Book VII

Other Social Media Marketing Sites

The 5th Wave   By Rich Tennant

"Here's an idea. Why don't you start a social network for doofuses who think they know how to set a broken leg, but don't."

Chapter 1: Weighing the Business Benefits of Minor Social Sites

In This Chapter

✔ **Reviewing goals for social media marketing**

✔ **Conducting social media market research**

✔ **Assessing audience involvement**

✔ **Choosing minor social communities strategically**

*W*ithout a doubt, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and MySpace are the elephants in the social marketing zoo, at least in terms of the largest number of visits per month. But this is one big zoo, as shown in Figure 1-1, which displays only 50 of more than 350 social sites. Among these, you'll find lions and tigers and bears, and more than a few turtles, trout, squirrels, and seagulls.

Figure 1-1: The zoo of social media sites is vast. Your time, however, is limited.

It's up to you to assess your business needs, research the options, and select which, if any, of these minor social marketing sites belongs in your personal petting zoo. In this chapter, we look at methods for doing just that.

REMEMBER

With the exception of Ning (which can become your primary Web presence if you use your own domain name), these smaller sites are best used to supplement your other social marketing (rather than standalone) efforts.

Reviewing Your Goals

Book I suggests that you develop a strategic marketing plan. If you haven't done so yet, there's no time like the present. Otherwise, the task of managing your social networks can quickly spin out of control, especially as you start to add multiple smaller sites for generating or distributing content.

REMEMBER

Marketing is marketing, whether offline or online, whether for search engine ranking or social networking. Obviously, your primary business goal is to make a profit. However, your goals for a particular marketing campaign or social media technique may vary.

As you know, social media marketing can serve multiple goals. It can help you

1. Expand your Web presence

2. Provide a free alternative or supplement to paid advertising

3. Enhance customer service

4. Disseminate news or information

5. Increase the number of inbound links

6. Improve search engine rankings

7. Improve the amount and quality of traffic to site

8. Generate qualified leads

9. Increase sales

Your challenge is to decide which of these goals applies to your business and then to quantify objectives for each one. Be sure that you can measure your achievements. You can find additional measurement information about major networks in their respective minibooks and in Book VIII. Table 1-1 suggests primary values you may have and matches several sites to the goal numbers for these major, and some minor, networks.

Table 1-1	**Matching Social Networks to Goals**		
Service	*Category*	*Primary Value*	*Fits with These Goal Numbers*
Facebook	Social networking	Strong profile rankings	1, 2, 5, 6, 8
Flickr	Photo sharing	Strong profile rankings	3, 4, 5, 6
LinkedIn	Professional networking	Strong profile rankings	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8
MySpace	Social networking	Strong profile rankings	1, 2, 5, 6, 8
Ning	Social networking	Strong profile rankings	1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9
Squidoo	Community	Direct link sources	2, 3, 4, 5, 9
Twitter	Community	Promote linkworthy content	2, 3, 4, 5

Source: SEOmoz.org

Researching Minor Social Networks

Doing all the necessary research to pick the right mix of social networks may seem overwhelming, but, hey, this is the Web — help is at your fingertips. Table 1-2 lists many resource Web sites with directories of social networking sites, usage statistics, demographic profiles, and valuable tips on how to use different sites. The selection process is straightforward, and the steps are quite similar to constructing a plan for paid online advertising.

Table 1-2	**Social Network Research URLs**	
Site Name	*URL*	*What It Does*
Alexa	`www.alexa.com/siteinfo`	Ranks traffic and demographic data by site
Dosh Dosh Blog	`www.doshdosh.com/list-of-social-media-news-websites`	Describes 50 social news sites
Experian Hitwise	`www.hitwise.com/us/datacenter/main/dashboard-10133.html`	Presents top 20 social sites by visits per week

(continued)

