

Chapter 1

Marketing in the Age of Visual Content

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 - ▶ Evaluating how visual social marketing can help your business grow
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As social media marketing has grown and evolved over the past ten years or so, an exciting trend that has emerged is visual social marketing. I've been involved in social media marketing since its inception and have noticed in the past couple of years the phenomenon of adding visual content to the social media marketing space.

Visual social marketing is powerful because visual elements allow marketers to create deeper connections via social media. The expression “A picture is worth a thousand words” indicates that humans can process a lot of information relatively quickly by looking at an image.

While recently examining trends related to tablet devices, I saw that Flipboard, a visual news application, was the most frequently downloaded app for the iPad. Pinterest, an image-based sharing site, was the fastest-growing social network. Instagram, an application for editing and sharing photos on mobile devices, was gaining in popularity (and was eventually purchased by Facebook for a *billion* dollars). At the same time, social networks such as Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn, and Twitter are all increasing the prominence of images on their sites. Also, studies have begun to emerge, showing that images on Facebook were generating more clicks and engagements than any other content.

All these shifts, plus video, now continue — short-format video especially is growing in popularity. Twitter launched its Vine application, which allows users to share 6-second videos, and Instagram added video sharing to its popular photo-sharing application.

The growth in the popularity of visual content in social media is undeniable — it creates an opportunity for marketers to connect with customers on social media in the formats that customers are most interested in. Savvy marketers are creating visual content on visual social marketing sites and existing social networks in order to break through the clutter and connect with consumers in a deeper way.



With the proliferation of the iPhone and other types of smartphones, creating visual content such as photographs, videos, and drawings is easier than ever. Technology is no longer a barrier to creating stunning images or videos that connect with customers. In this age, every individual and business has the power to create powerful visual content at their fingertips by way of the smartphone.

In this chapter, I explain what visual social marketing is and why it's a vital part of any social marketing or communications strategy.

Defining Visual Social Marketing

In *visual social marketing*, you use images and videos to connect with consumers via social media. Visual social marketing can take place on visual social networks, such as Pinterest, YouTube, or Instagram, that focus primarily on sharing visual content, or on other social networks such as Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn, and Twitter.

Visual social marketing can include images or videos that a business purchases or creates itself or *user-generated* content, which anyone can create.

Visuals are images and videos (photographs, graphics, images, or videos) that are created to support visual social marketing.



Though some people believe that visual social marketing is only relevant to businesses that offer highly visual products in categories such as fashion, design, or food, that isn't the case. *All* businesses can benefit from participating in visual social marketing.

My company, Boot Camp Digital, provides social media training. It isn't a highly visual topic; however, my employees know that our customers are active on sites such as Pinterest and Instagram — plus, we need relevant ways to connect with our customers on Facebook, Google+, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

Boot Camp Digital employees create images with social media statistics to share on Facebook. These posts often generate more views than Facebook posts that have only text. We also use Instagram to share images from conferences and events. All these tools help build visibility with our target audience and benefit from our existing social media marketing.

Appreciating the Marketing Potential of Visual Social Marketing

Visual social marketing is a powerful way to grow your business presence on social networks. Because visual content is more powerful than text content, it can provide a number of benefits for businesses, including building deeper connections, increasing the believability of your marketing efforts, and communicating more quickly.

Building deeper connections

Visual social marketing allows businesses to create deeper connections with customers. A video or an image allows for a much more meaningful connection with customers than can simply sharing text.

For example, Pure Michigan is an effort by the state of Michigan to drive tourism and business to the state. Though it can use text to describe how beautiful Michigan is, nothing is more compelling than displaying stunning images. You can see the power of visual content in Figure 1-1 by taking a look at Pure Michigan's Facebook page. As a resident of a neighboring state (Ohio), seeing amazing photos of the lakes in Michigan makes me consider vacationing there, and it certainly changes my perception of the state. The images build this impression much more powerfully than text could have.



Images and videos can create deeper and longer-lasting emotional connections.



Figure 1-1:
The Pure Michigan Facebook page.

Increasing the believability of your marketing

Effective marketing influences perceptions, and visual content is a powerful way to show how a product works and to convince people to purchase it. A restaurant's site can tell you about its beautiful dining room, but seeing photos of it makes the claim believable. Visual elements allow customers to truly see how a product looks, works, or functions, which makes advertising and marketing claims more believable.

