So the big thing that they realized is that it wasn't about educating people more about their transmissions; it was more about how to educate them on how to sell better.

So what we did is we came up with an article that we sent out every week and posted it to the website, Facebook and Twitter. It offered tips on how to sell, and better run their

businesses. It was well received, and led to a lot of new conversations, which led to sales. The company from about 25 million to about 36 million in annualized sales in two years.

Tim: Let me ask you a question: What platforms did they use to distribute the story?

Phil: Well, they used e-mail marketing so using [Mail Chimp](#). Then they created a [Word Press](#) blog, a Twitter account, and a Facebook fan page. They told stories and then responded to comments and to the e-mails. They engaged in dialogue with their customers

Tim: How can owners and managers find the time for all these social media activities?

Phil: You have schedule the time and you have to block it on your calendar just like you would anything else. Even before that, you have to start with a strategy. You have to think about, what is the outcome that you're trying to achieve. The other thing, when it comes to time, is remembering that there are many tools out there that allow you to schedule information.

Tim: What are some of your favorite tools to help streamline and make efficient social media marketing?

Phil: My favorite tool is [Hootsuite](#). I recommend it to all my clients to schedule the content they post and set up alerts for comments they should interact with.

[Word Press](#) is always part of what I recommend, as it's the best blogging platform. I recommend it because it makes it easy for your readers to share your blog posts via Facebook or Twitter. I'm also using a new tool called [Bundle Post](#) to insert syndication feeds (they are called RSS) and manage all my customer or reader interactions.

And then when I'm on my mobile, I always have to have something that I use to interact with all those things so I'm going to use [Echofon](#) on my mobile device, as it gives me the same dashboard view of what I need to see as Hootsuite on my computer. So I take advantage of every second that I have, even when standing in line to get a cup of coffee.

Tim: Do certain social networking platforms work better for certain vertical markets?

Phil: Business-to-business companies can really benefit from LinkedIn because it seems more professional and it offers you the ability to touch a person that wants to engage with your company. It allows you to put your product or services up there and people to follow you so they see kind of the corporate news and think about this as a corporate news

page that human beings then can interact with and human beings being their employees can then post information too.

If your business sells to consumers, understand that visuals work best for them. They want to see pretty pictures and Pinterest is quickly becoming that visual way of seeing things. Integrating Pinterest into your blog so that every article that you post has a pretty picture that someone can then share on Pinterest, which then links back to your article, if people want to see more information. It's really important and that's fast becoming one of the most important traffic sources for my blog.

Tim: So what blogs or books do you recommend a business owner read?

Phil: Yeah, or for social media, one of the best books to read is Content Rules. It's great because it shows you all the different ways that you can learn how to create content, how to get that content out there.

If you're not at all familiar with social media, Chris Brogan's and Julia Smith's Trust Agents is a very good primer. Marsha Collier's, The Ultimate Online Customer Service Guide is absolutely fantastic.

Tim: If you suddenly were given a small business to run in Milwaukee, what would be your must-do's for your social media strategy?

Phil: Some must-do's for a brand new small business, first of all, is you have to build a Word Press blog. The second thing I'd do is I'd hire a good video person for a day and shoot at least 60 bite-sized with 60 to 120 second chunks of information and I'd cut that up and I'd have that. That would be other content. The third thing would be to hire a good writer to create as much content as he can by interviewing my customers or to interview other thought leaders in the space. Next, I would set up an e-mail subscription service that people could sign up for that e-mail. That's the first week's work.

The next week I would set up a Twitter account and I would follow and try to engage as many local people as I could, regardless of industry; just local people. I would follow them, share their stuff and try to engage them. I would try to set up a meet-up at my physical location as fast as possible and get people to start seeing that I'm part of the community. Don't be afraid to invest your money in face-to-face because offline leads to online leads to offline leads to revenue.

Tim: Here is my last question for you: How does social media level the playing field for small/medium businesses or does it?

Phil: It doesn't make it completely level but it does a lot and the reason it does a lot is because you can produce interesting

content as a small business; you can produce interesting videos as a small business, and you can be more human as a small business. It's not perfect because a big business, of course, can hire a hundred writers; maybe you can only hire one, part-time. What it does do is it gives you the same opportunity if you're willing to put in the work. It allows you to be just as human as the big business.

In fact, it's an advantage because in a small business, often it's your face that's on the cover, your face that greets customers, and your face is something users can and will trust. Big businesses often hide behind logos or brands. So definitely, a small business can leverage that humanism and use that to even be more human because people like to do business with humans, not with buildings. And being human is the way to ultimately win business...with other humans.

For more of Phil Gerbyshak, visit his [web site](#).