

Executive
Alert!

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LETTERS TO THE C-SUITE: GETTING SERIOUS ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA

Executives around the world continue to ask, “How can social media be monetized?” and “How does it fit into my existing interactive marketing?” The latest research from Forrester points to social media being the fastest growing marketing channel, reaching \$3.1 billion by 2014. The chance to connect with customers in real-time is incredibly powerful and presents an amazing opportunity—arguably the first for brands to really develop a personal relationship with customers.

To help you navigate the social media waters and really understand how your brand can join the conversation via social media, we’ve asked a dozen of the industry’s top social media experts to offer their insights to help you broaden your social media strategy. I encourage you to read the advice and insight from the experts, and don’t be afraid to connect with all of us on Twitter to learn more.

Here are three things to remember as you read *Letters to the C-Suite*:

1. Marketing is no longer a department—it’s a state of mind. The marketing department no longer owns the channels in which customers connect with brands. It’s not about control—it’s about managing conversations and engaging where appropriate. Social media provides a remarkable opportunity to understand what customers want and deliver an immediate experience with your brand.

2. The conversation’s happening with or without you. Two-thirds of Fortune 100 companies are on Twitter, and customers expect companies of all sizes to engage and serve them across social networks. With millions of Tweets and status updates every hour, the conversation is happening. The choice, of course, is whether or not you choose to engage.

3. Social is social—not a silo. For years, marketers have aspired to develop one-to-one communications, where brands personally talk with customers online. Social media takes the idea of one-to-one even further and no longer makes it a brand-to-customer conversation. Instead, it’s now a person-to-customer conversation. Within the overall interactive marketing ecosystem, social media marketing is most effective when it’s used as part of a brand’s overall communication with its customers—across email, mobile, social, and sites.

Social media represents the powerful evolution of marketing. From social to email to mobile, interactive marketers are increasingly asked to do more. We’re committed to providing you the latest research and solutions to bring simplicity to the ever-changing interactive world.



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Executive Alert!

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TO THE EXECUTIVE TEAM:

I realize everyone is telling you social media marketing is a unicorn, but maybe it's just a horse?

Sure, social media marketing differs from the marketing we're used to in that it puts the company and our customers on the same—rather than opposing—teams. But beyond that, isn't social media similar to traditional channels that have come before it?

I'm not talking necessarily about using social media to acquire new customers, but rather using it to keep the customers you've already earned. Maybe social media isn't the new television, but rather the new telephone or CRM?

Why would a consumer "friend," "fan," or "follow" you, unless they were either already a customer, or at the very least had considered buying from you? The average Facebook member becomes a fan of just two companies per month, yet is exposed to thousands of brands during that same period. People don't experimentally engage with brands on social networks, they engage with the brands they already support.

Thus, your organization should consider how you're going to "be" social, not just "do" social media, and then consistently manifest that relationship your entire spectrum of communication tools: your Web site, blogs, Facebook page, Twitter account, email program—and even down to your customer service department.

Your strategies and expectations for social media should complement what you're already doing in email and lifecycle marketing. Aren't Facebook pages just a post-modern email newsletter—where you can stay top-of-mind with your best customers, engage with them, give them unique offers, and try to turn them from consumers into advocates?

By integrating your CRM and social media, you can use social interactions with customers to learn more about their needs and desires, and improve the relevancy of your email communications and offers. Consider this: why not use your social media outposts as targeted landing pages for your email and direct mail communications, or ask your blog visitors and Facebook fans to subscribe to your email newsletter? The opportunities are endless!

Lastly, it is also important to add the same level of testing and measurement rigor to social media that you do to email and CRM. There's a best time to send Tweets. There's a best time to post to Facebook. There's an optimal structure for blog post headlines. There's a reason that some videos show up on the first page of Google, and others don't. There are answers for all your social media questions, and by committing to testing and optimizing your social media efforts in 2010, you'll go from having a social media presence, to having a social *purpose* that drives meaningful ROI.

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TO THE EXECUTIVE TEAM:

Think globally, act locally, and panic internally! Sound like your world at times? The online space is moving at a pace that many organizations struggle to keep up with. Social media marketing has been thrust upon us all, making your job even tougher: You have to meet the street's expectations, a new age of consumer expectations, and shifting channel demands. Are you equipped to manage this new social media marketing experience? It promises to build brand extensions, create and sustain communities of loyal advocates and influencers, and challenges how you view measurement and customer engagement with a new set of behavioral data. Here's my best advice to you:

1. The customer is more connected and less engaged. We love to believe there are segments of customers that are ready and willing to engage with us through our traditional business and share their experience within their communities. The reality is, online and social media engagement is fragmented, and it's really difficult for marketers to pull it all together. It's critical you realize that the way you engage in any online community or social network is opposite to how you market your products and services. You must enable events, activities, and experiences without disrupting the balance with biased advertisement or influence.

