



HOME-BASED AND MICRO BUSINESSES
**CASHING IN ON
BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES**

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**INCORPORATING SOCIAL MEDIA INTO
YOUR MARKETING PLAN**

PREFACE

This unit includes a number of factors to be considered if a business wants to adopt social media into its array of marketing tools. It is designed to be used in a two-hour combination lecture/interactive session where participants have the opportunity to have hands-on experiences seeing and using the various forms of social media. Since an important component of this lesson is the process through which social media is incorporated into the business' marketing plan, rather than being added on as an afterthought or because it "seems like the thing to do," this module should be taught in conjunction with the business planning and marketing modules. The instructor should work with local information technology consultants to provide advice and information on the technical aspects of implementing the various media.

Goal: Entrepreneurs will learn how to develop and implement a social media strategy as a means of online marketing and to determine if social media can and should play a role in achieving their marketing objectives.

Objectives: After this lesson, participants will:

- Become familiar with the world of marketing online via social media applications.
- Identify the parts of creating a social media strategy.
- Identify the most popular social media online tools and applications currently available.
- Determine if and how social media can be incorporated into their individual business marketing plans.

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

SLIDE

1

WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA?

In today's world, online marketing has become a method of 'listening' and 'engaging' (the two components of any conversation) with current and potential customers. That is what social media is all about – 'listening' and 'engaging'!

According to the Social Media Guide¹, if you ask 50 different people to explain their definition of social media, you are likely to get many different answers. Examples:

- Brian Solis² - Social media is the democratization of information, transforming people from content readers into publishers. It is the shift from a broadcast mechanism, one-to-many, to a many-to-many model, rooted in conversations between authors, people and peers.
- Wikipedia³ - Social media are media for social interaction, using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques.
- Answers.com⁴ – It is the online forms of communicating to the masses, which include blogs, microblogs, social networking sites and podcasts.
- Duct Tape Marketing⁵ – Social media is the use of technology combined with social interaction to create or co-create value.

While each of these definitions are different, they all have one common theme: Social media uses web-based applications and technologies to transform, broadcast and interact. These online tools have revolutionized how businesses can interact and reach particular types of customers through the Internet. Regardless of your business size – you may be able to take advantage of the social media tools to inform, educate and engage with your customers.

WHO ARE SUCCESSFUL SALES PEOPLE?

SLIDE

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If you haven't watched the YouTube video on the Social Media Revolution⁶ (Version 2009), you may want to now!

So what's all the 'buzz'?

While several marketing studies point to the increased adoption and use of social media strategies, one that provides clear and consistent recommendations is "The State of Small Business Report"⁷ sponsored by Network Solutions, LLC and the University of Maryland's Robert H. Smith School of Business.

1 <http://thesocialmediaguide.com.au/2011/01/06/50-definitions-of-social-media/>

2 <http://www.briansolis.com/>

3 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_media

4 <http://www.answers.com/topic/social-media-technology>

5 <http://www.ducttapemarketing.com/blog/2008/09/25/the-definition-of-social-media/>

6 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIFYPQjYhv8>

7 http://www.networksolutions.com/smallbusiness/wp-content/files/SBSI_February_2010.pdf?channelid=P99C425S627N0B142A1D38E0000V100

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This report identified a 12 percent increase in the use of social media by the surveyed businesses from 2009 to 2010, and that one in five businesses use social media as part of its marketing strategy.

Other uses of social media by the surveyed businesses found in this report include:

- 75 percent have a company page on a social networking site
- 69 percent post status updates or articles of interest on social media sites
- 57 percent build a network through a site such as LinkedIn
- 54 percent monitor feedback about the business
- 39 percent maintain a blog
- 26 percent tweet about areas of expertise
- 16 percent use Twitter as a service channel

According to this report, the major accomplishments of social media are related to marketing and service and include:

- Identifying and attracting new customers (61 percent of users)
- Developing higher awareness of the business in its target market (52 percent)
- Staying engaged with current customers (46 percent)
- Collaborating more effectively externally with suppliers, partners and colleagues (35 percent)
- Collaborating more effectively internally (21 percent)

Check out some other industry studies – search for Social Media in the search engine of your choice – Bing, Google, etc.

