8. social media

What's inside: An **introduction to social media** and a brief breakdown of the **history** of this phenomenon, followed by the **key terms and concepts** required. There's so much to learn in **how it works**, and it's broken up into social media for **bookmarking and aggregating**, for **creating and sharing content**, social networks for **connecting** and blogging and podcasting for **creating content and opinion**. We take at look at **marketing using social media** and how social media has **changed traditional media**. There's a little difference to the **tools of the trade**, and of course we end with the **pros and cons**, a **summary** and a look at **how it all fits together.**

introduction

Blogs, wikis, social bookmarks, tag clouds – new words for new things, and new ways to use words. You may be living in the world of social media, but to many it's a jumbled jungle with no clear structure.

The many facets of social media are also called Web 2.0, consumer generated media, citizen media and new media. In fact, comparing social media to traditional media is probably the most useful way of defining what exactly this means.

Most simply put, social media are media (from written to visual to audio to audio visual) that are designed to be shared. Sharing means that it is easy to comment on, that it is easy to send, and that there are no high costs associated with viewing the media. And, because of the connected nature of the Internet, it means that sharing, commenting and viewing can all be tracked and measured.

Traditional Media	Social Media
Fixed, unchangeable	Instantly updateable
Commentary limited and not real-time	Unlimited real-time commentary
Limited, time-delayed bestseller lists	Instant popularity gauge
Archives poorly accessible	Archives accessible
Limited media mix	All media can be mixed
Committee publishers	Individual publishers
Finite	Infinite
Sharing not encouraged	Sharing and participation encouraged
Control	Freedom

The Internet, and the software developed to run on it, has made it simple for anyone to publish and distribute. It has also made it simple for anyone to access the content that has been published.

The realm of social media is about collaboration, users generating content, sharing and, most of all, it is about connecting.

history

Blogs are probably the best known example of social media. One of the earliest online journals recorded was www.links.net, the online diary of Justin Hall, which he kept for 11 years from 1994 (Harmanci, 2005). From the very first days of the Internet, early adopters used it to create personal content.

These online diaries were referred to as "weblogs" for "web" and "log", but in April or May of 1999, Peter Merholz unwittingly coined the term "blog" by adding the following to the sidebar of his web site peterme.com:

> "For What It's Worth
> I've decided to pronounce the word "weblog" as wee'- blog. Or "blog" for short."

Developers began creating tools that made it easier for anyone to start a blog. Blogger, a popular blogging platform, was launched in August 1999 and acquired by Google in 2003. In 2001, Wikipedia, probably the most well known wiki, was created.

Technorati, which tracks blogs and tagged social media, launched in 2002. As of April 2008, Technorati was tracking 112.8 million blogs and noted in 2007 that 1.4 new blogs were being created every second.

Social media is not just about blogging, though, and several platforms that made sharing other kinds of content easier have come to the fore. Flickr, the online photo sharing tool, launched in February 2004 and was bought by Yahoo! in June 2005.

By this stage, the social media buzzwords and neologisms were being picked up by the mainstream press, and in 2004, Merriam-Webster dictionary chose "blog" as the word of the year.

key terms and concepts

Blog A blog is a type of web site that allows users (bloggers) to post entries on different topics and often allows readers to comment on these posts.

Blogosphere The world of blogs, bloggers and blog posts.

Bookmarking Saving the web address of a web page or web site so that it may be easily referred to. Bookmarks can be managed with a browser, or with an online tool.

Chicklets In social media, chicklets are little buttons that makes it easy to share or save information using social media services.

Crowdsourcing Harnessing the skills, talents and ideas of a broader community, usually through social media.

Flog A fake blog is known as a flog.

Folksonomy Categorisation or taxonomy based on social media tags.

Microblogging The practice of sending brief text updates (usually, 140 – 200 characters), images as well as audio clips and publishing them online, either to be viewed by anyone or by a restricted group which can be chosen by the user.

Permalink A unique URL which points to the permanent location of a single blog post and its associated comments and TrackBacks.

Ping Packet Internet Groper - a utility that verifies a link or a connection to the Internet.

Social network In the online sense, this refers to a type of web site model where individual members become part of a broader virtual community.

Tag In social media, tags indicate or label what content is about.

Taxonomy Classification and division into ordered categories, usually hierarchical. In social media, taxonomy can refer to the categorization of content on the Internet.

TrackBack A mechanism used in a blog that shows a list of entries in other blogs that refer to a post on the first blog.

Vlog A video based blog, also called a video blog.

Wiki A simple web site that can be edited in real time by a number of users.

YouTube, the online video sharing web site, previewed in May 2005 and launched six months later. It was acquired by Google in November 2006 for $1.65 billion. Twitter, which allows for users to share 140 character tweets, launched in October 2006.

In 2006, Time Magazine named "You" as the Time Person of the Year for "the growth and influence of user-generated content on the internet."

how it works

Social media has changed the world we market in, and can be used as an integral part of an online marketing campaign. Social media is all about the ways that we create, connect and share online.

bookmarking and aggregating
– sharing things you like

If there are web sites that you visit often, or that you would like to keep as a reference to come back to, it is easy to use your browser to "bookmark" them. This means that you store the URL so that you can locate it again easily. It also gives you a personal library of web sites that you can store on your computer.

Social bookmarking sites, however, allow you store these links online, use tags to describe them and share these lists with other users. Some of these sites let you submit URLs that other users vote on, while others allow you to use the tags saved to browse through the lists and libraries that have been generated.

Web sites which want to encourage users to submit content to bookmarking and aggregating sites use chicklets. These are buttons placed around the content that make it easier to submit and share the article.

