

**SOCIAL  
AMERICAN**

# Using Social Media to Build Your Business and Your Brand



*“Customers expect tailored outreach; contact that shows them the company understands who they are and what they want.”*

## Introduction

The marketing and advertising landscape has undergone a drastic change over the past fifteen years. Television and print were the main forms of media consumption. Now the Internet and video games have emerged at the top of the list, forever changing the media landscape. This change has forced marketers to look at consumers in a new light.

In the past, marketers worked off of a model of “intrusion;” they had a captive audience that had little to no options for content, and that grudgingly accepted commercial advertisements. Today’s customers utilize timeshifting, mechanisms like TiVo and DVRs in order to watch what they want, when they want. Print media continues to see drops in readership as more and more people are finding their news and magazine content on line.

The resulting change in access to potential markets has led to a model of customer- driven interaction, forcing marketers to utilize a model of relationship building and engagement when creating outreach strategies. And, social media is the key to building these connections. New media marketing represents a major shift in thinking; it requires companies to move from a push advertising and marketing strategy to a pull strategy.

Customers now demand tailored outreach; contact that shows them that the company understands who they are and what they want, along with interaction and dialogue, not static websites and mass-appeal printed materials.

At first, this shift may seem daunting...after all, who has the time and resources to completely shift their customer relationship management and marketing processes? But even if you aren’t in a position to outsource this the changes needed to adapt to new media marketing, there are still basic steps you can take to engage your customers in a new way...and a little bit can be very powerful, if it is used in the right way, at the right time, with the right community.

This guide does not list all of the possible social media platforms out there and all of the great things you can do with them, because that would be of zero use to an on the go business person...and swimming around in a sea of options won’t get you started on the path to greater customer returns.

Instead, this guide is meant to help you get started on your journey into the social media realm. So, let’s begin...

### Step One: Gather information

To begin the journey, start by evaluating your business and the business landscape around you. If you haven’t already done so, identify & understand your target market. Then, consider the following factors:

- The amount of time and resources you can make available for this effort

*75 % of internet users participate in some form of social media.*

*(Up from 56% in 2007)*

*-Forrester, 2008*

- The level of interest in your company
- The level of support from colleagues and leadership
- Your current relationship with customers
- Your current level of customer service/satisfaction
- What tech-savvy staff you have in place

You will also want to scan what information exists about your business on the internet. In fact, if you don't do that regularly, you need to start now. One of the fundamental principles of reputation management is staying ahead of any potential concerns.

There are a number of ways to automate your monitoring process. One of the easiest is Google Alerts. After establishing a (Google) GMail account, you can set up alerts to search the web for key phrases like your company's name. In this way, you can keep an eye on the chatter around your products and services. These alerts can be delivered right to your inbox once a day...it doesn't get much easier than that.



## Step Two: Create a Blog

There are many different free blog hosting sites on the Internet, and if you don't have the financial resources to have a custom blog platform, these sites are a great second choice.

What is more critical is the content of your blog. This is one of the biggest stumbling blocks for businesses seeking to use social media. Let's start with a list of what **NOT to do**:

- Don't write in an inconsistent timeframe
- Don't write as if each post is an ad for your product
- Don't write as if you are having a one way conversation
- Don't write in too formal of a tone

There are also things to do:

- Write conveying an interest and passion for your product/service
- Display your knowledge as an expert, serve as a source of information

*Use your blog to connect in an authentic way with your customer base.*

*Tip: Use a syndication service like FeedBurner to market your RSS feed to its greatest benefit.*



- Keep your posts current and address current relevant issues in your field
- Comment on your blog in return to other comments that are made... let your customers know that you read their feedback

Remember, your blog is your mouthpiece to the community. And, it gives you a space to stay current and involved. Keep in mind that it is also a great opportunity for you to use specific, product related phrases that will help customers find you in search engine rankings.

### Step Three: Open a FaceBook, MySpace or LinkedIn Account

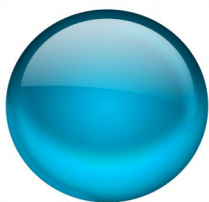
FaceBook, MySpace and LinkedIn comprise three of the largest social networks. Each of these sites holds multiple social media functions within its virtual walls. And they do not play well together. Information cannot be shared across platforms (ie, is not open source) and much of the content is restricted from search engines. Though they are a time investment to set up, they all have value in different ways.

- **MySpace:** The original social networking site. For many years, it ranked as the number one website on the internet. Now it is being challenged for that position by FaceBook. User demographics for this site trend to the under 30 crowd, greater ethnic diversity and lower total household income. Very easy to rapidly build a following. Profiles are visible to all, unless set to private.
- **FaceBook:** originally geared towards college students, this platform opened its doors to all interested parties, including business and cause pages. User demographics trend towards those with college degrees, higher median income and lower ethnic diversity. Age range strongest from college age to mid 40's. Takes a bit longer to build a following, not able to see the profiles of people you do not have established connections with...generally make contacts through other contacts.
- **LinkedIn:** this site started as a functional business rolodex, of sorts. People would build their networks through existing contacts and their spheres of influence. Direct contact is limited and members are discouraged from friending people they don't know. Demographics skew to networks of professionals with higher levels of education, age range is likely 30-50. Recently, LinkedIn added groups, forums and other social networking features. This change has made it a more appealing platform for many.