ARE YOU READY FOR SOCIAL MEDIA?

As you work through this curriculum module, one of your overriding concerns should be, “Should I adopt social media as a marketing strategy?” To address this issue, ask yourself these questions before you make a final decision regarding the implementation of a social media marketing strategy:

- Are your customers likely to be online?
- Are you ready to handle negativity?
- How will you incorporate this into people’s daily jobs?
- How will you measure the results?
- How long are you willing to give it a try?
- What’s your willingness to experiment, take risks, and adjust your plans?⁸

Another resource that you may want to examine is “Creating A Social Media PR Strategy, Why It Matters and How You Can Do It”⁹ by Adam Singer. While this post contains some fairly advanced materials that will be referenced later in this lesson, it does lay out very relevant factors to consider when deciding if you should undertake this type of marketing strategy.

⁸ Chris Brogan. Starting a Social Media Strategy. <http://www.chrisbrogan.com/starting-a-social-media-strategy/>

⁹ <http://comprehension.prsa.org/?p=1653>

Importance of Social Media Strategy

Incorporating social media strategies into your marketing plan can help you be successful in reaching your business goals. However, you must remember that, in most cases, social media will be just one marketing strategy among several that you will employ. Therefore, it must be considered and evaluated just like any other marketing strategy. Careful planning is critical!

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WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS?

Chris Brogan, President of New Marketing Labs, works with large and mid-sized companies to improve online business communications through emerging web and mobile technologies. In a blog post entitled “Starting a Social Media Strategy,”¹⁰ he challenges small businesses to **Begin with the End in Mind**. The social media strategy is not the goal – it is a path to get you where you want to go. He also recommends you consider potential goals for using social media:

- Increasing customer base
- Generating sales leads
- Driving sales
- Building product or firm awareness
- Making money from online content
- Establishing thought leadership
- Educating customers
- Making customers a part of your product development
- Reaching new customers
- Improving internal communication

Once you have identified those goals that apply to you and your business, then you can determine the best strategy to achieve them.

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PARTS OF A SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

- Identifying your goals
- Identifying your target audience
- Creating a profile/brand
- Finding the social media that’s right for you
- Planning a time frame
- Including search engine optimization (SEO)
- Measuring goals

SLIDE

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SET MEANINGFUL GOALS

In many of the previous modules associated with this curriculum, you have been challenged to identify your business goals. If your goal is to maximize the profit that your business generates, then you have to determine the marketing objectives and strategies that will

¹⁰ <http://www.chrisbrogan.com/starting-a-social-media-strategy/>

accomplish this? The same is true for adding more customers, generating more repeat customers or increasing revenues. These are all business goals that you have to determine and then identify marketing strategies that will help you reach them.

One way to think about this is in your Vision Statement – the long-term mission that should be timeless and inspiring for stakeholders. Every business has a brand or reputation, so include the characteristics of your product or service that define the brand.

Having identified your vision, you can use the S.M.A.R.T method to determine the objectives that will help accomplish your social media goals! Use this method to make sure your goals and objectives are:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Attainable
- Relevant
- Timely

IDENTIFY YOUR TARGET MARKET

As we have discussed in other modules, a key component of an effective marketing plan is to identify your target audience. In most cases, we won't be able to say that our customer is "the world" (at least not if we want to realize our business goals). This is particularly important if we are determining if utilizing social media would be an effective marketing strategy for our firm. Questions that you should ask to help identify your target customer include:

- Who are your customers?
- What social and demographic characteristics do they have?
- What age group do they come from?
- What are their spending or shopping habits?
- Do they shop online?
- What social media applications are they using (or, even more important, do they even use social media)?