These services allow you to see what the community of web users finds useful, interesting or humorous. You are able to find other users with similar interests to yours, and explore the web sites that they have found that you might not have come across yet.

Social bookmarking allows like-minded people to share interesting and relevant content with one another easily. It can also be an excellent tool for members of a company or organisation to earmark relevant web sites and articles. Content submitted to a social bookmarking or aggregating site can dramatically increase traffic to a web site, and expose the site to many new eyeballs.

del.icio.us (del.icio.us) is a social bookmarking site which was created in 2003 by Joshua Schacter and today boasts over 3 million users (Arrington, 2007). It was designed to be a site which would help Internet users organise online media in a quick,

easy to access and user-friendly format. Now owned by Yahoo!, the primary function of del.icio.us is to allow you to store all of your bookmarks online and then to allow you to access those bookmarks from any computer anywhere in the world. del.icio.us is more of a community based tool in comparison to the other social bookmarking tools out there, as it allows others to see your bookmarks. Essentially it lets you identify other people whose interests and concerns parallel yours and grants you access to all of their bookmarks as well.

Check out del.icio.us/quirkemarketingtextbook to see some of the URLs we think are relevant to your eMarketing studies and career.

Digg (www.digg.com), **Muti** (www.muti.co.za) and **Reddit** (www.reddit.com) are sites where users submit content which other users can then vote on. Popularity, based on votes, moves the submitted content up and down lists which are available on these sites. Submitting and voting requires registration, but there are many, many people who visit these sites to get an overview of content that is "hot". In fact, in early 2008, Digg was at 170 in the Alexa rankings. Although its traffic is declining, it's still generating plenty of traffic each day.

Appearing on the top of these lists generates a huge increase in traffic for the content sites, so much so that servers can crash if the leap in visitors is unexpected. Getting into the top listings is a prize eyed by many a marketer, but any attempt to manipulate listings usually backfires and can generate plenty of community backlash.

The communities around these sites differ demographically, and this is reflected in the content. For example, Digg has been technology focused, while Reddit tends to have more general news.

Stumbleupon (www.stumbleupon.com) lets you explore the Web through your interests, based on how other Web users tag content. Users select categories of interest and bookmark URLs to those categories. You can then choose to "stumble" through the Web using the category of your choice. The service will randomly show you a web site that has been submitted to that category.

Stumbleupon allows users to explore the web based on the taxonomy applied by other users. Instead of looking to search engines for relevance, users are instead appealing to the knowledge of a community.

Technorati (www.technorati.com) started life as a real-time blog search engine but has since evolved to incorporate other forms of user generated content including images and videos. According to technorati.com/about, Technorati finds itself tracking over 112 million blogs and 250 million pieces of tagged social media as of early 2008. Internationally it is THE blog aggregator and an essential tool for anyone who operates online.

Technorati's core is a tag-based index that allows users to conduct searches on topics that interest them. Contributors are able to tag their individual posts – the better tagged a post, the better chance it has of being picked up by a relevant search. Instead of contributors being separated into categories it is the content of each individual post that is indexed. Technorati doesn't just search the blogs of subscribed members though – it also operates as a normal search engine.

Technorati can also be used to keep tabs on Internet buzz, both to monitor online reputation and to see what trends are emerging.

bookmarking and aggregating as marketing tools

Seeing how users categorise your content will give you an idea of how your web site and company are perceived by your audience. It might be remarkably different to what you think they see you as. Look at what other web sites are tagged similarly. You might find new competitors, and possibly new ideas.

You can also use these services to share what other URLs your company finds interesting. This can be a useful resource to add to an online press room, as well as a utility that fanatics of your company would get really excited about.

To create link love and traffic, investigate what sort of content your target audience loves voting for, and get creating that content. A word of warning: never do the content submission and voting yourself. It's one sure-fire way to incur the wrath of these communities.

Organic growth is the only way to go here. It might take time as you build your reputation and worth amongst the community, but the end result can be very worthwhile.

As a content provider, make sure you have the appropriate chicklets added to your content to make it easier to share.

Chicklets can be standard, like on www.gottaquirk.com on the left, or can be adapted as www.timesonline.co.uk have done on the right.

content sharing – create and share

YouTube may be the first content sharing site that comes to mind, but users share images, audio and information as well as video. If it can be created, it can be shared. There are many sites that facilitate that sharing of videos, images and audio, and they are exceptionally popular. From Flickr to YouTube, they have all tapped into the fact that we love to create content for others to view.

The key word here is free: there are no fees for joining, whether you are uploading content or viewing content (although premium paid for memberships can allow you further features). This means that these sites attract an enormous audience. In fact, according to Alexa rankings, YouTube is the second most visited site in the world!

Many of these services also encourage distribution of their content. YouTube allows videos to be embedded easily into other web sites, and Flickr has generated a number of applications and widgets that allows the images to be shown all over the web (and even printed onto cards and stickers via www.moo.com).

Most of these web sites rely on advertising to support the free services they offer and some have a premium paid for membership version which is without adverts.

video sharing

YouTube (www.youtube.com) is essentially a web site which, by using Flash technology, allows users to upload, view and share videos with the rest of the connected world. These videos can range from music, movie and television clips to homemade amateur videos and vlogs.

YouTube has 60% of all online video viewers with up to 79 million viewers in an evening (Yen, 2008) and over 65,000 videos uploaded every day. This makes it both the premier online video site and social video sharing site online. This implies that most video consumption on the Web is already based on social media, and that there are over 130 million online viewers of video overall (ibid, 2008). YouTube was acquired by Google in 2006 for $1.65 billion. In fact, according to comScore data, the number of searches on YouTube make it the second largest search engine.