2. The data is directional at best—beware of the false prophecy of social measurement. While the Razorfish Social Influence Measurement Scoring (SIMS) methodology is great at trending, it is directional: a brand health indicator. The tasks of building reach, influence, and connections are not always aligned within a business. I'd recommend you take a close look at what data is valuable from a directional perspective and invest in building behavioral extensions of social graph data. Measurement at the brand level can lull you into thinking that your efforts are working, but will not help you understand how your customers engage and share in the brand experience online.

3. Remember what's important, not what's urgent. Retaining your customers and building value with them is important. Yet, social media marketing can sometimes warp this thinking with the belief that by engaging through social environments at the brand level, you are building loyalty and retention. We are on the verge of establishing how social experiences influence brand loyalty, but this type of view can get lost in day-to-day planning and execution. Social media marketing will be seen through an episodic lens and can't be held to the same ROI models as direct marketing, thus can't operate persistently at the "urgent" level.

Remember, your brand is a constant, but your voice in the market is continually shifting to the vehicles available to sustain it. Good luck in 2010!


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Sergio Balegno is Research Director for MarketingSherpa's Research Group. He researches, writes, and frequently speaks about emerging marketing topics at industry conferences and online events. As principle analyst covering the topic of social media for MarketingSherpa, Sergio created the Social Marketing ROAD Map, a systematic approach to mapping an effective social marketing strategy. He also developed the firm's research model for Social Marketing Maturity. This model demonstrates the disparity in the performance of social marketing programs by organizations in each phase of the maturity lifecycle. Following 30 years work on both the brand and agency-side of the digital marketing fence, Sergio joined MarketingSherpa in 2008.

TO THE EXECUTIVE TEAM:

Shhh...hear that? It's the sound of nearly everyone in your organization sharing information and opinions with their peers online. It's the reverberating sound of type and click conversations. It's a phenomenon enabled by technology that has quietly permeated our lives, both business and personal. And, like a force of nature, it has taken on a life of its own. So, how will you harness this force and make these conversations work for your business?

Social media has created an exciting and challenging world of new possibilities for companies. Until recently, a vast majority of marketers were exploring this unfamiliar terrain without a compass—or strategy—to guide them. Captivated by the hype and the ease of implementing social sites, many ignored proven marketing principles. They launched their social initiatives by creating blogs, Twitter and Facebook accounts without a plan or purpose. Not surprisingly, these initiatives failed for many.

Driven from the top, by leaders like you, a momentous change is taking place in the use of social media for marketing purposes. Social media marketing is maturing to the point where the mainstream is now in transition from the trial-and-error phase of the learning curve to the strategic phase. Marketers are learning to begin their social initiatives by researching the medium and monitoring target audiences to determine realistic objectives. Then and only then do they formulate their tactical plans and roll-out the social platforms required by the plan.

Social media has created new ways of utilizing proven tactics even more effectively. An integrated marketing tactic like social sharing—a practice that allows email recipients to click and share email content with their friends and peers on popular social networks—is an example of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts. This integration exponentially extends the reach of email messaging.

There is a steep learning curve to gaining proficiency in this new medium, and marketers will need a practical method for mapping their social media strategy. They will need to develop a coherent process for achieving objectives that can be easily and routinely performed. The Social Marketing ROAD was created by MarketingSherpa to fulfill this need.

But the commercial significance of social media goes well beyond marketing. It is creating a new, more transparent way of doing business. A shift in thinking that requires strategic vision and leadership—from the C-level of every organization.

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TO THE EXECUTIVE TEAM:

2009 marked the beginning of the social media land-grab by the business world, seemingly driven by the notion that social media was the new hot series of channels through which to engage with customers. Companies of all sizes—from global consumer brands to small retail operations—rushed to plant their flags on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and other popular social networking sites, and the role of “social media manager” was born.

And for the most part, not a whole lot happened after that. Why? Simple: companies were too focused on planting their flag in the social web, and didn't think enough about what to build on their little plot of land once they were there. In order for organizations to be successful in social media marketing, a shift from “presence” in the social web (merely being there) to becoming operational (using the space to support actual business objectives) needs to start happening in 2010. How do you get started?

First, you get rid of the idea that the social media manager role is one-size-fits-all.

