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**The New Reality of  
Marketing and  
Customer Service**

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# Chapter 1

## The Social Media Manifesto

### *Engage or Die*

#### ■ THE SOCIALIZATION OF MEDIA IS YEARS IN THE MAKING

In my 19-year marketing career, I've dedicated the last 13 years specifically to the practice of and experimentation in online interaction. My findings are based solely on the chemistry of failure, success, and, well, ambivalence, which by many accounts equals either defeat or promise. The constant theme throughout has been the sustained balance between the pursuit of new influencers and the incorporation of verified traditional methods. This experience, and the experiences of others, ultimately serves as the foundation for creating a new communications bridge between companies and customers.

Socialized media has:

- Rewired the processes by which consumers share experiences, expertise, and opinions.
- Broadened the channels available to consumers who seek information.
- Changed how companies approach markets.
- Altered how companies develop products.
- Remodeled the processes by which companies connect with and show appreciation for their customers.
- Transformed the method of influence, augmenting the ranks of traditional market experts and thought leaders with enthusiasts and innovators who self-create content-publishing platforms for their views.

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Source: Original artwork by Jesse Thomas (<http://Jess3.com>).

- ▶ Facilitated customers' direct engagement in the conversations that were previously taking place without their participation.

A fundamental shift in our culture is underway and it is creating a new landscape of influencers, as well as changing how we define influence. By establishing an entirely new ecosystem that supports the socialization of information, this shift is facilitating new conversations that start locally, but ultimately have a global impact.

The days of "hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil" have passed without lament.

Monologue has given way to dialogue.

The message is clear. Social media has created and magnified a new layer of influencers across all industries. It is the understanding of the role people play in the process of not only reading and disseminating information, but also how they share and create content in which others can participate. This, and only this, allows us to truly grasp the future of communications, which is already unfolding today.

The socialization of information and the tools that enable it are the undercurrent of interactive media—and serve as the capital infrastructure that defines the social economy.

*Content is the new democracy and we, the people, are ensuring that our voices are heard.*

This is your chance to reinvigorate the tired and aging models of marketing and service, build a corporate brand, and increase revenue,

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all while paving the way for a brighter, more rewarding, and more prosperous métier.

How can companies implement an integrated communications strategy quickly in this new social landscape? By focusing on multiple markets and influencers that will have a far greater impact on brand resonance and the bottom line than trying to reach the masses through any one message, venue, or tool.

Our actions speak louder than our words.

New media is constantly evolving and has yet to reveal its true impact across the entire business publishing and marketing landscape. We're only now starting to realize a small portion of its benefits and advantages. What we do know is that the current iteration of social media is only one chapter in a never-ending resource that continues to evolve as new media permeates every facet of every business. In fact, new media is only going to become more pervasive and, as such, become a critical factor in the success or failure of any business.

The life of the information offered in this book is interminable. New tools and strategies will be revealed, and they will be tied to exciting case studies that document the challenges, tactics, lessons, and successes for each.

We're just getting started.

The evolution of new media is also inducing an incredible transformation in customer service, community relations, public relations (PR), and corporate communications—its most dramatic evolution in decades. In the world of customer and product support, socialized media is putting the “customer” back in customer service, retracting the ideologies associated with cost-cutting tactics when interfacing directly with the people who purchase and influence the purchasing decisions of others. Likewise, in the world of communications, the democratization of media is putting the “public” back into public relations. It creates entirely new teams within organizations to proactively listen, learn, engage, measure, and change in real time. And we'll soon see it have a profound effect in the financial sector.

With the injection of social tools into the mix, people now have the ability to impact and influence the decisions of their peers, as well as other newsmakers. This new genre of media is not a game played from the sidelines however. Nor is this book written merely to inform you of the benefits only to have you go back to your day-to-day routing. Those who participate will succeed—everyone else will either have to catch up or miss the game altogether.

Businesses will evolve, customers will gain in prominence, and brands will humanize—with or without you.

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### ■ THE FUTURE OF COMMUNICATIONS AND SERVICE IS ALREADY HERE

The secret to successfully navigating the new landscape of marketing and service is understanding that socialized media is about anthropology, sociology, and ethnography, and less about technology and the social tools that captivate and connect everyone today. New media marketing and services are mash-ups of new and traditional media and processes that span across advertising, PR, customer service, marketing communications (marcom), human resources (HR), sales, and community relations.

