



The Best of Both Worlds:

How to Effectively Leverage Social Media Relationships
with Real-Time Collaboration Tools

Written by Tom Bunzel

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Objective: This eBook explores the many opportunities afforded by social media to connect with prospects and customers *through what they care about most*. It also details how those relationships can be harvested through the effective use of real-time collaboration tools.



Introduction

According to Forrester Research, social media spending will grow from \$716 million this year to more than \$3.1 billion in 2014. (Source: Yahoo Finance Canada online)

Social media lets users build relationships of trust over time through viral videos, blogs and social networks (communities of common interests). In these networks, users get their information from one another, not from mainstream media, institutions, organizations or businesses. This eBook will detail how marketers can nurture these relationships through active, strategic participation.

You will learn how real-time tools such as online conferences and Webinars (with their global reach) can be extremely effective in following up on newly forged relationships.

Online events connect you to your market immediately and directly, providing you with the ability to capture registration information, present benefits and features, interact with polls and get direct feedback, answer specific questions, motivate stakeholders, and close sales.

The Key Issue: Getting Customers to Pay Attention

Elaine, the marketing director for a new line of cell phones, needs to convince retailers to stock products and promote them actively. She's got Webinars set up with her usual prospects, but some of them cancel and many of them attend half-heartedly. She needs to make her target and she's getting worried. *What can she do to improve her results?*



A young colleague mentions that her friends saw a music video on YouTube by an unknown comedian who has a routine interacting with a cell phone. Elaine begins to follow the comedian on Twitter; she aggregates his followers and some begin to follow her. She friends them through MySpace and Facebook and sends several free phones and music accounts, asking for their feedback and comments on her Facebook page.

She uses Twitter, MySpace and Facebook and her blog on the company Web site to connect with her young friends, posting a link to the YouTube video and responding to comments and questions.

Instead of a sales conference for managers, she schedules an online Webinar: "Which Phones are Funniest: How to Use Comedy on Cell Phones" and uses her new set of contacts to help distribute information on the Webinar, building a buzz with a hashtag on Twitter (#cellphonecomedy) and having her followers "Retweet" (RT) her tweets to their friends. She gets critical mass and builds a large audience of cell phone users and interested retailers.

At the Webinar, she shares comments from her young friends about the new line of phones and gets one or two to describe why they like it during the session—choosing the most active participants and positive influencers from among her new connections.

She also pays the comedian a small fee to do his routine to warm up the audience at the beginning of the Webinar and talk about the phone's voice recorder—which he renames a "joke machine," adding that it makes recording and sharing laughs a breeze. Elaine captures the Webinar attendee list and when her team follows up with these leads they are able to place the phone in many stores by emphasizing its new feature, the "joke machine." She posts the Webinar recording online, and she continues the relationship with her new connections through Twitter, Facebook, her growing blog audience and other social sites.

Social media grows virally because people share their passions.

Do You Know Where Your Prospects and Customers Play?

The key element of social media is that, unlike conventional media, such novel technologies permit users to participate and gain value from each other. Instead of a message “broadcast” from a centralized organization or corporate entity, social media offer a more organic process of communication.

Some organizations feel threatened by these new technologies, either in terms of security, diminishing their brand or simple *loss of control*. However, these social technologies need not be disruptive; when effectively mastered, they can be powerful enablers and provide opportunities for developing new relationships and gaining competitive advantage. Social media can be especially effective when supplemented by the complementary tools of collaborative real-time conferencing in the following areas: Marketing, Sales, Customer Support, Training, Fundraising, Non-Profit Community and others yet to be discovered.

A Partial Overview of Social Media Categories and Examples:

Blogs (and RSS Syndication)

News sites (Digg.com)

Entertainment sites for media

Music sites (BitTorrent, iTunes, Rhapsody)

Sports sites (ESPN, CNN/Sports Illustrated, NBA, Nascar)

Gaming sites

Young girls (Real Girls Media, BettyConfidential)

Virtual worlds (Second Life)

Universal social networks (Facebook, MySpace)

Microblogging (Twitter)

Niche or special interest networks (Ning, corporate, industry)

Business networks (LinkedIn, Plaxo)

Automated discovery sites (Spoke, Rampleaf, ZoomInfo, Wink)

Automated business/professional services (Generate,

LexisNexis ExecRelate, and Collexis)

Twine(s) – semantic webs

User-generated content sites – viral video (YouTube, Flickr,

PhotoBucket, Helium)

Social bookmarking (Delicious)

Wikis

Auction sites (eBay, uBid)

Online malls (vintage-fashion – MakeMinePink, Buy It Sell It)

