

SOCIAL NETWORKING AS MARKETING

The popularity of social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn is phenomenal. Social networking sites make it easy for people to create profiles about themselves and use them to form virtual networks combining their offline friends and new online friends. According to Twitter, there are 284 million monthly active users, and people generate an average of a half a billion tweets a day. Facebook now reports 890 million daily active users, and LinkedIn, the largest professional social network, has more than 300 million members. And it's not just the United States; social networking is extremely popular all over the world. For instance, more than 80 percent of Facebook users are outside the United States. Not all visitors to these sites create their own profiles, but there are millions and millions of people who do—to share their photos, journals, videos, music, and interests with a network of friends.

While these huge numbers are impressive, we can easily lose track of what this means to us as marketers. When we consider the reach of influential people on social networking sites, we should rethink our notions about who can best spread our ideas and tell our stories. Many people tell me that they want to get quoted in important publications like the *Wall Street Journal* or have their products mentioned on television news networks like the BBC or on shows like the *Today* show. These media hits are seen as the holy grail of marketers. But while mainstream media are certainly important (and who wouldn't want to be on BBC news), is that really the best thing for your business?

At the South by Southwest Interactive Festival in the past few years,¹ I've hung out for a while in the blogger lounge, a place where people who are active in social networking could get Internet connectivity, AC power, and a cold drink while they met their virtual friends in the flesh. As I looked around the room and saw the hundred or so influential people, I realized something important: The collective voices of the bloggers who were in the South by Southwest blogger lounge that day are likely more powerful and have more influence than the *Wall Street Journal*. As you think about reaching your audience using social networking, consider who really has the power. Is it mainstream media? Or someone else? And how can you reach them?

Television's Eugene Mirman Is Very Nice and Likes Seafood

“There is no middleman between me and an audience,” says comedian Eugene Mirman,² known for his work in *Flight of the Conchords*; his book of satire, *The Will to Whatevs: A Guide to Modern Life*; and appearances on Comedy Central and late-night television shows. Mirman currently plays Yvgeny Mirminsky on *Delocated* and

voices Gene Belcher for the animated comedy *Bob's Burgers*. He writes a blog, has a Facebook page,³ and is on Twitter.⁴ “I want to be entertaining on the web,” he says. “That’s what’s fun for me. While there is a store on my website, the push is to provide things to entertain people, not to sell.” And entertain he does. As I write this, Mirman’s Twitter bio reads: “I am television’s Eugene Mirman. I am very nice and like seafood.” Sample tweet: “When it turns out the Black Eyed Peas are hostile aliens spying on earth, humanity will feel silly, since it’ll be obvious in hindsight.”

Mirman uses Facebook and Twitter as ways to get his information out to multiple audiences very quickly. For example, immediately after he delivered the commencement address at Lexington High School in Massachusetts, he posted the video on YouTube⁵ and then pointed to it from his blog, as well as from his Twitter and Facebook profiles. The video got 100,000 views in just one week.

Mirman says that he writes what’s interesting to him at the time and doesn’t worry about productivity. “I want to do things that are funny and I want a lot of people to see it, but I do what I think is good and funny and then hope that others pass it on,” he says. “It’s easier for me to do what I like, and if it attracts fans, then that’s great. And I’m lucky that it has been effective over the years to do it this way. With social media, you can tell a story. If you have a special interest, like cooking, then you can get an audience.”

Think back to my metaphor of the web as a city and social media as a cocktail party, which I discussed in [Chapter 4](#). Cocktail parties are fun. You go because you want to be there. And while the chance of meeting someone who could become a customer is a distinct possibility, that’s a by-product of good conversation. Take a tip from Mirman and make sure you bring the right attitude to social media. With that in mind, let’s look in detail at several of the most important social networking sites.

Facebook: Not Just for Students

In the time since I wrote the first edition of this book, Facebook has taken off as an online tool for businesspeople to connect to communities and to customers directly. The spark for this remarkable explosion was the September 2006 opening of Facebook to nonstudents. Prior to that time, you needed an email address ending in .edu to qualify for an account. According to comScore, in the months prior to allowing open registration, [Facebook.com](#) traffic hovered at approximately 14 million unique visitors per month. The number of visitors nearly doubled in the next nine months, reaching 26.6 million in May 2007. As of this writing, Facebook has well over a billion users worldwide and the site reports⁶ that nearly a billion people log onto Facebook at least once each day.

The site connects members via a friend request process. Until you approve someone as your Facebook friend, your extended profile remains private. I’ve found Facebook to be a great way to maintain contact with school friends and work colleagues.

The most important thing to remember about marketing on Facebook (and other social networking sites) is that it is not about generating hype. The best approaches to Facebook marketing involve four useful ways to deliver information and ideas to a network of people who are interested in you and your products and services: (1) a personal profile for friend-to-friend communication, (2) company pages, (3) groups, and (4) applications. The first, your personal profile, is generally the easiest and really just requires that you describe yourself and add relevant data and a photo. For example, when I publish a new blog post, I'll typically post a message on my Facebook profile so my friends will know what I'm up to. I also post links to my upcoming speaking engagements and photos after the gig. Similarly, back when I set up my profile, I included a short video to give my Facebook friends an idea of what one of my speeches was like. My Facebook friends see my updates via their Facebook feed, basically an ongoing delivery of information from their circle of friends.

How to Use Facebook to Market Your Product or Service

A Facebook page is a great first step for getting your organization engaged. Think of a Facebook page as a personal profile, but for a company. For instance, you're likely to use a logo instead of a photo for the image in the upper-left corner (the profile picture). Once your page is complete, you should post interesting information there, like links to blog posts and videos as you create them.

One of the most useful aspects of Facebook is the ability for people to “like” and “tag” the things you do on the site. When users like your page or something you posted on it (they do this by pushing the little thumbs-up “Like” button), the fact that they like it will probably appear on their Facebook profiles for their friends to see. The same thing is true when you tag something. Tagging is when you identify people within a post or a photo on Facebook, such as all of the people appearing in a photo. When you tag people, they get notifications that point them to the tagged content. Isn't that great? When you create something interesting, your friends can spread it for you! But remember what we've discussed previously in these pages: As with other forms of web content, don't use Facebook to overtly sell. Rather, create information that people will want to share.

Steve Broadbelt, managing director at Ocean Frontiers Ltd. in the Cayman Islands, does exactly that. He and his team are constantly posting tagged photos and videos on their Ocean Frontiers Facebook page, photos and videos that people are eager to share. Ocean Frontiers specializes in small-group scuba diving off Grand Cayman's East End. Broadbelt runs a modern scuba-diving operation and dive shop with old-style Caymanian hospitality. Many clients return again and again. He's been active on the web since he first built his Ocean Frontiers site (in 1997), an email newsletter soon after, and more recently a presence in social media, including Facebook, Foursquare, and Twitter.

It was the realization that people like to come back year after year that prompted him to create “The Green Short Challenge,” where scuba divers who visit each of the 55 dive sites within the East End dive zone in Grand Cayman are given special recognition. The prizes include a pair of coveted, limited-edition green shorts (just like the Ocean Frontiers staff wear), a party to celebrate the achievement, a gold medal, a plaque embedded into the dock that leads to the boats, and special recognition on the Ocean Frontiers Facebook page—with photos documenting the achievement. Participants record their visits to each of the 55 dive sites in a custom-designed dive logbook with hand-drawn illustrations. Anybody can download the book for free, with no registration required.⁷

Broadbelt recalls his creation of the award: “I had a customer at a dive show expo in New York who couldn't remember the name of our business, but he remembered that all of our staff wear these green shorts,” Broadbelt says. “At the same time, I was frustrated that some of my longest-standing customers, people that have been diving

with me for more than 10 years and come back every year, hadn't seen certain dive sites. So that got me on a mission to try to get all my customers to see all of my dive sites, because there's so much variety and diversity to see. So now we get them on this trail where they check off all the sites, and I found out it's quite addictive. So we made The Green Short Challenge and that's how we built our tribe of loyal followers. I never thought it was going to be such a marketing powerhouse and get the reaction that it has. Everybody who touches The Green Short Challenge seems to stick to it.”

