

PART ONE

Attraction: Your Essential Content Marketing Strategy

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CHAPTER 1

How the Social Web Works

As new technologies are integrated with the growing body of social data, you can expect search capabilities to rise to breathtaking levels.

In the classic film *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy receives the following instructions on how to get to the magical land of Oz from Glinda, the good witch of the North: “It’s always best to start at the beginning, and all you do is follow the Yellow Brick Road.” Seems simple enough; start at the beginning, and follow a reliable path. Yet that sound advice is apparently uncommon when it comes to launching a company’s social marketing program. This is usually due to the fact that many people don’t know where the true beginning is—or the reliable path that follows from it.

The Internet was originally designed to connect multiple computers so they could communicate with each other and share information. As more computers were connected and more information was shared, it became necessary to make that information discoverable, which meant the Internet had to be searchable. The web as we know it today is driven by search.

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This is why you should always consider the impact of search when planning and implementing your online marketing—because search drives the web. Learn how it really works, trust it to guide your efforts, and you will control your destiny.

One of the greatest mistakes businesses make with their online marketing is to downplay or completely disregard how search will impact their results. *Built-In Social* provides information that will open your eyes to basic principles that have long been shrouded in mystery by Internet marketing experts. After spending years in the dark myself, I began a quest to learn the truth. This book is the result of that quest, and the truth that I discovered will liberate your social marketing efforts.

Built-In Social teaches you essential practices that will help you become adept at achieving higher search engine rankings for your websites. The web was indeed designed to make it easier for people to discover informational content—predominantly for research purposes. Of course, search queries have evolved to deliver much more than web pages; they now include images, videos, and the burgeoning mountain of social commentary that is transforming how the web works, and therefore how you should be using it.

On that note—let's get started with how to best position your business marketing to take full advantage of this phenomenon that is completely changing how business is done.

SOCIAL MARKETING IS A PROCESS

Social media marketing—now more appropriately known simply as social marketing—is a strategic process designed to make a business and its products and services more attractive to buyers. Of course, this has always been the goal of modern marketing. The significant difference today is that much of this is accomplished digitally—and in order to start properly, you must respect the vital role that search plays in the process,

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and how content marketing relates to that. Only then are you equipped to use social media well. This is the mistake businesses make—jumping into social media without a plan or thorough understanding of how it will generate sales revenue. When you make social media marketing a checkbox, you miss the message of this book—it has to be built into the fabric of your business structure, because it is similarly influencing the habits and behaviors of the communities your business serves.

As Figure 1.1 shows, the social marketing process is a simple three-step progression that begins with useful and valuable content that attracts the attention of buyers, followed by using social media to engage them further to build relationships and earn trust, resulting in new business that is predominantly accomplished in the real world with direct selling.

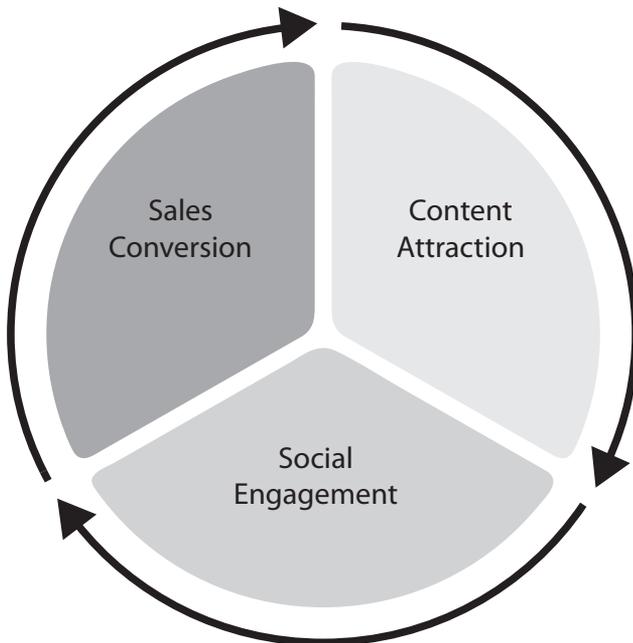


Figure 1.1 The Social Marketing Process©

Marketing Always Starts with Attraction

The early days of modern marketing focused on advertising. These were the glory days of Madison Avenue, when perception was everything. Now choice has replaced perception—and informational content is an essential component that helps consumers make better choices.