YouTube is a complex site offering numerous features, yet it is simple to use. While it is possible for unregistered users to watch most of the publicly available videos, a quick, straightforward registration process allows members to upload an unlimited number of clips, comment on and add video responses to them and subscribe to content feeds that catch their attention and interest. Frequently enhanced functionality and clever features on YouTube continually push this site to deliver bigger and better services to its ever-increasing user base.

Many marketers have adopted the opportunities afforded by YouTube. There are two aspects of marketing through YouTube - self-promotion of people and products such as music videos, movie previews, interviews, video-advertisements, and sponsored adverts, supplied by Google AdWords.

YouTube has changed the way we view video adverts. Marketers, such as BMW, have shown that if an advert is good enough, many people will choose to watch it. BMW has created a BMW South Africa channel on YouTube, and has uploaded many of their adverts. One of them has been viewed over a million times since August 2006.

These are people who have chosen to watch this advert at a media cost of zero! Other advertisers have realised that far longer adverts can be created and uploaded. As long as the content is good, there will be viewers. Time constraints are not the same as they are for TV networks.

BMW South Africa's YouTube success.

Savvy marketers also realise the potential of watching for organic mentions of their brand, and then capitalising on this. An unknown teenage girl, with the YouTube account name Bowiechick, made a 75 second video clip about her break-up with a boyfriend. While making the clip she played with some of the effects on her new webcam, like putting ears on her head and a moustache on her face with its facial tracking software. Three days after uploading the video, 178,000 people had seen this video and 900 had commented on it. The comments had nothing to do with the break up but with the Logitech webcam she had used in the video. Following this, the camera broke into Amazon's Top 100 bestselling products list. Logitech were obviously listening and made the most of the opportunity by becoming YouTube's official partner (Sandoval, 2006).

The medium of online video sharing also means that conferences are able to generate a far greater audience than ever before. The companies that sponsor or run these conferences are able to engage with a larger audience by making freely available videos of the various sessions held. TED (www.ted.com) and Nokia's Nokia World are excellent examples of organisations that increase interest by making their remarkable presentations available for free.

knowledge sharing – the wiki

note

"Wiki wiki" means "rapidly" in the Hawaiian language.

Howard G. "Ward" Cunningham, pioneer of the wiki, began programming the WikiWikiWeb software in 1994 and installed it on the web site of his software consultancy in 1995. Back then he described a wiki as "The simplest online database that could possibly work." 13 years later this is probably still the most accurate description.

Essentially, a wiki is a piece of software which users can create and edit online, using simple mark-up language via a web browser. They support hyperlinks and have a simple text syntax for creating new pages and links between internal pages. In its most basic form, a wiki is a web site that supports user collaboration through a variety of functions.

There are numerous types of wiki software available that share the following characteristics:

- **Create and update documents:** Wiki users have the ability to create and update documents easily.
- **Review versions:** Most wikis store each version of a document. This functionality makes it easy for users to view the various modifications that a document has undergone over time.
- **Community-oriented tools:** Most wikis provide users with an ability to engage in some form of discussion about the documents on which they are collaborating.

Wikis can be open to all, such as Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org) and Wikitravel (www.wikitravel.org); they can be open to or aimed at certain communities only, such as Geek Dinner attendees (geekdinner.pbwiki.com); or they can be private and open only to individuals within an organisation. Internal wikis are exceptionally useful for creating knowledge bases within organisations and companies.

note

If you'd like to try out setting up your own wiki, **www.pbwiki.com** provides free wikis and has a host of features.
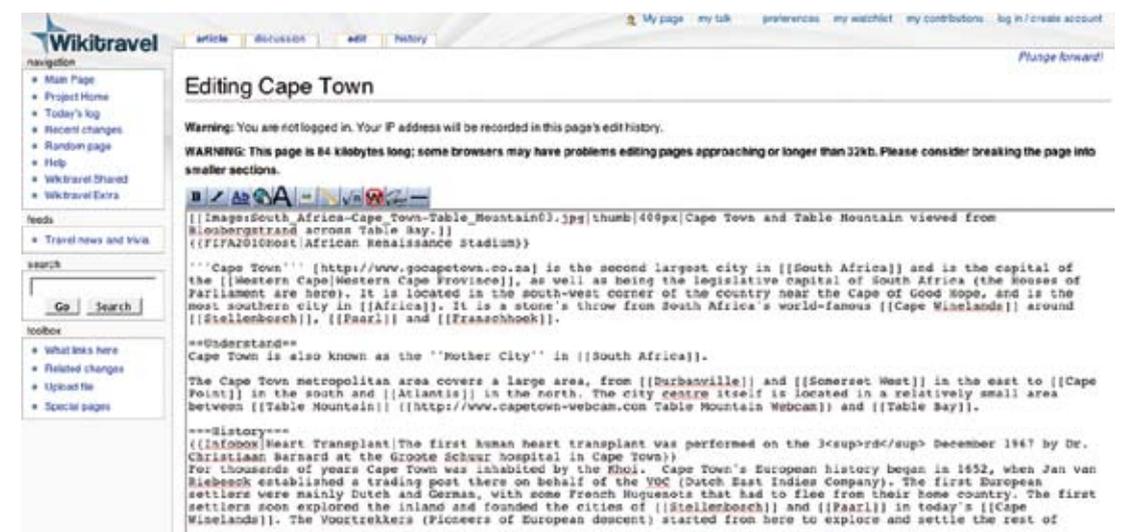
A wiki can be edited by anyone who can access it!