When we talk about social media, we're referring to a set of communications channels. These channels can be used for a variety of functions, some outbound, some inbound, and some a mix of both. Social media can serve the specific purposes of every department in an organization, very much in the way that the telephone can. Public Relations, Marketing, Customer Service, Technical Support, Community Management, Business Development, HR, IT—all have their own uses for social media. In light of this, a social media manager is unlikely to be capable of managing every aspect of a company's social media activity.

We aren't talking about blogging and posting status updates to Twitter and Facebook here. At its very basic level, effective social media program management encompasses building strategic plans based on business objectives, operational management, market research, marketing management, community management, customer service, data analysis, and much more. The complexity of building, deploying and driving a social media “program” not only requires a breadth of skills on the management side, but also a division of labor across the organization. PR needs to own its use of the space, customer service needs to own its use of the space as well, and so on. And to make it all work, a social media manager (or Director) needs to be at the center of it all, making sure that all the pieces work together.

As more and more companies approach their first full year in the space, we're already seeing the start of a shift towards a richer definition of social media expertise within organizations. On their own, customer service departments are already beginning to monitor social networks for positive and negative mentions of their companies in order to address customer needs in real-time. PR departments are monitoring chatter to increase the velocity and effectiveness of their response during crises. Marketing departments are seeding brand-to-customer interactions with promotions and content. Even internally, HR departments are using social platforms to more effectively share information to employees. This rich and fully integrated model, though still in its infancy, is the intelligent next step in social media adoption for the business world.

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As BrandBuilder Marketing's principal and senior strategist, Olivier Blanchard helps companies develop, build, integrate, manage and measure social media programs. He also helps companies manage their reputations online and offline, and establish leadership in their markets. In addition, Olivier often trains company executives and project teams in all matters of social media management and measurement, then helps them build and integrate effective programs into every facet of their business. Olivier also spends time speaking about effective brand development, marketing strategy, and corporate social media engagement—the latest of which is Red Chair Training. Visit www.redchairgroup.com to learn more.

Executive Alert!

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Jason Falls is one of the leading thinkers and educators in the social media, public relations, and communications industries. He has the unique perspective of having lead a national advertising agency's interactive and social media efforts, worked with Fortune 100 brands as a social media strategist and served as an independent consultant in the social media industry. His work has resulted in acclaim and recognition in publications and honors, including a 2009 SAMMY Award for Best Integrated Social/Cross Media Campaign. His insights on marketing, advertising, public relations and more are published regularly on his blog at *socialmediaexplorer.com*, which is consistently ranked among the top 20 in the industry. Falls has been recognized for his thought leadership in the industry by USA Today, The Wall Street Journal, Entrepreneur, Business First, The Dallas Morning News and more.

TO THE EXECUTIVE TEAM:

The social media purists who preach about conversation, engagement, and adding value to the community without tying it to the bottom line are in for a rude awakening in 2010: They're going to be looking for a job. Your business doesn't grow, the needle doesn't move if you're just sitting around chatting it up on Twitter.

Last year, your organization learned about and embraced social media. Now it's time to get serious about it. Here's how:

1. Plan as you would any other marketing effort. Is having a direct mail piece a marketing goal? A tactic, perhaps, but a goal? No. Why, then, would having a Facebook fan page be? Plan each social media interaction as you would any other marketing effort. Think about what you're trying to persuade people to do and how that manifests itself on your blog/Facebook/Twitter. The conversational elements change your approach, but they don't change your end result. Now that you're familiar with the social media tools and channels—it's time to start prescribing activities that use them.

2. Ensure your social media goals reflect your business goals. Building a large following for your corporate blog is great, but how does that help you sell more stuff? Challenge your marketing and communications staff to show how each social media effort aligns with the ultimate business goals for the year. If they can't make the connection, that particular effort isn't a priority. If social media isn't helping your organization achieve its business goals, then it's just a hobby.

3. Don't just gather friends. Activate them. An agency partner I work with recently exclaimed, "We have 350,000 fans on Facebook!" My response was, "What are you going to do with them?" Figure out how your marketing efforts can elicit a response. Consideration, Trial, Purchase, Recommendation...none of them happen in a vacuum. Or a room with 350,000 people with nothing to do.

4. Measure everything. If you don't measure your social media marketing efforts to prove what did or didn't work this year, then next year your decisions will be ill-informed. Present clear calls-to-action on your blog, Twitter feed, Facebook page and measure how effective those efforts were. For internal social media efforts, measure productivity levels, energy, or time saved by diverting internal emails to a social platform and so on. Quantify it to justify it. It's the only sure way to know it's working.