By answering these questions about your target audience, you will know how to focus your social media marketing efforts. Focus is the key word here; most social media (as well as other online marketing strategies) target a specific group. Identifying potential customers who have similar needs and wants will serve to increase the success of strategies that utilize social media as a marketing option.

Conducting market research can give you a better understanding of who your targeted customers are. There are several ways to go about using market research. Many of the other Cashing in on Business modules talked about the various ways of performing effective market research, including using interviews, focus groups and customer surveys. For more information on Building a Better Survey – see the Inc. Magazine article "How to Conduct Market Research."¹¹

¹¹ <http://www.inc.com/magazine/20090901/guidebook-how-to-conduct-market-research.html>

Conduct social media research for your customers

There are many online resources available that will help you get a broad perspective on the demographics of potential customers. These types of demographics will prove very useful in identifying the appropriate types of social media that will help you to achieve your vision for the business.

One of the best sources for advice on search techniques that can be used for target market identification is found in Rhonda Abrams' book "Successful Business Research." A brief version of her advice, along with observations from "Business Feasibility: A First Cut Analysis – A Guide for Agricultural Entrepreneurs"¹² by the University of Wisconsin's Center for Community and Economic Development is shown below:

Perform a keyword search

You first need to determine the word or term that your customers will enter into a search engine (such as Google, Bing, and AOL) to find a product or service such as yours. Expect to try several different words or phrases.

For example, try *flowers*, then try *flower industry*, then try *floral industry*. In general, you will need a phrase (instead of a single word) that contains specific keywords to describe your topic. Using an online tool such as Google Trends¹³ can help you to determine the effectiveness of various search terms.

Use quotation marks in your search

If you place quotation marks around a term, the search engine will look for only those sites that contain all the words in the quotation marks, rather than any site that contains any of the words. If you put quotation marks around "*floral industry*" you would eliminate sites about other types of industry.

You can also put quotation marks around two pairs of words in a search. For example, if you entered *flower shop profit margins*, you would find a variety of results, not many of which are interesting. You could very well get zero results if you put all four words in quotation marks. If, however, you entered "*flower shop*" "*profit margins*" you would find many sites that could be of interest.

Search by NAICS codes

NAICS (pronounced "nakes") stands for North American Industry Classification System, and every type of business in North America has been assigned a NAICS code. It replaced the Standard Industry Classification (SIC) system in 1997. Knowing your NAICS code can help you search for information specific to your industry.

To find your NAICS code, go to the Census Bureau's website.¹⁴ You can do a keyword search there to find the NAICS code for your industry.

¹² <http://fyi.uwex.edu/aic/startup/>

¹³ <http://www.google.com/trends>

¹⁴ <http://www.census.gov/epcd/naics02/naicod02.htm>

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The code for florist is 453110. When we used 453110 to do a Google search, we found many industry-specific resources, including several that offered industry overviews and financial benchmark information.

Other web databases include:

- ESRI Industry database (<http://esri.com/industries>)
- ESRI Free Data site (<http://esri.com/data/free-data>)
- Pitney Bowes Business Insight (<http://pbinsight.com>)
- My Best Segments (<http://mybestsegments.com>)
- Rutgers University Market Research Guide (http://libguides.rutgers.edu/market_research)

Survey design help:

- E Surveys Pro (<http://esurveyspro.com>)
- Google (<http://google.com>)
- Survey Monkey (<http://surveymonkey.com>)

Professional advice:

- Marketing Research Association (<http://mra-net.org>)
- American Marketing Association (<http://marketingpower.com>)

“AND” and then some

Try using the word “AND” or a comma to expand and clarify your search. For example: *Flower shop AND profit* and *Flower shop, profit* – should produce the same results.

Begin with the following:

- *Industry Analysis:* What are the trends and issues in my industry?
- *Customer Analysis:* What are the demographics of my customers?
- *Niche Analysis:* How big is the market for my specific business?

For more information on conducting this type of market research, refer to Pages 31 to 62 of “Business Feasibility: A First Cut Analysis.”