Wikipedia: the most famous wiki of all

Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org) is a free, web-based, content encyclopaedia that is rated one of the top ten visited sites in the world. Originally created in 2001 by James Wales and Larry Sanger, this online encyclopaedia has received both praise and criticism. Roughly 15 times the size of Encyclopaedia Britannica, with more than 9 million articles in over 250 languages, this encyclopaedia is increasing in size at an exponential level (Wikipedia: About). However, with the increased adoption of this tool, criticism has also increased as to the validity of the definitions.

All definitions seen on Wikipedia are written by a collaborative team of volunteers from around the world. Anyone can submit a definition and these can then be edited by anyone who has access to the Internet. This combination of contributors leads to a democratic way of including the most up to date information. Since definitions are reviewed frequently, it should decrease the amount of bias and inaccuracy, while building a unique social network with people of similar interests contributing.

All Wikipedia definitions should also be referenced externally. Although anyone can contribute to Wikipedia, there is a permission ranking system which has been instituted to maintain the level of credibility that is associated with Wikipedia. Further measures include a discussion tab on most articles where academics can question the validity of the sources and its content.

Wikipedia articles tend to rank highly in the SERPs, so the allure of a link to your web site from a relevant article is tempting indeed. Wikipedia has instituted a policy that all external links are "no follow" links so as to combat spam.

Wikipedia is a useful research tool. With so much information on the Internet, many users are starting to look at a human edited (as opposed to search engine algorithm distilled) way to embark on research. For a company to be reachable via a link from this research base can very traffic and reputation worthy.

Companies should also take note of what is being written about them on Wikipedia, and make transparent efforts to correct information.

content creating and sharing as a marketing tool

Content sharing sites, from video to photos to music to knowledge, provide marketers with a snapshot of how users interact with and perceive their brand. Most of the sites have RSS feeds available, where marketers can keep a tab on mentions of their brand.

These sites and services allow marketers the opportunity to capitalise on the creativity of their consumers to further amplify their brand. By making content easily available, and removing restrictions on use of that content, companies can nurture creative interactions that are likely to spread.

Wikis can be used when creating an event with a network. Encouraging users to interact allows them greater connection and ownership of the outcome, and provides a means for ongoing communication.

crowdsourcing – unleashing the power of the online community

A term first used in Wired magazine back in 2006, "crowdsourcing" has become a powerful and cost effective method of achieving business goals through the use of the masses. Simply put, business and corporates invite the public to submit ideas and innovations for new and existing products, in exchange for a once-off or a small percentage of future royalties.

Social media has spurred on this innovation, and has allowed the business world to tap into the consumer psyche with little financial outlay.

connecting – social networking

Social networking refers to the forming and substantiating of online social networks for communities of people. The communities are people who share interests and activities, or are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others. And to complete the definition of online social networking: the building of these social networks requires the use of software.

Social networking is all about using the tools of the Internet to connect and build relationships with others. Social networking sites such as Facebook (www.facebook.com), MySpace (www.myspace.com) and LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com) allow users to create personal profiles and then interact with their connections through sharing media, sending messages and blogging. Not only do social networking sites allow you to interact with the members of your own virtual Rolodex, but they allow you to extend beyond your personal network.

Social networks have created new meaning for the term "friend" with many connections existing solely online. In the realm of social networking, it is unnecessary to have met someone in order to connect with them.

Personal profile pages remove much of the anonymity of the Internet. Users of social networks reveal a great deal of information about themselves, from basic demographics such as age, gender and location, to nuanced and detailed lists of likes and dislikes. Although explicitly made known to a user's connections, users are also divulging this information to the networks, and hence to the networks' advertisers. Users tend not to be aware of the data that is amassing regarding their online profile,

and it takes features such as Facebook's Beacon to reveal just how much information users are making available.

Social networks can be general, such as Facebook, or niche, such as LinkedIn or Dopplr (www.dopplr.com). LinkedIn is a network for professionals. Members connect to others that they know professionally, and are able to recommend members that they have worked with. Dopplr is a social network for frequent travellers. Members can share their trips, and make plans to meet up when schedules overlap.

Many social networks, including Facebook, Orkut (www.orkut.com) and MySpace, have opened up their platform to outside developers, allowing the development of applications for the members of the social networks. Generally, use of an application requires a member to allow the application developer access to their personal information.

social networking as a tool for marketers

Social networks, free for their members, tend to rely on advertising for their revenue. Because of demographic information collected by the social networks, advertisers are able to target their adverts to a particular audience.

Applications are another way to market products. Creating a useful application that is relevant to a product, can expose a whole new audience to a company's offering, as well as allowing a company to collect detailed information on their users. However, although Facebook applications were the big marketing story of 2007, there are few success stories to emerge from the buzz. It's very much a developing market.

Profiles are not limited to people. Bands, for example, have found immense success with creating MySpace profiles for their band and using the profile as a means of connecting with their current and potential fan base.

On Facebook, Facebook Pages "provide a customized presence on Facebook for your band, brand, small business, and more." Quirk eMarketing has a page at www.facebook.com/pages/Quirk-eMarketing/6639858751.

Marketers can also use social networks to identify how users are perceiving or interacting with their brand, and open up new avenues of communication with them. For example, if you are marketing a bar, look to see how many people are using a social network to organise events at your bar. Find a way of rewarding those who are bringing you extra customers.

Social networks are also an avenue for members to voice frustrations and annoyances, and these should be closely watched by marketers to gauge sentiment.

creating content and opinion
– blogging and podcasting

Everyone has an opinion, and the Internet allows for everyone to share their opinion. Blogs and podcasts have emerged as social media that are being embraced across the Internet population.

blogging

A blog is a web site where entries (blog posts) are typically displayed in reverse chronological order. Technorati, a blog and social media tracking engine, defines a blog as a "regularly updated journal published on the web." Blogs usually allow for comments on blog posts. A typical blog will feature text, images and links to other blogs and web sites related to the topic of the blog.