As I said, Broadbelt uses the Ocean Frontiers Facebook page to recognize the achievement. As I write this, several days after a customer hit the 55-dive-sites milestone, the Facebook post reads: “Congratulations to Michael Piner who completed all 55 dives of the Green Short Challenge. The weather was cooperative and Michael was able to dive The Arch as his last dive. Besides the delicious cake, icy champagne, fancy medal and coveted Green Shorts, Michael will also have a plaque with name engraved on it embedded in the OF walk of fame! Good Job Michael!” There are seven photos of Piner on the Facebook post, including the staff toasting him with champagne and cutting a cake. Plus there's a beaming Piner holding up his new shorts.

“It ties into social media because every time somebody completes the challenge, we have a celebration and they share with their friends on Facebook,” Broadbelt says. “It is the scuba diving hall of fame for our customers, as they've reached the ultimate celebrity status with the dive community here. We use Facebook to make everybody aware of the achievement and then people share that with all their friends, and alumni that have already completed the Green Short Challenge comment. There's a lot of warm and fuzzy, feel-good vibes as they're welcomed to the club—and that cements them as a customer for life.”

When customers see their achievements recognized on Facebook, they frequently “like” the posts and use tags to identify people in the photos, spreading the love to their own Facebook friends. This is one of the reasons that Ocean Frontiers has some 20,000 likes on Facebook. “You couldn't ask for a more loyal and dedicated customer base than what we're building,” Broadbelt says. “From whatever social media platform they communicate, if someone wants to go diving in the Caribbean, our customers are going to recommend us. There's a human element that can be brought in with Facebook. You humanize what your business does.”

Speaking of humanizing a business, I found out about Ocean Frontiers from Mark Rovner, a communications consultant at Sea Change Strategies, who told me about how he dove all 55 sites and now has his very own pair of Green Shorts. “Steve Broadbelt is a really creative guy and developed a dive logbook with sketches of the dive sites, and little stickers you can put on each dive site,” Rovner says. “He gamified it. The Green Short Challenge works in so many different ways. The ceremony gets put on their Facebook page, and then each of us who becomes a Green Short alumnus puts that on our Facebook page. It gives us a story to tell to

every diver friend we know. And the one thing that is true of divers, like any other sort of hyperpassionate hobby, is that there's little else that divers want to talk about more than diving.”

Increase Engagements with Facebook Groups and Apps

A great way for organizations of all kinds to keep interested people informed is to gather them into a Facebook group. All users can create groups, and their membership can be closed (invitation only) or open (anyone may join). There's also a similar place where people can meet called a Facebook page, which is a page of information that anybody can see (compared with groups, where you must register first). Facebook groups are typically for more in-depth communications around a subject (such as a product launch), while Facebook fan pages are typically for a loose but longer-term presence. I know this sounds complicated, but it should be further incentive to join some groups and become a fan of a few companies to see what people are doing.

For example, Philip Robertson, director of marketing communications for ooVoo,⁸ an application for conducting face-to-face video conversations with friends, family, and colleagues, wanted to establish social media connections soon after ooVoo was launched. "Facebook was quickly becoming a place for people to connect and catch up online," he says. "At the same time, we began to look at different ways to market." Robertson started a Facebook group as a way to communicate with existing ooVoo users and to help build a larger population of users as people discussed the service and shared it with their Facebook friends. "We've used the group to promote campaigns such as 'my ooVoo day' where top-tier bloggers used ooVoo to interact with people. We also use it as a way to post new software. People who are fans of the brand can use new software first."

Starting a Facebook group is very straightforward. It takes just a few minutes to set one up, and the process includes a built-in tool for sending invitations to your Facebook friends (and, as appropriate, the friends of your colleagues). You should also mention the group on your organization's regular website or blog. "We got 250 members to the Facebook group really quickly," Robertson says. "We invited the initial members through our own fan base, and we also invited influential people who can give us feedback on the brand." There is also an ooVoo Facebook app with more than a million users and a Facebook page that more than two million people like.

People join Facebook groups because they want to stay informed, and they want to do it on their own time. Just as with blogs, the best way to maintain a Facebook group is simply to make valuable information available. Unlike intrusive email updates, which arrive only when the sender chooses, Facebook groups can be visited at the member's convenience. "You are not spamming people with information that they are forced to read," Robertson says.

The informal, two-way nature of Facebook's group dynamics is an important aspect for marketers. "Pass-along value is very important," says Robertson. "You can recommend Facebook groups and applications to friends in a much easier and more casual way than you can with email. And people can post information to the group

themselves, to actively take part in the brand.”

I've had some remarkable experiences with Facebook groups, experiences that never would have happened in the absence of social networking tools. One of the most interesting was with Stephen Quigley's New Media and PR class at Boston University.⁹ The class uses this book as one of its texts, and for several terms, the students have invited me to join their invitation-only Facebook groups. One term's group was called New Media Rocks My PR World (love the name), and another set of students went with Media Socialites (love this one even more). Here is the Media Socialites' description of their group: “Professor Quigley's new batch of student social media sponges, eager to soak up as much information about New Media and PR in a semester as is humanly possible...and, in proper social networking fashion, making important connections along the way.”

Social networking has given birth to new models for learning. I graduated from Kenyon College in 1983, and in four years, I don't recall ever giving textbook authors any thought whatsoever. I certainly never met any of them. But with social media tools like Facebook, smart professors (and students) are now involving textbook authors and other guests, effectively creating virtual classrooms to supplement the physical ones. The students and professors tell me it's transforming their learning process. How about your business? How is social media changing what you do? Take a lesson from these forward-thinking educators and become a part of the discussion.

The final feature I mention is the ability to make applications, which are a great way to build your brand on Facebook. As an open platform, Facebook allows anybody to create applications that allow friends to share information on the service in different ways. There are many thousands of applications available on Facebook, and the more popular ones are used regularly by hundreds of thousands of people each day—not bad for a marketing tool that costs nothing to launch and is easy to create. One of my personal favorites is the Cities I've Visited application from TripAdvisor.¹⁰ It displays a map on my Facebook page where I can stick a virtual thumbtack in the cities I've visited. Since I am on the road a lot, this is a great way for me to keep track of my world travel.

TripAdvisor's business is providing unbiased hotel reviews, photos, and travel advice, so the Cities I've Visited Facebook application is a perfect marketing tool for the company. Facebook applications are a terrific way for marketers to be creative and try something new, and there is always the possibility for an application to catch fire and go viral like Cities I've Visited. Which, by the way, now has an amazing three million active users.

In short, Facebook is emerging as a primary means for folks to keep in touch with the people and the organizations that are important to them, and it follows that it has become an important marketing tool for many companies. As with other social networking media, success on Facebook comes from being a thought leader and developing information that people *want* to absorb.

Why Google Plus Is Important for Your Business

Just prior to the publication of the fourth edition of this book, Google launched a new social network called Google Plus¹¹ (also referred to as Google+ or simply G+). As it launched, I blogged: “I really want to hate Google Plus, because the last thing I need is a new social network.” But Google+ is just too important to ignore. As a service of Google, it has direct ties to how you and your company appear on Google search results.

You use Google+ to connect with friends, post photos and videos, and do other Facebook-like activities. While the service did not achieve significant numbers of active users beyond early adopters, it's not an either-or choice for most people who want to market their business. Let me repeat: The connection to Google and the power of its search engine makes it too important.

For most people, Google+ is an essential component of personal branding. Why? Because when someone enters your name into the Google search engine, your Google+ profile will be among the top results. So if you haven't done so already, get yourself a profile and take some time to upload a photo and a bio. Make a few posts.