5. Don't forget the purists were half right. All the advice to engage, participate, be transparent, and add value to the community is good advice. Should you have business goals and tie social media to the bottom line? Yes. But you can't march in with a bullhorn and sell-sell-sell here. Keep in mind the online consumer won't trust you until they feel your intentions are good and focused on them, not you. Be consumer-centric and genuine, but smartly so.

Investing more money in social media marketing means you need to draw a solid line from your investment to your returns. And if your social media counsel isn't doing that for you, find one who will.

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TO THE EXECUTIVE TEAM:

Look, you're busy, so I'll keep this brief. You have a business to run, payroll to make, decisions to weigh, things to manage, and prioritize, and direct...Should you make time to read these letters? Yes. Here's why:

Business has shifted. Marketing as you know it has changed, and along with it the rules for customer engagement. The most successful businesses must now speak directly with their customers or prospects through a content-focused strategy. Your company, too, must find its voice and create bold and compelling content that will attract people to you; that speaks to their needs, wants, or desires. In other words, creating great content is increasingly a cornerstone to lead generation and lead nurturing. It's key to attracting new customers and to deepening relationships with existing ones.

So, you know all that. But how do you go about doing it? How does a company make the leap from "marketing speak" to become a publisher on the Web? How can you create "bold" stories, videos, and blog posts? How can the C-suite contribute?

Well, since you asked, here are my two pesos:

1. Stop worrying that your underwear will show. Your customers are already talking about you, so quit worrying about controlling the message. You can't. It's time to belly up. Engage. Respond. Be graceful and humble. Be human.

2. Change your culture and your mindset. Sure, creating content is the cornerstone of your marketing efforts. But this isn't about pushing your messages at people. It's about providing value to people through the information you develop. Are you blogging? Podcasting? Creating cool or fun videos? Producing webinars and newsletters and the rest with an eye toward being helpful? Bonus: As CEO, you have your own blog, or podcast, or the like.

3. Don't leave it up to marketing. Well, not solely, anyway. Chances are, creative people who love your company exist in all corners of your organization. They include: Subject Matter Experts, Product Junkies, Geeks, the Passionate, Quirky, Funny, or Awe-Inspiring. Find them. Empower them. Help them tell their story. Bonus: Create a reward system for employees who regularly feed the content machine at your company.

4. Keep your ears open. Harvest customer stories that detail the way your brand has helped them. Erect listening posts via online tools and forums and monitor public platforms like Twitter or LinkedIn to keep up with the positive and negative buzz.

5. Create a social media governance plan that doesn't feel like a ball and chain. Make it easy and manageable for your company to respond to all types of feedback (even complainers!) in a manner that fuels positive word-of-mouth. A good social media governance plan is more than a policy document; it's a process that empowers staff to participate and collaborate across an array of social media platforms. Encourage your employees to interact with customers and share the top-shelf content your organization is creating. Bonus: Make your social media policy both simple and public, like Intel's, which reads, in part: "Talk to your readers like you would talk to real people in professional situations." (Sweet, huh?)

So as I was saying: Business has shifted. Are the people in your organization trying to manage it without you? Or are you on board?

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Ann Handley is an 11-year veteran of creating and managing digital content to build relationships for organizations and individuals. Currently, Ann is the Chief Content Officer of MarketingProfs, which provides strategic and tactical marketing know-how for business professionals through a full range of online media. Ann writes at the MarketingProfs Daily Fix (www.mpdailyfix.com), a blog in the top 20 of the Advertising Age Power150 and in the top 10 of The Viral Garden's Top 25 Marketing & Social Media Blogs. She also blogs at the Huffington Post (www.huffingtonpost.com/ann-handley) and writes her acclaimed personal blog, *Annarchy* (www.annhandley.com).

Executive Alert!**JOSEPH JAFFE**

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One of the most sought-after consultants, speakers, and thought leaders on marketing, new media and social media, Joe Jaffe is Chief Interruptor of Powered, Inc. Previously, Joe founded and ran crayon, a strategic consulting practice, which was recently acquired by Powered. Joe is also the author of three books, "Life After The 30-Second Spot: Energize Your Brand With A Bold Mix Of Alternatives To Traditional Advertising" (Wiley/Adweek, 2005), "Join the Conversation: How to Engage Marketing-weary Consumers with the Power of Community, Dialogue and Partnership" (Wiley, 2007), and "Flip the Funnel: How to Use Existing Customers to Gain New Ones." Joe blogs, video blogs, and podcasts at www.jaffejuice.com and www.jaffejuice.tv.

TO THE EXECUTIVE TEAM:

Did you ever aspire to be on TV? Well now's your chance—and here's the great part: you don't have to do anything at all! Just keep on doing what you're doing and you too can be on the Today Show and get your straight-from-the-teleprompter YouTube vignette that's sure to rack up at least 100 views. Maybe even 200.