Communication, whether inbound or outbound, is now powered by conversations, and the best communicators always start as the best listeners. And, the best listeners are those who empathize while they are listening.

This is where and how the future of influence takes shape.

- It begins with respect and an understanding of how you connect with and benefit those whom you're hoping to help.
- Intent is defined by a genuine desire to evolve into a resource.
- Genuine participation is a form of new marketing, but is not reminiscent of traditional marketing formats and techniques—it's a new blueprint for "unmarketing."
- Meaningful content can earn the creator trust, authority, and influence.
- Conversations can forge relationships, which are measured by social capital and trust.

Figure 1.2 shows the range of people you will be interacting with, from innovators to laggards.

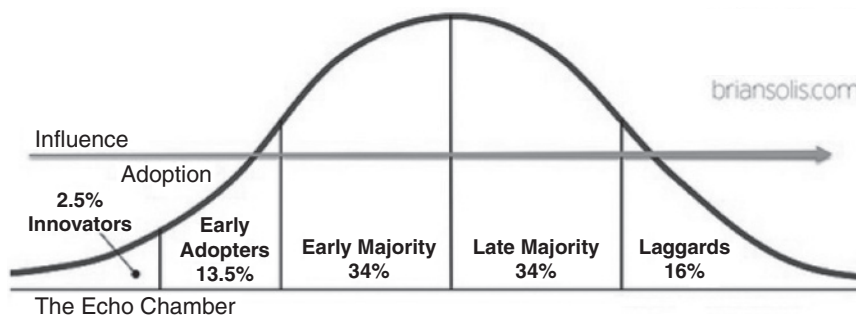


Figure 1.2

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These are pretty powerful statements and they are the essence of this more dynamic form of communications required to succeed today. These methodologies combine traditional marketing with the ability to develop flourishing and dynamic relationships with important individuals and groups of people who define multiple markets, thus giving us the ability to have an impact on multiple markets in the process.

### ■ WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS, WE ARE NOT MESSENGERS

While we lead the transformation and socialization of our company's marketing and service infrastructure, we must also ensure that our actions are discernible. Much in the same way that we attempt to create ambassadors by empowering our customers and advocates in the Social Web, we must become their ambassadors within—representing their concerns, ideas, questions, and experiences to those on our team who can provide resolution and also internal change.

Since this is a powerful new form of *social* media, it begins with how we speak. This is the point at which most companies fall down, when they rely on traditional marketing instead of creating new dialogues.

Messages are not conversations. Targets and audiences are not people. The inability to know people for who they are and what they represent prevents us from effectively and truly seeing them—which then impedes our efforts to reach them. As Doc Searls, coauthor of *The Cluetrain Manifesto*, wisely stated, “There is no market for messages.”

The market for self-promotion is finite. Yet brands, even those that experiment with social media, confuse their role and place within these new digital societies. People do not create accounts on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, or any other social network to hear from brands. Those who are solely and intentionally seeking input from companies are joining networks such as GetSatisfaction or UserVoice, and dedicated forums such as those on Yahoo!, Google, and other bulletin boards. The bottom line is that people are seeking answers and direction, not messages or sales pitches.

People just don't speak or hear things in the same way companies speak about their products and services. In order to be heard, we have to communicate as though we were speaking person-to-person with our customers.

Social networks are a hub between the company and its customers. They represent a new genre of customer-focused engagement that fuses marcom, PR, product development, sales, and customer relations, all in one community. How we participate in each network

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defines our stature within them and also determines our ability to earn friends and followers while also promoting and instilling advocacy.

Everything we're integrating into the marketing mix is aimed at sparking and cultivating conversations, as well as continuously expanding a network of lasting relationships.

### ■ CONVERSATIONS HAPPEN WITH OR WITHOUT YOU

In his great essay entitled "We Are the People Formerly Known as the Audience," Jay Rosen introduced an entirely new concept of reaching people. In many ways, Rosen's essay served as a manifesto for the marketing, media, and advertising industries, serving as an eye-opener to the world of democratized influence and how to recognize and embrace the opportunity it represents.

In order to reach people, we have to first figure out who they are and where they go for information. In the process, you'll quickly discover that there is no magic bullet for reaching everyone, all at once. The strategy is in how to segment active communities from audiences—humanizing and materializing the people we wish to reach.

The best communications programs will reach out equally to traditional media, A-, B-, and C-list bloggers, and communities because, while newsmakers reach the masses, peers and customers also reach each other in the communities where they congregate. This approach requires a new mindset and a new era of metrics.