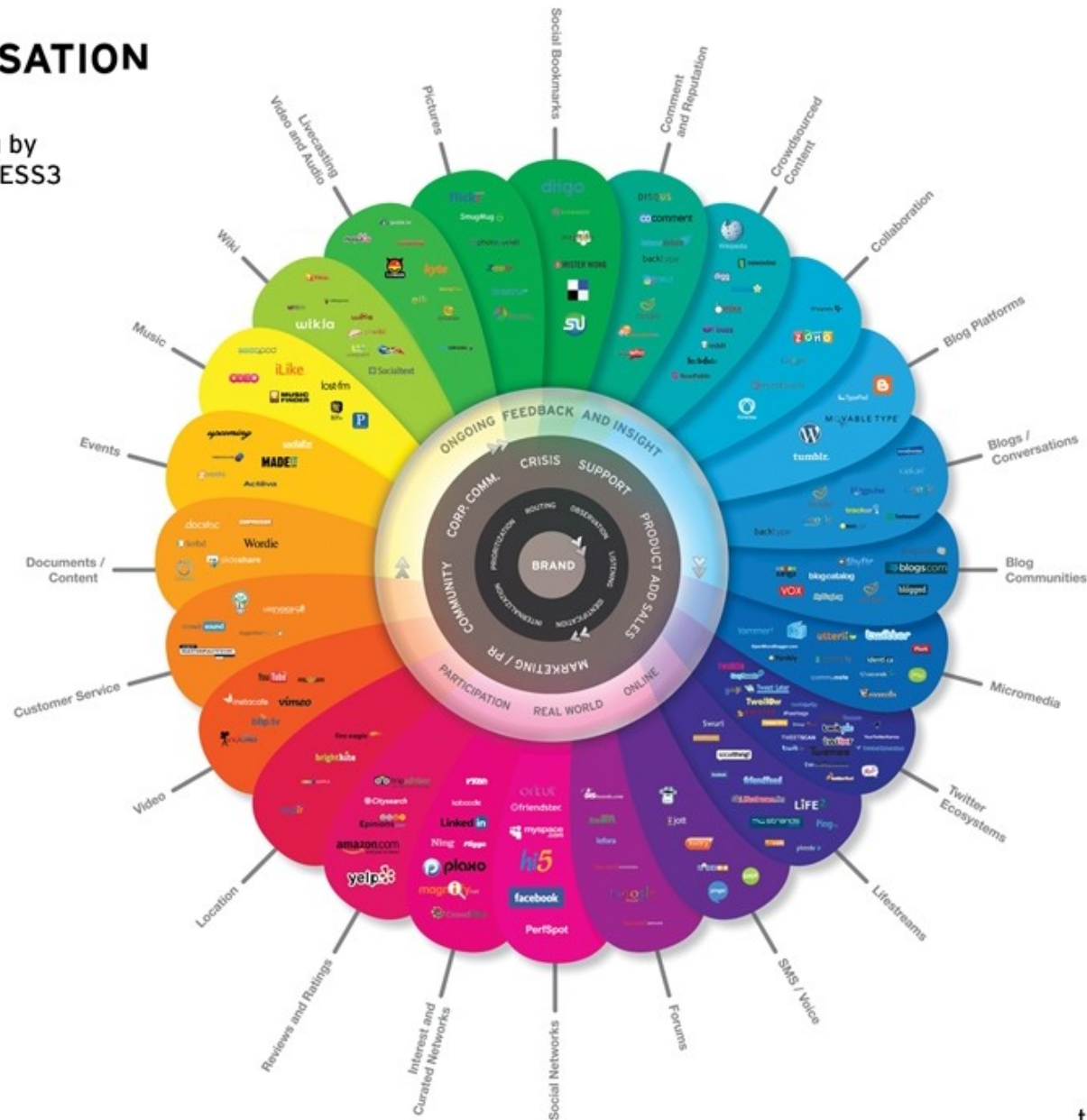
Product ratings and reviews (Amazon)

Consumer sites (Epinions)

