

HARNESSING THE POWER OF SOCIAL NETWORKING

By Stephanie Maddocks



Social networking is the electronic equivalent to the old fashioned quilting bee, coffee klatch or barbershop network. First we had books, then telephones, then televisions and now computers. Social networking allows people to connect with each other in a manner of their choosing via the all-powerful Internet. And the key there is “their.” Social networking is all about the individual user and their desire to belong, to fit in, to stand out, to stand up and to share. Social networking seemed at first to be a generational fad—teens tweeting, friends facebooking, big shots blogging and “you know who” on YouTube, again. However, the statistics are staggering:

- More than 500 million active users on Facebook.
- 50 percent of average Facebook users login every day.
- People spend over 700 billion minutes per month on Facebook.
- Between 2009 and 2010, the 35-plus age group on Facebook increased 1,250 percent.
- Not to be outdone, LinkedIn boasts over 66 million members, with an average of 35 million of them visiting the site each month.
- And Twitter, the social networking site no one seems to understand, has over 100 million registered users, tweeting an average of 55 million tweets a day.
- YouTube exceeds 2 billion views a day, with the average viewer spending 15 minutes a day on the site.
- Companies are using Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and YouTube to post their instructional and training manuals and videos and customer service support blogs.

Social networking is here to stay. Now, how do we harness its power?

We need it. We want it. We think it will help our business. We have no idea what that means. After all, I’m on Facebook, connected with all my friends. And I’m on LinkedIn with all my co-workers. I’ve

watched some pretty funny YouTube videos that my nieces e-mailed me. Twitter tweets? Well, I still don't get it.

Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing is a different animal. The days of TV pitchmen and printed brochures are quickly fading away. Now, an individual can change the world with one post, one tweet or one video. And that one message, echoed through the social network, exponentially grows until Betty White is hosting SNL, or the Egyptian government is crumbling, or all your friends and family know you're getting married. It is change we can believe in.

Social media marketing is all about trust. We are more likely to trust someone we know. So if my friend or fan shares a message, I am more likely to believe it and support it and share it. Authenticity is paramount; people can detect the smell of a fraud as fast as they can that nasty skunk smell that gets in the car when you're on the highway. And the stench sticks around for a while, doesn't it?

It's indisputable that social media creates social change. Messages fly around the world at the push of a button, influencing the thoughts and feelings of followers thousands of miles away. However, this power must be respected. As Obi Wan Kenobi said in *Star Wars*, "Use your power for good, not evil."

Social media marketing incorporates the combination of social networks, online communities, blogs, newsletters and other online collaborations to share your message. It is used to spread the company's brand, gain exposure, and earn and maintain customer relationships. Social media marketing techniques are used to attract customers to your message, convert them from consumers of your message to customers of your product, and transform those successes into magnetic forces of attraction to build more success.

In order to harness the power of social media marketing, you need to first identify three things:

- Your brand: In a one word or short phrase, summarize what you do.
- Your outcome: In a sentence, explain your goal, the end result you desire to obtain.
- Your differentiator: In a few sentences, describe how you are different from the competition.

Who are you? What is your expertise? What do you want to be when you grow up? These three pieces of information are critical to understanding how to proceed with a social media marketing strategy. Access via social networks will amplify these messages and you must have a clear and concise understanding of who you are in order to stand out from all the other Internet choices.

Your Website

Once you have identified your brand, outcome and differentiator, you are ready to educate, market and sell your products and services, which just so happens to be what websites are designed to do. In *The Zen of Social Media Marketing*, author Shama Hyder Kabani acknowledges that "... a website is the window to a company's soul." It should be easy to get to know your company via your website. There are five critical elements to a good website. Take a fresh look at your website and see how it measures up to these criteria.

- Design. It must be attractive and easy to use.
- Structure. It must allow the user to navigate through the "educate to market to sell" steps.
- Content. It must educate and build your expertise, preferably using written, audio and visual formats.

- Optimization. It must be optimized for search engines (Google, Yahoo), multiple Internet browsers' software (Internet Explorer, Safari, Firefox) and mobile applications (iPhone®, iPad™, Android).
- Maintenance. It must be maintained with fresh and new content to encourage return visits.

Once you've built your website, highlighting your brand, desired outcome and differentiator, using ways to educate, market and sell your product or service, it's time to tackle social media marketing. And this process can be as easy or as complicated as you want to make it. Here are three easy steps to get started.

First, identify which social media marketing outlets to use. My recommendation is to target Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. Then, do the following: Create accounts on each social media resource, add links on your website to each social media resource and start gathering friends and fans (and become friends and fans in return).

Yes, it starts that simply.

Second, create a 12-month message calendar. Again, three easy steps: Identify specific events to target, create a list of everyday successes to highlight and generate a list of tips, tools, ideas, concepts, content, messages, stories, contests, videos, written documents and more to share.

We're picking up momentum now.

Third, git'er done! Time to put the plan into action, in only three steps: Develop the messages for your special events and success celebrations, identify your internal or external resources to update content and blog, continue to nurture and grow your friends and followers list.

Now sit back and bask in the glory of a job well done! Oh, and start planning the next set of messages to dazzle your friends and fans.

That is a fairly simplified strategy to get started with social media marketing, and there certainly are many more opportunities to enhance your social networking profile. And there are some great resources out there to help—books, websites, blogs and company with expertise.

Oh, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention that you can find me and my companies on these social networks:

Facebook: www.facebook.com/fast.0.dash or www.facebook.com/stephanie.maddocks

Twitter: @fastdashllc and @stephmaddocks

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/fast-dash or www.linkedin.com/profile/view?id=42757468

Or the old fashioned way: www.fastdash.com or smaddocks@fastdash.com

Join up and enjoy the future of communication!



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