Blogs range from the personal to the political and everything in between. They can be written by one person or by a group of people. Some are aimed at the blogger's immediate family and friends, and others rival leading newspapers in terms of reach and readership. Blogs are mostly textual, but can comprise solely of images, videos, audio or any combination of these.

According to Technorati data, there are over 175,000 new blogs created and over 1.6 million posts updated every day (over 18 updates a second). That's a lot.

The power of blogs is that they allow anyone to publish and share ideas, and anyone can read and respond to these. They have given consumers and companies a voice and blogging has opened up a world of information sharing possibilities.

The basic elements of a blog post are:
- **Author** – the person who wrote the blog post.
- **Blog post title** – the title of the blog post, which is usually used to create a unique URL, or permalink, for the blog post.
- **Tag** – tags are the categories used to describe the blog post, and aid services such as Technorati in categorising blog posts.
- **Comment** – comments left by readers of the blog are shown with the blog post.
- **TrackBack** – a notification of other blogs linking to a post, often displayed below blog post.

Some other elements of a blog include:
- **RSS feed** – an RSS feed allows for readers to subscribe easily to the blog.
- **Categories** – blog posts can be allocated categories.
- **Blogroll** – a collection of links to other blogs or web sites commonly read or used by the blogger.
- **Archives** – previous posts remain available for visitors to search through. Archives are usually categorised by date.

note 🔊

RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication and allows for information to be syndicated, well, simply. It means that instead of you visiting various web sites for updates and information, information is packaged and sent to your RSS reader. Information is supplied by web sites in a standard feed format, and your RSS reader knows how to turn that into something that makes sense to you. As soon as an RSS feed is updated, i.e. new information is added, it appears in your RSS reader.

RSS readers can be integrated with an email client, can work offline or can be online only. Some are free, and some are not. Look at your email client to see if you can set one up there, or try www.bloglines.com, www.google.com/reader or www.feeddemon.com. Find the one with the features that suit your needs.

RSS readers are a useful way to keep up to date with blogs, as most supply an RSS feed of their posts. Still confused? Take a look at commoncraft.com/rss_plain_english.]

Whether blogging as an individual or a company, there is plenty to be gained from the process. You can:

- Create an online identity.
- Create a voice for yourself or your company.
- Promote engagement with your audience
- Create a community.

blogging and SEO

Search engines value regular, fresh content, and by blogging you can create just that. The more you post, the more often search engines will spider your site, looking for additional, relevant content. Basing your blog on your keyword strategy created in the SEO process can also aid your web site in ranking for those key phrases. Blogs, by their social nature, can also increase the incoming links to your web site.

Using a blog platform that has been designed to be search engine friendly is crucial to harnessing the SEO power of blogging. Some features of SEO-friendly blogging software include:

- Each blog post should be assigned a unique page which can be easily accessed and indexed by the search engines. This is called a permalink.
- Pages should be able to be tagged with keywords relevant to your SEO strategy.
- Each post should be able to have its own unique meta data (title, description and key phrases).
- Social bookmarking functionality should be built in.

corporate blogging

Blogs can be very successful marketing tools. They're an excellent way to communicate with staff, investors, industry members, journalists and prospective customers. Blogging also helps to foster a community around a brand, and provides an opportunity to garner immediate feedback on developments. This is an audience made up of players key to the success of a company: that makes it important to get blogging right.

Generally the tasks that a blogger undertakes include:

- Writing posts.
- Replying to comments from readers.
- Monitoring other blogs within the industry.
- Keeping up to date with the latest industry news.
- Building relationships with other bloggers in the community.
- Commenting on other blogs

For corporate blogs, it is important to outline a strategy and establish guidelines before starting the blog, especially as there will most likely be a number of contributors. Transparency and honesty are important, but companies need also to be aware of sensitive information being blogged. If there are "no go" areas, they need to be clearly defined to the parties involved. While certain topics can be restricted, ultimately the bloggers should be granted the freedom to express both negative and positive points of view about the approved topics.

Positive claims are more believable if the blogger is able to express negative views as well. For example, Robert Scoble in his popular blog www.scobleizer.com admitted that the Firefox browser was better than Microsoft's Internet Explorer. Robert Scoble was an employee of Microsoft at the time. This honesty gave him a credible voice, and so his positive views on Microsoft are respected by the community.

Corporate blog content should be:

- Industry relevant
- Appealing to your target market
- Transparent and honest
- Personal and entertaining
- Related to what's going on in the blogosphere
- Posted regularly

promoting blogs

While Technorati may be tracking 112.8 million blogs it doesn't mean that all of these blogs will still be active by the end of the year - in fact only 55% of blogs make it past the first three months (Sifry, 2006). Longevity rests in the hands of the blogger, but here are some tips to raise the profile of a blog:

- **List the blog in blog directories:** While they're not as popular as search engines, many Internet users do in fact visit them while looking for information. Examples include: Google's Directory (www.google.com/dirhp)and BlogCatalog (www.blogcatalog.com).
- **Ping web services with updated content:** Sites like Ping-o-Matic (pingomatic.com) and Feed Shark (feedshark.brainbliss.com) offer a service whereby they ping multiple web services, blog directories and search engines to let them know that a blog has fresh content.
- **Use TrackBacks:** If a blogger writes a new entry commenting on, or referring to, an entry on your blog, and both blogging tools support the TrackBack protocol, then the commenting blogger can notify your blog with a "TrackBack ping"; the receiving blog will typically display summaries of, and links to, all the commenting entries below the original entry. This allows for

conversations spanning several blogs that readers can easily follow.