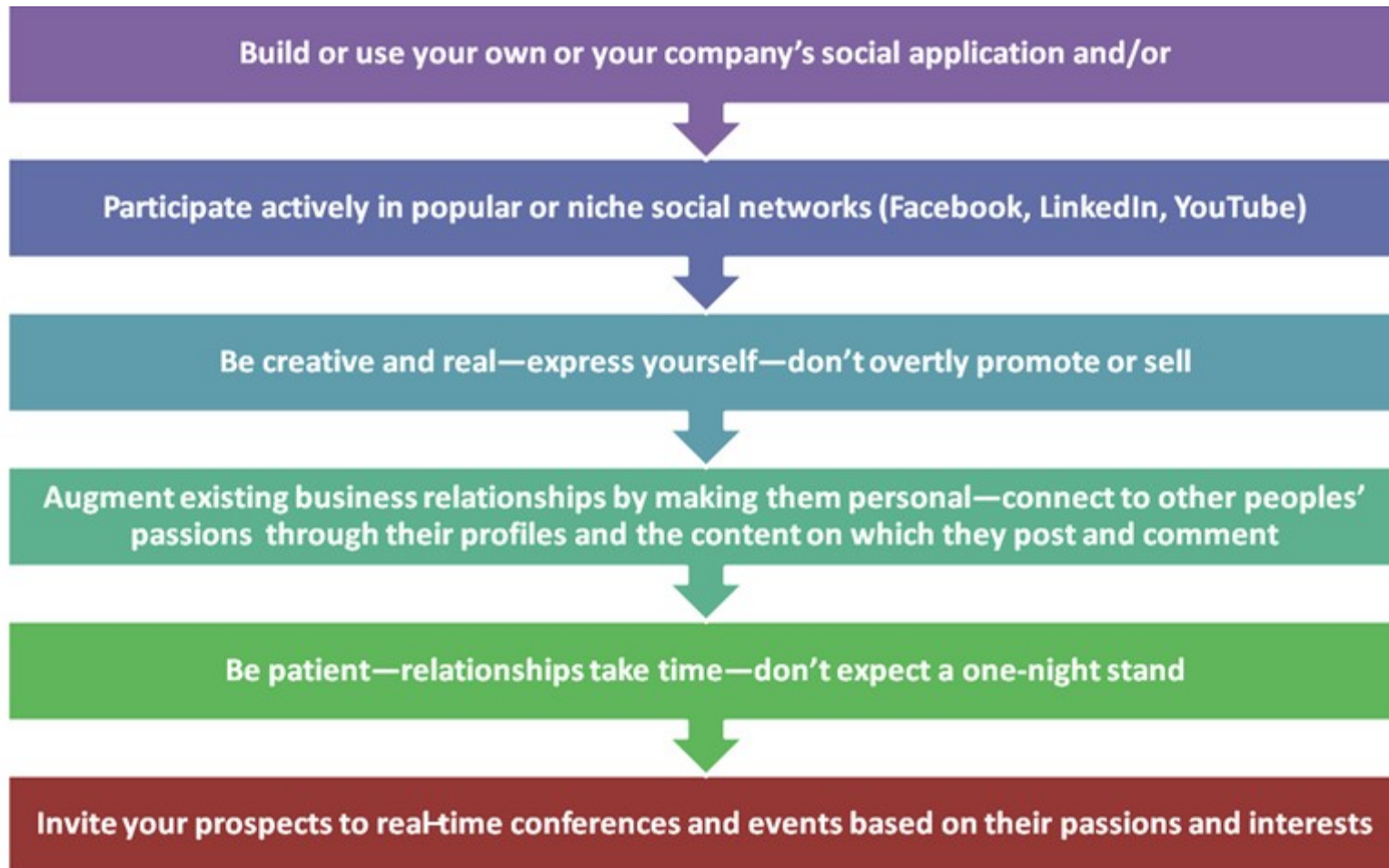
Classified (Craigslist)

THE CONVERSATION PRISM

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How to Play by the New Rules



Matching Social Media Features and Real-Time Communication Tools

Web 2.0 social media and real-time online meetings may appear to be distinct and different technologies, but in reality, they complement each other. Here is a brief comparison of each technology's unique benefits and features:

Social Network – Asynchronous	Web Conference/Webinar – Real Time
Users care and want to be there	Invite-register-capture information
Build relationships and trust over time	Interactive polling and chat
Personal – blogs, video, profiles, pictures	Direct contact for call to action
Natural – add content when impulse hits or schedule allows	Structured
Collaborative – forums, comments, email	Accountability
	Demo with shared desktop (social site features)

How do we integrate the use of social media with conferences and Webinars?

The first step is to creatively invest time and effort in the most relevant social sites and participate broadly:



"Think Oprah" – don't set goals or try to achieve instant results. Women do better in social media for a reason; they stay focused on building relationships.

Scenarios for Success

When Citibank wanted to promote their new Citi Forward credit card, they combined a social media campaign with a Webinar targeting financial media and mainly Gen Y users of financial services. The marketing team made sure that participants in the Webinar were well-known bloggers in the financial industry, and a follow-up campaign to the Webinar was planned on social networks like Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and YouTube. Most of the buzz about the Webinar was created directly by the blogger/panelists chosen by Citi's marketing team, and the moderator, a well-known financial podcaster who also worked for the Student Loan Network.

Mack Collier, a social media expert who participated in the event and wrote about it on his blog, actually used Twitter mainly to build critical mass, and says that he only contacted seven Twitter colleagues to help promote the Webinar. This builds on a central tenet of social media: these were key *influencers* and those with whom Collier already had long-term trusted relationships. (Collier adds in his blog that he doesn't respond to "pitches" from people who contact him for the first time with a proposal—he only favors those he knows well.) The result of using social media connections to promote the Webinar was that media registrants (the main target audience) exceeded the hoped for number by 100% and the event was a successful launch for Citi Forward. (Please see @Mack Collier in References)

While you might think that celebrities or athletes are the most powerful *influencers*, social media users know they are often paid for their opinions.

Active participation—not pitching—on social media lets you identify the most powerful influencers (pro and con)—passionate users of your product or service.

Blog Your Brains Out

If you don't know quite where to start, you can clear initial cobwebs if you "blog your brains out." Use a centralized "bully pulpit" to express your deepest feelings and passions about your professional and personal interests. If you are stuck on how to launch or use a blog, check out the Appendix for which types of "blogging roles" you would feel most comfortable filling, or which might be most useful to you. Then also look for relevant content on viral video (YouTube) and presentation sites (SlideShare, AuthorSTREAM).

Respond to comments actively and use other media such as YouTube video, images, music and hyperlinks to create an organic dialog with your audience. Use the comments and reactions to your blog, along with linked content, to build traction for potential online presentations and Webinars.

As your objectives begin to crystallize (remember to think in terms of value and not results), identify the top blogs in your field and contribute through comments to link back to your own blog or social site to begin to aggregate likeminded prospects for invitations to a Webinar or online conference.