In order to make your brand attractive today, you need more than slick advertising; you have to answer questions and solve problems. This is the purpose of your content marketing—and however you position it, you should design it to create value. Value is essential in this economy, which is quite a departure from the days when marketers “sold the sizzle instead of the steak” to attract buyers.

Your content marketing challenge is simple: learn what your ideal customers value most. Then use that understanding to develop content that will attract them to your business by helping them accomplish more of what they want to do.

Social Media Engages Buyers

Consumers now have a voice—and that voice plays a big part in determining the value of your brand. The truth is, for all practical purposes, your customers own your brand. Marketing starts with attraction, then the next logical step is engagement—which social media does especially well.

Unfortunately, not many businesses readily understand this. Consider your own business: do you expect to go straight from attraction to a sale, just because that is how traditional marketing worked? While that may occasionally be possible, it is unlikely, much as it would be unlikely to expect to progress straight into marriage after the first date.

Use your social media to build engagement, and remain open to new relationships. Make it a point to learn about your community and how you can help. Social marketing is a

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process designed to build the trust necessary to be relevant in any economy—but especially one that is strongly influenced by the collective voice of consumers.

Sales Converts Engagement into New Business

You know your sales process; it's often one that you intuitively developed to successfully grow your business. It should ideally be written out in a step-by-step fashion so that everyone on your team knows how it works. This is also necessary to make sure that your team is clear about its vital importance for bringing home the business that your content marketing and social media engagement have rightfully earned.

Having a well-designed sales process not only gives your team confidence; it also does the same for your prospective customers by letting them know, in no uncertain terms, that you have a plan for taking them where they want to go. The best way to refine your sales process is to review your greatest successes. Then break down all of the steps you followed to make them happen. You will discover patterns—some of which you may have eliminated that once served you well.

The cycle of attraction, engagement, and conversion are elements that comprise a simple yet reliable formula for social marketing success. They provide a structure that works because it starts at the logical beginning and progressively builds from there. That beginning starts with search.

SEARCH DRIVES THE WEB

Understanding Google's primary objective—to deliver the most relevant results as quickly as possible for every search query—is essential, because that mission is something from which the search giant has never wavered. The challenge for businesses that want to be more visible online is to learn the nuances of exactly what information search engines consider

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to be most relevant and why. You can then start actively creating it in such a way that leaves “a trail of breadcrumbs” back to your business by way of searchable keyword phrases.

As a point of convention, when referring to search engines I will nearly always mention Google because it is universally recognized as the leader. Google controls roughly two-thirds of search in the United States and even more in other parts of the world. Nearly all of the remaining balance is handled by Bing, the Microsoft search engine that also drives Yahoo! and Facebook search.

In addition to search on the open web, you also want to keep in mind that several of the respective social networks—including LinkedIn, Google+, and Twitter—are all internally searchable, and to some degree on the open web, too. Facebook is the exception; its search capabilities have been reserved for targeting Facebook advertising—a task that the site accomplishes with amazing accuracy. Although, that is changing with the introduction of Graph Search, a feature that promises to make Facebook more “open and connected.” Nevertheless, you should know that, for the most part, what happens within Facebook stays there—much to Google’s disappointment.

The Game of Search

Despite its dominance, it is important to remember that Google isn’t the only player in the game of search. Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and other sites are all hungry for content, too. They want high quality material that people will find entertaining, will help them solve problems, and will generally attract attention to their sites. Since you want interested buyers to visit your sites, your role in this game is learning how to help them—so they can help you in return. And they will do that by linking back to your original content.

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Learning the game of search engine optimization, or SEO, is a vital component of any successful social marketing strategy. Many experts would have you believe that it is a complicated science—and indeed it is, at its highest level. Yet, this is true with any endeavor. But becoming proficient with search doesn't need to be complicated; it just requires you undertake a practice of learning what your customers find most useful, creating it for them, and helping them locate it using the social networks.

You will find that it's really not that difficult to get good results from SEO if you employ a proven process and consistently implement it.

The business of search generates billions of dollars in advertising revenue for the respective players. That is what is at stake for Google, Facebook, Twitter, and the others—and why they are eager for your active involvement. They have a job to do: serving their users with useful information. Your job is quite simple—give them what they want so they will lead those users to your business.

