Chapter 6: Staying Ahead of the Curve

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*T*he variations of social media marketing are infinite. Particular services always wax and wane; add-on applications are always too numerous to track. However, the underlying concept of social media — using the Internet to connect real people to each other — is here to stay.

As a business owner, you already have your hands full with existing marketing techniques. Who has time to keep an eye open for new opportunities?

If you take a breather every once in a while, just for the fun of it, experiment with one of the latest trends in social media described in this chapter — or one that no one has heard of yet. If it works, you might discover a new route to success; if it doesn't, you'll still have learned something and kept your creative juices flowing.

Gaining Customers, Sharing Savings

A group of friends hitting the mall is an offline version of social shopping. Online, the term means something quite different: An entire group of strangers saves money by volume buying while they become new customers for your business. The group coupon has emerged as a new way to aggregate (collect as a whole) buyers in specific cities by offering a one-day promotion online or by e-mail.

Services such as Groupon (www.groupon.com), shown in Figures 6-1 and 6-2, and LivingSocial (www.livingsocial.com) offer discounts of 50 percent or more on products or services. The catch: A deal goes through only if a minimum number of buyers sign up for it. As the merchant, you define the deal and set the minimum number of sales high enough to mitigate your risk. You can also set a maximum number of deals to limit your exposure.

Figure 6-1:
Groupon writes clever copy in a unique style for all the ads it features.

Figure 6-2:
A detail page for another offer shows the minimum number of purchases required and other conditions set by the company.

You set the timeframe over which buyers can exercise a deal, usually several months to a year. You don't end up with all the buyers on your doorstep in one day — unless the offer is for a scheduled event, or if you set a short period for redemption. Unlike other forms of advertising with upfront payments, you pay a fee (a percentage of revenue) only if the minimum number of sales occurs. Your business benefits from this approach by obtaining a stream of new customers in a relatively short length of time, compared to how long it takes other forms of advertising to produce new business.

This obvious business-to-consumer (B2C) technique works well for both service and product companies, including bars and restaurants, tourist destinations, health and beauty salons, events, recreation, personal services, and more.

You can make this approach work for business-to-business (B2B) offers, though it's a little more complicated. A B2B offer would depend on the quality of the e-mail list, a product that applies to both individuals and companies (bookkeeping or office supplies, perhaps), or on recommendations from employees to employers.

Even if you're offering a loss leader on one of these collective coupon sites, try not to sell too far below cost. You may not always be able to specify a maximum number of deals. Giving away hundreds of $4 ice cream cones for half-price is one thing; giving away hundreds of $40 haircuts at half-price may leave you short on the rent.

Groupon

Like Don Vito Corleone in *The Godfather*, Groupon makes "an offer [they] can't refuse" to daily e-mail subscribers and casual site visitors in more than 50 cities.

Often, after an offer brings prospects in the door, satisfied customers proceed to spend more money through these avenues:

✦ **Impulse buys and add-ons:** Buyers get 50 percent off on a specialty burrito and proceed to spend their "savings" on drinks and sides.

✦ **Take-home purchases:** "This slice of cake from the offer was so good that I'm buying a whole cake to take home."

✦ **Ongoing services:** One good massage and that client may be yours every two weeks for years.

✦ **Word-of-mouth:** Buyers bring their friends to share the experience.

Groupon was first out of the box with this approach to advertising, based on the concept of the tipping point used to build a critical mass for social action or contributions. (See The Point at www.thepoint.com.)

From its inception in November 2008 through June 2010, Groupon claims to have sold more than 6.3 million coupons to more than 6.3 million e-mail subscribers, and contends that more than 97 percent of featured merchants want to make an offer again.

TIP

For financial reasons, craft carefully your offer, discount, minimum sales requirement, and sold-out maximum amount, recognizing that Groupon takes 50 percent of sales revenue. (Groupon helps you with this task.) Factor estimated add-on purchases as well as lifetime customer value into your calculation. Obviously, new customers who make multiple, repeat purchases are more valuable than customers who buy only once. Try to make your offer something worth a repeat buy!

Groupon selects which businesses participate and determines the schedule for featuring them. In preparation, you may want to create a separate landing page on your Web site for the Groupon offer; a link to it appears in the offer.