Social media is about speaking with, not "at" people. This means engaging in a way that works in a conversational medium, that is, serving the best interest of both parties, while not demeaning any actions or insulting the intelligence of anyone involved.

So what of those skeptics or apprehensive executives who claim that participating on social networks will only invoke negative responses and ignite potential crises?

As we're coming to realize, the social landscape is an apparent sea filled with unforgiving predators—most of whom would love nothing more than to have marketers for every meal of the day. Nevertheless, succeeding here is the future of integrated communications, marketing, and service.

The truth is that there will be negative commentary. However, that should not deter you from experimenting or piloting programs. Even without your participation, negative commentary already exists. In most cases, you just aren't encountering it. This is why I like to ask business leaders the following question: "If a conversation takes place online, and you weren't there to hear it, did it actually happen?"



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Yes. Yes, it did.

Assuredly, every negative discussion is an opportunity to learn and also to participate in a way that may shift the discussion in a positive direction. If there's nothing else that we accomplish by participating, we at least acquire the ability to contribute toward a positive public perception.

The conversations that don't kill you only make you stronger. And those negative threads that escalate in social networks will only accelerate without the involvement of inherent stakeholders.

### ■ SOCIAL MEDIA IS ONE COMPONENT OF A BROADER COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING STRATEGY

It's true that everything is changing. And in many cases, it's also true that everything old eventually becomes new again. The underlying principles of customer focus and service certainly aren't new. Instead, the attention on these elements may have waned, as businesses expand, contract, shift, and evolve based on market needs and trends, profit, and peer influence, as governed by the guidance of stakeholders and shareholders.

Social media is a critical part of a larger, more complete sales, service, communications, and marketing strategy that reflects and adapts to markets and the people who define them.

Therefore, we should be realistic about how we integrate social strategies into the human-powered machine of listening, learning, engaging, and evolving.

Social media is a never-ending fountain of lessons and insight.

Social media delivers new communications tools, and also new opportunities to learn how, when, and where to use them.

Social media is both distribution channels and rivers of knowledge, education, and experience.

Social media is a means, not an end.

Social media is a revelation that we, the people, have a voice, and through the democratization of content and ideas we can once again unite around common passions, inspire movements, and ignite change.

Social media is a chapter in the evolution of New Media.

It's not a one-way broadcast channel. We are no longer broadcasters. We are now part of the community we wish to inform, and therefore we must establish prominence and earn influence in order to amass attention, instill enthusiasm, empower ambassadors, and create a community of loyal collaborators toward a more meaningful form of "unmarketing" and communications.

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The previous hierarchy of messaging has collapsed. Now, in order to appeal to customers, clients, or potential stakeholders, we must approach them from top-down, bottom-up, and side-to-side. We must out-manuever the elusive. We must out-think the pessimists. We must sanction and amplify the experts and the emissaries.

### ■ BUILDING A BRIDGE BETWEEN YOU AND YOUR CUSTOMERS

No matter what the industry, we are all, in some way, responsible for the public relations of the organization we represent.

That's right.

I'm not talking about PR or publicity intrinsically. Since our communications efforts are outward focused, visible, and indexable on the Web for all to see and find, everything we do now, whether we're in PR or not, reflects on, and contributes to, the brand we represent. Arming employees with knowledge, guidelines, rules, objectives, and expertise, and accordingly empowering them to participate on behalf of the brand and greater mission, creates an efficient, influential, and community-focused organization that stays in sync with stakeholders. Doing so builds an active collective of participants, powered by influential voices, in addition to employees, who will shape perception, steer conversations, and provide help to those seeking advice. The community that once operated without us now becomes an extension of our outbound activities, beliefs, passions, and value propositions.

We are both architects and builders of strategic relationships and alliances, and we are creating the blueprints for and also constructing the bridge that connects customers and the people (you and me) who represent the companies we believe in.

In order to truly help businesses and the decision makers responsible for their direction, we need to learn through real work. We have to get our hands dirty. There's just no way around it. We can learn from the mistakes and successes of our peers, but actions speak louder than words. The last thing we need are more cooks in a crowded kitchen. At the same time, we need direction and lucrative movement. We need thinkers *and* doers. It is the only way to get smarter and, in turn, become more valuable to those you're consulting or helping.

Immersion equals incontestable experience, perspectives, and knowledge.

Let's get to work, build the bridge, and open up the gateways to traffic on both ends.