Interestingly, some Google+ posts are also appearing in the Google News real-time search engine. You'll see this when you go to Google News and click the “See realtime coverage” button. Frequently, Google+ updates will appear to the right of mainstream media stories. This means that many more people might see your blog posts if you also post them to your Google+ page.

After you've got your personal profile set up, you can create a business profile on Google+.¹² This helps with your search engine ranking, especially with local search. When buyers search on Google, the results may include relevant posts, photos, and videos from your Google+ page, so having one helps you get found across Google at the moment buyers are most receptive. All you need to do to get found in the local search results is update your Google+ business page with relevant content. This can be as simple as a few sentences about your latest blog post with a link to the post. You can also embed YouTube videos and photos that might also appear in other places on the web. If for no other reason, you need a Google+ account for search engine marketing.

Check Out My LinkedIn Profile

Marketing on social networking sites can be tricky, because online communities disdain overt commercial messages. Acceptable marketing and promotion on these sites frequently involves brands or personalities creating pages to build and expand an online following, rather than directly advertising products.

For example, many business-to-business marketing and sales professionals rely on

LinkedIn, the world's largest professional social network (more than 350 million users in over 200 countries and territories), to meet business partners. Unlike social networks that people use to keep up friendships, LinkedIn's mission is to connect the world's professionals and make them more productive and successful. LinkedIn is a great way to network with others in your industry and to meet buyers of your products and services.

LinkedIn is used for identifying buyers and potential partners, understanding the competitors, conducting market research, sharing information, and promoting events. Like other social networks, your personal profile is your public face. Given LinkedIn's focus on business, your profile should emphasize the skills you bring to your market niche and the value you add to your community. With your profile up and running, you request to join other people's networks or invite them to join yours—both people must approve the connection. Once you're connected with someone, you can see contacts you share in common and how you might reach someone you want to meet through your connections. One of the fastest-growing aspects of LinkedIn is its company profiles, which deliver an overview of what a company does and for whom, the products and services it offers, and any positions available at the company. When you view a company profile, you can see how many company employees are on LinkedIn and if any are in your network.

“A profile on LinkedIn is not a ‘presence’ on LinkedIn,” says Mark Amtower, director of the government market master's program at Capitol College in Laurel, Maryland, and an active LinkedIn user. “A presence occurs when people start to take serious notice. After you have set up your profile, your outreach begins. Determine who the key players are in your niche and develop a plan to connect with them. Keep in mind, your profile has to be interesting enough to make them want to connect. Short, informative paragraphs and bullet points are more readable than long paragraphs. A great profile can open doors, help you get a job, get you consulting and speaking gigs, and more. A poor profile reverses these actions.”

Amtower's goal with LinkedIn is to be among the most connected and most visible people in government contracting. He does this by regularly posting relevant information and starting discussions in groups to raise his visibility and demonstrate value to the community. He has a personal network of more than 7,000 first-degree connections (people he is connected to directly) and manages contractor groups with another 9,000 members.

“For me, it has reinforced my position as a leading consultant in the government contracting market,” he says. “Through my LinkedIn profile alone, I have landed more than 30 consulting gigs with large, medium, and small government contractors, as well as several speaking engagements. At this point, I would suggest that those without a robust social networking presence will lose market share in direct proportion to their social networking inactivity.”

A tactic that some smart nonprofit organizations use is to encourage employees to

establish a personal page on Facebook or LinkedIn, with details of the cause they support, as a way to spread the word. Supporters of political candidates (as well as some candidates themselves) create pages on social networking sites, too. As with all good marketing, it is important to create content that is right for the people you want to reach, and that effort starts with the choice of which social networking site (or sites) to post your profile on.

As you consider a strategy to get yourself out there and onto a social networking site for marketing and PR purposes, just remember that authenticity and transparency are critical. Don't try to fool the community into thinking that the page is something that it is not. (You might want to skip to the discussion of ethics in [Chapter 16](#).) Frequent eruptions within these communities happen when members uncover a fraud of some kind, such as an advertising agency creating fake profiles of people applauding products. Yes, you can use social networking sites such as LinkedIn to build a following, but avoid sleazy fake profiles of people who supposedly use your products.

An interesting use of Facebook and LinkedIn for business comes from KLM (Royal Dutch Airlines). The KLM Meet & Seat application¹³ lets those booked on certain KLM long-haul flights find out who else will be on the flight, too. With Meet & Seat, you can view other passengers' Facebook or LinkedIn profile details and see where they'll be sitting—long before the flight leaves the ground. So you might search for people who are going to the same conference as you or work in the same industry.

The KLM Meet & Seat service requires opting in; you can still be anonymous if you want. But plenty of people do choose to share their profiles. Once you share yours, you can see the profile details of other passengers who have opted in, as well as their seat assignments. You can even try to sit next to someone interesting.

In a market where offerings are similar and buyers typically choose based on price, getting them to think about something else (like who else will be on the plane) is a good thing. Imagine being seated adjacent to your next customer, new business partner, or even future spouse as a result of this social matchmaking.

Indeed, KLM is a social media pioneer. The airline also created a surprise program for those who checked into their flight on Foursquare, just as that service was taking off. Both of these KLM initiatives are designed to get people talking about the airline on their social networks.

Tweet Your Thoughts to the World

Twitter, sometimes called a “microblogging” service, has become a very popular social network. And popularity is important because of the social nature of Twitter, a service for friends, family, and co-workers to communicate through the exchange of quick, short messages known as tweets (with a maximum of 140 characters).

People use Twitter to keep their followers (people who subscribe to their Twitter

feed) updated on their lives. For instance, you might tweet about the conference you're attending or the project you're engrossed in, or you might ask your network a question. Twitter is an excellent way to share links to videos, blog posts, and other content you find interesting. Users can choose to follow the Twitter updates of anyone they want to hear from: family members, colleagues, or perhaps the author of the last book they read.

Because of the severe constraint on the length of tweets, people use Twitter to post information that is important to update their network about but is much more concise than a blog post and more casual than an email. You can update your Twitter feed from a web browser, a mobile phone, or an instant messaging service, so Twitter is always on. I update my feed a few times a day, tweeting about my travels around the world, whom I'm meeting, and what's going on at the events where I speak. I also frequently send out links to examples of great marketing that people send me, things like e-books, YouTube videos, and blog posts. In this way, Twitter is a way of pointing people to things that I find interesting. As with other forms of social networking, it takes time to build a following. In particular, the best way to get people to pay attention to you is to participate by following others and responding to them.

Every marketing and PR person should be aware of Twitter and understand how people use it. As a first step, you should immediately hightail it over to the Twitter search engine¹⁴ to see what people are saying about you, your organization, your products and services, and perhaps your competitors and the category of product you sell. If you've never done this, please do it right now, because it can be an eye-opening experience to see what (if anything) people are saying. A great way to use Twitter to monitor what people are saying is to use a Twitter client application such as TweetDeck or HootSuite. These free applications allow you to monitor multiple keywords and phrases in real time so you know instantly when something important (such as the name of your CEO or a product your company sells) is mentioned.

When you're ready to set up your own Twitter profile and begin to tweet, the most important aspect from the marketing and PR perspective is—as I say time and again—don't use this service as an advertising channel to talk up your products and services. If that's your intention, you need to be very careful.

With all this online conversation going on, some people think that Facebook, Twitter, and other social networking tools can replace a face-to-face approach to business. I actually think strong social networking ties lead to *stronger* personal relationships because it is easy to facilitate face-to-face meetings that never would have occurred otherwise. For example, before a conference, I might send a tweet saying, "I'll be in San Francisco next Tuesday." I'll frequently get a message right back from someone who is planning to be at the same conference, or someone who lives there, and we end up meeting in person. I'll also create an impromptu meeting of my followers—sometimes called a tweetup—that occurs when people who are connected on Twitter have a face-to-face meeting. I've had between 10 and 50 people show up in cities

like Wellington, New Zealand; Mumbai, India; Amsterdam; New York City; Atlanta; and Phoenix, Arizona, to connect.

