
P A R T I

BACKGROUND BASICS AND TACTICS

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CHAPTER 1

What Is Social Media?

Social media is one of those phrases that many people think they should know because it combines two familiar words. You know what *social* means. After all, people are social beings, relying upon one's abilities to interact with and influence others in order to survive. As a kid, your mother may have told you to "go outside and be social." To be social is a desirable thing. The word connotes something good.

Now take the word *media*. In a traditional sense, media includes things such as newspapers, magazines, and television. You might think of the *New York Times*, *BusinessWeek*, or CNN, three media giants with a tremendous amount of influence in society. While the word *media* does conjure up images of news organizations, it also brings up impressions of how the news is delivered: via print, audio, video, and photographs. Each is an important medium used to engage an audience by telling a compelling story or sharing important news.

Since the focus of this book is business and not journalism, stop the train here for a moment, just long enough to point out that there has always been a powerful relationship between the traditional media and business. The media has always been particularly good at gathering people to read, watch, or listen to something of interest. Whether it is sports, finance, fashion, or international politics, traditional media has something to offer you. Enter the people who advertise their products and services via commercials and print ads that accompany your favorite source of news. These advertisers use print, audio, video, and photographs in an attempt to influence our behavior. They rely upon the traditional media to help them get closer to you and your money. It's a symbiotic relationship that is generally accepted without question. You expect to get a sales pitch on every page and half a dozen commercial breaks during a broadcast.

Words, pictures, video, and audio can inform and inspire, just as they can influence and incite. Humans like to know about the good, the bad, and



the ugly side of people, places, and situations, as well as to share this information with others, often as quickly as possible.

In the past, neighbors would meet on the corner and coworkers would meet at the water cooler to talk about and share what they read in the morning paper, heard on the evening news, or learned from a friend of a friend at a party. Sometimes the conversation assumed life-and-death proportions, and sometimes it was simply about a sale at a local store. But whatever it was, people listened and often responded.

Modern technology hasn't obviated the need to meet on the corner or at the water cooler, but it has greatly increased the amount of information available to share. Most importantly, technology has allowed everyone to participate in creating and delivering information to family, friends, and colleagues. Everyone has the ability to function as citizen journalists or market mavens. That is, you can capture a robbery at a local auto dealer on your camera-phone and send it to your local TV station within seconds. Or you can snap a few shots of the sporty new hybrid on the showroom floor and send it to your brother who's trying to reduce his carbon footprint.

Thus, from a business perspective, *social media* is about enabling conversation. It is also about the ways that this conversation can be prompted, promoted, and monetized. Definitions of *social media* and its cousin *Web 2.0* appear later in this chapter, but first the chapter takes a look at the darker and brighter sides of social media.

The Two Sides of Social Media

Did you hear the story about the extremely paranoid guy who can no longer go to football games because he can't stand the thought of the players talking about *him* in the huddle? In the new world of social media, this kind of paranoia may not be as extreme as this old joke would have you believe. That's because people are talking about you. They're talking about your business, your brands, and your products, too. What's more, you can't stop them. In fact, there are thousands of social media tools—and more on the way—that enable conversation among the masses of humanity with Internet access who may want to talk about you.

So be careful of what you do, and of what you say, and whom you say it to. Learn to live with the idea that it's nearly impossible to hide from friends, employees, customers, and others who are motivated to talk about you. People are going to talk and gossip and complain. This behavior is human nature, and in the new world of social media, you have virtually no control.

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Now let's consider the bright side of social media. If you've got a great product or service in search of more customers, you want people talking about you. There's nothing like word-of-mouth to take your business to the next level. If your company has won an industry award or enjoys a reputation as a great place to work, you want people talking about you. In other words, conversation about you, your business, or your brand is not inherently a bad thing.

You may not have control over these conversations, but if you have a social media strategy and can get comfortable with some basic tools and tactics, you can use social media to your advantage. Really. You won't have total control, but you can have considerable influence, and influence is the foundation of successful relationships with customers, employees, vendors, family, and friends.

You've just learned the first three rules of social media for business:

1. Social media is all about enabling conversations.
2. You cannot control conversations, but you can influence them.
3. Influence is the bedrock upon which all economically viable relationships are built.