*Tip: Start with one major network and focus your efforts on building relationships and community within those walls. Use that platform to build traffic and connectivity to your blog and static website.*

### Tips for Creating a Great Profile:

- *Be authentic, don't fudge and don't fake. This is social media, not the personals.*
- *Whatever you do, don't start adding friends until your profile is complete. Many people will be offended that you didn't take the time to finish this step first.*
- *Be creative, be funny, be yourself. Just because it is an informative profile doesn't mean it has to be a bore.*
- *Add a picture. Profiles have zero credibility without a picture.*
- *Always add links back to your blog and web page, this helps increase your search engine visibility.*



Start with one major platform and choose it by identifying your target group. If you are seeking to engage latino youth, build a MySpace profile. If you are trying to reach 40 something career-minded folks, try LinkedIn.

When you establish a profile on a network, keep in mind:

- Humanize your profile. Don't use a company name and logo and expect people to be interested in connecting. They want to talk to other people.
- Fill out the profile completely, don't skim on this part. Many people will make a determination about whether or not to join your circle based on what you write.
- Add pictures of you, the state you live in, something fun about your company...personalize!
- Make sure you set up an RSS feed so that your blog posts are automatically published on your profile. Not all sites allow that, but for those that do, make sure you don't skip this important step.
- Join groups where your potential customers are connecting. Don't start by popping in and posting an ad for your great product. Start a conversation, get to know people, contribute in a meaningful way...

## Step Four: Sign Up for and Use Social Bookmarking

Signing up for a social bookmarking site is easy to do and requires very little maintenance. Though some might question the value of these sites, they serve great purpose. My favorite site is Delicious. Though this information is primarily for that site, there are many tactics that could apply to other sites as well.

First of all, it is an easy way to build links back to your own site, and while they won't be the most highly charged links, they will have value. This is an important step in creating a strategy to increase your search engine rankings. There are two things that make it important...one, it is low hanging fruit, too easy to pass up and two, repetition, repetition, repetition. Search engines like repetitive links. Bookmark each post and page on your site. Be sure to fill in the review or description area.

Secondly, these bookmarks are public (unless you set them as private), so you can network with other people who are saving similar sites. Browse around and see what tags others are using to categorize sites, see what their notes are on different pages. Search their links to discover connections to other people and sites.

Third, you can perform simple market research by seeing who is linking to what sites and how often. It is incredibly easy to search by tag and by trending topics. You can also search a URL and see how many times it has been bookmarked, by whom, what notes they used and how it was tagged. This is really helpful when trying to understand your market and what they find important.

## Step Five: Strategy of Use

As we mentioned earlier, creating a strategy of use that connects the overall mission of the organization with the resources and investment level of the employees is critical when creating a strategy of use. Once that is established, here are some tips to ensure you make the most of your efforts.

- Check out the norms and landscape of each new social media tool you use, don't just dive in and expect to be accepted
- Don't oversell or push your product, never start by saying how great your product is
- Don't become a fountain of posted links back to affiliate programs, multi level marketing, or other goods
- Work smarter not harder, use search tools to find like-minded people, don't spend hours sifting through endless lists
- Interact, don't just put out information, people want to know who you are, not what you sell
- Build relationships, talk to people, care about what happens in their life...start organizing a community around your brand
- Build brand loyalty and evangelists by starting with community building. As brand loyalty grows, your community will too

*Social American creates campaigns based on three critical components:*

- \* *Assessment of the company, landscape, research, brand*
- \* *Strategy or the right tool at the right time for the right people*
- \* *Oversight is our finger on the pulse of the interaction, flexible response to change*

## Step Six: Advanced Social Media Sites

And when you are ready to create a robust strategy that embraces the diversity and complexity of a full social media campaign, remember, we are here to help guide you through that process by consultation or full campaign management.

Here's an aggregation of the types of tools we use in our campaigns:

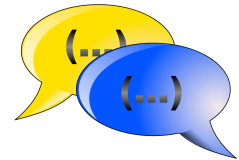
- **Social News Sites and Press Syndication** - Syndication to other press and blog contacts and use of social news sites allow readers to submit news from around the web, engaging their community

*Social Media participant age range is spreading to include a rapidly growing segment of 35-44 year olds.*

*-Forrester, 2008*

members in voting and commenting on various stories, Newsvine, Mixx

- **Social Bookmarking** - Social bookmarking of relevant content using top social bookmarking sites, StumbleUpon, Delicious
- **Social Aggregation** - Social network profiles, blog profiles, video sharing sites, image sites and other relevant profiles can be aggregated and maintained using social aggregation services, FriendFeed, Lifestyle.fm, MyBlogLog
- **Micro Blogging** - Micro Blogging of company and community activity using popular micro blogging tools, Twitter, Jaiku, Pownce, Plurk
- **Video Production and Syndication** – Production, optimization and syndication of video to popular video sharing sites, YouTube
- **Image Syndication** - Syndication of Images to popular image sharing sites. Photos can be uploaded as well as tagged, organized and placed into collections. Other Meta data can be collected, such as geographic coordinates, places, names, and facial recognition, Flickr, Snapfish



## Conclusions

Hopefully this white paper was helpful on your journey into the realm of Social Media. If used properly, social media tools can be used to increase brand awareness, drive sales, and form strong ties for customer loyalty.

Our strategists are prominent social media leaders who are ready to assess, build and execute your campaign. Please don't hesitate to call us if you have any questions.