Social Networking and Personal Branding

I've had many conversations with people who are new to social networking sites such as Twitter, and often they are puzzled at first about what to do. Hey, I've been there, too. We all make mistakes. I recall when I was first getting going with Facebook and my teenage daughter was looking over my shoulder. She rolled her eyes and called me a big dork when I wrote a message on my own Facebook wall (a place for your visitors to write). I found that with my own learning and the experiences with people I've helped over the past few years, getting a few things right at the start makes the experience more fun (and productive). While I'll be writing about Twitter here, the basic ideas apply to all social networking sites.

An important thing to consider is how your online actions are a reflection of your personal branding (the image that you project to the world). As you already know, *people* use Twitter to keep others updated on what they find interesting at that moment. Frequently when I am asked about Twitter and its use in personal branding and marketing, people immediately dive into stuff like “How often should I tweet?,” “What should I tweet about?,” “Is it cool to DM [direct message] people?,” and other tweet-related details. Well, that's all fine, but the vast majority of people miss the most basic (and important) personal branding aspect of all.

What does your Twitter page look like?

Most Twitter pages don't say enough, and most have crappy design. While that's all right if you're just communicating with friends, if you care about your personal brand, you need to do better. Much better. And it is so easy! When you first set up your Twitter account, you have choices. And after you've set up the account, you can make these changes to any aspect of your profile at any time (except your Twitter ID) under the Settings tab in Twitter.

Twitter ID: (Mine is [@dmsscott](#).) Choose an appropriate ID. Something like [@MrSillyGuy](#) is probably not a good idea for most people. However, a silly ID might fit your personal brand, say, if you're a comedian. (Incidentally, the ID [@MrSillyGuy](#) has been taken by Niki Dubois [@ikiniki](#) from Belgium after he read an early edition of this book.)

Name: (Mine is David Meerman Scott.) Use your real name. Don't just default to your user ID, which so many people seem to do. And don't just use a nickname like Pookie. You can put your nickname in quotes inside your real name if you want to. If you really care about your personal brand, you'll want people to know who you really are.

Location: (Mine is Boston, MA.) Use the town or nearest city that makes sense for you. Saying something cute like Earth or “somewhere in Canada” turns people off who don't know you. Besides, the location is a good way to make local contacts.

Web: (Mine is www.davidmeermanscott.com.) If you have a blog or site, put the URL here. Or maybe your profile on a company website makes sense for you. This should be somewhere people can go to learn more about *you*. If you don't have a blog or site, I recommend that you create a Google profile and link to that. Go back to [Chapter 5](#) to learn about Google profiles. You can also leave the web link blank if you want, but that says to people that you don't want to be contacted or have people learn more about you.

Bio: As I write this, mine is “Marketing & Sales Strategist, keynote speaker, and bestselling author of 10 books including *The New Rules of Marketing & PR* and *Newsjacking*.” This is where you say something about yourself. You get only 160 characters. As a component of personal branding, this is a critical section. Don't leave it blank. And don't make a mini-resume from a laundry list of attributes like this: “father, husband, surfer, economics major, world traveler, marketer, and rock star wannabe.” (I confess, that would be my list.) I see this sort of thing all the time, and it is not good for personal branding because you don't really focus on your particular expertise. Try to be descriptive. And try to be specific.

Photo: Your photo is very important! Don't default to the placeholder that Twitter provides for those with no photo. And don't use something clever as a stand-in (like your cat). If you care about your personal brand, you should use a photo of you and not a pet or an image of your car. Photos appear very tiny on Twitter—like a postage stamp—so use a close-up shot. If you use a full view of yourself, then you will appear like a stick figure. Remember that your photo conveys a very important first impression when people see your profile for the first time. Are you wearing a hat? Is it a casual shot of you taken on a vacation with a beer in your hand? Or have you chosen a formal head-and-shoulders shot with business attire taken by a professional photographer? Is your son or daughter in the photo with you? There is no absolute right or wrong, but do keep in mind that each of these choices says a great deal about you.

Background image: The background image of your Twitter page is a place where you can really show off. The default background is like when you first open PowerPoint—it's a default. Twitter has some choices, but many people use them, so you will not be unique. Shoot a custom photo to really shine. I use a close-up photo of a nifty old typewriter keyboard. It's my personal brand on Twitter.

Banner image: Twitter also provides an opportunity to add a header photo to your profile, which serves as a background for your bio. A header photo is a great way to show your personal brand, but don't try to sell. Many sales and marketing people add an advertising message to this real estate, but I think that's a mistake and recommend resisting this tendency. Adding your messages or heavy-handed branding

to the header detracts. Sure, I could have used an image of, say, all my book covers for my banner. Instead I chose an image I really like of me onstage at a speaking gig. Your header photo will show up on your Twitter web page as well as on mobile devices.

These choices are really easy to set up, but they're very important for your personal brand. If you are on Twitter, take the time to make some changes today. Again, the same ideas apply on other social networking sites like Facebook and LinkedIn, so don't forget to carefully consider your personal branding on those sites as well.

The Horse Twitterer

When I talk about Twitter and business, people often say, "That sounds good for some people, but I don't think it makes sense in my business." Or they tell me they are reluctant to try Twitter because they don't know how to measure the results. But those reactions are based on fear. People are reluctant to try Twitter because it is new and different. I like sharing with these people the story of how Mike Pownall, DVM (Twitter ID [@McKeePownall](#)), uses Twitter. Pownall is co-founder of McKee Pownall Equine Services,¹⁵ a veterinary practice with five locations in the Toronto area. Pownall and other vets in his practice reach horse owners in Toronto through their Twitter feeds, and this effort has led directly to business growth. This in a down market where other veterinarians have told me they are struggling because of the current economy.

"Five of our vets are on Twitter," Pownall says. "We brought in Twitter mainly because the equine practice is based on relationships. If this is a way that people can start to follow veterinarians, get to know their personality, get to know what they're all about, then it's going to be a lot easier to develop a relationship. A couple of our vets have pretty good senses of humor that don't necessarily get translated during examination; often we're very serious through that. This is a way for people to read the other side of it and just to exchange good information."

Pownall's wife and business partner, Melissa McKee, DVM, is also on Twitter. "She works in a racetrack practice, so a lot of the stuff that she tweets about relates to the racing industry," he says. "She wants to be a resource for other people interested in the racing industry. But then we'll also talk about just interesting things that happen to horses, whether it's horse welfare or just amusing or entertaining stories. We're just trying to have fun with anything that's interesting. I get a lot of hits when I talk about stuff that's not even related to horses. There were a few things with SPCA [Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals] issues going on in Toronto last year that I was tweeting about and I got a lot of responses on. That's a side that I want people to know. We're not just horses, but we love all animals, and again, just trying to show a more complete picture of who we are as people."

Their efforts on Twitter and on other social networks like Facebook and YouTube help

drive new business to McKee Pownall Equine Services when competitors are struggling. “More and more people are finding us through online means,” Pownall says. “We get people that will come to us the first time as clients and say, ‘I heard about you on the web, or I saw this on the web.’ Our business, in these tough economic times, has done well, and we've had growth over the last two years. I think some of it has to be related to social media. I hear people all the time saying, ‘Every time I go on the web, you guys are there.’”

The CIA Joins Twitter

Ha! Now you will *know* when they follow you. Well, on Twitter at least.

The [@CIA](#) joined Twitter on June 6, 2014. Yes, that CIA. They're also on Facebook. (I never dreamed I'd be writing those words.)

The CIA's first tweet is my favorite single tweet of all time: “We can neither confirm nor deny that this is our first tweet.” Love it, right?! So did 300,000+ retweeters.

In less than 24 hours, [@CIA](#) amassed more than a quarter million followers, and they are at nearly a million as I write this.