As you gain experience and confidence, you can post your own videos (success stories, problems, in the trenches) and link back to your business or social site(s). This accentuates the synergy between blogs and real-time online conferences or Webinars—once you hold such events you will develop a library of archived recordings of the events; you can link people directly to the Webinar archive page or they can be hosted on a site like YouTube and embedded easily into your blog (follow up about the event and subsequent topics).

Most experts on social media agree that what you don't want to do is to use a blog or social site like a billboard. In Web 1.0 innovators disdained Web sites that were essentially "online brochures;" for today's more sophisticated level of end users, putting up a stream of commercial messages is a huge turnoff, especially among the youth.

Remember that this space is all about users learning from other users, so assuming the superior position of "broadcaster" or advertiser is self-defeating. Your main role is as a facilitator of the exchange of useful information, connections, ideas, opinions and probably most important, links to other synergistic sources.

Get all stakeholders involved in blogging or participating on the corporate or public social networks according to their specific passions. The potential for interacting with decision makers will allow potential conference attendees to feel connected with those making decisions and perhaps presenting at a live event.

When you really think about it, this is precisely the type of activity which will add value to the natural climax of your efforts—a Web conference or Webinar in which your enthusiastic connections will be able to finally interact and hear (and perhaps see) each other in real time. This will lead to increased connections and eventually sales through stronger relationships.

Crowdsourcing

Crowdsourcing is one of the most powerful ways to use social media in business. A great example is the turnaround Dell made in customer service when it created user forums, where computer users helped each other rather than having people call “outsourced” support lines with disinterested personnel reading scripts. Microsoft has similar forums where the most active participants who help the most people become “MVPs” and earn trips to Redmond for recognition and rewards.

But you don’t have to have a formal internal social network to encourage or reward passionate users for their input, advice or solutions to problems.

For example, Elaine, the cell phone marketing director, could move her social media efforts to the next level on MySpace or Facebook by running a contest for “The Most Annoying Thing about My Cell Phone,” promising a free year of service or a new phone for the best problems *and solutions*.

This discussion could also be moved over to her blog, and she might invite the best participants to serve as a panel during a Webinar to which all of the contest entrants and visitors are invited, and where the grand prize winner is announced. Most good collaborative Webinar tools also have polling. Imagine the excitement if the winner was the recipient of the most votes in a real-time, instant poll during the event.

Some have raised ethical concerns about the exploitation of users in crowdsourcing. However, if you keep the value proposition of “everybody wins” at the forefront and then bring the participants together in a real-time conference or Webinar—where there is no overt selling, but useful education and information being distributed—it can certainly add cohesiveness and loyalty to your brand.

Playing in Twitterville

Follow key players in your field through Twitter by developing a group of followers, aggregating “tweets” and responding using the #____hashtag feature to track the conversations. (Example: #fightskincancer might be a hashtag to aggregate tweets that you could use in a campaign to promote a new sunblock formula—consider a “Tweetathon” charity event tie-in, organized using a Webinar). A “Twistival,” or celebration promoted via tweets, could be hosted directly using an online collaboration tool that is highly scalable and allows for real-time participation.) Twitter can help you build critical mass quickly with resourcefulness and creativity, but don’t expect miracles.

Instead of telling people where you ate dinner, use simple features like a “Re-Tweet” (RT) to distribute significant posts from others in order to add value and get new connections.

Shel Israel, author of *Twitterville*, recently did an event where he used Twitter to answer students’ questions in a classroom in New England while he stayed home in Silicon Valley. He first used Twitter to begin the communication with the students, which he aggregated with a hashtag so that everyone could follow (using a filter) all of the preliminary questions and commentary.

The event was fun and the students loved it because it used Twitter (and presumably not PowerPoint), but you might still wonder—where were the visuals and the accountability? The climax of the event was a real-time (synchronous) class. It would seem that the best tool for this part of the project would be one where messaging was available (chat), along with voice (audio conferencing) and also some visuals. Suppose an important Web site came up as an answer to a question? How could it be shown?



While it is true that using only Twitter facilitated instant interaction with students using portable devices, a large screen

shared between Israel and the classroom would have added a very useful dimension to the conversation.

Add to that a whiteboard and a few other bells and whistles and the results might have been far more wide ranging. Using Twitter for the preliminary steps to build interest and gather questions would be extremely useful, but the real-time event would be best served by using a conferencing tool that allows for a full sensory experience in the audience, while still enabling instant dialogue—all you need is a moderated Q&A, chat or audio.

Twitter's main feature, the Status Update, lets you eavesdrop and participate in conversations relating directly to your brand, service or product. As a marketer this is “in the trenches” product research, because it's not getting filtered by a research firm of any staff members. For better or worse you are getting the word from people who are passionate enough to type out a message about their feelings.

On the other hand, it's easy to get overwhelmed by the sheer volume of irrelevant static or minutiae on Twitter and Facebook. Or it may begin to seem like all users are just self promoting—everyone is selling but no one is buying. Get yourself out of that paradigm and think in terms of creating value in your posts.

Once again the answer is to participate meaningfully: address comments candidly, engage in conversation where you listen as well as write posts, and you will find that you begin to attract a group of followers who respond to you and value the relationship.