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### ■ BEING HUMAN VERSUS HUMANIZING YOUR STORY

It takes so much more than an understanding of the tools and popular networks to inspire change and build long-term, meaningful relationships. We must not forget to fuse what works today with the strategies that reach and compel those influencers and tastemakers who live on the edge and thus promote change among those who reside in the center.

The ability to set up a profile on Facebook or Twitter, the wherewithal to update status in each network, the capacity to befriend people within each network, is in fact, child's play. This is a learned practice not unlike the sending, filing, and reading of e-mail, chatting through instant-messaging tools, placing IP-based calls on Skype, decoding the mystery of using a short message service (SMS), or sending a text message from your mobile phone.

There's a bigger, more significant opportunity to make a true impact within an organization. The tools are just extensions of you and your expertise and artistry. Everything starts with a deep commitment to the brand you're representing—its culture, personality, overall potential, and people. Without it, you're pushing the same old rhetoric in new places, which hardly helps you achieve your potential or the true capabilities of your team. And it certainly doesn't inspire anyone to concern themselves with the brand's presence in these emerging social networks that are so vital to our corporate economy.

Don't speak to me in messages!

Put down the sales sheet or the press release.

Remove me from your broadcast mailing list.

Stop calling me at home and on my cell phone.

Give me something to believe in. Give me something to let me know that you *know* who you're talking to.

I am influential. I am a consumer. I have a valuable social graph. You only wish you could connect with me. I'm the gatekeeper among gatekeepers who needs direction, insight, and answers in order for me to accomplish the tasks in my life and meet my personal and professional goals. You could be just what I'm looking for, but in social media, where I dwell, I wouldn't know it based on how you are or aren't participating.

I'm a human being and so are you.

Treat me as such.

Alas, being human is far easier than humanizing your story. Transparency is just not enough to convince me that I need to pay attention to you.

Get a little empathy going on and you'll begin to facilitate meaningful interaction. This is the necessary commitment to adopting and

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embodying a customer service mentality fueled by empathy and the desire to deliver resolution—one strategic engagement at a time.

Feel it.

Live it.

Breathe it.

Be it.

If you don't engage and become an internal champion, someone else will. That person may reside in your organization right now, or they may dwell in the cubicles of your competition's offices, or both. It's as simple as that. The key difference though, is that you can definitively demonstrate how your story can impact the day-to-day workflow of various important leaders and trendsetters, across multiple markets, because you, by default, have also become a new influencer in the process of socializing your company. While intent counts, value talks and BS walks. It's the poetry of relationship-building, versed in the language and delivered with the swagger of someone who knows how to speak to the people because he or she is from the people.

### ■ SOCIAL SCIENCE IS NO LONGER AN ELECTIVE

As mentioned earlier, technology is not in or of itself the catalyst for change. Social tools facilitate the online conversations, but it's the people who are the instigators for change.

While Generation Y (the Millennials) are entering the workforce with unprecedented knowledge of how to communicate with each other using social networks, micromedia communities, blogs, and all things social, their business discipline and work ethic are still rivaled by Baby Boomers and Generation X. And the technical aptitude of previous generations is locked into a perennial cycle of catch-up and self-education. Each generation, however, is unique and representative of the reality that everyone, no matter which generation they represent, still needs to learn how to hear and see things differently. It's psychographics over demographics, and the only way to learn about and motivate people is to see and connect with those who band together through tastes, preferences, interests, and passions, regardless of age, location, and gender.

*Psychographics: Any attribute relating to personality, values, attitudes, interests, or lifestyles; also referred to as IAO variables (for interests, activities, and opinions).<sup>1</sup>*

*Demographics: The physical characteristics of a population, such as age, sex, marital status, family size, education, geographic location, and occupation.<sup>2</sup>*

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The knowledge of the tools is one thing. But it's what we hear, say, and learn that traverses seamlessly across generations and technologies—as it relates to those connected by relevant data and individuals who share their interests.

How people interact on Facebook is not the same as how they communicate on Twitter. Community interaction on YouTube is radically different from communication on MySpace. Each network cultivates its own culture—creating a unique society that fosters connections and socialization as determined by the network's terms of service (ToS), technology capabilities, and, finally, by the people who join, who produce and share content, and who interact with one another.

Social sciences instruct us to study the social life of human groups. Conducting fieldwork in the form of listening, observing, asking questions, and documenting people in the natural environments of their online habitat reveals the insights necessary to successfully navigate our own immersion into each community.