Additional locations to seek market research information include:

- Local chamber of commerce
- Local economic development organization
- Small business development centers
- Local Extension offices
- Public libraries

Once you have the data tabulated, patterns should emerge. If not, you may want to collect more data or conduct a resurvey or focus group.

However, you must remember what you are looking for. In addition to providing you with industry standards and resources for your particular type of business, you should also be able to get a good idea of how customers find the types of products and services that you will be selling. You are looking for that ‘aha’ moment; a revelation that shows where you can have the greatest impact on your customers in a positive way. This will show you have been listening and that you have developed a strategy that will provide value for your customers!

Now you can define the strategies:

- How will you position your business against other businesses?
- What target markets are your best prospect to achieve your goals
- How will you price your offerings to achieve your goals?

CREATE A PROFILE/BRAND

Creating a brand is not just about looking ‘pretty’ or marketing individual products or services. Rather, it’s about creating an image and reputation for your company that is easily recognized when marketing your company through any method. Is your company trusted by its customers to the point that they recognize it as an entity that offers a solid product at a good price, and it creates value when they hear your name? For example, many sources report that Amazon.com is the United States’ most trusted brand, but few people can grasp the breadth of products and services that Amazon offers over its websites. However, most people do agree that they trust the company to deliver what they order at the specified price in a timely manner.

You have to determine what you want your brand to say about you. Does it reflect your values, your business ethics, your vision? Think long and hard about what ‘brand’ you want people to remember about your business.

A brand is much more than a catchy domain or screen name. Your website domain and all other associated social media should reflect the brand. As you create your online profiles, think about your screen name and consider whether it reflects your current website domain name and your business name.

Consider how the following business used its business name in all online screen names:

- Nextgenweb.org
- Twitter.com/nextgenweb
- Youtube.com/nextgenweb
- Facebook.com/pages/nextgenweb.org
- Ustream.tv/nextgenweb
- Delicious.com/nextgenweb
- janedoe@nextgenweb.org – email address

Look at the way this company has incorporated its name into all social media applications. The brand is consistent throughout its online presence.

FIND THE SOCIAL MEDIA THAT’S RIGHT FOR YOU

Now that you have established your target audience, what does the data and research tell you about what they are doing online and which tools they might be using?

You don’t have to be all things to all people – pick and choose which social media tools make the right sense for your vision of where you want your business to go and then concentrate on making that network work for you.

People have a tendency to create social media profiles and then do nothing with them. Don't be one of those people!

Explore all social media applications and see which one fits your marketing strategy. By utilizing a mix of applications for your social marketing effort, you will be able to engage with the desired audience who spend time interacting and share content about your product and/or service. Whatever the mix, it is an investment in time and relationships. Be aware that it is not a short term effort if it is to be effective.

It is recommended to begin small and then expand your online social media presence.

PLAN A TIME FRAME

When it comes to incorporating social media into your overall marketing plan, your investment involves more time than money. Michael Stelzner, author of "2010 Social Media Marketing Industry Report,"¹⁵ says that the more experience you have with the social media tools, the more time you will spend on creating content and engaging with customers.

Map out a schedule, that specifies the days and times you will spend on social media marketing. You need to figure out what is realistic for you and your staff. An example schedule could look something like this:

- Everyday – try to post something new. The key word here is try. In many instances, you may have too many other responsibilities and won't be able to post something. Remember that if you begin to use social media as a marketing method and then stop, your company may "disappear" in the minds of many of your customers.

At the same time, you have to walk a fine line so as to not overwhelm your customers. Post when you have something to say that your customers want to hear. Service innovations, new or improved products or new markets that you are entering are all subjects that you definitely want to post.

- Mondays and Wednesdays – respond to comments and direct messages
- Tuesdays and Thursdays – "retweeting" to people's comments, thanking people for mentioning you or making comments on other's blogs
- Friday – searching for new ways to use the media

Spend some time thinking about how much time you think that you should spend on your social media strategy, either daily or weekly. Is it 10 minutes per day, an hour a week, or longer? The studies cited here have shown that there can be significant paybacks from spending increasing amounts of time on developing social media strategies. However, you have to decide how much time can be spent "away" from your business in developing this media.