TIP

After the offer appears, you can promote the deal in your own newsletter and social media outlets and elsewhere, although you may not have much notice. The "share-this-deal" functionality encourages people who receive your daily Groupon e-mail, or those who visit your site, to tell their friends about the deal on Facebook and Twitter and by e-mail.

Groupon may be an excellent way to bring in new customers, especially if your target audience matches their demographic profile of educated, young, single women who work and have discretionary income. (See it at `www.grouponworks.com/demographics`.)

If a deal goes through, Groupon charges the credit cards of successful buyers. After deducting its 50 percent fee, Groupon sends you a check. It also sells advertising and side deals that appear in its e-mails and on its site. For more information, go to `www.grouponworks.com`.

REMEMBER

Speak with your accountant about how to handle revenue from Groupon and similar deals. Prepaid income is usually treated as a liability on your balance sheet until you fulfill the obligation, or until the time expires to exercise the offer. (Think gift cards.) You may also encounter state-by-state issues regarding sales tax.

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Watch for more competitors to the Groupon model. For example, Gilt (`www.gilt.com`), the luxury discount site, has launched a weekly local deal in New York City with plans to expand. Similar programs, sometimes with a little twist, are opening internationally.

LivingSocial

One of many recent competitors to Groupon, LivingSocial (http://livingsocial.com) offers enticing coupon deals along with peer-recommended local activities and events. Launched in August 2009, it reached 14 cities within the first nine months and is rolling out across the country. It works much like Groupon, except that buyers receive a unique link they can share with others while the deal is on.

The benefits are the same as with Groupon: brand awareness, direct appeal to locally targeted markets, word-of-mouth advertising, high visibility to a new customer stream, no charge unless your minimum number is sold, and an easy way to track results.

Like Groupon, LivingSocial is predominantly a location-based advertisement, although Groupon now accepts offers in specific markets for a deal redeemed online, as opposed to an offer redeemed locally.

Neither of these is the best way to reach a national audience all at once, unless you're willing to target multiple individual cities within your national audience with separate offers. This approach might work for franchises or branches in several cities.

Because LivingSocial promises to save visitors 50 to 70 percent, be sure to set the minimum number of buyers high enough to make up for losses and the percentage that goes to LivingSocial. Include in your calculations an allowance for the LivingSocial share-for-free deal. (If three or more people purchase the deal using the link sent to the original buyer, the original buyer receives a freebie.) This strategy can get expensive if groups organize to purchase a deal — 25 percent of your traffic on the deal might pay nothing!

Most businesses don't set an upper limit on the number of sales, but a cap makes sense in certain situations, especially for event organizers or service providers. For example, your equity waiver theater may have a fixed number of seats, you may have room for only a certain number of people in a dance class, or you may have enough stylists to handle only a certain number of haircuts per day. You can protect yourself from unhappy customers by requiring appointments and allowing adequate time to redeem the offer.

LivingSocial allows users to enter comments below its Things to Do feature. It integrates with Facebook, Twitter, e-mail, and the iPhone to share deals. Claiming more than a million subscribers, LivingSocial also offers an affiliate option for internal Deal Bucks (not cash). For more information on signing up, go to http://livingsocial.com/merchants.

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Gaming the System

Social gaming refers to the transfer of video, online, and cellphone games to social network platforms. According to `www.insidesocialgames.com`, at least 16 games on Facebook already boast more than 10 million monthly players apiece; the Zynga FarmVille game alone has more than 82 million monthly players.

The platform shift alters the interaction between users, making it possible for people to play games with their friends rather than with strangers. It may portend a change in the entire sociology of gaming; it has already changed the demographics. And that's where your business opportunity arrives.

PlayFish and Zynga now offer the greatest number of social games on Facebook and MySpace, but that's expected to change as other companies transfer their popular programs to social networking platforms. Table 6-1 lists some of the many social games and their creators. If you're interested in advertising, product placement, or sponsorship, investigate each one individually and contact the company. Life is negotiable in the gaming world, social or otherwise.