- **Participate in the blogosphere:** You can't expect anyone to engage on your blog if you're not engaging on theirs. It's all about fostering a sense of community.
- **Make use of aggregators:** Examples of aggregators include Technorati, Amatomu and Afrigator.
- **Use traffic generating tools like MyBlogLog:** The MyBlogLog (www.mybloglog.com) widget allows you to see who in the MyBlogLog community has visited your site and they can see if you have visited their site in return. Bloggers will more often than not click through to your site from this widget, as they are interested in learning more about who is reading their blog. If they like what they see when they get there, they may become regular readers.

microblogging

Microblogging is a form of blogging that allows a user to publish short text updates, usually limited to 200 characters that can be viewed by anyone or restricted to a specified community as specified by the micro-blogger. This can be accomplished using various communication tools such as Instant Messaging (IM), via the web, text messaging on your mobile phone, even a Facebook application. Microblogging can also refer to the publishing of short posts using a limited number of images, audio or video files. Currently, the most popular text micro-blogging service is called Twitter (www.twitter.com), which was launched in July 2006. Other similar sites includes the likes of Jaiku (www.jaiku.com), Identi.ca (www.identi.ca), as well as Yammer (www.yammer.com). Examples of rich media based microblogs include Tumblr (www.tumblr.com), Streem (www.streem.us) and Soup (www.soup.io). On Twitter, posts are called tweets and are limited to 140 characters. Despite frequent disruptions to Twitter's service, its users are fiercely loyal. These posts are usually short thoughts or URLs to interesting articles.

Twitter has also become massively popular due to the nature of its immediacy. Major news events such as the Mumbai attacks in November 2008 were extensively covered by Twitterers, and breaking news can also regularly be found here first. A year on year study from November 2007 to November 2008 saw Twitter's monthly unique visitors increase by 600% to 3.5 million visitors. Twitter has entered the mainstream, with public figures such as Barack Obama (www.twitter.com/barackobama) and Britney Spears (www.twitter.com/britneyspears) having set up accounts.

blogs as a marketing tool: listen and engage

Blogs are powerful because of their reach, their archives (information is seldom deleted and is thus available long after it has been posted) and the trust that other consumers place in them. For a marketer, they present opportunities to learn how others perceive your brand and to engage with your audience. Some brands get this right; some get it wrong.

A Twitter feed, appearing at www.twitter.com/robstokes.

Above are some guidelines for corporate blogging, but marketers do not need to be bloggers to use this tool. As with all other social media, blogs provide a snapshot of audience sentiment regarding a brand. Marketers can also listen to blog activity around competitors in order to gain market insights.

Although blogging is the best way to respond to and engage with bloggers, companies can also interact with bloggers by commenting on relevant posts. Demonstrating the capacity to listen to bloggers, and then responding using the same medium, can reap tremendous benefits with this community.

podcasting

A podcast is a digital radio (or video) programme downloadable from the internet. Podcasting started to take off around 2004 and it zoomed from 'geekdom' to mainstream so quickly that 'podcast' was voted 2005 'word of the year' by the editors of the New Oxford American dictionary. Podcasts started as audio blogs. People then figured out a

way of distributing them using the same RSS feeds that were being used to distribute blog post information. It was then possible to subscribe to a podcast as one would a blog. Suddenly you could listen to a whole range of programmes and voices whenever and wherever you wanted. It was radio without a station telling what you could hear and when. Just as blogs have allowed people to become writers without having to deal with a media channel controlled by someone else, podcasting has allowed anyone who fancies it to become a broadcaster.

With the right kind of 'podcatching' software on your computer the latest edition of any podcast you subscribe to is automatically downloaded every time you log on. Most people use iTunes. Go to http://www.apple.com/itunes/store/ for loads more information on podcasting and a huge list of available podcasts. You can listen on your computer or transfer the file to an iPod or any other kind of MP3 player. You don't have to have an iPod to listen, the name came from the fact that the iPod was taking off at the same time and the 'pod' (play on demand) part fitted this new medium. Podcasts are usually free.

Creating a podcast

Podcasts are usually recorded and edited using home equipment and done for the love of it. There is specialised podcasting software available like Apple's Garage Band or Quicktime Pro. These packages make it quite simple to record, mix and format the audio files correctly. Just like bloggers, though, many podcasters are trying to figure out ways of making money from their podcasts and turning listeners into revenue.

A lot of people are producing music podcasts. This has meant a huge move to circumvent traditional rights issues about downloading music from the Internet. There is now a large body of music that is classified 'podsafe'. This has either been composed especially for podcasts (as jingles' etc) or the artist has specifically decided that they want their music to be available via the net for all who want to hear it.

Radio stations have realised that they have a whole new way of using their content. They began packaging their output so that fans could listen to their favourite shows whenever they wanted to (without the music). The BBC is awash with podcasts (www.bbc.co.uk/podcast). In South Africa, 5Fm was the first station to use them. Now nearly every radio station offers them – have a look at Classic FM, Talk Radio 702 and East Coast Radio.

Educators and teaching institutions have latched on to podcasting as a way of sharing content and providing tuition for learners who cannot be present at lectures or tutorials.

The corporate world is also realising that podcasting can add huge value to their communications mix. The term 'podcast' is increasingly being used to cover any audio or video that is embedded in an organisation's web site.

podcasts as a marketing tool

Podcasts offer an incredible opportunity for marketers. The bottom line is that you now have a way of getting content to your target markets without having to persuade a media channel to carry it or to pay huge advertising rates.
Podcasts are:

- **Targetable** – you can create highly relevant, niched content and then promote it to a specific target market.
- **Measurable** – you can see how exactly many downloads and subscribers you have.
- **Controllable** – it's your content.
- **Responsive** – set up a blog alongside your podcast, alter content according to the comments, you are actually having a conversation with your market.
- **Boundary free** – it's the Internet.
- Relatively **inexpensive**.