One of the biggest video marketing successes in the history of YouTube is the Will It Blend series by BlendTec (www.WillItBlend.com), a company that produces high-quality blenders. To show the strength and durability of its commercial blenders, BlendTec created a series of videos in 2006 showing its blenders blending items such as blocks of wood and even the iPhone and iPad. The video series increased sales of the BlendTec blender by 700 percent and even led to the creation of a consumer line of blenders. The blenders now have their own website, as shown in Figure 1-2, and most of their videos generate hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of views.



Visual marketing provides you with the opportunity to show customers the information that you want them to believe about your business — take advantage of this opportunity to create compelling marketing messages.

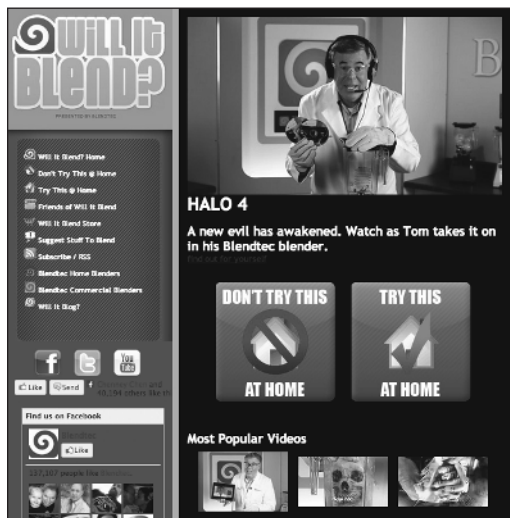


Figure 1-2:
The Will It Blend video website.

Communicating more quickly

In many instances, a concept may be communicated more quickly by using a video or an image rather than text. For example, if I wanted to teach you how to tie a bowtie, it would take pages of text to describe how to do it. Alternatively, I can *show* you in only a few minutes.



When used well, photos and videos can be a more effective and more efficient means of communication. For marketers, communicating by way of visual content often makes it easier to explain how to do something. This method is also appealing to consumers who are starved for time online.

Evaluating how viewers process visual elements

One reason that visual social marketing is becoming prominent is the way that people process images and other visual content. They can communicate more information, more quickly, by way of an image or a video than by text.

A number of studies show that the human brain processes visual information more quickly than it processes text. Images and visual concepts are processed 60,000 times faster in the brain than text. If you want to communicate quickly, therefore, an image can communicate the information faster than can text.

In social media, users typically scroll through news streams that have a lot of status updates and then choose to read the information that interests them. Because images can be processed more quickly than text, users of social networks are more likely to look quickly at an image than to read text.

Ninety percent of information that's transmitted to the brain is visual, so most of what you comprehend and understand comes from visual cues. When you omit visual content and use only text, you're eliminating a large percentage of information that can be consumed by way of an image.

Describing in print the photo of two men with computers in Figure 1-3 could take pages of text — especially their facial expressions. Viewing the image directly, on the other hand, communicates a lot of information quickly. Within a few seconds, you can comprehend their feelings and emotions much more accurately than by reading a text description.



Figure 1-3:
Two men
with com-
puters —
and easily
discernible
emotions.



Visual elements aren't just important — they're an effective and efficient way for people to consume and understand content.

Digging in to see how visual elements attract results on social networks

Visual content is generating tremendous results on social networks. Considering that people process images more quickly than text, you probably aren't surprised to know that, across social networks, images are generating more views and clicks than are other types of content.

The statistics in the following list indicate how images are garnering results on a few popular social networks:

- ✓ **Facebook:** The site reports that images generate 50 percent more interactions than other types of content; more than 6 billion photos are now uploaded to Facebook every month. Images on Facebook generate seven times more Likes and ten times more shares than links (on average).
- ✓ **LinkedIn:** A study by The Ladders (www.theladders.com) found that recruiters on LinkedIn spend more time examining a user's picture than the person's qualifications.
- ✓ **Twitter:** Images are the most often shared links on this site.
- ✓ **Blogs:** Posts and articles that include images generate 94 percent more views than posts without images.

As these statistics show, images are generating results across social networks, and they aren't important only for visual social networks such as Instagram and Pinterest. Images are an important part of *any* social media marketing strategy.



In any social media strategy, create a visual social marketing plan (described later in this book) to maximize results and drive interactions. If you're marketing or communicating on a social network, make visual content a part of your strategy.

A quick look at a variety of leading-brand social networks shows that many of them are harnessing the power of social media. Oreo received a lot of attention for its unique and creative Facebook images, creating 100 daily Facebook posts to celebrate its 100th birthday. Most of the posts included interesting and creative (and, sometimes, provocative) images, all of which featured the Oreo cookie, as shown in Figures 1-4, 1-5, and 1-6. During the 100 days of the campaign, the product's Facebook Likes grew from 26 million to 27 million and interactions increased *195 percent*.