Table 6-1	Companies That Create Social Games	
Company Name	*URL*	*Game Name*
Booyah	`http://booyah.com`	MyTown
Heatwave Interactive	`www.platinumlife.com`	Platinum Life
PlayFirst	`www.playfirst.com`	Diner Dash
Playfish	`www.playfish.com`	Hotel City, Gangster City, Restaurant City, Country Story, Pet Society, Crazy Planets, more
PopCap Games	`www.popcap.com`	Bejeweled Blitz
Take-Two Interactive Software	`www.take2games.com` `www.facebook.com/civnetwork?v=info`	Sid Meieir's Civilization Network
Zynga	`www.zynga.com`	Cafe World, FarmVille, Fashion Wars, FishVille, Mafia Wars, PetVille, ,Poker Blitz, Treasure Isle, YoVille, Zynga Poker, and more

Before you decide to advertise, observe and play a game for a while. Remember to check the user demographics, which may vary by game. If you plan to make a serious investment in social gaming, confirm that your target audience is actively participating.

Tracking who's playing

A 2010 survey of social gaming in the United States and United Kingdom released by game-maker PopCap and Information Solutions Group offers some fascinating insights. More than 24 percent of respondents said they play social games on networks such as Facebook and MySpace, indicating a user base of 100 million in the U.S. alone.

Analysts expect the social gaming industry to generate revenues of more than $1 billion in 2010. PopCap Games (`http://popcap.mediaroom.com/ index.php?s=43&item=149 www.infosolutionsgroup.com/2010_ PopCap_Social_Gaming_Research_Results.pdf`) offers these intriguing demographics (numbers shown are for U.S. only):

✦ The average age of U.S. gamers is 48, with 46 percent age 50 or older.

✦ Women make up the majority of U.S. social gamers: 54 percent versus 46 percent male, which is quite different from the profile of young males who dominate action-packed video games.

✦ Gamers' income profile is across the board: 34 percent below $35,000, 38 percent from $35,000 to $74,000; 23 percent over $75,000.

✦ Women are more likely to play with people they know (68 percent versus 56 percent for men), whereas men are more likely to play with strangers (41 percent versus 33 percent);

✦ Eighty-three percent of respondents have played social games on Facebook versus 24 percent on MySpace, and single digits on other social networks.

✦ Friends' recommendations are the number-one factor influencing social game selection.

✦ Sixty-one percent of social gamers play for more than half an hour; 95 percent play multiple times per week; 68 percent of U.S. gamers play daily.

✦ Thirty-two percent have purchased a virtual gift while playing a social game; 28 percent have purchased in-game currency with real money.

✦ Among the specific games studied, *Bejeweled Blitz* and *FarmVille* were more popular with women; *Mafia Wars* and *Texas Hold'em Poker* were more popular with men.

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Changing the game for marketers

Another report released by the Social Media World Forum in 2009 claimed that 80 percent of the women who play social media games clicked ads or signed up for promotional features in return for points and virtual currencies.

From a marketing point of view, you have several ways to take advantage of social gaming to reach these rather astonishingly large and devoted audiences, generally limited only by your ingenuity and your budget.

(WARNING!) Many in-game advertising solutions are so expensive that only the largest companies can afford them.

Try these ideas:

✦ Advertise on games so that your ads appear where characters would see them in reality: on billboards, signs, subway posters, street flags, or store signage.

✦ Let players "buy" your products with virtual currency, give them as virtual gifts, or win them as prizes.

✦ Give away points or virtual goods for clicking through to your online or video ads instead of ignoring them. The ads might appear as interstitials (between screens), as pop-ups or pop-unders, or between rounds of play.

✦ Place your product so that it appears as a prop or part of the "stage set" for a game, just as it would in a movie, TV show, or video game. It can be a cereal box on a table, a book on a shelf, or branded running shoes worn by a character.

✦ Sponsor branded items within the game that players can acquire, such as jobs or T-shirts. Think big. Elite Taami Nutz, an Israeli candy manufacturer, sponsors a peanut crop on FarmVille on Facebook, the first advertiser to do so, at `http://apps.facebook.com/elitenutz/?toolID=8QQL83`. The large sign in the center welcomes users to the first-ever sponsorship on FarmVille. The text on the crates tells players they can buy the peanuts for 20 and sell them at 78. The top tabs are navigation, and the new Nutz candy bar appears in the lower right corner.