¹⁵ <http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/social-media-marketing-industry-report-2011/>

INCLUDE SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

According to the preceding report, 85 percent of all marketers completing the survey indicated that social marketing increased exposure to their business. Therefore, making the most of your media's keywords just makes sense as you identify and create your social media marketing tactics. Search engines have been incorporating social content in organic (non-advertisement) search results, including Twitter tweets, blog posts and updates from other real-time services, according to a post written by Adam Singer entitled "Creating a Social Media PR Strategy, Why It Matters and How You Can Do It"¹⁶ on comPREhension.

Just like optimizing searches of your website, you need to optimize the search engine-related social content, including headlines, title pages, alt text, images and video, with your target keyword(s).

In selecting optimal keywords, there are several tactics to consider:

- Focus on good phrases
- Avoid "vanity" keywords
- Use Google AdWords: Keyword Tool - <http://adwords.google.com>
- Remember the value of repetition
- Guide your content strategy

For more information, see the Inc. Magazine article "5 Secrets to Selecting Highly Effective SEO Keywords."¹⁷

DEVELOPING CONTENT

Developing meaningful content of your social media sites is essential to support meaningful and interactive experiences with current and potential customers. You will need to use words and data to create content that entices them to want to engage with your brand and your company.

Experts talk about creating a content strategy to develop useful content for the media's readers (this could be either social media or a more typical website). However, a content strategy really isn't a strategy at all. In her article "The Discipline of Content Strategy,"¹⁸ Kristina Halvorson says that content strategy is a comprehensive plan for creating, publishing, and governing useful and usable content. It is comprised of a set of key deliverables that maximize the benefit to the user:

- Key themes and messages
- Recommended topics
- Content purpose
- Content gap analysis
- Metadata frameworks and related content attributes
- Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

¹⁶ <http://comprehension.prsa.org/?p=1653>

¹⁷ <http://www.inc.com/guide/2010/06/picking-effective-SEO-keywords.html>

¹⁸ <http://www.alistapart.com/articles/thedisciplineofcontentstrategy/>

Think about this in terms of the material that we covered on Slide 9. While social media is a relatively new and very exciting marketing strategy, it is probably only one strategy in your marketing portfolio (other strategies could include non-social media internet marketing such as websites, etc.; local radio or newspaper advertising; word-of-mouth; etc.), but the content that you develop needs to tie all of these strategies together. This is particularly true of the experiential strategies such as word-of-mouth reputations, open houses, etc.

Creating content that is enticing to the consumer and provides the message of your brand takes discipline to be able to get your message across. We have to be committed to treating content as a critical business asset worthy of investment. If we don't, our customers still won't find what they are looking for, and we'll keep failing to create online content that they care about.

MEASURING GOALS

There are no clear standards in measuring your return on investment (ROI) in the social media context at this time. The ultimate goal may be higher profits, increased sign-ups of newsletter or increased customer satisfaction, but audience engagement and an increase of customers interacting with your brand/company will play a critical role in the social media marketing effort.

Unlike many other marketing thrusts, measuring the success of social media begins by asking more questions. Aaron Uhrmacher created a post on Mashable.com that provided some hints to the questions a business owner should ask:

- Did we learn something about our customers that we didn't know before?
- Did our customers learn something about us?
- Were we able to engage our customers in new conversations?¹⁹

In his article "Measuring Audience Engagement in Social Media,"²⁰ Nathan Linnell points out that there are many existing social media-oriented tools that can be used to help answer these questions. Using the premise that audience engagement is typically at the core of any social media campaign, he suggests that the following metrics may help a business owner determine the success of social media marketing success.

Blog Comments – This is a simple, easy way to get a sense of how engaging your blog posts are for your audience. However, don't just count the comments; create a set of categories (such as satisfaction, dissatisfaction, product inquiry, etc.) and assign a category to each comment. Doing this on a computerized spreadsheet allows the comment categories to be easily analyzed.