Table 1-2 *(continued)*

Site Name	URL	What It Does
GetDegrees	`www.getdegrees.com/ articles/p/art- schools/top-social- networks-for-artists`	Lists top artists' social networks
Google AdPlanner	`https://www.google. com/adplanner`	Compiles traffic data by site
Google Toolbar	`www.google.com/toolbar/ ff/index.html`	Installs Google Toolbar with Google PageRank
Ignite Social Media	`www.ignitesocialmedia. com/2009-social-network- analysis-report`	Compiles traffic, demo-graphic data
Mashable	`http://mashable.com`	Presents social media news, Web tips
	`http://mashable.com/ category/social-media- lists`	Lists Top 10 lists and tips
	`http://mashable.com/ category/social- network-lists`	Lists Top 10 lists and tips
	`http://mashable. com/2007/10/23/social- networking-god`	Categorizes 350 social networking sites
	`http://mashable. com/2009/03/12/ entrepreneur-networks`	Ranks top ten entrepre-neurial social networks
	`http://mashable.com/ 2009/01/30/generation- y-social-networks`	Ranks top ten Gen-Y social networks
Quantcast	`www.quantcast.com`	Compiles traffic and demographic data by site
SeniorHome. net	`www.seniorhome.net/ blog/2008/50-best- social-networks-for- seniors`	Ranks 50 senior social networks

Site Name	URL	What It Does
SEOmoz	`www.seomoz.org/article/social-media-marketing-tactics`	Compares 101 business social networks
Social Networking Watch	`www.socialnetworking watch.com/all_social_ networking_statistics/ index.html`	Aggregates social net news and stats
Toms Skyline Design	`www.tomsskylinedesign. com/2009/06/expand-your-social-media-vertical-markets`	Lists 17 vertical market sites
Web Strategy Blog	`www.web-strategist. com/blog/2009/01/11/a-collection-of-social-network-stats-for-2009`	Compiles statistical sources
Wikipedia	`http://en.wikipedia. org/wiki/List_of_ social_networking_ websites`	Provides directory of more than 160 social networking sites

Follow these general steps to get your research under way:

1. **Review the strategy, goals, and target markets for your social marketing campaign as described in Book I.**

   If your B2B business needs to target particular individuals during the sales cycle, such as a CFO, buyer, or project engineer, be specific in your plan.

2. **Decide how much time (yours, staff, or third parties), and possibly budget, you want to commit to minor social networking sites.**

3. **Skim the directories and lists of social media in Table 1-2 to select possibilities that fit your goals.**

   For more ideas, simply search using terms for your business area plus the words *social network* or *social media* (for example *fashion social network*).

4. **Review the demographics and traffic for each possibility by using a site such as Alexa, Google Ad Planner, or Quantcast as discussed in Book I, Chapter 2. Cull your list to keep only those that "fit."**

   Figure 1-2 displays the relative market share, according to StatCounter Global Stats (`http://gs.statcounter.com/#social_media-US-monthly-201005-201006-bar`), for the seven top-ranked social

media services in the United States from May 2010 to June 2010. Market share is ranked not by traffic to the sites themselves but, rather, by "the amount of traffic they refer to other sites." This approach may be valuable for business analysis because it discounts personal users who stay on social media sites to communicate with their friends. The Other category encompasses sites such as Flickr, LinkedIn, Ning, and Squidoo.

Figure 1-2: Relative market share, based on traffic generation capabilities, from the top social media sites from May 2010 to June 2010, according to StatCounter Global Stats.
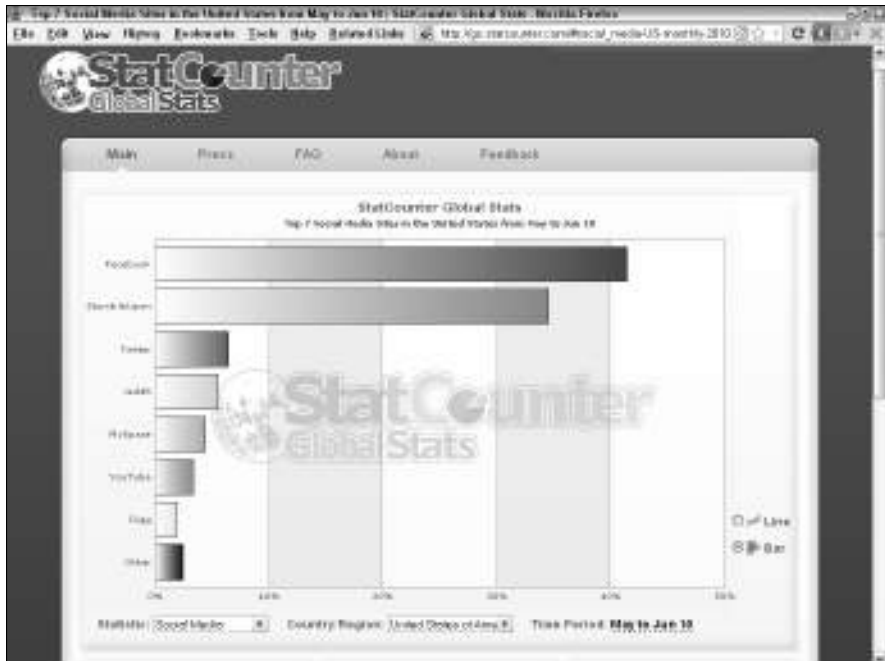
Courtesy of StatCounter Global Stats