Living Virtually

When reality becomes too much to handle, beating a hasty retreat to a virtual world sounds tempting. These 3D worlds combine animation, video, and audio to provide an all-encompassing experience for users. Though virtual worlds have been around for almost a decade, their technological sophistication continues to increase. The format is appealing not only as a game environment but also for virtual meetings, training, teaching, modeling, conferences, and more.

Users, or *residents,* interact with each other by using avatars, which can socialize, participate in activities, travel, or create and trade virtual property. Indeed, an active virtual economy crosses over into the real world, to the tune of more than $560 million in 2009.

The best-known virtual world, *Second Life* (`http://secondlife.com`), has about 1 million users, of whom about three-quarters log in more than once a month. You might also want to take a look at OpenSim, an open source virtual world application (`http://opensimulator.org/wiki/Main_Page`). Table 6-2 contains some useful *Second Life* advertising resources. For more information on virtual worlds, see *Second Life For Dummies,* by Sarah Robbins and Mark Bell.

Table 6-2	***Second Life* Advertising Resources**
Description	*URL*
Blog describing do's and don'ts of advertising in *Second Life*	`http://secondthoughts.typepad.com/second_thoughts/2006/10/dos_and_donts_f.html#more`
Free, categorized *Second Life* business directory	`www.slbiz2life.com`
Inventory of online advertising opportunities	`http://world.secondlife.com/place/f43e2972-b091-50c5-c413-dc3fc65671a0`
Linkable resource list for *Second Life* marketing	`http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Advertising_in_Second_Life#Advertising_networks_in_Second_Life_2`
Second Life blogs	`http://blogs.secondlife.com/index.jspa`

Advertising in *Second Life* is much like advertising within games: You can post your advertising in different *Second Life* environments, including signs and billboards, some of which are controlled by residents. Or, you can trade your goods virtually or in reality; some folks sell rain, snow, barking dogs, and fancy outfits, though most sell real estate.

The unique exception is that you can create your own environment within *Second Life.* Users can interact with the environment while learning about your products and services and building relationships. Saint Leo University, whose real-world address is Saint Leo, Florida, does this well with its virtual campus in *Second Life.*

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The university uses its presence in *Second Life,* shown in Figure 6-3, as not only a dynamic opportunity for online meetings and education but also a marketing tool to attract students from around the world to enroll in online classes. Prospective and current students, staff, faculty, parents, and friends can all gather in *Second Life* to get a "taste" of the college. For more information on Saint Leo University's virtual presence, see `http://info.saintleo.edu/col/SL.cfm`.

Figure 6-3:
The campus of Saint Leo University in *Second Life.*

Courtesy Saint Leo University, Inc.

Making Social Mobile

Social media is no longer confined to a "standard" computer of any size. The integration of social media with mobile devices, from cellphones to iPads, creates both opportunities and challenges for your marketing campaigns. The proliferation of smartphones and apps, 3G networks, more affordable data plans, built-in Web browsers, and mobile-ready Web sites have all contributed to the growth of mobile social activities, though the human factor is a major component, too.

A February 2010 study from Ruder Finn, a large public relations agency, looked at how people use their mobile phones. Americans spend nearly three hours per day on their phones — 91 percent of them use it to socialize, compared to 79 percent of PC users. Aha! Table 6-3 details what those 91 percent are up to.

Table 6-3	How Mobile Users Socialize
Task	*Percentage Who Use This Method*
Send instant messages	62
Forward e-mails	58
Post comments on social networking sites	45
Connect to people on social networking sites	43
Share content with others	40
Share photos	38

www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/new-study-shows-intent-behind-mobile-internet-use-84016487.html

Not too surprisingly, usage also differs by gender and age. According to the same study:

✦ **Men look at prices but women buy:** Men are more likely than women to compare prices (47 percent versus 30 percent), but women are more likely to purchase (40 percent versus 30 percent).

✦ **Women express themselves while men do business:** Women are more likely than men to personally express themselves (49 percent versus 35 percent), but men are more likely to conduct business (62 percent versus 57 percent).