The official CIA press release revealed their plans: “Follow us on Twitter [@CIA](#) and on Facebook for the latest CIA updates, [#tbt](#) (Throwback Thursday) photos, reflections on intelligence history, and fun facts from the *CIA World Factbook*. You'll also receive updates on CIA career postings and get the latest glimpse into CIA's Museum—the best museum most people never get to see. Our social media expansion will put [CIA.gov](#) content right at your fingertips.” The CIA Twitter bio reads: “We are the Nation's first line of defense. We accomplish what others cannot accomplish and go where others cannot go.”

As advertised, the feed is an excellent collection of historical images and facts, live event streams, quotes, and other interesting information.

I am so glad to see this development.

With this one move, especially that clever first tweet, the CIA did more to humanize its organization than probably anything else in its history. At the same time, it shows organizations of all types that it is okay to open up and it's perfectly acceptable to operate in real time on social networks. The use of humor is icing on the cake. Nicely played, CIA people.

And thanks for making my job easier. Now it's simple what I tell people who are still resistant to the idea of getting active on Twitter and other social networks: If the CIA can do it, so can you.

The Sharing More Than Selling Rule

Social networks are a great place to share content, to interact with others, to listen in on what's happening, and yes, if approached carefully social networks can also be a way to get the word out about you and your business. However, as I review individuals' business-related social streams I find way too much selling going on. Too many companies are shouting into the social world.

When I speak with people at conferences, many want to know, specifically, how to use social networking feeds such as Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook to communicate effectively as a marketing and sales tool. While there is no right or wrong when it comes to content creation and sharing, I'd say that a loose guideline may be helpful as a way to think about the various uses of social networks.

As a way to think about your social activities, I'd suggest you should be doing 85 percent sharing and engaging, 10 percent publishing original content, and only 5 percent or less about what you are trying to promote.

85 Percent Sharing and Engaging

Sharing and engaging includes such things as commenting on someone else's blog or Facebook post, quoting a tweet and adding your take, or responding to somebody who has said something that interests you. You can also share an interesting blog post or news report with your network.

Most people, especially those new to a social network, don't share and engage enough. I'd say you should be doing it with at least 85 percent of your social interactions but it could be much more. Since sharing and engaging is the easiest aspect of social networking, it shouldn't take much for you to do more of it.

10 Percent Original Content

I'd recommend that 1 out of 10 of your social interactions be publishing something original. You can share a photo you shot, write a blog post, compose a tweet about something that interests your marketplace, or publish a video. The more helpful this content is to your buyer personas the better.

Many people worry about social networks as a tool of business because they think that everything they do has to be new content. But I suggest only 10 percent needs to be!

Make 5 Percent or Less a Promotion about What You Do

One out of 20 interactions (or fewer) can be something that you want to promote to your audience. This is when you can share a new product your company offers, a special discount for social followers, or other content of a promotional nature.

Most people sell way too much and as such their social feeds don't have much interaction. People just don't want to be sold to. However, if you are helpful and

engaging and responsive on your social feeds, then you build an audience who will want to hear from you and who will be receptive to learning more about what you and your organization does.

Jay Blakesberg is a perfect example of somebody who interacts with social networks in the way I suggest. Jay is a San Francisco–based music photographer and film maker who has shot over 300 assignments for *Rolling Stone* and has been published in print magazines from *Time* to *Vanity Fair* to *Guitar Player* as well as hundreds of other major magazines.

I first met Jay virtually when he commented on a blog post I wrote about the Grateful Dead some years ago. Jay has shot the Grateful Dead and the individual band members hundreds of times so my post was perfect for him to respond to. That simple interaction led me to reach out to Jay and we've become friends. I've hired Jay for three different projects so far: He supplied the photos for the book I co-authored, *Marketing Lessons from the Grateful Dead*; Jay shot some portraits of me; and I had him photograph me delivering a keynote speech at a major conference. All that work from me is a result of one simple comment Jay left on my blog!

Jay has a very popular Facebook page¹⁶ for his business, with more than 42,000 followers. He posts interesting original photos and if you're a fan of rock music like I am, the feed is fun to check out. Jay is constantly interacting with his fans and posting his content, for free, for all to enjoy. Jay was the official photographer for the Grateful Dead “Fare Thee Well” final performances in July 2015, and over the several weeks following the shows he posted photos every day for fans to check out. For weeks Jay was share, share, share! But once, Jay sent a rare promotional message to his Facebook fans that read:

I have a new book out! *Guitars That Jam!*

It features Bob Weir, Jerry Garcia Phil Lesh, Trey Anastasio Warren Haynes Derek Trucks, and so many more! It is the stories about their guitars written by the artists (except Jerry) with my photography!

I know many of you loved my Fare Thee Well photos.... Please support your friendly neighborhood Photographer.

This Facebook post generated 578 likes, 38 shares, and 30 comments in just the first 12 hours after it was posted. Imagine that. A promotional message that generated such amazing results.

Because Jay's interactions are mostly sharing, responding, engaging with fans, and publishing his original photographs, he's earned the ability to occasionally talk about his products and services. And because people appreciate Jay's content, they are eager to support him. Editorial note: I've purchased a copy of *Guitars that Jam* for myself and for several friends. It is a terrific book.

Social media is about engagement. Sure it is also a tool for marketing and sales, but

you need to engage first.

Connecting with Fans

“Being a touring musician means meeting fans,” says Amanda Palmer, an American performer who first rose to prominence as the lead singer, pianist, and lyricist/composer of the duo the Dresden Dolls and currently with her own act, Amanda Palmer & The Grand Theft Orchestra. “I go out and meet fans after every gig. It’s important to make contact in real life and not just online in social media like Twitter. If you don’t meet fans in real life, too, then you’re a fraud. If you’re not comfortable getting into the sweat with them and talking with people at shows, then how can you do it successfully online? I love connecting with fans. Speaking to people at the merchandise table after the show is great. I can stay there forever.”

This committed attitude has helped make Palmer a personal branding force of nature, using her infectious personality to connect with fans in person and on the web. She has amassed a large online following on her blog, her Facebook fan page¹⁷ (more than 313,000 fans), and her Twitter feed ([@AmandaPalmer](#), more than a million followers). Note that Palmer’s former band, the Dresden Dolls, also has nearly a quarter of a million friends on MySpace.

When the Dresden Dolls formed in 2000, Palmer created an email list from day one. Soon after, the personal connections she established at the band’s concerts, which continued in email messages with fans, started to bleed onto her personal forum, The Shadowbox.¹⁸ A collection of all things Amanda Palmer, The Shadowbox has accumulated a remarkable quarter of a million fan posts since its launch. “It’s like I’ve built a house and people are hanging around in it,” Palmer says.

Palmer is very active on Twitter and uses it as a tool for instant communication with her fans. She frequently answers fans’ tweeted questions and comments. Because she truly enjoys her connection with her followers, Twitter comes naturally to her. “It’s important to have the makeup that I do,” she says. “I love to answer fans’ questions, and I love to make people happy. You can’t fake being authentic with your fans. It’s so easy to see through when other musicians are faking it, such as when some employee of their record labels tweets on behalf of their artists. Fans can see through fake tweets like ‘I’m about to play at a rad club. Get tix here.’ Fake artists’ blogs are the same. Who cares?”

Palmer frequently uses Twitter to bring together groups of fans quickly and spontaneously when she is on the road. She tweeted a secret gig in Los Angeles one morning, and about 350 people showed up five hours later at a warehouse space where she played the piano. It works great for her because, although she’s able to get a large number of people to show up, she is not so popular that she would create a dangerously huge mob. “I’m in the sweet spot of popularity,” she says. “I can send out a tweet and get 300 people to show up in a couple of days and do a free gig on

the beach. I'll play the ukulele, sing, sign, hug, take pictures, eat cake, and generally hang out and connect. And I'll stay as long as it takes to talk with everyone personally. Trent Reznor of Nine Inch Nails can't do that because he's just too popular.”