To this list, you could perhaps add a fourth rule: paranoia has a purpose.

Lessons Learned at Starbucks

Few would consider Starbucks, the Seattle-based company that has forever changed the way people look at a cup of coffee, to be paranoid. But they are, thanks to their employees and a blog-based web site that enables conversations among employees and customers. A quick visit to www.starbuckgossip.typepad.com reveals brief missives, musings, and rants about company policies, practices, customer behavior, and just about anything else having to do with the unique brand of coffee culture that Starbucks made famous. You won't mistake this for a company newsletter.

You can read about the Starbucks barista from Minnesota who was fired for trying to unionize employees. Not to worry, though: he got his job back. Starbucks officials were quoted on the site as saying that the termination and reinstatement had nothing to do with the effort to unionize. It may, however, have had something to do with the coverage the event received on the Starbucks gossip blog.

This story demonstrates what employees and customers can do when they decide to huddle together for a little conversation about your company.

What did Starbucks learn from this experience? They received a fast lesson on the first three rules of social media for business.

Is this unique to Starbucks, or is it happening other places, too? It's happening everywhere. A quick click to Glassdoor.com or JobSchmob.com and you'll see restless, wild, or world-weary employees ranting about their bosses and the working conditions at their companies. What you say inside your company is never too far away from becoming a feature on someone's blog.

Social Media and Web 2.0 Defined

You're not alone if you're not able to define *social media* and *Web 2.0* quickly and with confidence. In a survey the authors conducted while writing this book, nearly 70 percent of 600-plus respondents were not especially familiar with the term *social media*. Again, many people think they should know what the term means, but most are not sure. About the same percentage were not completely confident in defining the term *Web 2.0*. To be sure, the terms are closely related but not exactly synonymous. The reluctance to offer quick and confident definitions of these terms reflects the cautious and often confused discourse that many businesspeople exhibit today when the topic of social media enters the conversation.

It seems as though people are living in a strange new ecosystem of innovative and highly disruptive applications. People tend to fear what they don't understand. There is a lot to learn about this complex and rapidly evolving ecosystem—the social media ecosystem.

So Exactly What Is Social Media?

Social media refers to activities, practices, and behaviors among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media. Conversational media are Web-based applications that make it possible to create and easily transmit content in the form of words, pictures, videos, and audios.

Most likely you belong to several communities, and if you've ever used your computer or cell phone to read a blog, watch a YouTube video, listen to a podcast, or send a text message to other members of your group or community, you've already ventured into the social media ecosystem.

What about Web 2.0?

Web 2.0 is somewhat of a misnomer. It does not refer to a new and improved version of the World Wide Web, the information superhighway

that's become ubiquitous over the last decade or so. There really is no new physical version of the Internet. In other words, it's not as though the highway has been widened by four lanes. But, to continue the analogy, there are a lot more interesting vehicles traveling on the highway, and some incredible places to stop along that highway, thanks to Web 2.0 technologies and the inventive people behind them.

Social media and Web 2.0 come together whenever one of these new technologies has as its primary goal to enable communities to form and interact with one another—to converse. This book does not distinguish further between Web 2.0 and social media, because the terms are closely related and *social media* is the more important of the two terms. In fact, you'll probably hear talk of Web 3.0 and Web 4.0 in the not-too-distant future. As such, it's probably easier to think in terms of social media tools and applications.

It's All about Engagement

Before you start a conversation, and certainly to continue one, you have to engage your audience. If you're in business, the litmus test for a social media tool or application is simple: does it allow you to engage with customers, prospects, employees, and other stakeholders by facilitating one or more of the following:

- Communication
- Collaboration
- Education
- Entertainment

A Closer Look at Engagement Strategies

Let's take a quick look at these four categories of engagement and a sampling of some of the social media tools associated with each.

