

Chapter 1

The Social Media Manifesto

■ THE SOCIALIZATION OF MEDIA IS YEARS IN THE MAKING

In my 20-year marketing career, I've dedicated the last 14 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 equals either defeat or promise. The constant theme throughout has been the sustained balance between the pursuit of new influencers and the incorporation of proven 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
- Facilitated customers' direct engagement in the conversations that were previously taking place without their participation

A fundamental shift in our culture is under way and it is creating a new landscape of influencers, as well as changing how we define

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Source: Original artwork by Jesse Thomas (<http://jess3.com>).

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 introduced 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 create and share content in which others can participate. This, and only this, allows us to truly grasp the future of business, which is, for all intents and purposes, 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, enliven a corporate brand, and increase revenue, all while paving the way for a brighter and more rewarding career.

How can companies implement an integrated social strategy quickly in this new social landscape? By focusing on desirable

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markets and influencers where they connect. This 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. But, 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, prove to be 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 within the organization, introducing opportunities for internal and external collaboration in customer service, product, sales, community relations, and public—its most dramatic evolution in decades. In the world of customer and product support, socialized media is putting the “customer” back in customer service. Likewise, in the world of communications, the democratization of media is putting the “public” back into public relations. It creates entirely new roles and 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.

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 routine. 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.

■ THE FUTURE OF BUSINESS IS ALREADY HERE

The secret to successfully navigating the new landscape of marketing and service is understanding that social media is less about technology and more about anthropology, sociology, and ethnography. New media marketing and services are mash-ups of new and traditional media and processes that span across advertising, public relations (PR), customer service, marketing communications (marcom),

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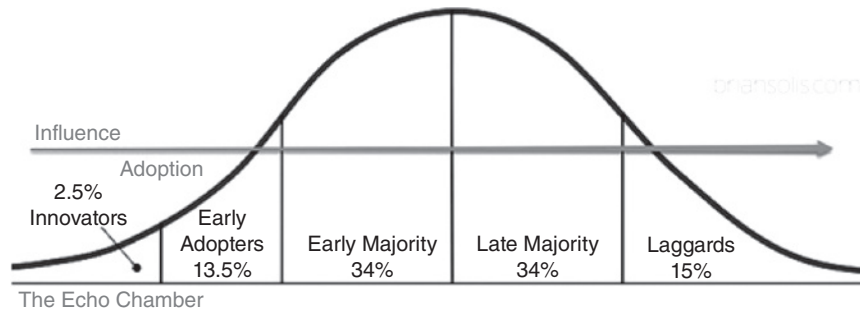


Figure 1.2

human resources (HR), sales, and community relations. We take the best practices from each and also introduce new social processes in and around them.

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.

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.

■ WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS, WE ARE NOT MESSENGERS

While we lead the transformation of our company's marketing, sales, 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

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concerns, ideas, questions, and experiences. Internal change is part of the game.

Since this is a powerful new form of *social* media, it begins with how we think and act. This is the point at which most companies fall down, when they rely on traditional marketing models instead of creating or adapting new methodologies.

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 truly seeing and hearing them—which then impedes our efforts to connect. 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. 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. For us to be heard, we have to engage as though we were speaking person to person.

Social networks are hubs between the company and its customers. How we participate in each network 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 now 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 titled “We Are the People Formerly Known as the Audience,” Jay Rosen introduced us to the people we’re now trying to reach. 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.

To best reach people, we have to first figure out who they are and where they connect and how they share and find 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.

Social media is about speaking *with*, not *at* people. This means engaging in a way that works in a conversational medium, that is,

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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 a vast 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.

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 listening in all of the right places. 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?"

Yes. Yes, it did and still does.

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 force businesses to reflect and adapt to markets and the people who define them.

Social media are never-ending fountains of lessons and insight, and they flow both ways.

Social media present a means, not an end.

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Social media spark 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.

It's not a one-way broadcast channel. We are now part of the community and we don't own it. We must establish prominence and earn influence so as to amass attention, instill enthusiasm, empower ambassadors, and create a community of loyal collaborators.

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

■ BUILDING A BRIDGE BETWEEN YOU AND YOUR CUSTOMERS

Since our efforts are outward focused, visible, and indexable on the Web for all to see and find, everything we do now contributes to the brand we represent. Arming employees with knowledge, guidelines, and objectives, and accordingly empowering them to participate on behalf of the brand and greater mission, they can create an influential and community-focused organization that engages 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.

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.

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

■ 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.

The ability to set up a profile on Facebook or Twitter, the wherewithal to update status in each network, the capacity to connect with 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, 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. 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. After all, why should I care about what you do in social media when you don't?

Don't speak to me in messages!

Stop trying to market at me!

Give me something to believe in. Give me something to let me know that you *know* whom you're talking to and why.

I am influential. I am a social consumer. I have built a valuable social graph. I'm the gatekeeper among gatekeepers who need direction, insight, and answers 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 . . . act 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 embodying a customer service mentality fueled by empathy and the desire to deliver resolution—one strategic engagement at a time.

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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 affect the day-to-day workflow of various important leaders and trendsetters, across multiple markets, because you, by default, have also become a new expert in the process of socializing your company. While intent counts, value talks and BS walks. It's the poetry of relationship building, versed in language and delivered by someone who knows how to speak to people because he 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 one another using social networks, micromedia communities, text messages, 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 in to 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 she represents, 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)¹

Demographics: The physical characteristics of a population, such as age, sex, marital status, family size, education, geographic location, and occupation²

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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 engagement on FourSquare. Each network cultivates its own culture—creating a unique society that fosters connections and socialization as determined by the people who connect, 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. Social media require digital anthropologists, sociologists, and ethnographers.

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.³

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.⁴

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.

■ YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Everything starts with unlearning what you think you know and embracing everything you need to know in today's ever-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 mindshare in an 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 one-to-many methodology that humanizes and

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personalizes 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.

Engage or die.

■ NOTES

1. Taken from Wikipedia.
2. Taken from Learnthat.com.
3. Wiktionary.org.
4. <http://vlib.anthrotech.com/guides/anthropology.shtml>.