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION FOR REGULAR PEOPLE

Search optimization is simple when you learn to think like regular people that respond best to simple language. And regular people are engaged by straightforward headlines, descriptive subheadings, and keyword phrases highlighted in bold letters. Creating web copy that follows these guidelines respects the short attention spans of the majority of individuals—including your customers—who want you to get to the point quickly. For example, “How to Protect Your Facebook Account from Hackers” is the title of an article I wrote that has earned thousands of shares—and it continues to accumulate more views

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every day—and that is a direct result of the no-nonsense headline with content that delivers on its promise. (Go to the Appendix for a link to this article and other online resources.)

Once you have the attention of your audience, you can then use original stories to humanize your message. But don't forget to keep the stories short. Offer bite-sized paragraphs that allow for quick and easy consumption, and use images and videos to descriptively tell your story. Everyone prefers to learn in their own unique way, so it always helps to provide multimedia options for ensuring that people not only receive your message, but also understand it clearly. Also, remember that Google is reading your story, too—and looking for relevant keywords that provide clues to the content of your message and its ideal audience.

Keyword Selection Simplified

Keyword selection for SEO is a process of using words in your web copy that most people in a mainstream community would use to search for a business like yours. You have to think middle of the road, like a regular person. This is a test of how well you understand your customer—which you may discover is not as well as you think you do.

Of course, there's an easy way to determine what your customers want and the words they use to express it: ask them. When I owned my landscape business and was just beginning to learn about keyword optimization for our website, I decided to survey my customers to find out which words they would use to describe us. It turned out to be a wise move—one that I highly recommend, and that's easy to implement using online survey tools such as SurveyMonkey.com, online form builder Wufoo.com, or Google Docs forms. I gave them a list of words from which to choose and asked them to select the ones that they would use to search for a company like ours.

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The phrases included terms like landscape contractor, landscape architect, landscape designer, and landscaper, among others. Our customers overwhelmingly chose landscaper—not a particularly flattering term that we were especially excited about featuring in our content. However, it was what they used. And since we realized we could either feed our egos or rank better for search results, we chose the latter.

Optimizing for landscaper—instead of the other common industry phrases we had been using—moved our site from page seven to page one for a local search within 60 days. One month later, we had the top two listings on the first page. This was not only exciting, it was our first clue that very few companies were optimizing their sites, or knew how to do it well. The second insight came after I sold the business. Even though our website hadn't been updated in nearly three years, it still ranked on page one for our desired search terms.

You should know that I accomplished all of this in a period of just a few months with no training other than a few decades of working with real customers. You cannot underestimate that experience. Assuming you similarly have extensive experience working with your customers, you have the most essential quality for making SEO work for your business: you know your customers and what they want. The only other help you need is a little technical guidance—and that you are learning here.

Most websites are not properly optimized because most webmasters are technicians—not people who understand your business as well as you do. Use your experience and expertise to help them do their job well. Many business owners with 10, 20, and 30 or more years of experience are impressed with what their younger employees can do with technology—but it really should be the other way around. This technology is useless when it's not grounded in time-tested business practices.

Virtually any keyword optimization effort that you develop from your sound understanding of your core customer and

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company mission will be beneficial, because the majority of businesses—including your competitors—are doing nothing at all. Sure, they may be paying for clicks or running ads, but that is not sustainable. The monster that is Google needs to be fed. You can feed it dollars and get modest results, or you can give it fresh meat—original content that it will devour and then come back to you for more. Once Google finds a valuable source of original content in your business, you’ve built a bridge—one that is that much easier to cross the next time around.

In addition to using your experience and instincts when choosing keywords, there are online services such as Wordtracker.com and (Google) Adwords.com that will tell you what people are universally searching for. Just keep in mind these tools examine the entire web, whereas you may only be interested in your local community, and there is no substitute for local knowledge when it comes to doing that well. You can of course use the tools—but trust your gut, too. One of the most effective tools you can use is a simple Google search. Enter a search query, and as you type, Google will serve up—in a prioritized fashion—the most commonly searched terms for that keyword phrase. (See Figure 1.2.) Use your expertise to judge how relevant those terms may be.