Communication: If you've sent an e-mail recently, you've communicated. If you've used a service like Constant Contact or Survey Monkey to invite a group of people (via e-mail) to view your newsletter or take a quick survey, you've taken your communication to the next level using a social media application. If you've used Twitter to blast a quick text message to a group of friends or colleagues, you've used a specific social medium to communicate. If you've used Jott to convert a voicemail message into an e-mail, welcome to the world of social media. If you haven't done anything beyond e-mail, that's

okay, too. This book is designed to make you comfortable with taking your business to the next level, from a social media perspective.

Collaboration: One of the earliest uses of the Internet was as a collaboration tool. If you've participated in a Listserv, a chat room, or a discussion board, you've already experienced collaboration to some degree. There are, however, several social media tools designed to foster collaboration among work teams, buyers and sellers, companies and customers, even authors and readers. Wikipedia, eBay, and Gather.com are all examples of applications and companies that offer a means of collaboration.

Education: Educating your customers and training your employees can be important to the success of your business. Several social media tools make the educational process easier and more dynamic. If you've downloaded music from Apple's iTunes, did you know that you can also download college-level lectures on a wide range of topics? Some businesses are using podcasts and YouTube videos as a means of educating others. There are virtual seminars and classes being held in Second Life. Some savvy real estate brokers are using blogs to educate potential buyers about schools, churches, and restaurants in their community.

Entertainment: Historically, some of the best commercials on television have been very entertaining and quite effective at selling products and services. They've also been expensive to produce and broadcast. Not so in the new world of social media. A quick search on YouTube using the phrase "Blendtec iphone" will let you see how a CEO of a company that makes blenders (yes, the kitchen appliance) was able to dramatically increase sales by shooting a series of videos showing him feeding different objects into his powerful blender, objects that included an Apple iPhone.

Now let's take a look at how one nationally recognized company is using a combination of these engagement strategies to drive business.

How H&R Block Engages Prospective Customers

What can be more practical than filing your income taxes? For decades now, H&R Block has helped wary and harried people prepare their tax returns at thousands of storefront offices throughout the country. Business grew through word of mouth. If you liked what they did for you, chances are you would tell a friend or relative. This fairly traditional business model helped H&R Block become the largest tax preparation service in the United States, a position it has worked hard to maintain.

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Concerned that new technologies enabling new forms of person-to-person communication could impact their business model, H&R Block decided to experiment with social media by trying new ways of reaching their valuable client demographic. Using applications such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, YouTube, and Second Life (where they opened a virtual tax preparation store), H&R Block tried several tactics that included text messages (Twitter “tweets”) to customers, and the introduction of Truman Greene, an affable, singing character who serenaded YouTube viewers with the brand’s key consumer benefits. The Truman character also appeared on H&R Block’s MySpace and Facebook pages in an effort to integrate his brand-enhanced persona into as many lives as possible. H&R Block’s strategic goals were to communicate with, educate, and entertain their prospective customers.

Were they successful? According to *Advertising Age* and research firm RocSearch, H&R Block saw a 171 percent increase in online ad awareness and an overall increase in brand awareness of 52 percent. The experiment cost the company about 5 percent of its allocated marketing budget, so it wasn’t free. But it’s hard not to like those metrics. Without a doubt, H&R Block bought themselves a lot of new customers with this strategy.

Madison Avenue Meets Social Media

In the summer of 2008, just prior to launching the second season of *Mad Men*, the A&E network’s highly acclaimed cable television drama about life in the fast lane of a 1960s Madison Avenue advertising agency, the network sponsored a contest in which *Mad Men* fans were asked to submit self-produced videos re-creating their favorite moments from the first season. The top prize included a trip to the show’s set and a cameo appearance on one of the episodes. In essence, A&E was asking loyal viewers to shoot, star in, and produce what would certainly be—given the premise of the show—racy, raucous content that could be shared with friends and other fans of the show via YouTube, MySpace, and other social media applications. The hope was to facilitate fan-generated content and comments that would help A&E expand its audience.

Were the show’s producers concerned that some really bad acting and horrific videography might damage the Emmy Award-winning brand? Probably not, providing that the content was memorable. Indeed, other fans would not expect Hollywood production values to be the basis for winning the contest. More than likely, fans themselves would look forward to entries that invoked hooting, hollering, and bawdy laughter upon watching other fans’ attempts to re-create scenes with the show’s trademark heavy

drinking, prolific smoking, and insatiable secretary-chasing, behaviors of a bygone era and the very glue that made the first season stick. If the goal was to generate buzz among this lucrative fan base and to extend that fan base via word-of-mouth promotion of *Mad Men*'s equivalent of amateur night, then it was a brilliant strategy.