Palmer does struggle with the amount of time she spends connecting with fans both in person and through the tools of social media like Twitter. “I feel guilty sometimes that I'd often prefer to answer questions from fans and do interviews and meet people than work on new music,” she says. Interestingly, she has fans who feel the same way; her prolific online *content* has earned a following of its own. “One person at a record store gig and signing came up to me and said, ‘I don't really like your music, but I love your blog.’”

How Amanda Palmer Raised a Million Dollars via Social Networking

After a two-year fight with Roadrunner Records, musician Amanda Palmer freed herself from her record deal. For the seven years prior to her label divorce, anything she wrote and recorded (either solo or with her band, the Dresden Dolls) was technically owned and under the ultimate control of the label.

Palmer knew she could do better on her own, because she enjoys such a terrific relationship with her fans via social networks.

So after much planning, Palmer chose a 30-day Kickstarter to fund her new album: *Amanda Palmer & The Grand Theft Orchestra*. Kickstarter is a crowdsourced funding platform for creative projects such as films, games, art, and music. She wrote the following in her Kickstarter pitch:¹⁹ “Since I'm now without a giant label to front the gazillions of dollars that it always takes to manufacture and promote a record this big, I'm coming to you to gather funds so that I have the capital to put it out with a huge bang. I think Kickstarter and other crowdfunding platforms like this are the BEST way to put out music right now—no label, no rules, no fuss, no muss. Just us, the music, and the art. I'm also making sure EVERY PRODUCT sold through this Kickstarter is unique to this campaign, to reward all of you who KNEW ME WHEN and were willing to support me from Day One.”

There were funding packages starting at just \$1 (entitling the donor to a digital download of the album once it's released) and ending at \$10,000 (good for dinner with Palmer plus all sorts of extras). The package I chose was a pledge of \$300; it includes tickets to a VIP party and intimate show with Palmer and the band in Boston (there were similar options in other cities).

Through social networking, in just a few days, Palmer raised more money from her fans than she would have gotten from her label. In the one month that the Kickstarter appeal was live, she raised nearly \$1.2 million, the largest amount any musician had

ever raised on the site. And she retains complete control of the production and the rights to the music.

To succeed at this technique, a musician must build a fan base, one person at a time. Social media is a great way to connect before and after the live gig, but the personal connection is essential.

The point is that social networking is an increasingly important way for people to connect and communicate. Organizations are using it cleverly to benefit their businesses, their followers, and themselves. So should you.

While your work may be completely different from that of a rock star, Palmer has something to teach you. Your product comes first and must be created with passion. And you've got to engage with your customers on a human level. Social networking can help you build this fan base. If you do it well, you can build a great company and a fantastic career.

Which Social Networking Site Is Right for You?

While some people might be tempted to create pages on lots of different social networking sites, this may not be necessary (or even useful), since each one appeals to different users. “While the top social networking sites are typically viewed as directly competing with one another, our analysis demonstrates that each site occupies a slightly different niche,” says Jack Flanagan, executive vice president of comScore. “There is a misconception that social networking is the exclusive domain of teenagers, but [our] analysis confirms that the appeal of social networking sites is far broader.” In fact, Facebook says that more than two-thirds of its users are out of college and that the fastest-growing demographic is those 35 years old and older.

So think about the right social networking sites for you and your business. Besides Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, here are a few other popular ones to check out.

Tumblr: People use Tumblr to post multimedia content (photos, video, images) to a sort of mini-blog. Very popular with young people, Tumblr hosts more than 70 million blogs. Within the Tumblr application, you can follow other users' blogs and reblog their posts to your own. Unlike the more traditional blogs that we discuss in [Chapters 5](#) and [16](#), Tumblr is based on a template approach that makes it very easy to upload a photo, video, or some text—all it takes is a minute or two. If your buyers include teenagers and people in their 20s, you need to understand Tumblr. Just remember to keep it short.

Vine: Vine is an interesting social media application available for Android and iPhone to deliver six-second videos. I tell people that it's sort of like Twitter for video. And since it was released by Twitter, the integration with Twitter is seamless. It's really simple to use (download it now if you can and follow along): Just tap and hold on the iPhone screen to record and lift up to stop. Then you can alter the scene and do it

again. This means you can easily do short segments of any length as long as they add up to six seconds total. At the end of the video, it repeats into an endless loop and you add a caption and release it to your Twitter feed and to your followers on Vine (that's where the social aspect kicks in). It's in its early days, but people seem to be using Vine for demonstrations or to capture the feeling of a location. With just six seconds, the challenge for marketing and PR use is to tell a story. In a weird way, I found the six-second constraint to be very liberating, much like with the 140-character limit of a tweet.

MySpace: As a social network strong in the entertainment businesses, MySpace is a popular place for musicians and other artists to showcase their work to their fans. Rock bands use MySpace to stream their music, show videos, blog from the road, post photos, and provide information on upcoming tours and album releases. While Facebook is a much more popular social network, MySpace is optimized for music. So if you're a fan (like me) or a musician, you need to be on top of it.

Local language sites: Keep in mind that many countries have local language social networking sites that may be much more popular than the global sites like Facebook. For example, the Japanese site Mixi is very popular, as is Orkut in both India and Brazil. And in the Netherlands, Hyves is the king of the world, with one in three Dutch citizens on the social networking site. It is the second most visited site in the Netherlands after Google, but in terms of time spent, it is certainly tops. Hyves has more users in the Netherlands than Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter combined. I'm always amazed at how marketing in different parts of the world requires adaptation. I lived in Asia for nearly 10 years, most of that time as Asia marketing director for Knight-Ridder. When working in Indonesia, Japan, Singapore, Thailand, Hong Kong, Australia, and the other countries in the Asia-Pacific region, I always had to go local in some way. If you're in the global market, localization is important. Yet many marketers assume that one size fits all.

Shopping and review sites: Okay, I know this is an outlier. Most people don't consider shopping and review sites to be social networking, and they're nothing like the other sites I've mentioned in this chapter. But don't overlook the incredible communities that thrive on sites like Amazon, where customer reviews, profiles of those customer reviewers, and user conversations take place every day. For example, if a new book comes out in your marketplace, why not be the first to review it on Amazon? If you're a real estate agent and you write a thoughtful review on a new book about real estate investing, it may be seen by tens of thousands of people (as well as the author and members of the media). People who then visit your Amazon profile learn about you and your business, and some may contact you. Other review-based sites to check out include TripAdvisor (travel reviews), Rotten Tomatoes (movie reviews), Zagat (restaurant reviews), and Yelp (reviews of local businesses). There are many more such sites covering different products and in languages other than English. Don't forget to create a useful profile for yourself with contact information.

You Can't Go to Every Party, So Why Even Try?

Think back to our social-media-as-cocktail-party metaphor for a moment. You can't go to every party thrown in your city. There are literally thousands of social networking sites out there, and it is simply impossible to be active in all of them. And once you choose a few parties to attend, you can't meet and have a conversation with each and every person there. You know there are tons of great conversations going on all around you, and you know that you can't be a part of them all.

What do you do at a party? Some people constantly look over the shoulder of the person they are talking to, always on the lookout for a better conversation. Some flit from one person to another every few minutes all night, having many short, superficial conversations. What I like to do at parties is have a few great conversations and be happy that I'm at a wonderful event. I know I can't be with everyone, so I have fun with the people I'm with. What more could I want?

If you're following my analogy here, you should apply the same thing to your participation in social media. For most people and organizations, it's better to be active in a few social networking sites instead of creating profiles on dozens of them and being too busy to spend much time in any one. In my own case, I have my own blog, I am on LinkedIn, Instagram, and Twitter, and I'm active on a few forums and chat rooms, but that's about it. There are thousands of other social media and social networking sites that I choose not to participate in, such as Nexopia, Bebo, Hi5, Tagged, Xing, Skyrock, Orkut, Xiaonei, Cyworld, and many, many more. Since you can't go to every party, you need to pick and choose. Where do you want to be? Where you can be most helpful? Where are the members of your buyer personas?