5. **Review each network (see my suggestions in the following bullet list) to make sure you feel comfortable with its Web presence, user interaction, Google PageRank, features, ease of use, and ability to provide key reports. Prioritize your sites accordingly.**

6. **After you make your final selection, enter it in your Social Media Marketing Plan (described in Book I, Chapter 2) and set up a schedule for implementation and monitoring on your Social Media Activity Calendar (see Book I, Chapter 3.).**

7. **Implement your plan. Modify it as needed after results come in.**

   Wait at least a month before you make changes; gaining visibility within some social network sites can take time.

TIP

For leads to other social networks that appeal to your audience, look for a section named Other Sites Visited (or similar wording) on one of the statistical sites.

Keep in mind these words of caution as you review statistics in Steps 3 and 4 for various minor social networks:

✦ **Not all directories or reports on market share define the universe of social media or social networks the same way.** Some include blogs, social bookmarking sites such as delicious.com, or news aggregators. Small social networks may come and go so quickly that the universe is different even a few months later.

✦ **Confirm whether you're looking at global or U.S. data.** What you need depends on the submarkets you're trying to reach.

✦ **Determine whether the site displays data for unique visitors or visits.** A unique visitor may make multiple visits during the evaluation period. Results for market share vary significantly depending on what's being measured.

✦ **Repeat visits, pages per view, time on site, and number of visits per day or per visitor all reflect user engagement with the site.** Not all services provide this data, whose importance depends on your business goals.

✦ **Decide whether you're interested in a site's casual visitors or registered members.** Your implementation and message will vary according to the audience you're trying to reach.

✦ **Check the window of measurement (day, week, or month or longer) and the effective dates for the results.** These numbers are volatile (witness the rapid drop in MySpace usage from 2009 to 2010), so be sure you're looking at current data.

TIP

Consider online statistics, regarding social media or everything else, for relative value and trends, not for absolute numbers. Because every statistical service defines its terms and measurements differently, stick with one source to make the results comparable across all your possibilities.

Assessing the Involvement of Your Target Audience

After you finish the research process, you should have a good theoretical model of which minor social networks might be a good fit for your business. But there's nothing like being involved. Step 5 in the earlier section "Researching Minor Social Networks" includes visiting every site to assess a number of criteria, including user interaction. If you plan to engage your audience in comments, reviews, forums, or other user-generated content, you *must* understand how active participants on the network now interact.

Start by signing up and creating a personal profile of some sort so that you can access all member-related activities. The actual activities, of course, depend on the particular network.

Lurking

Spend time watching and reading what transpires in every interactive venue on the site, without participating. In the "olden days" of Internet forums and chat rooms, you were *lurking*. You make a number of qualitative assessments that will help you determine whether this site is a good fit for you:

✦ **Quality of dialogue:** Do statements of any sort float in the ether, or does interaction take place? Does a moderator respond? The site owners? Other registered members? Is there one response or continual back-and-forth? If you intend to establish an ongoing business relationship with other participants on the network, you want to select a site where ongoing dialogue is already standard practice.

✦ **Quality of posts:** Are posts respectful or hostile? Do posts appear automatically, or is someone reviewing them before publication? Do they appear authentic? Since you're conducting business online, your standards may need to be higher than they would be for casual, personal interaction. Anger and profanity that might be acceptable from respondents on a political news site would be totally unacceptable on a site that engages biologists in discussion of an experiment.

✦ **Quantity of posts compared to the number of registered users:** On some sites, you may find that the same 20 people post or respond to everything, even though the site boasts 10,000 registered members. This situation signals a site that isn't successful as a social network, however successful it might be in other ways.