So what were the results of this social media strategy to collaborate with and entertain the show's fan base for *Mad Men*? According to the show's producers, it worked nicely. There were 17 winning entries that can be viewed on the A&E web site, where you can also see how many fan votes each entry received. You can also read comments posted about each video. The net result for A&E was that second-season ratings for *Mad Men* increased by 89 percent. Not a bad use of twenty-first-century media to advertise a television program about the good old days in the advertising business.

When Engagement Strategies Backfire

In an attempt to engage customers, the makers of Heinz Ketchup and Pepto-Bismol both sponsored video contests that allowed amateurs to produce brief commercials for their flagship products. According to representatives from both companies, there were some "very good" amateur commercials produced, but there were also a number of entries that put these household brands in a position of being parodied and ridiculed. One of the more memorable Heinz entries showed an adolescent boy dealing foil packages of Heinz to an addicted customer desperate for his next ketchup fix. Heinz executives did not honor the entry with any recognition whatsoever, let alone an award. You won't find the entry on the Heinz site, but it has led an active life on YouTube. Pepto-Bismol had a similar experience when several participants, in an attempt to sing about diarrhea, turned the contest into a joke. Heinz and Pepto-Bismol may not have made social media work for them in these instances, but they do deserve credit for being brave enough to experiment.

But what happens when you become the victim of social media without attempting a strategy that backfires? Look no further than the Kryptonite U-Lock, a bicycle lock based upon a trusted 50-year-old design. In 2004, an industrious cyclist figured out how to pick the lock using a ballpoint pen and posted the information on a bicycling blog. The word spread quickly. A YouTube video followed. The design flaw invoked a recall that has cost Kryptonite's parent company, Ingersoll Rand, over \$5 million.

Chances are that some companies in your industry encourage the use of blogs and wikis among employees and customers. These can be great collaboration tools for coworkers to share general knowledge, special expertise, and even best practices. Blogs and wikis are also effective means of

educating your customers, or of letting customers sing the praises of your product or service to each other. It's nice to get special insights from the blog of a design engineer who helped create one of your favorite products, whether it's a sports car or a software application. As a customer, you feel closer to the product. As more organizations discover the power of employee- and customer-generated content via blogs, wikis, and other applications, you can imagine how productivity, performance, satisfaction indices, and sales might rise. You could even argue that the Kryptonite bicycle lock debacle was an excellent example of how social media ultimately improved the quality and reliability of a product.

The next point to consider is what happens when an employee posts something damaging to your brand or reputation on a company-sponsored blog or wiki? Worse still, what happens when current employees, former employees, and customers create an independent blog or wiki assailing your company's products or practices? You quickly learn the difference between control and influence. Inside your company, you can control what employees share, say, and do with social media by instituting regulations and enforcing behavioral standards, but these can only apply to what they do on company time using company-provided equipment. Remember, in the vast social media ecosystem that lies outside your company, beyond your reach, there are no set rules of behavior. You can be assailed, spoofed, and blasphemed, and you have no control. It's as simple as that. However, you do have the ability to influence the conversation if you understand how the social media ecosystem works.

But, again, even that can end up balancing itself out a little bit and try to get those genies back in the bottle through the ongoing conversation. But they require people to really be citizens; they require people to really participate within their communities of interest.

Social Media Is Disruptive

Social media is a disruptive factor for many organizations. It will remain a mystery to many until it becomes commonplace, in the same way a toaster and microwave are common to your kitchen. The fact that many people will find it hard to understand what it is and how it works creates an opportunity for those who move first. People felt the same way about railroads, the telephone, automobiles, and airplanes. They were disruptive technologies too. Most people tend to avoid and even fear what they don't understand. They're willing to let other folks go first, the ultimate risk mitigation strategy. Don't make this mistake. Social media is already redefining the way people live and do business. You don't have to be a technical wiz to take advantage of

the business opportunities that social media creates. History has already shown us that.