Facebook Interactions – Look at the sum of comments, wall posts, and likes on your Facebook page. Analyze the comments and posts in the same way as the blog comments.

¹⁹ Uhrmacher, Aaron. "How to Develop a Social Media Plan for Your Business in 5 Steps.

<http://mashable.com/2008/07/10/how-to-develop-a-social-media-plan/>. July 10, 2008.

²⁰ <http://searchenginewatch.com/article/2068013/Measuring-Audience-Engagement-in-Social-Media>

Twitter Retweets – Looking at the volume of tweets your company creates is likely meaningless (although it could give you an idea of the level of resources you are putting into this medium), but looking at the number and content of retweets (the tweets that your readers forward to their Twitter followers) will shed insight on content relevancy.

Twitter @Tweets – These types of tweets act like a direct mail message from a potential customer to your company. An @tweet indicates the desire for direct communication by a customer with the company. This is where an ‘engagement’ can lead to or enhance a relationship.

YouTube Video Interactions – Counting the number of video comments, favorites and ratings can measure how well your business or brand moves viewers beyond just watching a video to engaging with it.

YouTube Channel Interactions – Much like the YouTube video interactions measure, this metric provides insights into understanding if viewers are moving to making a more personal connection with your brand/company by utilizing your company or brand channel as a whole instead of analyzing individual videos. Visit YouTube.com for more information.

Social Media Brand Mentions – There are a many other opportunities that can help you to measure the effectiveness of your social media marketing campaign by monitoring or evaluating the engagement of your business/brand with customers. An example is the number of times your business/brand is mentioned on forums/message boards that deal with your type of product or service. Once you can identify these types of sites, you will be able to determine how widespread your business name is throughout the various social media networks.

How often should these metrics be measured? This is an important question and, unfortunately, the answer is “It depends.” Daily is probably too often if you want to analyze general trends in your postings (however, daily may be just right if you are wanting to gauge your audience’s response to a particular post). If you have a regular daily or every other day posting regimen, then you should probably check these measures every week or so to get a feel of the general trends of your audience. If you are only posting once every week or two, a monthly check is probably sufficient. However, utilizing a service like Google Analytics²¹ will provide you with enough information to make a determination not only on whether your goals are being met, but also the frequency that you need to evaluate your progress.

SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS TO CONSIDER

While there are myriad existing social media technologies and many more are likely being developed each day, most of these fall into some basic categories. According to the e-book “What is Social Media,”²² these include:

Social Networks – A formal definition of social networks describes them as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a

²¹ <http://www.google.com/analytics>

²² <http://www.icrossing.co.uk/what-we-think/>

bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and move among their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature of these connections may vary from site to site.²³

A more understandable definition is that social networking is the grouping of individuals into specific groups (networks), like small rural communities or a neighborhood subdivision. It is most popular online. Social network websites function like an online community of internet users. Depending on the website in question, many of these online community members share common interests in hobbies, religion or politics. Once you are granted access to a social networking website, you can begin to socialize. This socialization may include reading the profile pages of other members and possibly even contacting them. Currently, the largest social network is Facebook.²⁴

A list of social networking sites can be found in the Wikipedia article http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_social_networking_websites.

Business Examples

- *Jewelry by Sonell*
<http://www.facebook.com/?ref=home#!/pages/Jewelry-by-Sonell/10150115481990654>
- *Lazy Girl Designs Quilting and Sewing Patterns*
<http://www.facebook.com/?ref=home#!/lazygirl>
- *pictureframes.com*
http://www.facebook.com/?sk=app_2309869772#!/pictureframes
- *Cabela's*
http://www.facebook.com/?sk=app_2309869772#!/Cabelas?ref

Blogs – A blog is a shared on-line journal where people can post diary entries about their personal experiences and hobbies.²⁵ Examples of websites where a blog can be relatively easily created include Wordpress,²⁶ Typepad²⁷ or Blogger.²⁸