Figure 1-4:
An Oreo
Pride image,
posted on
Facebook.



Figure 1-5:
An Oreo
post about
the Mars
rover.

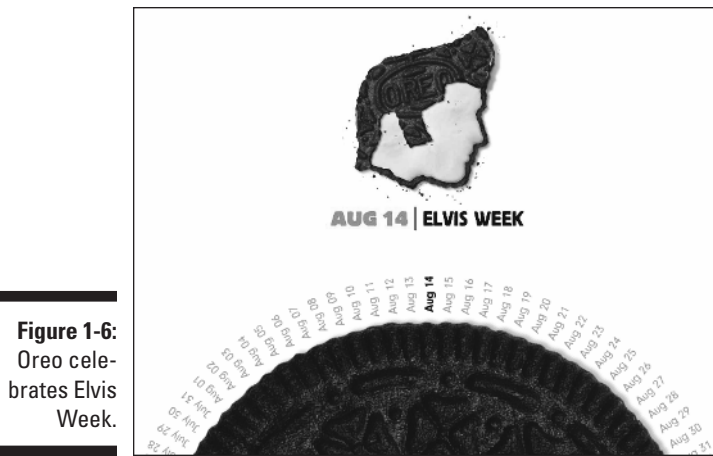


Figure 1-6:
Oreo celebrates
Elvis
Week.

Recognizing the challenges facing social media marketers

One daunting challenge for marketers is that social networks are becoming more and more cluttered — and marketers have to figure out how to break through and be noticed. According to Facebook, its average user has 130 friends and is connected to 80 groups, pages, and events. The average Facebook user is therefore connected to more than 200 elements on Facebook. If each of these is updated only five times a day, the user could be exposed to more than 1,000 status updates every single day.

If an average user can be exposed to 1,000 updates a day, how can marketers stand out and be seen? How can they attract attention and drive people to notice them?



To break through the clutter on social media, you have to be more strategic than ever about creating content that people want to see. As a business or an individual, if you want to gain attention, you must create content that people want and deliver it in a format that appeals to them. Otherwise, your posts will be filtered out with the noise.

As you start to consider the issue of overwhelming content and the challenge that businesses face to create the right content in the right format, one trend shows up again and again: Images, videos, and other visual content are increasingly what people want to see online.

Overcoming the clutter

Visual social marketing helps marketers overcome the key challenge of social media clutter and noise because visual elements such as images and videos can be processed more quickly than text.

Visual content overcomes the challenge of transcending social media clutter, for a number of reasons:

✔ **People process visual content more quickly than text.**

As I mention earlier in this chapter, because our brains process visual content quicker than it processes text, visual content is a more efficient way for people to consume information. In cluttered social networks, where marketers are trying to stand out, it makes sense that images are more likely to be viewed than text.

✔ **Visual content generates the most interactions.**

On many social networks, images and videos generate more Likes, clicks, and views than do text-only updates. These interactions increase the overall visibility of a post. For example, if you like a photo on Facebook, your friends may also see that photo in their newsfeeds, which makes visual content powerful for marketers — because the content generates more interactions, it also generates more views.

✔ **Ideas are distilled into the basic points.**

Ideas communicated via images and videos are typically distilled into key points that omit extraneous text. For example, in Figure 1-7, the key ideas of a blog post are displayed directly in an image. The entire blog post or article will likely be significantly longer. Because the use of images to communicate ideas forces marketers to share their ideas more concisely, images helps to overcome the challenge of eliminating clutter.

✔ **Images catch the eye when you skim information.**

People who are overwhelmed online increasingly skim content to find key information. When you skim content, good images stand out and grab your attention.



Visual content is growing in importance in the cluttered world of social media marketing because it's processed quicker than text, generates more interactions (leading to more visibility), forces marketers to distill their ideas into key points, and draws in users who skim social media content. You can see in Figure 1-8 that even in the LinkedIn newsfeed (the screen a user sees immediately after logging in to LinkedIn), images stand out.

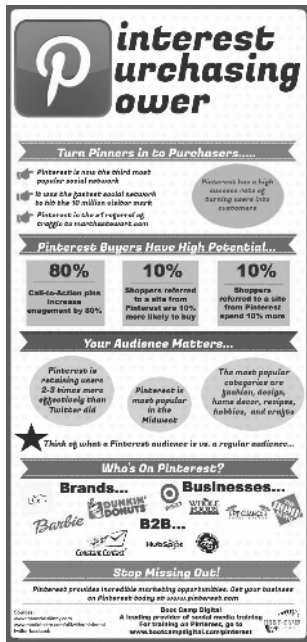


Figure 1-7: An infographic showing the purchasing power of Pinterest.