For example, it wasn't necessary to understand how the engine of a steam-powered locomotive worked to see that railroads would change the way people live and do business. As a result, the people and institutions that built the railroads made a lot of money, but so did the companies that manufactured locomotive engines and those that built boxcars—as did the entrepreneurs and business owners who bought property and set up shop in the towns whose fortunes were forever changed when the railroad came through.

You didn't have to understand the physics of flight to see that airplanes were fundamentally going to change the world. Companies that manufactured airplanes made a lot of money, but so did those that made luggage, as did those that started travel agencies or wrote travel guides about exotic locations. And don't forget rental car companies like Hertz and overnight airfreight carriers like FedEx. These are examples of companies that took the time to understand the business implications and applications of a new technology and then either found, filled, or created a profitable niche associated with that technology.

Find and Exploit Your Niche

If you make it your goal to understand social media in the context of your current business, to experiment a little, to harness its awesome power, to make it work for you, your chances of achieving success will dramatically increase. You might, however, see an opportunity to use social media to create a new kind of business. The microwave oven was invented when scientists and technicians using microwave technology in a lab setting discovered that it would rapidly heat and cook things. It didn't take long for someone to notice that a changing social pattern among busy families and two-income households might create a market for the time-saving properties of a microwave oven. As use of microwaves became widespread, someone conjured up the concept of microwave popcorn. You get the idea. Chances are there's a niche for you somewhere in the social media ecosystem.

The Formula for Success: Experiment and Explore

Can anyone guarantee your success with social media? Of course not, but here's your alternative: take a wait-and-see approach and do nothing. Perhaps it's all just a fad, something as short-lived as the telegraph or the citizens band radio craze of the 1970s.

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Every era in the history of business has provided great opportunity for the first wave of explorers, experimenters, and investors. Those in the second wave, having made strategic and tactical alterations based upon the experiences of the first-wavers, have often enjoyed great success as well. Sometimes those in the third wave are able to make additional adaptations or find small, untapped niches. But those in the fourth wave? They generally get left behind and wind up wondering what happened.

Self-Assessment: Social Media Inside Your Organization

If you are part of an organization that has more than two or three people who make the business run, take a minute and answer the following questions:

- Would people in your organization be more effective if they could communicate more quickly and precisely with one another?
- Would people in your organization be more productive if they were able to work in a more collaborative environment?
- Does entertainment play a role in the way your company operates? In other words, could the environment be improved by increasing the fun quotient?
- Could employee training and development be improved?
- Do people in your organization feel as though they are stakeholders? In other words, are they fully engaged in the business's mission?

Self-Assessment: Social Media Directed Outside of Your Organization

If your organization has customers, investors, or vendors, and most do, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you have a strong relationship with them?
- Do you know their names, their preferences, and their needs as they relate to your company's product or service?
- Do you know their accepted beliefs about your company's product or service?
- Have you ever asked them to help you create or improve your company's product or service?
- Would they welcome an opportunity to help you improve your company's product or service?

- Does your product or service create an opportunity for them to be entertained or amused?
- Do you currently do anything to educate them about the use or value of your product or service?
- Would they react positively to an opportunity to be educated concerning the use of your product or service?
- If asked, would they strongly recommend your product or service to a friend?
- Do many of them already strongly recommend your product or service?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you need to learn more about and experiment with social media tools. For your organization to be effective, you need to consider methods to communicate, collaborate, educate, and entertain within your organization. To maximize your impact with customers and prospects, you need to understand how to employ specific social media strategies in an effort to influence the conversation about your company.

Expert Insight

Peter Booth Wiley, chairman of the board, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
Publishing, www.wiley.com



... I started out independently as an author and publisher. I am a member of the sixth generation of Wileys involved in the publishing business; we are 201 years old. There is a seventh generation: two of my sons, both of whom are aggressively working in social media. I've been the chairman at John Wiley & Sons, Inc. since 2002. Prior to joining our board of directors in 1984, I was a magazine publisher and a newspaper reporter, a writer of articles for magazines, and the author of five books. ...