Blogs are usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order. “Blog” can also be used as a verb, meaning to *maintain or add content to a blog*.²⁹ Several blog search engines are used to search blog contents, including Bloglines,³⁰ BlogScope,³¹ and Technorati.³²

23 Boyd, D.M. and N.B. Ellison. Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*. 13(1), article 11. <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol13/issue1/boyd.ellison.html>

24 <http://www.facebook.com/>

25 <http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu>

26 <http://wordpress.com/>

27 <http://www.typepad.com/>

28 <http://www.blogger.com> (Blogger.com is a Google product. This website will redirect you to a Google domain.)

29 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blogs>

30 <http://www.bloglines.com/index.html>

31 <http://www.blogscope.net/>

32 <http://technorati.com/>

Business Examples

- *The Fruit Company*
<http://blog.thefruitcompany.com/>
- *GROW Nebraska*
<http://www.growneb.com/blog/>

Microblogging – Microblogs are broadcast media in the form of blogging. A microblog differs from a traditional blog in that its content is typically much smaller, in both actual size and aggregate file size. A microblog entry could consist of nothing but a short sentence fragment, an image or an embedded video, and these are typically distributed both online and through the mobile phone network.

As with traditional blogging, microbloggers post about topics ranging from the simple, such as “what I’m doing right now,” to the thematic, such as “sports cars.” Commercial microblogs also exist to promote websites, services, and/or products and to promote collaboration within an organization.³³ While Twitter³⁴ is currently the most popular microblogging site, other sites include Seesmic,³⁵ Tumblr³⁶ and Six Apart.³⁷ In addition, many full scale social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace include microblogging features known as status updates.

Wikis – These collaborative websites allow the users to add, delete and edit website content.³⁸ They are exceptionally useful for incorporating many ideas to develop a concept. The best known wiki is Wikipedia,³⁹ the online encyclopedia which has over 3.5 million content pages.

Podcasts – These audio and/or video files are available by download through services like Apple’s iTunes⁴⁰ or Napster.⁴¹ These files may be downloaded without charge or by per-download or subscription charges. Podcasts require special software for their creation such as Propaganda,⁴² Audacity⁴³ and Hipcast.⁴⁴

Forums – A forum is an online community or social network of individuals who interact and engage in conversation of mutual interests or goals. Virtual communities and forums are used for a variety of social and professional groups. It does not necessarily mean that there is a strong bond among the members, although when people carry on public discussions long enough, with *sufficient human feeling*, personal relationships are formed.⁴⁵

33 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Microblogging>

34 <http://twitter.com>

35 <http://www.seesmic.com>

36 <http://www.tumblr.com>

37 <http://www.sixapart.com>

38 <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/wiki>

39 <http://www.wikipedia.org/>

40 <http://www.apple.com/itunes/>

41 <http://www.napster.com>

42 <http://www.makepropaganda.com/>

43 <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>

44 <http://www.hipcast.com/>

45 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual_community

Content Communities – These communities organize and share particular types of content. The most popular content communities tend to form around photos (Flickr⁴⁶), bookmarked links (del.icio.us⁴⁷) and videos (YouTube⁴⁸).

Multimedia Sharing – This allows Internet users to upload digital photos, video clips and slideshow presentations to an online application or website, thus enabling the user to share them with others (whether publicly or privately). The host then stores the files on its server and allows for others to view. Examples include YouTube, Flickr, vimeo⁴⁹ and Slideshare.com.⁵⁰ Wikipedia has a number of video hosting⁵¹ sites and photo sharing⁵² sites in its articles.

Social Bookmarking – It is a method for Internet users to share, organize, search and manage bookmarks of web resources. Users save links to web pages that they want to remember and/or share. These bookmarks are usually public, but can be saved privately, shared only with specified people or groups, shared only inside certain networks, or another combination of public and private domains. The allowed people can usually view these bookmarks chronologically, by category or tags, or via a search engine.