There's an old marketing adage that if you please a customer, they'll tell 5-7 of their friends, but if you disappoint them, they'll tell 15-20 of their friends. Not true anymore. Today, if you upset a customer, they'll tell 1,000,000 of their closest strangers. And you know exactly what I'm talking about, don't you?

If you work for a well-known Japanese automaker that's all about moving forward, a popular pizza chain named after a game played with tiles, or a low-cost airline where bags fly free, you know all too well how a couple of disgruntled employees or attempts to sweep a very real product-related problem under the floor mat...er rug...can instantly transform what might have been a private conversation, or internal admonishing into a full-blown crisis.

Word-of-mouth, peer-to-peer chatter and pass-a-long, or even the concept of community or social networks (as in groups of humans with something in common) is nothing new (and neither is the notion of customer service, customer experience, or relationship building). What is completely new is the sheer magnitude of the speed, scale, and reach of social networks, the amplification and power of the megaphone that levels playing fields, and empowers "someone just like me" (the same "someone just like me" that is trusted more than corporations, governments and their propaganda a.k.a. advertising) to influence "someone like you."

Through my travels and opportunities to speak with executives just like you, I spend a great deal of time talking about how to operate during a recession and get more from less. In many respects, operating during tough times is really no different than operating during normal times, or even good times. What is different, however, is that it forces us to take a good, hard look at ourselves in the mirror, realign our priorities with what **REALLY** matters (our customers and employees) and return to the fundamentals. Today, you have a unique opportunity to meet your consumers half way and social media will be the rope that either helps you lasso that boulder at the top of a cliff allowing you to get to the top or the noose that hangs you. The choice is yours.

To help you on your journey, I want to leave you with three pieces of advice:

- 1. The term "social media" is an oxymoron.** The real role of social media is retention. Humans interacting with humans is not an "impression" in search of a brand sponsor.
- 2. To be successful, think small.** That is, think like a small business. R.E.A.C.H. out and touch someone – Responsive, Empathetic, Accessible, Connected, Human.
- 3. Think "commitments" over and above "campaigns."** Show your customers you're in it for the long haul through staying power, follow through, and the ability to recognize and reward your most loyal, tenured, and valuable customers. You have a unique opportunity to Flip the Funnel and turn retention into new acquisition.

And you'll also avoid being "video of the week" on YouTube. Which is not bad a thing in this particular case. Trust me.

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TO THE EXECUTIVE TEAM:

I may need to resort to jumping up on a conference table and flailing my arms if you haven't noticed the growing trends of social media seeping into facets of your company. Maybe you have noticed your employees, potential clients, or current clients using Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, or LinkedIn. If your team has been looking for ideas on how to focus your attention on this topic of social media, you are probably ahead of the curve. So the questions asked in conference rooms around the country are: What is going to happen with social media in 2010? Should the tools even concern me? Below are a few key insights to help address these questions:

- 1. Monitor Your Brand.** It's extremely important that your company starts monitoring the content that is being shared online. It doesn't matter what kind of platform you use for monitoring, but it is important to know exactly what your executives, spokespersons, employees, PR firms, and other industry professionals are saying about your brand. People are already talking about your company, so you might as well join in the conversation.
- 2. Build a Corporate Policy for Social Implementation.** Corporate social media policy development is of the utmost importance in 2010 because of the increase in social media use. Your employees leave an electronic footprint in every crevice of the Internet, making it important to prepare for what could be the ramifications of "said" content.
- 3. Education is Key.** Being prepared is one of the biggest obstacles companies face when they first begin using social media. It's extremely important to adequately educate your employees, partners, and executives about, not only the "hows," but also the "whys" of using social media. You need to make sure your employees are not sharing the wrong kind of information on the Internet. The best way to dodge that bullet is proper education.
- 4. Understand the Concept "Customers Are People First."** Customers are people first and buyers second. This mantra floats around the offices of change-oriented, innovative companies. It's a concept tied to the belief that because customers have mobile and social media tools, they are free as individuals to express opinions, likes, dislikes, and experiences. Consumers have the ability to connect with anyone, anywhere, anytime—without the constraints of physical space.
- 5. Find an Enterprise System to Help Manage Social Media Use.** In the future, free tools will not be capable of effectively keeping up with corporate content management or your employees' use of social media. We are in the beginning stages of a complete enterprise solution to manage social media communication. ExactTarget and CoTweet offer solutions that come to mind. An enterprise system will give you the ability to monitor, manage, and produce content on a variety of different social networking sites from a multitude of different people.



