



**CUSTOMER
MANUFACTURING
GROUP**

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SOCIAL MEDIA

IS IT RIGHT FOR YOU . . . RIGHT NOW?

New marketing communications technology and methods occur periodically. Radio and TV were new in their day, as was the Internet. And social media, or so-called Web 2.0, is the latest new, new thing you need to consider as part of your arsenal for communicating with current and would be customers. This paper takes a look at the major social media approaches (circa 2010) and, more importantly, asks you to consider your overall strategy before jumping in.

In this new technology-oriented world, the most recent surge of interest has lain in social media. "Facebook me" and "Tweet that" have become normal parts of our daily conversation to the point that it seems that everywhere we turn, everyone seems to be jumping on the social media bandwagon. Although the immediate return on investment seems vague when considering social media for business uses, the problem is compounded because most people are also doing it wrong. If you use social media wisely and consistently, with a clear plan of action, it can be just the tool you need to grow your business.

Before we look at the hard questions to help you create a social media strategy, let's quickly review the six major forms of social media. A number of others exist that we won't cover in this paper because they are not as well known:

- **Twitter:** without a plan, this media is like standing in a stadium full of people and screaming your message along with everyone around you. With a plan, you can walk into a boardroom full of people only interested in what you have to say and speak calmly to their needs.

This growing site has 75 million active accounts with 6.2 million new users per month. Think of this as a huge chatroom or forum in which millions of voices write, with a 140-character limit, about anything and everything you can think of. The whole idea may sound overwhelming and crazy — how can your voice even be heard among so much cacophony? — but there are a number of tricks to organizing your account and gaining useful followers (people who keep track of your "tweets") who may eventually become useful business connections.

- **Facebook:** the invisible community of the world, Facebook has over 460 million users, enough people to create a separate large country. Without a plan, Facebook can be not only frustrating but also dangerous. The amount of time you could waste on this site is astounding, as

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you see people's status updates, look at digital photo albums, and accept a million friend requests from people you don't know and never will. In some respects, Facebook especially must be handled with care when trying to use it for business as it has a reputation for being more casual and relationship-based, thus allowing you to confuse activity with results.

- **Linked-In:** the "business" media, Linked-In is a trusted networking site for business-minded individuals. With 65 million users worldwide, it is like a board meeting where you are connected to all the other board meetings going on around the world at the same time. You won't find as many friend requests as on Facebook but the relationships can be far more valuable. Here too you can lose yourself in creating relationships that go nowhere, but with the right plan you can create business opportunities that will result in direct money-making projects.
- **YouTube:** This site receives 13 billion views per month. An under-used resource, YouTube is filled with more dirt than gold. This is a good thing! If you implement a good strategy and post quality videos here, you can stand above the crowd in your field and gain a reputation for excellence. Not to mention there is far less effective competition here than in other social media arenas. You need a video camera to do this one (a webcam works too). Unless you can give a perfect performance every time, you will also generally need some kind of video editing software to get these files online. Videos can also be posted to your website.
- **Podcasting:** you may have heard this term used before and instantly thought of space aliens. Podcasting refers to recording yourself (or others) speaking about a particular topic, essentially creating your own radio show. There aren't as many podcasts as YouTube videos, but the accessibility of these shows helps reach very specific listeners. All you need is a microphone, which you can purchase at any Best Buy or Radio Shack. You will definitely need some sort of computer software to transfer these sound files to the site of your choosing. You can upload files to a number of locations, including iTunes and your own website.
- **Blog:** one of the most important mediums, blogging has become a key-stone in breaking into an untapped market. Blogging is the equivalent of writing a newspaper article without having to go through the expense of printing. Although more organized, this can be similar to yelling in a stadium (or perhaps more like a crowded auditorium). As with the oth-

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ers, with a solid plan and some tricks, you can become the expert in your field using only blogging. You can purchase a website blog for a reasonable fee or you can create one for free at: WordPress, Blogspot, LiveJournal, Blogger, and many others. For WordPress alone, there are over 250 million readers per month. You can either direct this blog to your website or you can use the space provided by the host website.

All of these sites address different markets and ultimately give you direct access to millions of people within seconds. But before you allow someone to convince you that you too should join every social media site on the face of the planet, here are some key questions you should ask yourself. These will help you determine if social media is right for you and your company. Consider these carefully as they will help save you time, money, and a headache later.

What do I want this tool to accomplish?

