

FOREWORD

If you're reading this book, you are probably interested in understanding how social marketing can enhance your brand, grow your business, and increase customer loyalty. The authors of this book make the important point that B2B relationships are defined by value, and social marketing has the power to dramatically increase the value that companies can provide to their customers.

Dell is, at our core, a B2B company and has been since Michael founded Dell in 1984 when he started out selling computers to businesses and universities. He had an idea that direct relationships with customers would allow more people access to technology so they could reach their full potential, and that is still very much a guiding principle for us today. Today, sales to commercial and public customers account for approximately 80 percent of revenue—and there's nothing more direct than using the input we get from social media to help our customers solve their most complex challenges.

Why Social?

Many companies talk about the importance of customers, but when it comes to embracing the principles of openness and interaction that social marketing enables, they may hesitate. After all, there may be just as much unfavorable feedback as there is favorable feedback out there. However, it's the combination of both the positive and the negative

that can truly empower organizations to make meaningful changes to better serve customers and build loyalty. Social media certainly make listening easier, but it's the actions that organizations take from their conversations that build enduring relationships with customers that last long after a single transaction.

When I'm meeting with customers or speaking at conferences, I'm often asked why Dell has embraced social media with such enthusiasm. Our commitment to blogs, social networks, and customer forums seems particularly striking in light of the fact that just four years ago we were the target of some vocal criticism in those same places. Here's why we embrace social media. It's because these social communities are where we get honest, candid feedback from our customers that we incorporate into solutions that better meet their needs. Our early conversations with online critics were actually a blessing. They reminded us of the importance of how direct customer interaction drives our business strategy and growth. Dell is mentioned in thousands of online conversations, and on any given day, comments about Dell on Twitter can reach as many as 10 million people. Each of these discussions is an opportunity for us to enhance or build a customer relationship, and to act on what we hear. Social media provide simply another way that we can listen to and engage with our customers—and a powerful way for us to learn what we need to do to help our customers succeed.

At Dell, we believe that team members are our most valuable assets, and they should be the ones to interact with our customers. If a customer has a technical issue, he or she will chat with someone from our product or engineering team. If it's a service issue, that customer will interact with our support team. We provide the foundation that our global team members need to use social media as part of their jobs through our Social Media and Communities University.

This scale of interaction may sound a bit scary at first, but it doesn't have to be when you align people around a common purpose so that when they speak to customers, they're working toward the same goal. For Dell, that purpose is to provide technology that gives our customers the power to do more—to grow, to thrive.

Why Social Marketing for B2B?

B2B relationships are fundamentally not about companies but about people. At Dell, we encourage team members to use their blogs and Twitter accounts to talk about their families, vacations, and passions, if that's information they want to share. These glimpses into the personal lives of professional colleagues are essential to building strong relationships. Think of it: When you speak to a trusted business partner at a meeting or on the phone, you typically spend several minutes chatting about events that go on outside the office. The better you know people professionally, the better you get to know them personally.

B2B relationships are also about being helpful, and here is where social media have opened some amazing new opportunities for us. A great example is our Social Media for Small Business page on Facebook. Those business owners look to us for advice on how to leverage social channels for their businesses, and we're excited to share what we have learned. We take great care not to make this resource a sales pitch. These days, the best marketing is the kind that helps people to be successful.

The authors give one example of how we support our customers in Chapter 1, where they tell the story of Dell TechCenter, an online support resource for customers who purchase Dell solutions for their businesses. TechCenter exemplifies the value of personal engagement in a business context. Our TechCenter staffers have gotten to know many of our customers personally as a result of their technical support interactions. These relationships are enhanced through dinners and meet-ups at conferences or even at Dell's offices, where customers often request meetings with the TechCenter experts.

Preparing for What's Next

The information technology ecosystem is constantly transforming itself, but even more impactful is how people are using technology to create innovations that will change our world. A few years ago,

customers primarily used Dell.com to buy products. Today, it's the focal point for a variety of social platforms where they learn from each other as well as from us. Tomorrow, the boundaries between online and offline may entirely disappear as “digital” and “virtual” just become ingrained in how we all communicate.

However, the one constant that will remain is the value that organizations of all sizes can realize from social marketing. Does social marketing enable a business to get closer to its customers? Does it provide feedback that can be used to improve the customer experience? Does it help grow the business and build the brand? The answer in all cases is *yes*. Embracing social marketing and finding a way to integrate it into the fabric of doing business can help B2B companies truly provide more value to the people they serve and create loyal customers for life.

—KAREN QUINTOS
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