Where do you locate like-minded Twitter users to follow? **Search.twitter.com** is a great way to start, and you can begin by listening and then jumping in. According to some social media specialists Twitter and Facebook are the ultimate forms of word of mouth—the equivalent of a knowing neighbor giving you the lowdown on the latest restaurant or lawn fertilizer.

Rather than searching or browsing for social threads on a specific product, like lawn fertilizer, think in terms of gardening or landscaping. Consider broader areas of interest where those who may use a given product or service in conjunction with others may express ideas and opinions.

At some point you may want to send an invitation to a Webinar about “Growing the Greenest Grass” to those Tweeters you’ve already talked to using a #gardening hash tag.

Sharing Social Bookmarks

You can build a prospect list through social bookmarks and networks (Delicious.com). Bookmarks, after all, are a great indicator of a person’s interests and the tags that a user assigns provide an even more precise set of guidelines to how they think and feel.

Karen, a health foods distributor, searches the Internet for detailed information about a particular kind of ginseng that she is thinking of promoting at her retail outlet. She bookmarks a global ginseng site on Delicious, and sees that there are 568 other users who have bookmarked the same site.

By clicking on the number, she gets immediate access to all of the 568 Delicious users who have publicly shared this bookmark, along with the other tags or key words that indicate more about their interest in ginseng: herbs, stress control, anxiety, stomach pain, and so on.

Now she could click on any of these tags in her Tag list and find the top bookmarked sites for any of these subcategories, which may be helpful, but by clicking on a few other users that share key words like herbs and stress, she stumbles upon a network in Delicious that aggregates bookmarks on herbs and stress management (natural healing). She joins that network and begins to contribute her own tagged bookmarks and subscribes to a feed that sends her new bookmarks tagged ginseng, stress, and herbs.

As she finds new users with similar bookmarks, she invites them to the network in which she’s active on natural healing. When she has a critical mass of natural healing members on the network, she offers an educational Webinar on the uses, types and benefits of ginseng.

During the Webinar she shares her desktop to conduct an online “world tour” of ginseng, describing its various flavors and properties, and makes the URLs of the tour available in a handout to attendees.

She promotes her own blog, “Natural Serenity,” during the Webinar, and makes connections with a few retailers who agree to stock the ginseng she has imported from Korea. Her sharing of knowledge about the herb resonates through her Delicious network, her blog and other social media sites, enhancing the cache of her Lotus Ginseng line, which she continues to support by responding to comments on her blog and on the network on Delicious.

Through her continued aggregation of new Web sites and interested users on Delicious, she stays active and keeps educating new people, thus expanding her brand presence. The Webinars become monthly events and she cross promotes them with other health-related natural products.

Doing a Ning Thing

There are a number of Web programs and sites that let you create your own branded social network, as opposed to forming a group in a public network like Facebook or MySpace. For example, www.ning.com now has over a million members and thousands of social networks.

The first step is to create an identity for all of Ning; then you find and join the social networks you want. If you’re just getting started in social media, Ning is a great way to search for networks in your profession or industry and begin to connect with others. Using the discussion forums helps you to form new relationships and get a feel for what works and what doesn’t—you’ll quickly see how self-promotion is ignored while active participation is rewarded.

There is also a Ning network devoted to its network creators (<http://networkcreators.ning.com>) and a Ning blog (<http://blog.ning.com>) that highlights new and interesting social networks. Even by looking at (and joining) networks in areas that are directly connected with your own, you can see how the basic network features enable a community of users helping and communicating with other users to flourish.

A branded Ning network can help you in a number of ways: first to get comfortable with the various features, and then to create a real venue where members can do what social media does best—share ideas and information with each other while you act as a host and facilitator.

An even better way to get a feel for these features is to create your own social network with Ning, even if it's just as a small test to see which features will best support your goals.

Briefly, each Ning has a unique Layout determined by its administrator. Ning's default features (already in Layout) include a network Description, a list of Members, Videos, Photos, a Forum or Discussion Area and Activity (like Twitter's Status Update). Using a simple drag and drop process, the Administrator can add additional features to the Layout of the Main Page:

Events	Text Box
Groups	RSS
Blog	Get Badges
Chat	Birthdays
Music	Notes

On the day I wrote this section, the featured Ning on the Ning blog was a network called Sneaker Lab. There is very little about the actual "sponsor" on the network—Maurice Taylor, an NBA player with two stores in the Houston area. Instead there is a music video and music playlist of artists and songs that young people who buy high-end athletic footwear favor, music videos by similar artists, and very beautiful pictures and reviews of hot-looking sneakers. Taylor appears in an audio blog where he talks about the NBA playoffs—an item of major interest to the Sneaker Lab members. The main event highlighted on the network was a sneaker extravaganza at a club in Houston.

Now consider: on a national level, if you were the importer of a new line of athletic footwear, wouldn't you be extremely interested in how others in your industry were viewed on this network? Wouldn't you love to have one of your products reviewed on the site? And then, at some point, couldn't you just as easily promote an online event, using a contest or giveaway, not directly about your sneakers, but perhaps about a topic that's hot on the site? For example, maybe Taylor himself could be induced to come onto a Web conference and discuss a topic like "Fashion or Passion? Do You Need a Shoe for the Clubs or the Gym?"