Don't fool yourself: social media is a tool, just like any other. Alone, it is little more than a way to waste time. As a tool, it can mean the next level for your company. Just like any other tool, you must have a deliberate need and purpose. A hammer, for example, can sit on the floor collecting dust. Even using it to hammer a few nails into random pieces of wood will not be useful. However, if you deliberately use the hammer to put in nails with the intention of building a house, your end product will be valuable.

What is your "house?" What is it that you wish to communicate to others?
What is your ultimate motivation?

Examples:

- I want social media to help bring my company more clients.
- I want social media to help me make business connections with people I would not meet in any other way.
- I want social media to inform our existing clients of new products or events that they don't know about.

All of these questions will also help you determine which of the social media tools you should be using. If your goal is to network, Linked-In may be perfect for you, although YouTube may not be as useful. If your goal is to educate, blogging may be the perfect solution whereas Facebook may not achieve the same ends. If your goal is to get the attention of news organizations, YouTube may be a great way of accomplishing this goal but blogging may not do the job as well.

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Does social media help my business?

In your business model, do you already have a method of accomplishing the above? Do you already send out a newsletter to your current clients which informs them of upcoming products? Would social media, as a tool, visibly help this existing method or would it make no difference? Social media must 1) work in a complementary way with any existing method you have and, 2) must save you time and money, and have a direct (positive) impact on your bottom line. If using social media offers no return, just like any other tool, it must be discarded for the one that works the best.

How much time can I devote to this project?

You have decided on your goal for social media and you have decided that it can benefit you alongside whatever existing method you have. Now you must ask the big question: do you have time for this? Should *you* be doing this or should someone else working for you take care of this project? If you must be the one to take on this project, can you give an hour a day to social media or are there more valuable uses of that hour? Should you choose to use social media, you must block the time as you would a meeting — posting a blog must hold the same weight as calling a customer. Just like a call to a customer, the blog (or tweet, or video, or whatever) must have a specific purpose in mind.

Will I make money? Will I lose money?

Social media as a tool will demand a certain amount of resources to get started, even from free sites. You must pay in time and sometimes in money. For example, posting a blog entry on a free site like WordPress means that you will be unable to spend that hour planning your next event, thus your time is spent on the blog instead of something that will definitely bring in revenue. Posting a video on your website requires a camera (at the least) and a microphone, lights, editing software (at the most). Are these investments in time and money ultimately beneficial to your business?

Is there something else you should be doing with your time that will directly help your company, perhaps even more than social media would?

Should you be doing this? Is there another person in your company who is better suited to this task?

While many *Fortune* 500 company CEOs blog, social media in general may or may not be the right thing on which the CEO of a mid-size company to spend his/her time. Like every other decision you make it is a matter of priorities. Juggling an already busy schedule, social media may hinder you from doing other tasks that need to be accomplished. If, for example, your goal is to keep people informed of upcoming events — a future sale, a planned event, the launch of a new product — then perhaps your advertising or PR person should head this particular project. If your goal is to connect with

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business people that could do projects with your company, you should be the one to speak to them one-on-one. Consider these questions before you sign yourself up for a million accounts. Do the following before taking any action:

- Motivation: what do you want social media to do for you? What solid result do you expect from it?
- With your end goal in mind, look critically at your schedule and decide if your time is best spent on this particular project or if your time would be more valuable performing another task. Do you even have time?
- Consider whether you should be doing this: is this a job that only you can do or can you delegate this project to someone else? Is it *better* to delegate it to someone else?

If, by the end of this exercise, you realize that you won't be able to sleep because of lack of time, consider if social media is the right tool for you. If you *do* have time and a clear idea of what you want from social media, and you believe social media can accomplish this task more quickly, efficiently, and cost-effectively than any other existing method, then create a strategy that will work best for you and your company.

Final Thoughts

Social media like other marketing communications activities in the past can be a great opportunity or a waste of resources. And like prior methodologies, if you don't think it through and integrate it into your marketing/sales processes it is likely to be a very large resource sink hole.

More Information About Customer Manufacturing Group

If you would like more information about how to apply a process to improve your marketing/sales function, simply contact us and we'd be happy to help you get started. From sweeping marketing/sales management process strategies to specific branding or product launch services, Customer Manufacturing Group can help.

If you'd like to learn more about Customer Manufacturing Group, or for a complimentary subscription to *Customer Manufacturing Updates*, give us a call at (800) 947-0140, fax us at (408) 727-3949, visit our website at www.customermanufacturing.com, or e-mail us at info@customermfg.com.

We have offices in major cities in the United States, and our experts travel extensively throughout the world. If you'd like to schedule a meeting when we're in your area, just let us know.

Author:

Natalia Locatelli was the primary author of this paper.