FRESHNESS AND AUTHORITY FOR RELEVANCE AND INFLUENCE

Google has traditionally used a “freshness factor” as a measure of relevancy to determine the best search results. In other words, the newest information is given greater consideration for being more relevant. This makes sense, because the most recent news is clearly likely to be more relevant (a factor that also explains the precipitous decline of print newspapers and related publications in a world that has largely gone digital).

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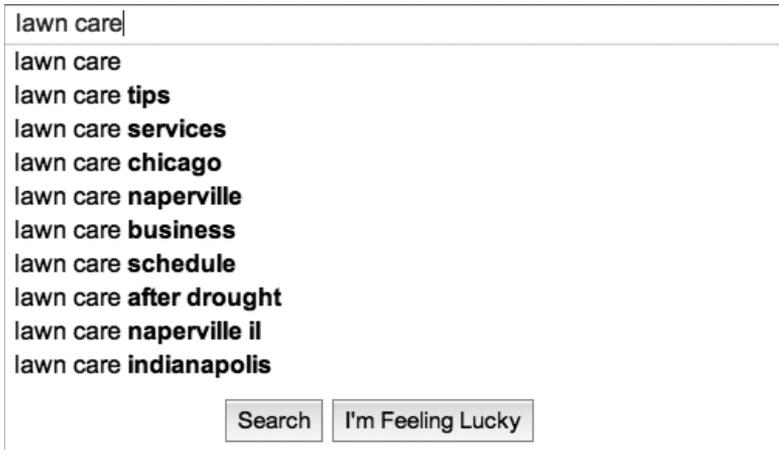


Figure 1.2 Google Search for Lawn Care

The second key consideration for ranking search results is the authority of the news source. Traditional media outlets such as newspapers and magazines once held massive influence, because they were few in number and had exclusive access to news that the general public eagerly anticipated. Today, the general public serves as both the news and its source.

There are millions of blogs today, many of which have more influence than traditional news sources such as *Forbes* or even *USA Today*. This democratization of media presents a significant opportunity for every small business. Social media has made it possible for a single person to become influential literally overnight. Now authority and influence is not consolidated within institutions, or even among celebrities and power brokers. It's everywhere, and it's specific.

You and your business may have a great deal of influence within your industry and the communities you serve. Thus, if someone is searching for the products and services your company provides, your influence will be weighted

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accordingly—especially if you are leveraging factors such as location, which is an undeniable source of authority for local businesses. We discuss in Chapter 7 why businesses large and small are trying to be more local, even hyperlocal.

The Freshness Factor

In early 2011, Google implemented the first of their series of freshness updates. This update to their search algorithm (formula for ranking search results) effectively killed websites that were repurposing data from other sources instead of creating fresh and relevant content. This opened the window of opportunity wide for every small business leader willing to digitize the knowledge and expertise that presently resides within their gray matter—thereby allowing Google to index and share it with those who are searching for businesses with that specific expertise.

Good quality information that helps your community will never go out of style. This is what we call evergreen content—information that will be just as relevant tomorrow as it is today. So, what makes it fresh? Quite simply, your timely perspective—one that is relevant to your industry, community, and customers.

Authority Is Influence

In the 1970s television commercials for stock brokerage firm E. F. Hutton, the catchphrase “When E. F. Hutton Talks—People Listen” was used to position the firm as a respected authority in the financial services industry—something that a business can earn over a period of time with a proven track record.

Authority is why Google considers me to be influential when it comes to social media for small business. Why? Because I have earned my “author-ity” by authoring and publishing content that has earned inbound links from other

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blogs that publish portions of my work and link back to me. Those inbound links are signals of authority to Google—digital validations or votes of confidence.

Thus, in addition to creating and publishing fresh content, your business has to use your social media to promote it and earn those inbound links. The key is to do this in service to others, who will in turn acknowledge the value of your work by linking to it.

Two of the most common mistakes that business owners make with their social marketing are failing to properly promote their content—and over-promoting it, sometimes referred to on Twitter as “hogging the stream.” Consider how often you would watch a television station that was 100 percent advertising. If you have been over-promoting your work, take a step back and rebuild your reputation as a valued contributor to your social communities.