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Executive Alert!

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Valeria built one of the first online communities with Fast Company magazine. A brand strategist with 20 years of real-world corporate experience, 10 of which were online, she's worked with companies from Fortune 500 to small start-ups in five industries. She helps brands determine what's next in their business cycle through marketing communications, customer dialogue, and brand advocacy. Conversation Agent is ranked among the top 25 marketing blogs in the world on AdAge. Handpicked by Fast Company as Expert blogger, Valeria is on the Advisory Board of SmartBrief on Social Media and a co-author of "The Age of Conversation." An active member of the Social Media Business Council, the AMA, and the PRSA, Valeria is an Accredited Business Communicator and a Board Member of the IABC.

TO THE EXECUTIVE TEAM:

You asked how to get serious about social media: Budgets are limited, there's too much information—and not enough best practices to implement. You're conflicted between building internal resources or hiring them. If you go the second route, who will lead the charge?

Connecting with and engaging customers and partners is important for the growth of your business. How can you find and activate brand evangelists? What steps do you need to take to build better customer dialogue, gain a broader share of mind, and benefit from greater share of budgets? Connections also come with some potential risk. Are you really prepared to address issues in real-time?

Social media has changed the way companies and brands are discussed and considered. This presents a challenge, but also opens a number of opportunities for companies ready to harness the power of human interaction. Human involvement is what gives brands the strongest competitive differentiation today.

To make social media operational, you must integrate these three key areas:

1. People: to give your best to customers and partners, you need the best from your teams. Social media enables you to achieve a broader strategy and purpose by activating all employees on behalf of your brand. Real-time digital communications become valuable interactions when all functions are seen as customer-facing—directly and indirectly. By supporting this less centrally-mediated culture, your employees will help you sell more by making your customers look like heroes. When everyone is involved, it's not about who anymore, it's about how.

2. Processes: being connected is a process. It begins with the creation of contexts and frameworks guiding your interaction with customers, creating and serving content, incorporating research, and continually improving. Customer intelligence is central. You need a mechanism to monitor and measure how you're doing at every point of your customers' decision journey. From initial consideration and active evaluation, to the moment of purchase and post-purchase experience, collecting this information will help you create customer loyalty and brand advocacy.

3. Technology: is your enabler. Content automation software can help. It allows you to personalize email, run lead-nurturing programs, integrate data, and segment your market throughout the customer lifecycle. You're already familiar with these tools, and know they save time and make you more efficient in tracking your customers' digital body language. These tools also provide a way to keep everyone on the same page and customer intelligence at the core of your activities.

In a recent interview at Davos, Tim Berners-Lee said that social networks, when grounded on a reputation-based system, have the potential to change the way we make decisions together, and how we decide what's truth. This is why technology, without people, gives you no insights.

We scale through relationships. To succeed with social media, you need to start thinking about marketing as a system that integrates people, processes, and technology.

VALERIA MALTONI

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TO THE EXECUTIVE TEAM:

Throughout history, the Estates of the Realm have come under various attacks. In the past, the asymmetry of wealth usually struck the decisive winning blow for the first or second estate, and all was set right with the world. Truth be told, the fourth estate (the press) has been under the complete control of the first (clergy) and second (nobility) estates throughout most of history, so the control of information and the control of knowledge was pretty well-guarded and defensible.

It is our freedom from that control (freedom of religion, freedom of the press, etc.) that makes America such a grand political experiment. To exercise and express our freedoms, we have been using technology, which up until now almost exclusively emanated from a central point. Be it a leader or an associated bureaucracy, there was almost always a yellow brick road leading to a physical location. This is no longer the case. Information is the true currency of our age and it has transcended its bounds.

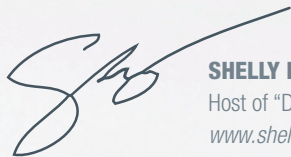
Far from being in the control of the realm, information now displays many of the characteristics we attribute to living things. It is born, it evolves, it eats, it excretes, it mutates, but, interestingly, it can no longer die. This was true on a small scale even before the “great unwashed” learned to blog or Tweet. However, this is the first time in history that an idea (good or bad, true or false) can travel worldwide instantaneously and live on with a permanent, un-erasable, record of itself. Burn all the books you like, the knowledge lives on in the ether.

One of the underlying principles of our American democracy is that the majority rules, but the rights of the minority are always protected by assuring them the right to speak and to vote. This principle is closely tied to another convention of American democracy that requires all citizens to abide by the majority rule even if they did not vote with the majority. We have the right to disagree with our leadership, and our laws give us a way to show them our displeasure with their performance—we can vote them out of office.