Peter Booth Wiley

... Years ago, social media was writing a letter, which was then handed to somebody who got on a horse (or handed it to somebody who was getting on a stagecoach) in the good seasons when it was dry. It would take a while to get from, say, Virginia to New York; and in the bad season when it was muddy it probably went by ship. Now we've got information and creative ideas flying through the air at the speed of the electrons. ...

... Going back when we talked earlier, I talked about how we began experimenting with introducing computers into the business in the 1950s. But we tried to understand and experiment with computers and networks really

aggressively 25 years ago, and our ideas about what we should be doing as a business came from our authors. We listened very carefully to them about what they thought was going to happen.

So that's part of it, and the other is creating a culture internally to Wiley that can implement not only gathering information while listening to authors and experts, but also developing within the company (or with partners, as the case may be) the necessary social experiences (I'm not supposed to use "platforms" anymore) that are helpful to us and to our authors and to our customers. . . .

. . . I think one of the things that's interesting about what we do is that we use social networks (now we use them electronically, before we used them in an interpersonal way) to understand who you are and what you are capable of doing. So in our initial conversation when you told me of your history in the world of technology, I was very impressed. And so Step 1 is, "Okay, I recognize that this guy is somebody who has been right on the cutting edge himself." Step 2 is to use our social network to evaluate your capabilities and your proficiency in whether you are going to be able to deliver to us a manuscript that we'll be able to sell.

And so it's very interesting the way in which the whole author/publisher relationship is evolving using social media. . . .

. . . Yes, it is interesting because we have a bookstore in *Second Life*. And we've actually published a number of titles in that area, and it has led me to think more about marketing and how you market. Because what we know is that in the traditional method when we talk about authors we use the term "platform" . . . what's Lon's platform? By which we mean, "Does he speak regularly at conferences, how big are they, is he going to get on *Oprah*, is he going to get on *Good Morning America*, will his books be reviewed?"

And in some of the traditional print forms for marketing, and specifically book reviews, they are having a very difficult time right now because print newspapers are failing. Book reviews are being either downsized or completely eliminated. Television works to a degree. I think it's very effective at times. We've had experiences with authors going on very high-profile television programs and selling a lot of books (like *Oprah*).

We've had experiences with other authors going on high-profile television programs and not selling a lot of books. And now we are looking more at the social media networks that authors have, and trying to understand the way in which you created your own community, digitally, and how we can get to that community to explain to people what your book's all about.

But the interesting thing is the way that you're actually "authoring" the book is creating the platform. . . .

. . . Of course, as a commercial publisher we are interested in metrics. So we are interested in seeing the evolution of the effectiveness of marketing and the effectiveness of networks. And we are at an early stage with that, but I really look to the libraries and their interaction with publishers. They are able to

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measure usage. So say that they license 100 journals from us; they can look at which of those journals are being used. They look at two things. Impact factor, which is the impact of the content on the audience that it is trying to reach—journals are rated according to their impact factor. The other is usage. So the librarians are saying, “Okay, I’ve got these 100 journals but only 98 of them are really being used. Let’s look at these two that we might eliminate or replace with other journals, and maybe they should remain in the collection even though there is a low usage.”

So there are metrics being developed and I assume over time (right now we go to Google and we look up Lon Safko, and we can get a rough metric there) we will be able to measure more accurately the impact of your work and of your particular social network. . . .

. . . But let’s go back to what we were talking about earlier and the way you are creating this book because this tells you a lot about where publishing is now and what its future could be like.

I wrote my last book in 2000; in that instance, an editor asked me to write the book. I sent the manuscript to the publisher. The publisher reviewed it and edited it and sent it to production. Production designed it and laid it out. It went to the printer and then to marketing and sales. And then it ended up in the customer’s lap.

It’s a very traditional model of print-on-paper. Right now we are seeing this continuous process, and we have a favorite graphic that we use at a lot of meetings. It’s out on Frommers.com. So we are one of the leading travel-publishers and we’ve created this circle called the Travel Cycle. And we have looked at what do we do in the Travel Cycle. So the first part of the cycle is to *dream* about what you are going to do.