Responding

After you have a sense of the ethos of a site, try responding to a blog post, participating in a forum, or establishing yourself as an expert on a product review or ezine listing. Assess what happens. Do others respond on the network? E-mail you off-site? Call the office?

Use this side of the lurk-and-response routine to gain a better understanding of what you, as a member and prospective customer, would expect. Will you or your staff be able to deliver?

If a site requires more care and feeding than you have the staff to support, consider dropping it from your list.

Quantifying market presence

In addition to assessing the number of unique visitors, visits, and registered members, you may want to assess additional components of audience engagement. Sites that provide quantitative information, such as Quantcast, help you better understand your audience's behavior, learn more about their lifestyle and brand preferences, and target your message. You can learn about these concepts:

✦ **Affinity:** A statistical correlation that shows the strength of a particular user behavior, such as visiting another site, relative to that of the U.S. Internet population as a whole — for instance, whether a Flickr user is more or less likely than the general Internet population to visit YouTube.

✦ **Index:** The delivery of a specific audience segment, such as women or seniors, compared to their share of the overall Internet population

✦ **Composition:** The relative distribution of the audience for a site by audience segment, such as gender, age, or ethnicity

✦ **Addict:** The most loyal component of a site's audience, with 30 or more visits per month

✦ **Passer-by:** Casual visitor who visits a site only once per month

✦ **Regular:** A user partway between Addict and Passer-by; someone who visits more than once but fewer than 30 times per month

Choosing Social Sites Strategically

It may seem ridiculously time-consuming to select which minor social marketing sites are best for your business. Why not just throw a virtual dart at a list or choose randomly from social sites that your staff likes to visit? Ultimately, you save more time by planning and making strategic choices than by investing time in a social media site that doesn't pay off.

TIP

If you're short of time, select sites that meet your demographics requirement but on which you can easily reuse and syndicate content as described in Book II, Chapter 1. You can replicate blog postings, for instance, almost instantly on multiple sites.

If you truly have no time to select one of these sleek minor "critters," stick to one of the elephants and add others later.

Ski Dazzle, shown in Figure 1-3, is a producer of four of the world's largest ski and snowboard shows. It exemplifies a company that plans its social media marketing strategically, implements it carefully, and monitors it regularly. Working from a carefully crafted strategic marketing plan, Ski Dazzle. com built a primary social networking community on the Ning platform, with links to four Ning subnetworks that serve each of its four geographically targeted markets (on the Shows and Sales tab). You can find out more about them in the following sidebar, "Ski Dazzle's Ning Dazzle."
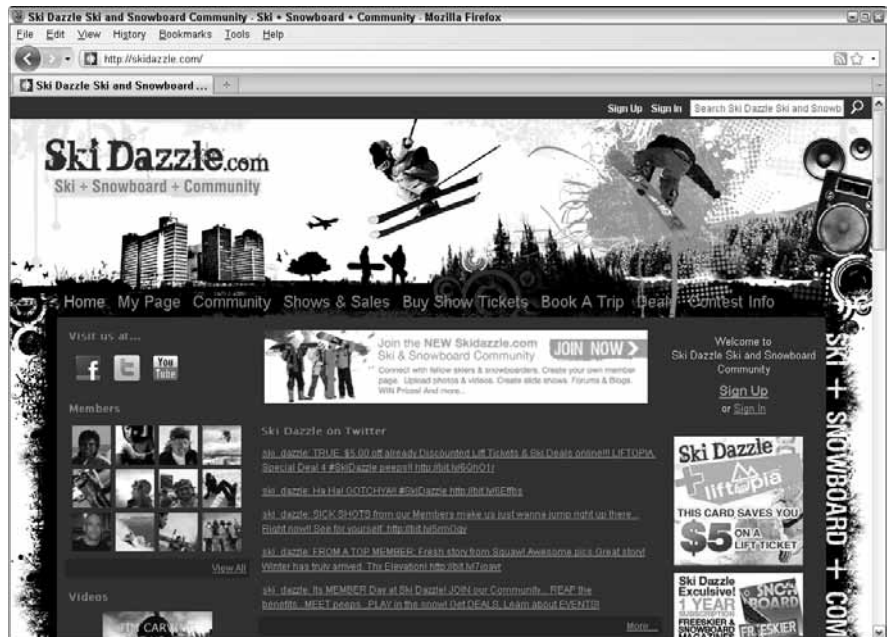
Figure 1-3: Ski Dazzle. com has built a presence on Ning.