Through wars, depression, recession, boom, and bust, America has survived and ultimately thrived these past 234 years. But, it has never had to deal with a decentralized, self-organizing, cogent, antagonistic Fifth Estate until now. BlogMobs and Trust Circles form like regular mobs. They can be constructive or destructive, patriots or rebels—but unlike their flesh-and-blood counterparts, their ideas can have immense, virtually instantaneous impact on a worldwide platform.

The most interesting attribute of BlogMobs is the way they self-assemble. These swarms of ideas evolve into points-of-view and then metamorphose and mutate into the next phase of their existence—gaining or losing the power to influence their audience. It is a fascinating twist on our ability to communicate and, for organizations that rely on central control (like governments and corporations), it is not necessarily a good thing.

In the Information Age, there are no gatekeepers, no pundits, no leadership, just passionate points of view. Perhaps the legacy of this technology will be the empowerment of a true Fifth Estate with a collective mind of its own and the ability to amplify the voice of the people above all others. Which begs for the question: “Can any traditionally organized government withstand an ideological force of this magnitude?”



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Shelly Palmer is the host of “Digital Life with Shelly Palmer,” a weekly half-hour television show about living and working in a digital world which can be seen on WNBC-TV’s NY Nonstop Tuesdays at 10pm Eastern and online, and the host of “MediaBytes,” a daily news show that features insightful commentary and a unique insider’s take on the biggest stories in technology, media, and entertainment. He is Managing Director of Advanced Media Ventures Group, LLC an industry-leading advisory and business development firm and the President of the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences, NY (the organization that bestows the coveted Emmy® Awards). Shelly is the author of “Television Disrupted: The Transition from Network to Networked TV” (2008, York House Press) and the upcoming, “Get Digital: Reinventing Yourself and Your Career for the 21st Century Economy” (2009, Lake House Press).

Executive Alert!**TREY PENNINGTON**

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As the author of “Spitball Marketing: Using What You’ve Got to Get More of What You Want,” Trey Pennington is committed to helping folks discover their hidden treasure, develop it, and deploy it for its greatest good. His marketing keynotes and workshops focus on helping companies use emerging technology to make meaningful connections with real people. Demonstrating his commitment to building community, he has launched ten Social Media Clubs in the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia. He also launched six children into the world and expects 2010 to be transformational for him—his first grandson will make a grand entrance in 2010!

TO THE EXECUTIVE TEAM:

Last year was rough. This year’s looking better. Before you get excited about things returning to “normal,” don’t let this unique opportunity slip away from you. Decide right now to create a brand new normal. This is one of those moments in history when leaders are given a chance to examine their assumptions about the way things are and the way things could be. Now is the time to reset your worldview and seize the chance to be transformational.

Worldview Reset #1: It’s not about the money. My graduate school textbooks said the goal of business is “to maximize shareholder wealth.” Maximizing wealth has traditionally meant a focus on efficiency and economies of scale coupled with policies and practices designed to squeeze every penny of profit out of everything. The collapse of so many big businesses indicates the focus on next quarters’ numbers is a futile pursuit.

The farmer is the new motif ideally positioned to capitalize on the current reality. He prepares the ground, invests his resources to increase the fertility of the soil, plants the seed, nurtures and protects it while it grows, waits patiently for the growth, and is willing to harvest when the right season comes along. If the farmer wants to maximize his yield at harvest, he’ll have to expend the lion’s share of his resources on the crop. A bountiful harvest is a by-product of effective nurturing. Your profit is, too. Focus on the nurturing.

Worldview Reset #2: It’s not about you. Listen to whichever political party is in the minority. You’ll often hear them say the key to regaining majority status is “getting our message out there.” Business leaders say that too. We call it “frequency and reach.” When sales decline, we’re prone to think, “If only we can reach more people with…” The assumption is, if more people only knew about you, your company, or your products, you would enjoy success.

With the unbelievable amount of media sources available today, people can find out all they want to know about whatever it is they’re interested in. What they’re looking for is someone who wants to know more about them. While your marketing department works on making sure you’re interesting, make sure your whole company lets your customers know you’re interested in them. That means giving your customers plenty of opportunities to talk. Of course, you’ll have to listen and respond to make it all work.

Worldview Reset #3: It’s not about protecting your rights. The whole world seems to be clamoring to protect what’s “theirs.” Organizations build fences around their assets to keep others out. As the world continues to change, those who use fences when dealing with the world will find themselves increasingly isolated.

Instead of seeing the world as a threat to your assets, see your neighbors as, well, neighbors. When a new family moves into the house next to you, you’ll receive them and give them homemade cookies. You expect nothing in return. You make friends. You help them and they help you. That’s what good neighbors do.