And you would look at travel newspapers, magazines, online forums, blogs; so right now we are doing travel newsletters, online forums, and blogs about travel.

And then you *plan*; and we are doing guidebooks and travel web sites with text, photos, video, podcasts, recommendations, interactive maps, and custom PDF guides.

And then you *go*, and when you are going we continue to interact with you with audio walking tours, and now we are going to be launching (or just launched) maps that will go on your iPods with airport guides.

And then after you come *back*, we share with customers and with the traveler online trip journals and online photo albums, and reviews and ratings. So there is a continuous process of interaction here, rather than the linear process I described earlier. And when you add to that what you are doing, which is working with the community (your community) to develop content, and review and refine the content, you have a completely different publishing model. . . .

To listen to or read the entire Executive Conversation with Peter Booth Wiley, go to www.theSocialMediaBible.com.

Expert Insight

Chris Heuer, founder, the Social Media Club,
www.theSocialMediaClub.org



Chris Heuer

... I got started in interactive in 1994. I read a book by Howard Rheingold who I am now, thankfully, able to call a friend, and who has done some amazing work since. It was called *Virtual Community* and I read that pretty much every day after work at the Barnes & Noble at the time, because they really didn't have a lot of Internet distribution for people like me.

And after that I ended up starting a company with a bunch of friends in South Florida called Guru Communications. Somewhere around then, I started getting involved in Interact. So from the beginning for me, it has been about community elements and we used to talk about it. In fact, Howard Rheingold, in the book *Virtual Community*, talked about it as the idea of social computing.

And until a few years ago when Chris Shipley, and a couple of others around the same time, started calling it *social media*, it really started this mind shift across the way, and as a result of those activities I got back into it.

I taught Interactive Marketing at Miami Ad School; I did web design and multimedia classes there as well. I also got a chance to learn some things for some people, like topography, and other important Photoshop skills I get to use every now and then. And I've been involved in a lot of different things ... I was at the U.S. Mint for a little while. ...

... It's very exciting. And there's an interesting debate, as you know, that's raged on between some people like Andrew Keane, and others, who say this is a very terrible thing for us because it's just going to get a lot more noncreative people, not eloquent people, creating media and talking and video and audio ... about things that they don't know about, spreading more falsehoods and all these other problems.

But you know there is going to be a little bit of bad with the good. But in the end the great thing about the system is, as you know from blogging, that it's self-correcting. You know, if I write something and it turns out that I am incorrect, you can almost assuredly bet that somebody is going to go ahead and correct that information. That's one of Robert Scoble's famous strategies that he employed very early in terms of how he was able to be so prolific with his blogging activities and almost everything he was able to get done. It was about not being afraid of being wrong, knowing that it was going to get corrected.

Now I didn't always agree with that, because there are some times you are wrong and, you know, 50,000 people or 100,000 people might end up getting the wrong information before it gets corrected. So that's kind of a little

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unfortunate thing as you get to a certain size, in terms of responsibility you have as a citizen of this online community and this social world we live in.

But, again, even that can end up balancing itself out a little bit. . . . But it requires people to really be citizens; requires people to really participate within their communities of interest.

There is also a lot of work going on in geography. I've met a couple of blogging mayors in the past years. It was very, very interesting in doing things by connecting directly with their constituents. So it's really a fascinating time on all elements in terms of an entertainment side and the ability of self-expression, as well as getting into the civic-responsibility areas . . . and, of course, the emergence of citizen journalism and many of the other elements . . . it served a social side, as well as the social/entertaining side. . . .

. . . But it's more interesting, of late I've seen a little bit of quick-ish stuff forming. And of course this is one of the reasons why we created *Social Media Club*, to ensure that we can really have people collaborating better together. But we are an emerging industry; social media, as you know, still has not matured yet. So there's actually going to be differences of opinions and values and things that are we are seeing over time, as people get together in different groups.

We just really want to see more people collaborating across the different groups. There is a scale, really, that's inside of here, of course. But at the same time, there are some really great ways we can share tactics and other ways of actually connecting across our systems and across our different corners of the social media worlds in order to be able to accomplish our goals and to meet people who we need to connect with. . . .