Ski Dazzle® is a registered U.S. Trademark owned by Ski Dazzle LLC.
All other trademark names mentioned are owned or controlled by their respective entities.

REMEMBER

Even the smallest social network sites can be valuable if they have your target market. All the averages mean nothing. It's about *your* business and *your* audience. Niche marketing is always the effective use of your time. Fish where *your* fish are!

Ski Dazzle's Ning Dazzle

Ski Dazzle LLC (refer to Figure 1-3) owns and produces four annual consumer ski-and-snowboard shows, one apiece in Los Angeles, the San Francisco Bay Area, Sacramento, and Chicago. Ski Dazzle.com, a Ning network for a year-round community, offers links on its Shows & Sales tab to four other Ning networks, one for each geographical area. (Ning, discussed further in Book VII, Chapter 2, is an easily customizable tool for building social networks.)

Owned by Judy Gray and Jim Foster, who have promoted Ski Dazzle Ski & Snowboard shows for more than 30 years, Ski Dazzle.com acquires user-generated content through YouTube and Flickr and broadcasts its content by way of Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Yahoo! Groups, local message boards, e-mail, and other areas where skiers and snowboarders congregate online. Discussions and feedback from these social sites help Ski Dazzle refine its content and messaging.

This intricate social media plan resulted from a strategic planning session in 2008. "The overall business model is to provide continuous value for members, in turn attracting more members, fans, followers, and friends across multiple social networks," explains marketing director Greg Hendrickson. In this model, the Ski Dazzle Web sites are the focal points for content and sales activities. "The goal is to drive/pull traffic from all other social media into the appropriate Ning community, whose value elements provide revenue opportunities for Ski Dazzle."

"The team investigated a number of social media platforms, settling on Ning for its low start-up cost and extensive do-it-yourself toolset for adding members, capturing content, and creating a flexible home page for changing annual promotions."

Ning-generated content — blogs, promotions, banners, e-mails, and events — are the primary content elements distributed to other social media. User-generated photos and videos have been supplemented with content from strategic partnerships established in 2009 with *Freeskier magazine* and *SnowBoard* magazine. "We re-purpose what we can across all our social media," Hendrickson continues. "We use Ning's share tools and home page widget capabilities for AddThis, hellotxt, Seesmic, Tweetie, twAitter, bit.ly, and SocialOomph."

All this activity requires staff. In addition to Hendrickson, Ski Dazzle has a social media content manager who handles content for Ning, Facebook, Twitter, and other social communities. During the busy show season, staff size expands to the equivalent of three or four full-time people, with outsourcing for graphic design, content development, and Web development. "While Ning provides relatively easy-to-use tools for placing and organizing content," Hendrickson notes, "graphics and content creation require development support and ongoing maintenance."

Ski Dazzle views its investment in social media as necessary based on the changes in the marketplace and the need to provide immediate and quantifiable value to both consumers and exhibitors (advertisers) all year long. For data, they rely on Google Analytics and bit.ly for Web site and campaign tracking, and on Reachmail for e-mail statistics.

Ski Dazzle cross-promotes its complex social media presence with multiple icons on the Web site and in content entries as well as in press releases, brochures, traditional advertising, online advertising, SEO, active blogging, and partnering with online ski- and snowboard-related companies.

(continued)

The strategic plan has paid off. Web traffic increased annually by more than 150 percent in the first year of implementation, according to Hendrickson. In addition, online sales increased significantly, and Ski Dazzle was able to generate online advertising revenue, a new revenue stream for the company.

Though social media allows a business to respond more quickly than in the past, reach more people, evolve, and hone in on effective offers, campaigns, and messaging, it's a true time hog. To be effective, "you must spend time planning your social media process with two things in mind," Hendrickson cautions. You need "a specific desired outcome, and regular timeframes to review data and evolve. Without a clear objective, social media can take a huge amount of time without providing the desired benefits."

If it sounds all-absorbing, it is. Owner Judy Gray coined a phrase that aptly captures the biggest issue with social media: "Feeding the beast," she calls it. "Social media is a great tool, but be prepared to invest in it 24/7/365."