With enough traction you could research members through their profiles and shared content—and then promote Webinars and conferences related to their interests. You could then post archived events on YouTube and link back to them on your various networks to build interaction and dialog, creating additional buzz about online events that add value for your members and potential customers.

Shopping as Entertainment

Make your Webinar a *special event*: educational, motivational, and entertaining to create real-time excitement. Preview the event on social sites with videos, music, images and testimonials. Post archived recordings on YouTube, solicit feedback and comments in a blog or wiki. Link to or embed the recording on other social sites.

Women shop differently from men—they shop for *entertainment*.

According to a recent social media survey by BlogHer, along with iVillage and Compass Partners, “42 million women in the United States (roughly 53% of the 79 million adult women in the United States who use the Internet) participate in social media at least weekly. As they spend more time with social media, women are spending correspondingly less time with traditional media: 39% less on newspapers, 36% less time reading magazines, and 30% less time watching TV.” (Source: <http://smallbiztrends.com/2009/05/42-million-women-use-social-media-blogs.html>)

In their book *Groundswell*, Li and Bernoff refer to a group of consumers highly valued in our economy: the “Alpha Moms” who control a majority of American households’ buying power. To reach this highly cherished group companies have created social networks that promote the notion of women helping and supporting each other in their purchase decisions; in the true spirit of social media the company becomes the facilitator of the exchange. For example on a blog run by an Alpha Mom a grocery chain offers ideas on how to get the family to spend time together over dinner (instead of trumpeting the features or even the benefits of its offerings).

As a friend of mine with an online mall pointed out, women shop differently from men—in her words they shop for *entertainment*. They might peruse an item in an online store with a social site to learn more about how it looks and fits into their lifestyle before they can reasonably afford it. They love to get the lowdown from other shoppers on their experiences and exchange stories over a host of social media: Twitter, Facebook, blogs or the social site of a smart company that hosts a blog or social network to facilitate such discussions.

But if you think about entertainment value, what could be better than such a group of like-minded consumers being brought together for a special event online, in the form of a Web conference or Webinar, with a panel by their peers or a well-respected blogger or expert, where they can gather information and ask questions of each other in real time?

Alpha Moms generally start off as “critics” but can be turned into loyal champions with useful information.

My friend Carole and her colleagues fill their eBay and online stores with used merchandise. She is currently planning a Webinar on how to shop in thrift stores, and she will have an eager audience that has followed her on a well-attended blog, where she conscientiously posts and responds to comments and keeps it interesting with personal stories and images. Her plan is to build excitement through the blog and on Facebook and Twitter, and even help plan the event through feedback from her followers. Through her frequent blog posts she intends to post images (which will also be in the PowerPoint presentation at the Webinar) that give a taste of what the online event will offer.

The result will be a Webinar in which participants will get great tips on buying pre-owned merchandise and have lots of fun hearing each other over the conference phone line. Meanwhile, my friend’s online mall will get a boost in traffic and sales.

Harnessing Dedicated Business Social Networks

Business social networks like LinkedIn and Plaxo combine the energy of widespread networks with the focus and functionality of technology with a purpose. While many users see these sites as ways of building an expanded network of contacts and potential prospects, savvy marketers use some of the advanced features to build stronger relationships.

For example, LinkedIn has many of the features of common social networks—invites, status updates, groups and so on, but as a business network it has tools that connect directly to a very important aspect of business development—your contact management system.

A LinkedIn Outlook toolbar lets you:

- Build your network from frequent contacts
- Manage your LinkedIn contacts in Microsoft® Outlook®
- Stay connected to your network

The other terrific aspect of LinkedIn is its ability to take advantage of SEO (search engine optimization) capabilities for finding members and doing research. By changing the URL of your public profile to match your name, you enable users of Google and other indexing tools to easily find your blog or Web site(s) from your LinkedIn profile. Almost all social media sites support keywords or *tags*; in LinkedIn, adding significant key words to your Summary and Experience fields makes them pop up in search engines, so that you can locate potential contacts using the same search parameters you put into your own profile.

The Advanced Search window for People or Reference is a great research tool to locate individuals by drilling down a host of useful parameters. In the Answers section of LinkedIn you can make connections based on important issues; for example, by asking a question like, “What are the key issues in getting return bookings in the business travel industry?” you can begin to aggregate a network comprised of both experts and passionate travelers.

In some ways using social media is like dating; when do you ask for a phone number or move the conversation from email to voice? There are no rules—a sense of trust must develop due to mutual respect and communication so that both parties feel safe about moving communication to the next level—from asynchronous to real time.

All of these features make business social networks rife for follow up with a real-time Web conference or Webinar. First of all, the invitations, registration and organization of guests into groups are facilitated by the integration with your email client and contact management program (Outlook being the most popular).

Then, the ability to not only get referrals, but to exchange information and ideas with users that you identify, learn more about and filter through a Q&A, Group or Advanced Search gives you a chance to focus any real-time Webinar or conference on issues that users feel passionately about. For example, a Webinar targeted to the results of research and search for the question above might be, “Eight Successful Strategies for Retaining Business Travel Clients.”

Using the connections of the business network with Outlook, you could easily process invitations and registration through a targeted distribution list and use the Webinar to get traffic to a product or service, such as a business travel Web site. You might find that some of the experts that answered your question on LinkedIn might be on a panel in the Webinar in exchange for promoting their blogs among the targeted attendees.