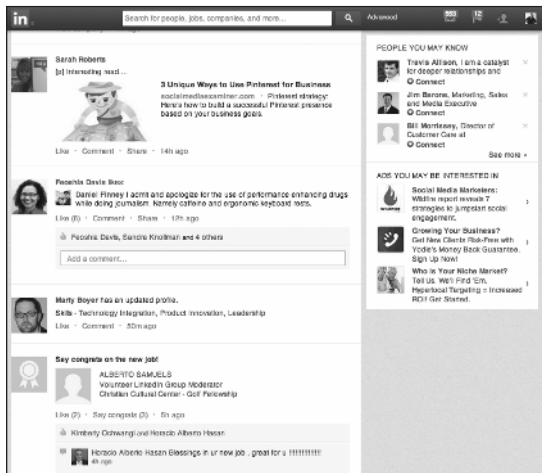


Figure 1-8: Images stand out in the LinkedIn newsfeed.

Adding visual content isn't simply a fad — it's a shift in social media that's based on the need of social networking users to quickly and efficiently process information in an increasingly cluttered world online.

Examining the Key Applications of Visual Social Marketing

Visual social marketing is generally applied in three ways: on social networks, on visual social networks, and to generate more traffic to a website. Though most social networks feature visual content, a visual social network is one that focuses on visual content such as images or videos. For example, Facebook includes visual content such as images and videos, but Instagram, a visual social network, focuses primarily on taking, editing, and sharing images.

Applying images on social networks

Images represent a prime opportunity to connect with customers on all social networks, not just on visual social networks. As described earlier in this chapter, images generate more views, likes, and clicks on most social networks than do text-only posts.

As a social media marketer, your visual strategy should focus on more than visual social networks such as Instagram and Pinterest. Your strategy should extend to all social networks in which you participate.



A solid social media strategy features a variety of content that includes images and videos. Additionally, existing social networks such as Facebook and Twitter are great places to post visual content.

For example, a photo taken on Instagram may also be used as a Facebook post or a Twitter status update. A video created to be shared on YouTube may also make a great post on LinkedIn or a strong blog post.

I describe how to integrate images into your social media strategy for nonvisual social networks in more detail in Part III.

Applying images on visual social networks

A visual social network is a powerful tool for visual social marketing because its primary content is *visual* — images and videos are the primary content that is viewed and shared.

Visual social networks are among the fastest-growing and most frequently discussed networks.

The primary image-focused visual tools that I cover in detail (in Part IV of this book) are described in this list:

- ✔ **Infographics:** A graphical representation of data tells a story in long-format images with charts.
- ✔ **Instagram** (www.Instagram.com): The more than 100 million users at this site (recently acquired by Facebook) shoot photos from their mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets.
- ✔ **Pinterest** (www.pinterest.com): This online, visual “pinboard” site allows users to create boards based on any topic and to “pin” to them relevant images from their computers or from the web. It is now the third largest social network, and many similar sites have begun to emerge.
- ✔ **SlideShare** (www.SlideShare.com): People share PowerPoint presentations at this site, which is growing quickly and generating tremendous numbers of presentation views.

The following list describes the primary video social networks covered in this book:

- ✔ **YouTube** (www.YouTube.com): At *the* biggest video-sharing website — and the number-two search engine on the Internet — visitors can share any type of video.
- ✔ **Vine** (www.Vine.co): Using this new video sharing application (launched by Twitter), people can share six seconds’ worth of short-format videos.
- ✔ **Instagram video** (www.Instagram.com): Users can create 15-second videos on Instagram and share them on Instagram or other social networks.

These social networks are all growing quickly and show the importance of visual social marketing.

Applying visual elements on websites

Visual content is vital to driving relevant and targeted traffic to a website. The importance of using images and videos on websites isn’t new. What is new is that, as social networks have grown, they have emerged as indispensable places to promote content from websites. Social networks also drive significant amounts of traffic to websites.



As social networks become more visually oriented, visually optimize your website to take advantage of the traffic that can be generated from social networks.

For example, my website, www.BootCampDigital.com, has a free report on how to use Google+ for marketing. The page containing the report originally included *only* the report, and because the report was on the page, I didn't include an image of it.