FACEBOOK AND THE WISDOM OF FRIENDS

Search advertising revenue is what makes Google, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Twitter free for users. How they accomplish that varies, and the Facebook model in particular is one that businesses should learn. More on how this works in Chapter 4, when we examine the major social networks in more detail.

As you now know, Google’s mission is to deliver the most relevant results for anyone performing a search within its platform. Thus, Google is always clear about who their customer is: any person performing a search query, regardless of whether they’re performing that search for personal or business reasons.

When Google focuses on providing the best user experience, they are serving everyone equally. In order to make

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a profit, Google employs a business strategy for delivering favorable results for both organic (driven purely by the value of the content) and paid search results—both of which are designed to be the most relevant results for a search query.

Contrast this with Facebook. Let's say that you and I are Facebook users (which we likely both are). Facebook users are not necessarily their customers—and that compromises the value of the user experience for both users and business customers that pay for advertising. In the early days, before Facebook launched their advertising revenue model, it was designed to create the best experience for networking. Now everything is designed for the true customer—businesses that want to connect with users.

One of the likely reasons that individual users are limited to 5,000 Facebook friends is because Facebook wants to encourage anyone desiring a greater presence to migrate their personal Facebook experience to a page. This compels them to assume the role of a personality or business, one that is encouraged to purchase advertising to stay engaged with their fans. This is presumably why Facebook is better searchable within the context of targeting specific users with ads—with Graph Search for users providing limited results from profile data and relationships.

This is unfortunate because with over one billion users actively sharing, Facebook is building a storehouse of valuable contextual data that insiders have appropriately named “the wisdom of friends.” When it comes to making buying decisions, our friends' recommendations are arguably one of the most important considerations—because they take a variety of factors including social influences, location, and direct experience from trusted sources into account.

While Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg has stated they could “create a web that's smarter, more social, more personalized, and more semantically aware,” that reality has been a long

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time coming, despite years of anticipation. The truth is that not only is Facebook only partly searchable, the user experience is filtered for everyone who uses it, including businesses.

As stated previously, Facebook takes this approach in order to encourage businesses to invest in advertising and promoted posts to reach a wider audience. Yet even this has been met with mixed results. For instance, while they still invest a portion of their marketing budget with Facebook, General Motors cancelled a \$10 million Facebook advertising campaign in 2012 due to lack of results, with Mark Cuban later responding in kind with the Facebook marketing of his 70-plus companies. The message is clear—evaluate your results.

My clients have generally received mixed results from Facebook advertising, ranging from exceptional to marginal. The problem is there is only so much room in the Facebook stream, just as there is only room for so many Super Bowl ads. So, while some Facebook ads work exceptionally well, there are others that may not get served at all. Of course, there is no cost incurred if that happens. That said, as long as the pricing remains reasonable, it is worth experimenting with these ads to build more traffic to your Facebook page, with the hopes that someday you will also be able to better search Facebook for valuable insights on your customers.

SOCIAL GRAPHS—THE SECRET YOU NEED TO KNOW

In the real world, you have relationships with objects as well as with people. For example, the car you drive reflects your personality and tendencies. Minivans suggest practicality, convertibles a love of freedom, and tinted windows clearly indicate a desire for privacy. That's in the real world.

Now consider that the web works exactly the same way, except that everything has to be accomplished digitally. Your

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digital relationships with people and objects provide clues about you. Objects in the digital world are videos, images, and just about any other type of searchable content—including everything within your social media. All of this content collectively makes up something called your social graph: a digital representation of who you are as told by your personal information, connections, and associated content that you have created and shared.

Think of these social graphs as digital maps that help to create alignment online. To get a visual of social graphs, imagine a three-dimensional matrix of horizontal and vertical lines, comprised of mostly empty space. Every point of intersection on that matrix is a potential connection point or node. When you make a social connection with another person, object, or company, you create a permanent node that makes the matrix more descriptive. Every node is a relationship that tells a story—your story. And the more active you are on a given social network, the more nodes you have and the more completely your social graph reflects who you are in real life.

As a practical matter, you want your business to have a descriptive social graph to create better alignment with it and your ideal customers—the people who are searching for a company like yours. Just as you have to give Google what it wants if you expect to rank well in search on the open web, you have to do the same for Facebook, LinkedIn, and every other social network where you want a stronger presence.