YouTube Is No Boob Tube

While many people think of YouTube as an entertainment site where they can watch snippets of broadcast television, many companies use it as a viral marketing site to build their brand, accumulate comments and feedback, and augment relationships they’ve nurtured on other social sites.

There are three powerful ways to use YouTube:

- As a hosting platform from which to organize, embed or link your content to other sites efficiently.

Asking for the Date

In some ways using social media is like dating; when do you ask for a phone number or move the conversation from email to voice? There are no rules—a sense of trust must develop due to mutual respect and communication so that both parties feel safe about moving communication to the next level—from asynchronous to real time.

- Building and supporting your brand through your YouTube profile or channel
- Create or join an existing group and participate in lively discussions with others

All of these strategies can enable you aggregate friends and comments; you can add your new YouTube friends directly on the site. But the linking and embedding capability of sites like YouTube provide an easy way to distributing your content all over the Web. You can use a link to send an email to a distribution list that takes recipients directly to your YouTube entry and channel or get a link and thumbnail up on Facebook, or you can embed content easily in many social network pages or blog; just copy and paste either the embed code or the link into the appropriate page.

Winning New Friends with Widgets

J.A. Jones, author of the Speak Media blog (www.speakmediablog.com) and a social media consultant has been a “big fan of these fun little tools for many years. They are increasingly popular with Web savvy consumers. ([According to eMarketer], widgets are used by 43.5% of adults and 77% of the teen Internet population.)” So what are widgets and how can you use them effectively?

Widgets are eye-catching animations or videos captured in snippets of code that users can easily copy and paste into their blogs, Web pages or profiles on social sites to spread the word on things they find interesting and important. Social media sites vie to offer the best and most creative widgets to get users to link back to them, thus increasing their traffic and traction in the market.

On her blog Jones describes a widget created for a pet supply company that social media users could share and also put on their desktops; the widget displayed an animated cat or dog scratching when their flea collar needed a replacement.

Taking this scenario a step further, suppose you were the client and offered a Webinar on battling your pet’s pests—the same widget could bark or meow to prompt users to sign up for the event and then remind them when the event actually occurs.

A widget like this could be particularly effective in counteracting a big problem with Web events—no shows. Many users are inundated with many Webinar invitations right now; they sign up but when the event occurs they forget or are otherwise occupied.

A widget, with a link to the registration page and then to the actual event could help people remember to log in and participate, or could direct them to the archived recording afterward.

Synergy between Social Media and Webinars

At this point we've detailed the various ways that social media can expand your business model in terms of communicating with your customers, clients, prospects or colleagues. But for all of its features that bind users and consumers into communities of passion, social media has a drawback: each person participates in his or her own space and time. This makes clear decisions among groups difficult. The solution to this limitation is *the integration of social media with real-time communication tools*.

There are three key elements to successfully using a Web conference or Webinar as part of your social media strategy:

1. Stay coherent
2. Make it valuable (and fun) for attendees
3. Use real-time tools effectively

Stay Coherent

You can't be a valued member of a community of like interest and suddenly revert back to Sales 101 when you promote or plan a Webinar. Make sure when you meet online, you maintain the same set of values that have gotten you to the critical mass of connections that makes a real-time event likely to succeed. If you promote on Facebook with a status update, keep it in the spirit of comments and interactions you've already posted; for example, instead of "Join Us for a Low-Cost Singles Cruise" you might consider "Meet Your New Friends at a Pre-Cruise Online Party."

Make It Valuable (and Fun) for the Attendees

Remember how Mack Collier's group used well-respected financial bloggers in the Citi Forward campaign to make potential Webinar attendees feel confident about the event's credibility and that significant information would be provided? Similarly, the teenage social site MyYearbook featured an online prom for its high school participants; if they'd put on a Webinar offering to sell formal apparel it would have been an obvious sales event. But with the fun and excitement of a real-time online event, complete with music and activities, a tuxedo sponsor did quite well.

Use Real-Time Tools Effectively

Besides the ability of a Webinar or Web conference to influence purchasing decisions or future courses of action, the tools themselves have specific abilities to stimulate interaction that is not available through social media. For example, while polling can be done on a social site, it happens over an extended time and the results are drawn out and not easily leveraged; on the other hand, during a Webinar you can get almost instant polling results and respond immediately and creatively.

While PowerPoint has a bad rap, there are effective ways to use it to communicate an important message, and it has a different impact, along with Web sites, software apps or powerful images, when a group is viewing it together; plus, you can have live Q&A. Webinars also include whiteboards and shared desktops that let you demonstrate, simulate or explain ideas that the audience may have suggested in the social media world, but now you can present the information dramatically for a live audience.



When a relationship is established, an ad hoc conference lets you connect directly and immediately on an issue of mutual interest.

When the Moment Is Right

After establishing a connection through any tool, use an ad hoc conference to connect directly and immediately on an issue of mutual interest. (Example: "I noted your blog comment on losing customers due to poor customer service ratings. Could we spend 15 minutes in a Web conference where I can show you how to solve this problem?")

For larger meetings you will need some patience to see results in terms of achieving a critical mass that ensures success. You need to sustain any strategy with the tools above over time, posting regularly and responding consistently over the long haul.