However, the content must be:

- **Excellent quality** – like anything on the Internet, it is just as easy to unsubscribe as it is to subscribe. Quality content is what keeps listeners coming back.
- **Real** – while there is value in having product or service information embedded in a web site, there is no point at all in producing an audio version of a company brochure as a regular podcast. Consumers are losing faith in the content of traditional media. Even if editorial is not actually paid for, a lot of the time it has been influenced in some way by advertisers. Although there are podcasts that carry adverts, people can fast forward straight past them and the chance of real success lies in branded content.

This is not about advertising or even just product information. It is about coming up with ideas for real programmes that, through informing or entertaining, enhance your customers' experience of your brand.

social media and marketing:
rules of engagement

Social media implies a democratisation of information, and requires authenticity and openness from those who would deliberately use it for marketing. Relying on the connected Internet, it means that good stories as well as bad stories spread and stick around. Jeff Jarvis may have had problems with Dell in 2005, but you can easily find all relevant communication with a quick Google search.

Although engaging publicly with a wide audience, marketers need to remember that they are communicating with individuals. While marketers should engage in the conversation, and can lead it, they cannot control it.

marketing to content creators

The influence of bloggers means that they should form a part of any PR strategy (see the WebPR chapter for further details).

Supply content creators with the tools and resources so that they can easily talk about your product.

marketing to content consumers

Social media allows anyone to have a say, and the same tools that are available to individuals are available to companies. Company blogs allow a brand to build a personality and to interact with its target market. Entertainment created and spread via social media increases brand touch points. Using the same channels that are available to your consumer aids in understanding the consumer, and evens the plane of conversation.

When using social media to reach out to content consumers, go to where your consumers are. The media used is dictated by your users.

For example, a nightclub for students can create a Facebook group to advertise its weekly specials, and interact with fans, while Land Rover enthusiasts would probably be more comfortable with a forum.

With all interactions, marketing messages need to be labelled as marketing messages, with a disclaimer added if necessary. Trying to hide them as something else will only decrease authenticity.

marketing to content sharers

Content sharers are content consumers who also pass your message on, whether by using chat or email, or by sharing a link on a blog or submitting your content to a bookmarking or aggregating service. They are a crucial link in the chain that passes your message around. Make it as easy as possible for sharers to share by using chicklets and unique and easy to read URLs.

advertising on social media platforms

While marketers can use the tools of social media to convey their message, also important are the user characteristics that define a social media web site. Social media allows users to express themselves, and this means that demographic information can be compiled to allow for more useful and targeted advertising. This presents many opportunities for targeting advertising, and for finding creative ways to reach an advert fatigued demographic.

the benefits of social media
to marketers

- People are finding it easier to switch off or ignore traditional advertising, particularly through traditional media environments such as TV or radio. Social media gives brands the opportunity to **interact with customers through targeted communications** which customers can choose to engage with on their terms. For example a consumer may visit a branded YouTube channel as opposed to deliberately ignoring advert breaks on television.
- Social media's potential to **go viral** is one of its greatest benefits - if users like the content they will share it with their communities.
- Social media allows you to **create an online community** for your brand and its supporters.
- Social media can tie in nicely with any of your other online marketing tactics - a **holistic eMarketing strategy** is always the best strategy.
- Social media allows you to engage with an online community and allows you to **connect your brand** to the appropriate audience.
- Social media has created a **forum for brand evangelists**. Companies should embrace as well as monitor this as users with negative opinions of your brand have access to the same forum.
- The various platforms allow you to **access a community** with similar interests to your own - networking without borders.
- The numerous interactions allow you to **garner feedback** from your communities.
- Feedback from social media sites helps drive both **future business** as well as marketing strategies.
- The range of media enables you to **learn more** about your audience's likes, dislikes, behaviour etc. Never before has this much information been available to marketers - market research just got a whole lot cheaper.
- **Niche targeting** just got a whole lot easier!

There are huge risks as well as opportunities. Social media facilitates a two-way conversation between customer and company. This necessitates that the company shifts approach from "deploy and watch" to one of constant involvement with the audience.

social media has changed
the traditional media landscape

To keep up with their audiences, traditional media have had to adapt. This has changed the way that they publish, both online and off, as well as how they can sell advertising.

summary

For example, many newspapers now publish their content online as well as in their print publications. Online, they can allow for instant commentary on their articles. It allows an instant snapshot of what their readers think, which can then be used to make editorial decisions. Print stories can be supplemented online with video, and this has been embraced by many news organisations. Visit www.thetimes.co.za to see how one newspaper is using video online.

As mentioned, TV adverts can be placed online for free via channels such as YouTube. This opens adverts to a new audience, and allows for adverts that can be created without the restrictions of television. Adverts can be extended, and now additional footage can become as important as the advert. Quality adverts are voluntarily and deliberately viewed, as opposed to deliberately ignored.

tools of the trade

As a creator of content, there are a plethora of platforms for the budding social media enthusiast. Throughout the chapter, we have listed the URLs for some of the most popular services, most of which are free.

Instead of going back through the chapter, visit del.icio.us/quirkemarketingtextbook. Use the tags to navigate to the social media tools you need to get started.

pros and cons

Social media allows marketers insights into their demographic and the chance to engage with their audience in a channel selected, and preferred, by the audience.

It allows marketers to capitalise on the creativity of their consumers to spread their message further, often at very low costs.

Lastly, social media provide avenues for establishing direct, personal contact on a level not available to traditional marketing campaigns.