As an executive, you can help your company be a good neighbor by sharing. Make it easy for people to get your whitepapers, e-books, samples, and more. Get rid of the fence-building “please enter required information” error messages. Then ask yourself, “What else can we share?”

Once you’ve gone through the worldview reset, you’ll be in a position to leverage social media to transform your world. Regardless of which platform you use, you’ll increase your opportunity for success if you’ll nurture, listen, and share instead of focusing on profit, promotion, and protection.

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TO THE EXECUTIVE TEAM:

One of my favorite parables is that of the blind men and the elephant. In the story, six blind men are escorted into a room and asked to describe what they find. Each quickly feels around and begins shouting out answers. "A tree!," yells one. "A snake!," yells another. "A whip! A fan! A weapon! A house!," yell the others.

When informed that they have all been touching different parts of the same thing—an elephant's legs, trunk, tail, ears, and tusks—the lesson becomes clear. Reality is a matter of perception, and to fully appreciate and address the challenges we face, we must be willing to listen, share, and collaborate.

Social media is the elephant in your C-Suite today.

If you're like most executives, you're currently caught in a hailstorm of people trying to explain what social media "is." The Marketing folks yell "brand!" Your Sales Team shouts out "sales!" The PR folks excitedly whisper "exposure" in your ear. "Service!" the Customer Service Team screams over the din. And as for your Legal Team, they just shake their heads in a mixture of fear and disbelief.

The good news is that your C-Suite has the benefit of perspective. You can see the social media digital elephant for what it is—an amazing mix of channels (Twitter, Facebook, blogs, email, and more) capable of serving needs (marketing, sales, PR, customer service, and more) across your enterprise.

If you're going to get serious about social media; however, you must do more than see the challenge—you must rise to it. To do so, you must:

- 1. Identify the passionate voices within your organization.** You need people on the front lines of social media who are as passionate about your products and services as your best customers. Not finding them in-house? Then go look elsewhere. Passion is the critical component to social media success.
- 2. Empower those voices to speak on your brand's behalf.** The speed of social media does not allow every word to be parsed by lawyers before being spoken (or typed). Instruct your Legal Team to come up with policies that encourage social engagement in responsible ways that can be explained, shared, and deployed easily.
- 3. Mobilize a cross-functional social media team** to meet regularly and develop, measure, and continuously evaluate how your company should engage through existing and new channels. Social media knows no silos—neither should your social media team.
- 4. Leverage technology to ensure timely, consistent, and informed social media participation.** To avoid killing consumers with kindness, embrace tools like CoTweet, ExactTarget, and others that help you identify the right internal people to engage in direct communications with consumers via the right media (Twitter, Facebook, email, etc.).

So are you ready to saddle up the social media elephant? If so, you're in for an amazing ride that stands to deliver a more accurate perspective of your customer's needs than ever before.



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Recovering attorney turned professional marketer, Jeff began his email marketing career as President of Optiem, a digital marketing agency based in Cleveland, Ohio, and one of ExactTarget's original Reseller Partners. Since joining ExactTarget, Jeff has spearheaded ExactTarget's SUBSCRIBERS RULE! initiative, the Reseller Program, and guided interactive marketing efforts through websites, blogs, and social networks. Jeff currently helps direct ExactTarget's Marketing Research and Education team and ponders how digital marketing's evolution will impact companies and consumers alike.

ABOUT EXACTTARGET:

THE GLOBAL LEADER

ExactTarget is the global leader in one-to-one marketing solutions. Our software-as-a-service technology provides organizations a single platform to connect with customers via triggered and transactional email, integrated text messaging, voice messaging, landing pages, and social media. Supported by teams of services professionals around the world, our technology integrates with more sales and marketing information systems than any other in the industry, including Salesforce.com, Microsoft Dynamics CRM, Omniture and Webtrends, among many others. For more information, visit www.ExactTarget.com.

EXACTTARGET + COTWEET

ExactTarget acquired enterprise Twitter platform CoTweet in March to create a solution for marketers to manage social media as part of broader marketing initiatives. CoTweet's Web-based collaboration platform allows companies to engage with customers on Twitter via a single dashboard. CoTweet now serves as ExactTarget's Social Media lab and leads all social media product development aimed at helping marketers tie together all forms of interactive marketing—across email, mobile, social, and sites. Together, ExactTarget and CoTweet power the interactive marketing campaigns of thousands of brands worldwide. To learn more about the power of ExactTarget and CoTweet, visit www.ExactTarget.com/connected.