Most social bookmark services encourage users to organize their bookmarks with informal tags instead of the traditional browser-based system of folders, although some services feature categories/folders or a combination of folders and tags.⁵³ Examples of social bookmarking sites include delicious and digg.⁵⁴ Wikipedia has a more extensive list of social bookmarking⁵⁵ sites in its articles.

RSS readers – Most commonly expanded as **Really Simple Syndication**, RSS readers comprise a family of web feed formats used to publish frequently updated works — such as blog entries, news headlines, audio, and video — in a standardized format. An RSS document (which is called a “feed,” “web feed” or “channel”) includes full or summarized text plus metadata such as publishing dates and authorship. Examples of these readers include feedlooks⁵⁶ and Google Reader.⁵⁷

GEO tracking – Geo tracking or in common terms, location-based targeting applications, examine the networks a person is connected to, cross checks the IP (Internet Protocol) address and then predicts where the person is on a map based on that IP address. Location-based techniques are a staple of targeting online advertising to specific customers. Furthermore, search engines (such as Google, Bing and Yahoo) use IP addresses

46 <http://www.flickr.com/>

47 <http://www.delicious.com/>

48 <http://www.youtube.com/>

49 <http://vimeo.com>

50 <http://slideshare.com>

51 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_video_hosting_websites

52 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_photo_sharing_websites

53 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_bookmarking

54 <http://digg.com>

55 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_social_bookmarking_websites#Social_bookmarking_sites

56 <http://feedlooks.com>

57 <http://www.google.com/reader>



to determine the geography of the user to a very detailed level, thus targeting local advertisements to a potential customer. Geo tracking is also used extensively in mobile phone applications, or “apps,” where retailers can provide directions to and information about stores in the user’s immediate vicinity. Examples of retailers using this type of technology include Starbucks, Wal-Mart and Target.

Another aspect to GEO tracking is the online mapping sites – make sure you claim your ‘bubble’ on online maps such as the ones provided by Google (<http://maps.google.com>), Yahoo (<http://maps.yahoo.com>), Bing (<http://www.bing.com/maps>), MapQuest (<http://mapquest.com>) and FourSquare (<http://foursquare.com>).

Recommendation/Reviews – Research conducted by the industry is telling us that people are more willing to buy a recommended product than to buy by brand alone. Consumers trust their peers about a recommendation. A review site is a website on which reviews can be posted about people, businesses, products or services. These sites may use advanced internet techniques to gather reviews from site users or may employ professional writers to author reviews on the topic of concern for the site.⁵⁸ Example review sites included Epinions,⁵⁹ Buzzillions,⁶⁰ ivouch⁶¹ and Yelp.⁶²

While these sites can be a tremendous help to the business owner in determining an online reputation, you have to be ready for the types of information that you will receive. Do you want to know what your online reputation is? Are you ready to manage your online reputation? Are you ready to hear what people are saying about your business, service or product? Most importantly, are you ready to respond to those negative comments and make changes in your business that address these types of issues? Are you ready to thank those who comment positively?

ARE YOU READY?

The conversations are happening. Are you ready? Are you willing to listen?

SLIDE

15

NOTE TO INSTRUCTOR:

If this topic is being taught in a classroom-type setting, this would be an excellent time to break the participants up into groups and have each group implement and discuss the concepts presented in this module.

Having a computer lab available or asking participants (at least one participant per group of four or five) to bring a laptop computer could add a great deal to the learning experience, particularly if you recruit some technical assistance persons to help with issues that could arise (high school or college students should work well in these roles). Make sure that you have a set of internet connections that will support multiple users, or the experience will be one of extreme frustration.

⁵⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Review_site

⁵⁹ <http://epinions.com>

⁶⁰ <http://buzzillions.com>

⁶¹ <http://ivouch.com>

⁶² <http://yelp.com>

Assign each group one or two of the topics and then have them report back to the class. It would be desirable to have each group analyze their situation in several different contexts of the groups' businesses.

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