Then, remember that knowing the audience through research is a key to a successful Web meeting, conference or Webinar. In their book *Groundswell*, Li and Bernoff break users of social media into six categories: Creators, Critics, Collectors, Joiners, Spectators, and Inactives.

By identifying these characteristics among the people with whom you interact online and keeping them in mind when you promote and deliver your online content, you can tailor your message and strategy more effectively for each of these groups.

Best Practices for Using Real-Time Collaboration with Social Media

Participate in what means the most to you (be real and effective).

- Be generous with your time and information (share and share alike).

Welcome any new members to social networks.

- Comment meaningfully on content that you find and bring relevant content to the mix.

Wherever your prospects or customers play, ask for ratings and reviews of your product/service.

- Don't confront negatives; use these as issues to address when presenting your product or service at online conferences and Webinars.

Dig deep into user profiles, blogs and comments.

- Connect profile info with your Contact Database.

Target social media invitations based on what you have gotten to know about your audience and tracked in your database.

- Offer significant benefits for participating in the online follow-up conference or Webinar.

Put together a library of images or videos that provide information, generate ideas or just entertain.

- Post them on image and video hosting sites and coordinate with your online presentations.

Prepare Custom Shows in PowerPoint for ad hoc Web conferencing sessions for different kinds of situations.

- Custom Shows can heighten interest, increase motivation, and facilitate a close or a call to action.

Post your best and also your unfinished presentations on SlideShare, AuthorSTREAM and YouTube (video) to get user feedback and comments.

- Stimulate conversation and actively link to these from Twitter or Facebook, your blog or other social site(s).

(Hint: Use Anagram software to grab contact information and events off the Web—at getanagram.com).

Closing Thoughts

More and more companies already realize the need for using social media and have created networks that reach out to the public and customers. These sites engage the real needs and passions of their visitors; as you discover and join them, you can gather information and background on colleagues, customers and prospects through their activities and profiles.

In addition, you can use the popular and especially niche networks and sites to research your field and, most importantly, to build relationships with potential customers and Webinar attendees. This makes their active participation in a conference or Webinar based on what they value potentially much more productive for both you and them.

What you achieve is what Patrice-Anne Rutledge calls “the virtual water cooler,” the modern equivalent of the watering hole in the desert. It’s where people go because they want to be there, and it is where you also need to be.

The key is not to approach the watering hole as a predator, but rather as a colleague with a similar thirst for community, knowledge and self-expression.

Appendix

In his book, *Blog Marketing*, Jeremy Wright identifies seven distinct blogger types you may recognize:

- *The Barber* – a generalist who has accumulated and shares wisdom based on personal contacts and experience.
- *The Blacksmith* – an insider or company person who “hammers” industry opinion based on his or her corporate perspective.
- *The Bridge* – a person who makes connections and brings people together, using the blog as a networking vehicle. Such a blogger may also placate controversies and act as a peacekeeper.
- *The Window* – also works within a company environment but brings in information from outside, following trends in the industry.

- *The Signpost* – an industry commentator and aggregator of useful and cool things of interest. (Wright's book was written before Twitter's ascendancy; this type of blogger will typically post many short items and links as she comes across items of interest.)
- *The Pub* – this type of blogger generates lively opinions and discussions and explores all sides. (At this point this function may also be addressed by the discussion forums of many social networks, both public and those hosted by companies).
- *The Newspaper* – rather than opinion (which will be invariably generated) this type of blog is primarily fact-based and is particularly apt for technical environments.

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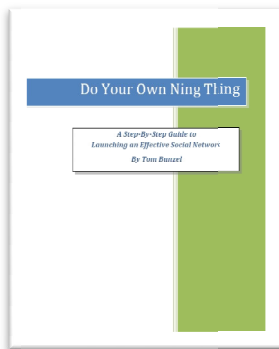
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About the Author

Tom Bunzel specializes in knowing what presenters need and how to make technology work. He has appeared on Tech TV's Call for Help as "Professor PowerPoint" and has been a featured speaker at InfoComm and PowerPoint LIVE, as well as working as a "technology coach" for corporations including Iomega, MTA Films, Nurses in Partnership and the Neuroscience Education Institute. He has taught regularly at Learning Tree International, West LA College Extension and privately around Southern California and does presentation and video consulting in Southern California.

Tom Bunzel has written a number of books, the latest being *Master Visually Microsoft Office 2007* and wrote a weekly column as the Office Reference Guide for InformIT.com. Published in 2006, "Solving the PowerPoint Predicament: Using Digital Media for Effective Communication" is a detailed, project-oriented approach to creating effective multimedia presentations. His new eBook, "Do Your Own Ning Thing: A Step-By-Step Guide to Launching an Effective Social Network," is available at http://www.professorppt.com/ning_how.htm.



Tom Bunzel's other books are *Teach Yourself PowerPoint 2003 in 24 Hours*, *Easy Digital Music*, *Easy Creating CDs and DVDs*, *How to Use Ulead DVD Workshop*, *Digital Video on the PC* and the update to PeachPit Press' *Visual QuickStart Guide to PowerPoint 2002/2001*. He can be reached through his Web site at <http://www.professorppt.com> or his blog: <http://www.tbunzel.blogspot.com>.