Let's take a look at the definitions of sociology, anthropology, and ethnography to appreciate the similarities in the practice of social sciences as related to our work in social media:

*Sociology: The study of society, human social interaction, and the rules and processes that bind and separate people not only as individuals, but as members of associations, groups, and institutions.*<sup>3</sup>

*Anthropology: The scientific study of people, including the development of societies and cultures. It seeks to advance knowledge of who we are, how we came to be that way—and where we may go in the future.*<sup>4</sup>

*Ethnography: A branch of anthropology that provides scientific descriptions of human societies based on people in their natural or "native" environments—where they live, work, shop, and play. Ethnography is based on objective fieldwork.*

Through sociology, anthropology, and ethnography, we're learning to peel back the layers of online markets to see the specific groups of people and document their behavior. As such, we can effectively visualize and personify the nuances that define each online community and the distinct subcultures within it. Through impartial examination, we gather the data necessary to effectively and intelligently cross over into societal immersion, in the networks that are relevant to our brand.

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Specifically, we are looking to uncover:

- Material social networks.
- People linked through common interests that are germane to our business, industry, and marketplace.
- Keywords commonly used by community members.
- Patterns for discovering and sharing information.
- Influence of outside networks and also the effects of existing networks on external communities.
- Influential voices, tiered, and how they form distinct and overlapping connections.
- The personality of networks and the specific communities.
- The nature of threads, memes, and associated sentiment.
- The language of inhabitants.
- The prevailing culture and our potential place within it.
- The tools people use to communicate in and around each network.

This critical element of preliminary fieldwork helps us adapt our outreach strategies and techniques, as well as construct the poignant information and stories we wish to share with potential stakeholders and advocates. And, through observation, we're able to find our real customers and those who influence them.

Later in the book, we'll uncover how to specifically identify the social networks and pertinent communities to your brand.

### ■ ARE YOU LISTENING TO ME? PROVE IT

One of the most important steps in digital sociology and digital anthropology is the process of uncovering the voices that define and steer your markets.

Tools and networks will come and go. Popularity will shift across existing, up-and-coming, and yet-to-be introduced services. Contrary to popular opinion, your presence is not required in every network that populates the Social Web. You need to participate and contribute only in those communities where identified customers and prospects are active.

The risk and reality is that your customers and influential trend-setters could be misinterpreting your value proposition without dispute or resolve. Worse yet, they're receiving information and direction

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from your competitors. And if your brand is absent from these conversations (no matter how negative), don't breathe a sigh of relief. It means you're off the radar screens in your customers' decision-making processes.

In the current state of social media, online conversations, along with real-world activity, cannot be ignored. Identifying these discussions is only the first step, however. It takes much more than running Yahoo! or Google searches or setting up Google Alerts to unearth relevant dialogue. The process of identifying influencers, applicable interaction, and associated sentiment is a much more human and sophisticated process that supersedes the work performed by even the most expensive automated Web-based or software listening applications available now.

Casting a wide net in order to identify where your communities are thriving is the only way to truly identify which networks are important to your brand and business. Once you understand where these conversations are transpiring, you can observe the cultures, climate, and dialogue in order to create a participation strategy and navigate each opportunity to reach the appropriate person.

In my experience, it's *listening* that separates social media experts from social media theorists.

Make the time. Document important and relevant discussions. Create a Social Map that visually communicates where important dialogue is materializing, and where you and your team are needed, as well as maintain a pulse on your ORM (online reputation management) initiatives. Use the Conversation Prism (see Chapter 18).

### ■ YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Everything starts with unlearning what you think you know and embracing everything you need to know in today's hastily advancing and transforming social climate.

We all need to determine what we need to know to compete for the future as professionals while helping the brands we represent compete for mind-share in the face of this distributed and ever-thinning-attention economy.

Whichever department we represent, the only way to evolve is to forge rewarding, long-term connections with the very people we wish to reach and compel. Success is tied to the ability to gain influence in our own right, within each community that affects our business and markets. Winning organizations will effectually shift outward activity from broadcast, us-versus-them campaigns to a one-on-one, and eventually to a many-on-many, methodology that humanizes and

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personalizes the spirit and personality of our brand. What we're learning is that the ability to move and react is where most companies begin. Inevitably, however, the greatest advantages of social media reside in its ability for worthy individuals and companies to shape perception, steer activity, incite action, and adapt to the communities that establish the market, both today and tomorrow.

Engage or die.