The term social graph was first used in reference to Facebook, and is now literally represented in its Graph Search feature; however, it applies to every social network, and even related platforms such as Google and Amazon. Digital graphing on sites such as Amazon would more accurately be described as “interest graphs” since they align buyers of one product with potentially related products. Google prefers the term “knowledge graph” regarding search. Don’t get hung up

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on the terminology; just recognize the power behind these digital social graphs for accomplishing your social marketing objectives.

The Facebook Open Graph

When Facebook launched sweeping changes to their platform on April 21, 2010, social graphs were suddenly thrust into the spotlight, predominantly due to privacy concerns. That's when Mark Zuckerberg coined a new term—Open Graph. The objective of Facebook's Open Graph is to integrate its users' social graphs on other sites with their identity on Facebook. Facebook accomplishes this through something called the Facebook API, which you know as the familiar Facebook Like button.

When you “Like” a Facebook page on an outside site that has embedded the Facebook Like feature, you are instantly connected with everyone else who has liked that site. Every Facebook Like connects and extends your reach into these communities, which tells Facebook more about who you are, your interests, and how you are associated with others.

As all of our social graphs are merged, they become mutually more descriptive and complete. This is why it's important to be actively engaged on the social networks—both on a personal and professional level. Doing so allows you to manage your destiny by building your social graphs to connect the dots to new friends and business opportunities.

How Social Graphs Tell a Story

Bill Gates is credited with noting in 1996 that “content is king”—and at that time, he was right. However, that was before social networking changed the game of search to what it is today—one where social context is equally important.

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As your messaging or content on the social web is shared, it gathers context and builds nodal relationships that tell a story. Once you understand this, you can more effectively enhance your social graph by creating useful content that favorably represents who you are and what you do best in all of your personal and professional roles.

Context not only tells us who you are, it also suggests who you are not. When you are open and authentic, you are likely to attract what you really want. Any company that tries to be all things to all people will necessarily have to work harder at filtering leads and inquiries. Thus, when a company is clear about its identity and mission and reinforces that with content shared on the social networks, it tends to attract buyers that the business can serve well.

Social graphs are predictors of human behavior. We are creatures of habit who are more likely to behave in the future as we have in the past. Conditioned patterns seldom change—and social graphs accurately reflect that. While it is technically not necessary to understand social graphs in order to network effectively, developing this understanding is invaluable for adapting to changes as this technology evolves.

Why Social Search Is a Game Changer

Google has hundreds of online properties, including Gmail, YouTube, and Google+, but its core business is, and presumably will always be, search advertising. That is how it makes the lion's share of its revenue, and that alone provides clues for understanding how to use the web to your advantage.

You may have already noticed that socially shared content is rising to the top of your Google search results. So if you want to earn higher Google rankings, you not only need to be creating high-quality content, you must also be actively encouraging people to share this content on the social networks.

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Why is there now so much emphasis on social content? Well, for one thing, there's so much of it. Google can't ignore the fact that people are creating social content at a breathtaking pace. And because search is all about content, Google has to go where the action is. Add to that the richness of social data and you have a game changer—one in which context is king.

As new technologies are integrated with this growing body of social data, you can expect search capabilities to rise to breathtaking levels, providing timelier, more accurate, and more personal search results.

What This Means for Business

In late 2010 at the Web 2.0 Summit, Mark Zuckerberg made the profound statement that every industry will have to redesign itself around the influences of social media in the coming years. This means that every leading business will have to do the same.

Imagine a web that has perfect access to information—a social web that is a digital copy of your physical world. That nearly impossible-to-imagine reality is here today. Every piece of data that is added to every social graph makes the entire system more intelligent. And the more the system knows, the more discerning it will be. Think about what that means for your business, and how you should be preparing it for a future that may already be here now.

Try This: Select Your Keywords

You can think of keywords simply as the language of the web—what consumers and businesses are using to get what they desire from a web search.

What are the keywords your buyers are using?

- Have a conversation with a few of your customers. After you reconnect, casually ask them what words they would use to search for a company like yours.
- Write everything down. You may be surprised what you learn.
- Start by using these key words and phrases to optimize your social media profiles for search.
- Now go back to some of your recently published content and do the same—especially recent blog posts and website content.
- Make it a habit to be laser-focused on using these keywords whenever you publish online, while also noticing which keywords generate more traffic.