Optimizing Social Networking Pages

If you're creating pages on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and the other social networking sites, and if you've been following the planning process outlined in [Chapter 10](#), then you're creating content that reaches your buyers and helps you achieve your goals. Although social networking sites aren't advertising, you can still use the sites to lead people into your buying process. For example, Amanda Palmer links to her blog from her Twitter profile.

Here are some ideas to get the most out of using social networking sites for marketing:

- **Target a specific audience.** Create a page that reaches an audience important to your organization. It is usually better to target a small niche market (e.g., people who want to do their own car repairs but don't know how to diagnose what's wrong).
- **Be a thought leader.** Provide valuable and interesting information that people want to check out. As you will remember from [Chapter 12](#), it is better to show

your expertise in a market or at solving a buyer's problems than to blather on about your product.

- **Be authentic and transparent.** Don't try to impersonate someone else. It's a sleazy practice, and if you get caught, you can do irreparable harm to your company's reputation. If your mother would say it's wrong, it probably is.
- **Create lots of links.** Link to your own sites and blog and to those of others in your industry and network. Everybody loves links—they make the web what it is. You should certainly link to your own stuff from a social networking site, but it's important to expand your horizons a bit.
- **Encourage people to contact you.** Make it easy for others to reach you online, and be sure to follow up personally on your fan mail.
- **Participate.** Create groups and participate in online discussions. Become an online leader and organizer.
- **Make it easy to find you.** Tag your page and add it to subject directories.
- **Experiment.** These sites are great because you can try new things. If it isn't working, tweak it. Or abandon the effort and try something new. There is no such thing as an expert in social networking—we're all learning as we go!

Integrate Social Media into an Offline Conference or Event

As you participate in social networking, keep in mind the relationship between the online world of virtual networks and the physical world of in-person networks. There will be many times that one will complement the other.

Consider conferences and other events. Today, the best live events are the ones that integrate social media into the festivities. At conferences all over the world, audience members connect with one another while speakers are up at the podium. These back channels are truly revolutionary, since they allow listeners to discuss content as it is being delivered. What's more, it brings a new virtual audience into the room—sometimes from the opposite end of the earth.

Alan Belniak, director of social media marketing at PTC, a software company producing product life cycle management tools, integrated social media into the PTC/USER World Event. Belniak notes one of the benefits of the conference is integrating the physical event with social networking. “Participants are better off because they can absorb more of the event without being in every session,” he says. “They may attend one session, but they can catch a blog of another session or skim the tweet stream of a third. By offering multiple forms of media, it lets people experience more of the event.”

Here are some of the ways Belniak used social media at the PTC/USER World Event:

- Developed a single page where all the social media feeds could be found.
- Gave out about a dozen video cameras and had the recipients create videos to upload onto a special YouTube video channel.
- Created a Flickr feed of photos shot at the event.
- Established a common hashtag and later archived its Twitter feed.
- Aggregated 35 different bloggers' posts.

The real-time social networking gave those who could not be present in person a taste of the action. “They can see what they're missing and possibly use these forms of real-time multimedia as justification that they should attend next year,” Belniak says. In fact, at least one person didn't wait until the next year. “A local PTC customer wasn't registered for the event but had been following some of the chatter on the website. He was a short drive away, so he told his boss that he should go. And he did.”

Build a Passionate Fan Base

During a summer evening in 2014, our daughter snapped a photo of me and my wife [@YukariWatanabe](#) as we enjoyed a delicious bottle of 2009 Silver Oak Alexander Valley cabernet sauvignon. When I tweeted the photo evidence, [@SilverOak](#) responded, “Looks like a beautiful evening! Thank you for sharing with us.” Silver Oak engaged with me, unlike, say, the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company (among many other brands).

When I dug a little deeper by checking out the [@SilverOak](#) Twitter and Instagram feeds, the Facebook page, and the YouTube channel, I noticed that the people at Silver Oak aren't just talking up their products. Rather, they authentically engage with people who are current or potential fans of the wine and who are enjoying interesting experiences with a bottle (or two). I also like the way Silver Oak shares beautiful images on social media. There are frequent shots of the vineyard, its buildings, and the people who make the wine. It makes me want to visit the winery in California and try more of its offerings!

“Social is important because it gives us a chance to listen,” says Ian Leggat, director of marketing and public relations at Silver Oak. “More than anything else, we look for social signals to get a temperature check on our brand and to understand what our followers are excited about.” And people do get excited about Silver Oak, as evidenced by their active online following.

Silver Oak is an expensive bottle, around \$100 and up depending on the vintage and where you buy it. What I've noticed about other high-end wines is that the branding plays to snob appeal. Sometimes wineries play hard to get—making wines scarce to increase the perception of value. Silver Oak does the opposite. The wine is widely

available when you want it. That attitude seems to extend to interaction with fans.

“The Silver Oak brand is very much linked with special moments, and all we are doing is facilitating people to share the special moments and be excited about them,” Leggat says. “Silver Oak is the wine that you drink to celebrate the birth of a child, to celebrate an anniversary. Last fall we were developing our print newsletter, and we reached out on Twitter to get a couple of these ‘bottle stories’ in 140 characters or less. Some of the things that came back to us were so powerful. We had one where someone had waited out Hurricane Sandy with a bottle of Silver Oak and a flashlight. That’s all she had. We had someone who ordered a large format bottle of Silver Oak in place of a wedding guestbook and just had people sign that bottle of Silver Oak and make this beautiful keepsake in their home. They wanted to take that picture and share with everybody. For us, it’s really just maximizing the social capital that we have among the very engaged base.”

Some famous people have shared their bottle stories on Twitter and Instagram as well, including LeBron James, Courteney Cox, and Kacey Musgraves.

“We have probably the most passionate fan base of any wine that I’m aware of, and we cultivate evangelists through our social media channels and help celebrate them,” Leggat says. “Our strategy has evolved over the years to be less about pushing content out and more about facilitating dialogue in our social channels and reaching out to influencers and pulling them into those conversations. What we really care about is not adding followers as much as the conversations that we have with them, and creating the kind of content that facilitates sharing.”

Because Silver Oak has been active on social networks for six years and uses the channels to actually engage with customers rather than try to sell products, the company has built a strong presence.

Social Networking and Crisis Communications

The real-time aspects of social networking, and the way it creates opportunities for two-way communication, make the tools of this chapter excellent ways to connect with constituents during a crisis. You can be certain that people are talking about you anyway, so getting your voice out during what can be a very tough time for your organization can help you get through the crisis.

Jerry Sandusky, a former Pennsylvania State University assistant football coach, was found guilty on 45 charges of sexual abuse and was sentenced to 60 years in prison. The story was at the forefront of the news cycle, from its breaking in November 2011, during the investigation and trial, and through the sentencing in October 2012.

Imagine you are responsible for social media within an organization faced with a major crisis like what happened at Penn State. How would you handle it? How would the senior executives handle it?

The right approach is to be honest and forthright. Communicate the facts quickly and don't hide. Assign a visible spokesperson. Silence and "no comment" are the enemy.

The Penn State story is certainly a tragedy. But the way communication about it was handled by the university administration is worth a look and some reflection. I spoke with Kelly Burns, a Penn State MBA graduate, about that experience. While a student, Burns interned with Penn State Football Marketing & Promotions from May 2009 through April 2012, and for three summers (2009 to 2011) she ran the Penn State Football Facebook²⁰ and Twitter ([@PennStateFball](https://twitter.com/PennStateFball)) accounts. "I was very lucky to have the opportunity to assist in developing the Penn State Football Facebook page back when it first launched in summer 2009," Burns says. She posted content (information, photos, videos, and the like) that fans enjoyed. "Having the opportunity to interact with Penn State Football fans was incredible, because Penn State Football has a history rich in tradition and 'Success with Honor,' and its fans literally wear their pride on their sleeves."