The problem was that whenever customers read the report and received value from it, they wanted to share the report on Facebook. My site didn't display an image of the report, so whenever the page with the Google+ report was shared, no appropriate image accompanied it.

When I saw a customer share the report, I realized that I needed an image to optimize the report for sharing on Facebook, so an image of the report was created. Now, whenever customers share the report, an image of the report appears as a part of the post, as shown in Figure 1-9.



Figure 1-9:
A Google+
report,
shared on
Facebook.

After the image was added to the web page featuring the Google+ report, it began to generate more shares across social networks, more traffic, and more downloads.



This simple example shows the importance of incorporating images into your website design and marketing strategy. Images on a web page are increasingly important in generating shares and traffic via social networks. (I cover this topic in more detail in Chapter 2.)

Determining the Copyright Status of Visual Elements

Using visual content such as images and videos in your social media marketing creates a number of concerns about adhering to copyright law. My intent in this section isn't to provide you with a comprehensive legal overview of the countless copyright issues and model release issues that surround the use of visual content online; rather, I hope to provide you with an overall understanding of the issues to be aware of when you're using images and videos online.



Business owners can't simply search for images online and use any images they find. The owner or creator of an image holds the copyright to that image automatically. A business that uses a copyrighted image without permission may end up in legal trouble.

When you search for images to use for social media marketing, be *sure* that you have the proper permission to use the image legally.



You can also purchase the non-exclusive rights to use an image in your marketing to promote your business. Both free and paid sites provide businesses with licenses to use images commercially. Paid image sites generally have better selections, higher quality, and fewer restrictions than the free photography options.

Images and videos: Embedding versus uploading

One thing that blurs the use of copyright on the web is the difference between embedding and uploading an image or a video. Though some debate still exists in this area, in most instances, images and videos may be embedded on a site without violating the copyright, but they cannot be uploaded.

When an image or a video is *embedded* into your website, the source content is hosted on another site but is displayed on your site.

Suppose that someone at www.mashable.com writes an article about Facebook marketing, accompanied by a photo. To add the photo to the website, Mashable uploads the photo, and it is hosted on Mashable's servers. Then a few weeks later, as I'm writing an article about Facebook marketing on my blog at www.BootCampDigital.com/blog, I want to use the Facebook

marketing photo from Mashable. I cannot simply download the Mashable photo to my computer and upload it to my blog post. Mashable owns the copyright to the photo it used, and I can't simply reuse the photo, even if I give proper credit. I can, however, embed the photo from Mashable into my blog so that the image is displayed. When a photo or video is embedded, it continues to be hosted on Mashable's servers, and I'm simply displaying its photo on my website.



The difference between embedding the photo and downloading the photo is subtle because, in both cases, the photo is displayed on my website. In downloading and uploading the photo, I'm hosting the image on my web servers and using the copyrighted image for my marketing purposes. If I embed the photo, I'm displaying the photo on my website but not copying, downloading, or reproducing it.

The bottom line: Embedding photos lets you use photos from other websites; however without proper permission, you cannot upload those same images to your website.

Avoiding legal issues when taking your own photos and videos

When you use your own images and videos online, you have to consider a few issues. Because a business's use of images and videos on social media is considered marketing, specific rules apply to the commercial use of images and videos. Consider the items described in this list:

- ✔ **Model releases:** When you take a photo of a person (even if that person is an employee or a customer), you may need to secure a *model release* — a form, signed by the person in the image or video, that allows the business to use the content for marketing purposes. A model release isn't required in every situation; however, if you're planning to use images of people, be sure to discuss this issue with your lawyer.
- ✔ **Property releases:** A property release may be required for images that include private property. For example, if you plan to create a video to promote your business and the video takes place in a Starbucks store, you may need a property release from Starbucks to show its store. When taking photos and videos on private property, determine whether a property release is important.
- ✔ **Trademarked logos or items:** When creating content to use for your business, consider whether your photo or video includes trademarks or logos from other companies. You may have noticed, in certain TV reality

shows, that the labels on products are blurred out; that's because the use of other logos or trademarks to promote a business may require special permission. If you're planning to use other business logos or trademarks in your content, check with your lawyer about the potential implications.

- ✓ **Other copyrighted materials:** When creating your own photos or videos, avoid including other copyrighted materials in your content. For example, if you're creating a video to market your business, do *not* use copyrighted music in it. Whenever you use any content (photos, music, or video footage, for example) that was created by someone else, be sure that you have the appropriate permissions.



Consult an attorney to find out more about how all these legal issues impact your business. This section is intended only to give you an overview of the issues, not to serve as a substitute for legal advice.