However, companies need also be aware that bad messages spread as well as good ones, and the connectedness that can prove so useful can also be a conduit for negative messages to be distributed.

This new landscape is one in which the customer really is king, and any attempt to dethrone the king can have dire consequences. Efforts to control the conversation in social media are soon found out, can backfire horribly.

Any company embarking on a social media strategy needs to be sure to monitor their reputation online. It is crucial to know what is being said in order to be able to respond and communicate in the social media sphere.

Social media is also known as consumer generated media and it refers to the creation and sharing of content by consumers on the Internet. It has allowed a democratisation of the Internet, where all Internet users now also have the opportunity to be creators as well as consumers of content.

Social media refers to the online technology platforms that allow users to:
- Bookmark and aggregate content.
- Create and share content.
- Use other Internet users' preferences to find content.

Most social media services are free to all participants and rely on advertising for revenue. Social media provides targeted demographic information to advertisers looking to direct their advertising.

the bigger picture

how it all fits together

Social media can have SEO benefits for a web site, particularly when a company engages in the various social media. By using the services of social media, either to create or share content, web sites can attract links, all helping to enhance search engine rankings. Companies can also use their SEO keyword strategy to focus their social media efforts.

Social media can provide a targeted network for online advertising, allowing detailed demographic information to play a role in media planning and buying. Companies can also make use of the increased engagement of consumers to create engaging advertising for these mediums, such as advertising within videos and social network applications, or merely making use of increased time on page metrics to create more intricate advertising.

Affiliates often use the new opportunities presented by social media to find new avenues for targeted traffic, resulting in revenue growth for the company being marketed this way.

Social media play a crucial role in viral marketing, due to the large, connected audience; in online reputation management (ORM), due to the way that users talk about brands; and in WebPR. Social media are used to express opinion, and so are the bedrock of ORM. Any company or brand that is hoping to communicate to this connected audience, needs to learn to listen to social media. ORM is all about the tools of listening, and using social media to guide the conversation.

Viral marketing, online reputation management and WebPR are expanded on in the following chapters.

case study: FNB and Idea Bounty

FirstRand Bank Limited is one of South Africa's largest listed companies. It features on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange's Top 100 index, with First National Bank (FNB) its retail and commercial banking brand. FNB employs 25 000 people in South Africa and serves over 6 million customers.

The nature of banking in South Africa is rapidly changing though and FNB is striving to remain at the forefront of social developments with progressive marketing and advertising strategies. One of the early adopters of holistic eMarketing in the finance sector, FNB is a proponent of social media as a way to reach their consumers and engage with them. FNB uses Facebook as a way to communicate with its community of clients and fans, as well as having pages that promote FNB sponsored events such as the FNB Whiskey Live Festival. These groups inform consumers about promotions, events and happenings within the financial services industry, allowing two way communication and a high level of consumer engagement.

In October 2008, a segment of FNB, FNB Premier Banking, took their commitment to social media one step further: the bank committed itself to a rapidly growing social media tactic known as crowdsourcing through the newly launched social think tank Idea Bounty (www.ideabounty.com). In contrast to the traditional agency model in which creative output is paid for in accordance with the amount of resources assigned to the project, Idea Bounty opens up advertising briefs to the global community, allowing anyone, anywhere to come up with the most creative solution. Brands then pay for the idea that they like the best, though if no idea is up to scratch, they don't pay at all.

In the case of FNB, a $2500 bounty was on offer for the best idea to promote the use of online banking to its Premier Banking clients. The campaign was promoted through a number of on- and offline channels, with a heavy emphasis on social media. This holistic approach meant that FNB promoted their involvement through discussions on their fan page and through channels such as Twitter, with the support of the Idea Bounty team, who use their blog, Facebook and Twitter to drive conversation around this creative strategy.

While FNB's involvement in this project was brave, it was also very enlightened. The response was phenomenal. While The FNB brief was live, over 800 creatives registered on the Idea Bounty site. Out of these, 130 ideas were submitted in response to the brief. During the campaign, the site was visited over 7000 times, and the online community was kept very busy, talking about FNB, proving that word of mouth spreads fast and social media engagement is contagious and has the potential to amass great creativity.

In the case of FNB, crowdsourcing, supported by social media, resulted in substantial PR value and an excess of ideas from which to choose, as well as the successful integration of consumers into the company. Their use of Idea Bounty allowed for the growth of brand awareness and close relationships with a large prospective client base.

First National Bank: www.fnb.co.za
Idea Bounty: www.ideabounty.com

case study questions

1. How do you think institutions such as banks can make use of social media? How would they measure success?
2. What do you think some of the challenges are for bank when it comes to the social media channel?
3. What are the benefits of crowdsourcing to an organisation such as FNB?

chapter questions

1. Visit www.timesonline.co.uk. List the ways that this print publication is embracing social media.
2. Why is transparency so important to marketing using social media? Has this halted or accelerated the use of social media for marketing?
3. What is the difference between advertising using social media and marketing using social media? What are the benefits of social media to each, and what are the challenges?

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further reading

www.gottaquirk.com
– the blog from the minds of Quirk, filled with the latest in social media and eMarketing.

www.mashable.com
– a blog that covers social networking and social media.

9. viral marketing

What's inside: An **introduction** to viral marketing, and a **history** of the term followed by **key terms and concepts**. In **how it works** there are a couple of short **case studies** to look at viral marketing in action, and we then look at the **steps required** when you are preparing to go viral. With a **viral campaign launched**, now what? shows you how to be prepared, and we look at astroturfing. There is a **summary** of the chapter, and **the bigger picture** shows how viral marketing fits into the marketing mix.