. . . I am going to first quote my friend Ian Kennedy for Yahoo!, who had one of the best answers I've ever received for the question of what social media is, which was, "It's not something; it's what you do with it." . . .

. . . It's not a noun, it's an adjective! You know, social media . . . it's what we're doing; it's what we're doing with media. And the way I really look at it . . . I come back to the social computing stuff, a little more technical I guess. But really it's just those two words put together, modified, as you might imagine. You know, there's this social element to it, which is involving connecting with others. And that's really, to me, what it's all about. And, of course, media does reference to a medium, which is something we connect through, or with, or whatever verb you want to apply to it. But the idea being this is something we connect with other people through. And that is the sharing of common stories, going back to cave paintings, and that was back to the beginning!

Cave paintings were the original social media. . . . It was sort of a story, it was visual, and it had so many different elements to it. But when we get down to the bottom of it, it's how we interact with one another. Some people like video, some people like audio, some people like, let's just say, fooling people, giving

them a hard time. Some people are good people who like to help and it really just reflects our overall humanity.

And the interesting thing is the majority of the dialogue is about the positive dialogue, the aspirational elements of, "How can we do this better?" To your point earlier, about you not wanting that information out there; well that's interesting as an amateur because it means you're willing to admit you're wrong. And there are still a lot of people out there who think that admitting they're wrong is a weakness, as opposed to strength. So I think it is a very important attitudinal element that you're bringing to it, as you get that experience. That's what we were talking about before. . . .

. . . You can go into an Internet café with a dollar in your hand and put out a piece of citizen-advocacy by just logging onto the Internet computer there. You don't even need to have a video camera or specialty equipment. If you're looking to distribute it more widely, of course, you want to have some more professional stuff in that.

But the point is it's really the democratizing of the access of information and the ability to share that information and publishing, in essence. . . .

. . . They talk about the original opening of the doors of the Internet to a broader audience back in the early 1990s, I guess, as being the biggest step in retrospect. What's happening now is much more so because it's making it accessible to the average, everyday person. And in fact, there are arguments being made that the same thing happened with TV, the same thing happened with newspapers and print.

But what we really go back to, historically, in terms of the greater significance of this era that we're living in now and the access to these technologies, is back to Renaissance, where we're looking at . . . it used to be only a few hand-transcribed Bibles that were going around. But as soon as they were able to make books that were vastly available and inexpensive—a good book was \$2.00 to \$3.00. When you have all these different people interacting and sharing their ideas and correcting their wrong ones . . . and being able to express themselves in new ways and collaborate and now we're actually able to build technologies to do this! Some people would say we are approaching a singularity. But it's actually much simpler than that. It really is a matter of us finally being able to balance the system, the ecosystem that we're in. It's for our mental competence—even for our ability to control our world to one degree and, and to another to interact with it.

One of the great things is that the majority of the people involved in this are aspirational toward how we can use it for positive ends . . . to everyone's benefit at the end of the day.

An interesting thing I do when I talk to people about this (because it sounds a little California-ish, hippie-ish, people might want to rally around this) but it really is about the market. It's actually understandable that

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information efficiency in a market allows people to make the correct purchasing decision. It allows people to “not” make the wrong decision with regards to hiring people.

So when we get this accessing near-perfect information, it’s actually better for the overall market, and it will actually accelerate our ability to innovate and create new things and solve old problems we never thought we solvable, and in incredibly interesting ways. . . .

To listen to or read the entire Executive Conversation with Chris Heuer, go to www.theSocialMediaBible.com.

Prepare to Explore the Social Media Ecosystem

The debate about social media’s impact on society and business will continue. Social media, like many tools and appliances in our lives, can be used for perpetrating both good and evil. However you choose to use these tools, we advocate on behalf of good, ethical behavior, but you can already find plenty of examples of “the good, the bad, and the ugly” within the social media ecosystem.

In this book, you’ll learn more about the functions of social media and be able to explore applications associated with them in more detail. You’re about to begin a fabulous journey. We begin with a closer look at that social media ecosystem and its component categories.

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