The Penn State Football Facebook page, currently with more than 600,000 likes, targeted students, recruits to the football program, alumni, and Penn State Football fans in the community. Burns also read each tweet and Facebook comment and responded personally to many. In this role, she frequently put in 40-hour weeks on a voluntary basis.

Then the Sandusky story broke. The grand jury investigation had been initiated in the spring of 2008 but had been kept quiet. In the summer of 2011, Burns was told to remove photos of Sandusky from the Facebook page. On November 4, 2011, Sandusky was indicted, and the next day he was arrested and charged and the story went worldwide instantly. "Our Facebook and Twitter lit up, but that was difficult because initially we were not allowed to post," Burns says. "We were not permitted to post anything about the scandal, nor were any other people working for the university. We were told to wait until Old Main [Penn State's administrative center on campus, which includes the university president's office] made a statement before we could say anything. So we went completely dark."

On November 11, the social media team was permitted to post about the Blue Ribbon Campaign against child abuse, and then on November 16 they were allowed to post some simple messages about football. But, still, they weren't allowed to say anything about the crisis.

"Penn State Football fans were never permitted to post directly onto the Facebook wall, but during this period fans were engaged on Facebook by commenting on posts that were already there, including the Blue Ribbon post. There were as many as 500 comments on some posts that I moderated. Many people aired their opinions, whether positive or negative."

While the majority of people were thoughtful, some were not. "We patrolled for foul language, rude jokes, and other disturbing comments and removed them," Burns

says. Negativity was fine, but with such a sensitive issue, inappropriate language was not allowed. “In several cases we needed to block individuals who insisted on continuing to make fun of Penn State in very inappropriate ways,” she says.

A full crisis management discussion is beyond the scope of this book. However, the response typically includes such steps as gathering facts, reporting facts quickly (even if the fact is that nothing is known), give the name of a spokesperson, acknowledge people's deep emotions, and communicate regularly. Social networks are a great way to communicate in real time during a time of crisis, and in the case of Penn State, the university had a tremendously active Facebook page ready to be used to communicate. However, Penn State Football elected not to take these crisis management steps. Burns says it took days before the board of trustees issued responses and put a face to leadership.

“We should have done a better job providing a way to communicate with the fans,” Burns says. “That's not something critical about Penn State Football, because it goes up to Old Main, who decided what was allowed to be said. I think in our day and age of social media, that silence was not the right response. Keeping information private is not the way to go when people are talking 24/7 on social media and need reassurance.”

Burns told me how fans of Penn State competitors also used social media and the Penn State Football Facebook page to show their support and understanding for the victims, the Penn State football players, students, alumni, and fans. She shared one of the best examples of a positive fan post from what is usually considered the enemy, Ohio State University. “In this situation, the fan laid aside the on-field rivalry to support a much greater cause (to say the least),” Burns says. Robert Benson, a Buckeye fan, posted in the November 11 comment thread:

When people are so quick to make sick references to Penn St. I am disgusted. How can anyone label an entire group of people in a negative way and feel good about it? Taking advantage of people who are down, weakened and heartbroken for your own sick pleasure. Does that remind you of someone?

What I see is a community shell-shocked and hurt, trying to find their way through all of this. A horrible situation for them. Surely, among them are kids attending Penn St. who themselves have been victims. Your negative comments about Penn St. must hurt them more than anyone would ever know. They want their university to stand for something better than this.

The whole world is watching Penn St. You will find your way and will come out on the other side to represent something good, and maybe something much bigger and [more] important than before.

Keep your chin up Penn St. When we meet you next week, win or lose, we want you at your best.

—A Buckeye fan

When people offer support like this on your social networks, it goes a long way to help mitigate the negative reactions.

If you don't have one already, your organization needs a crisis communications plan in place. As part of the plan, you should secure agreement from executives, public relations professionals, and your legal staff about how you can use social networks like Facebook and Twitter to communicate during a crisis. Don't wait until the bad news comes, because then there is too much happening to make quick decisions.

Why Participating in Social Media Is Like Exercise

One of the most common questions I get at my talks is this: “How do you find the time to do all this social media stuff?” People want the secret to regular participation on Facebook, Twitter, and the other sites that help them create valuable information for their buyers.

I've found that finding the time to participate in social media is just like finding the time for exercise. You have to choose to exercise regularly to stay fit. As far as I know, the only effective way is to make exercise part of your routine. Some people like fitness clubs. Others enjoy running outdoors or dancing or kickboxing. But in all cases, success comes from engaging in the activity regularly.

I enjoy an hour of exercise every morning. I have an elliptical trainer at home, so sometimes I use that. Other days, I go to a nearby health club and swim laps. If I'm near a beach, I enjoy running on sand and I do yoga and calisthenics when I'm in a hotel room. I get up early, around 4 A.M. most days, and I've been at it for more than a decade. I feel great. I don't even think about finding the time to exercise, because it is a very important part of my life.

It's the same with participating in social networks and creating online content—it becomes part of your life. In my case, I write about 100 blog posts per year and shoot maybe 20 videos. I comment on thousands of blogs. Most years, I write a free e-book. And I'm on forums, chat rooms, Twitter, Instagram, and other social sites.

Many people are surprised when I say that I probably spend about six hours per week on social media, about the same amount of time I spend exercising. I don't even think about it. It's important, so I do it. And I can't really say how I fit it in. Unlike with my exercise routine, I do my social media work mainly in microbursts of a couple of minutes each throughout the day.

I recommend that you don't even try to find the time to create content and participate in social media. You'll fail, just like many of us have in our attempts to find the time to exercise, leading to failure and no small waste of money.

Instead, make social media (and exercise) an important part of your life. A good way to start, in my experience, is to make television a less important part of your life or maybe even eliminate it completely. You will be amazed at how much time you free

up.

Make social media both a part of your life and a part of your business, such as the way clever businesses use Twitter to reach out to buyers. I was once in Sofia, Bulgaria, to deliver a New Marketing Masterclass. When I'm in a city for the first time, I always want to poke around a bit. So when the people at Free Sofia Tour ([@FreeSofiaTour](#)) tweeted to invite me along (they had heard about my Masterclass), I knew I had to go. Free Sofia Tour relies on volunteer guides and donations from their guests to support the organization.

I love how Free Sofia Tour embraces social media, while the other city tour operators use traditional marketing. I saw the other guys' brochures in the hotel lobby. They have ads at the airport and in the tourist magazines, too. But Free Sofia Tour uses social media, including Facebook, Twitter, and good old-fashioned word of mouth. If you're social, it's easy to find them. They make you feel welcome beforehand, and they follow up via Twitter after the tour.

But you don't have to take my word for it. Free Sofia Tour is ranked the number one activity in Sofia on TripAdvisor, with 645 “excellent” ratings out of 699 as I write this. In a world of commercial approaches (like the big bus tours that operate in many cities), sometimes the personal touch works best. If you ever find yourself in Sofia, now you know who should show you the sights. Just send them a tweet.

This story leads me to one last point about the connecting power of social networks. With all this online conversation going on, social media take the pervasiveness of the Internet one step further. And while we don't know where they're heading, what is certain is that marketing and PR on the web will continue to evolve—quickly. Success comes from experimentation. With a service like Twitter or a site like Vine (or whatever the next new thing is, like Ello, which was hot in late 2014), nobody knows the rules at first. Smart marketers succeed just by trying. JetBlue created a huge following on Twitter because it was an early adopter. The trick to benefiting from any new medium is this: Participate in it; don't just try to take advantage of it. Be a *genuine* part of the action! Whatever is your social networking site of choice, don't hesitate to jump in and see what you can do.

Notes

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