✦ **Youth are the target for retailers:** Youth (44 percent) are more likely to shop over their mobile phones than the average mobile user (35 percent).

You'll find additional resources on mobile phones in Table 6-4.

Table 6-4	Mobile Social Media Resources	
Name	*URL*	*Description*
Broadtexter	`www.broadtexter.com`	Free mobile club to text marketing messages
Facebook Mobile	`http://m.facebook.com`	Mobile Facebook
LinkedIn Mobile	`http://m.linkedin.com/session/new`	Mobile LinkedIn
MobGold	`www.mobgold.com`	Mobile advertising network
MySpace Mobile	`http://m.myspace.com/login.wap`	Mobile MySpace
Ruder Finn	`www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/new-study-shows-intent-behind-mobile-internet-use-84016487.html`	Study of mobile phone use
SocialMediaTrader.com	`http://socialmediatrader.com/38-social-networking-sites-for-your-mobile`	List of mobile social networking services
Twitter Mobile	`http://mobile.twitter.com`	Mobile Twitter
Wadja	`www.wadja.com`	Mobile social networking service
Zannel	`www.zannel.com`	Social media syndication including mobile applications for text, images, and video
Zinadoo	`www.zinadoo.com`	Free mobile Web site creation tool

Source: http://socialmediatrader.com/38-social-networking-sites-for-your-mobile

TIP

If you haven't already created a mobile Web site as part of your suite of Web pages, do it now. Zinadoo offers a free starter tool at www.webdesignfor mobiledevices.com/wordpress-mobile-templates.php.

It's hard to say which is the chicken and which is the egg: smartphones or social media? It doesn't matter. What matters now is that Facebook and Twitter and other social networking services have become do-it-now, do-it-anywhere-on-the-phone activities. Social media is convenient, easy, and cool, and it can be done in bits and snips.

Mobile social marketing offers far more opportunities to "reach out and touch someone" with your message. The challenge, of course, is that everyone else is trying to do that, too. Your efforts have to cut through an increasing amount of clutter.

Locating Yourself with Social Mapping

Location. Location. Location. It works in real estate. Now, apparently, it's another key to successful social media marketing. Several applications of location-based services, including social mapping (identifying where people are), and location-based games, now exist. They are evolving as a loyalty-program offering rewards to consumers for patronizing particular retailers.

The convergence of GPS, mobile phones, and social media offers the holy grail of opportunity for marketers. Theoretically, you can inform potential customers that you offer exactly what they're looking for, when they're looking for it, and within just a few miles of their locations. In March, foursquare added a tool that lets businesses monitor foursquare visitors who check in by number, gender, day of week, and time of day. You won't see a better service until cyberpsychics start offering their services.

Going geo or staying put

Whether you should use these social mapping services depends on the nature of your business, whether your customer base is using them, and which location-based activities consume your prospective customers' time. Consider these issues:

✦ **Many cellphone apps already offer a service (for example, a weather report, road conditions, a list of gas prices at various stations around town) and then add a sponsor.** If all you're trying to do is reach the consumer-on-the-go who is ready to buy, do you need more than that? Maybe a pay-per-click (PPC) ad on a mobile search engine solves your needs.

✦ **Enough people have to be using a particular application to make it worth the effort.** The chart shown in Figure 6-4 might give you pause. As of spring 2010, the number of local users of two of the most hyped location games (foursquare and Gowalla) was relatively small. You need to determine how many people you need to reach to have enough of them become customers, and you have to know whether privacy is an issue for them.

Figure 6-4:
The rate of adoption for foursquare and Gowalla seems surprisingly low compared with their hype.

Local's Long Tail Challenge

U.S. Total Population		City/U.S.	foursquare	Gowalla
	308,885,867		500,000	100,000
New York City	8,363,717	2.71%	13,539	2,708
Los Angeles	3,833,998	1.24%	6,206	1,241
Chicago	2,853,116	0.92%	4,618	924
Houston	2,242,195	0.73%	3,629	726
Phoenix	1,567,925	0.51%	2,538	508
Philadelphia	1,447,396	0.47%	2,343	469
Dallas	1,279,911	0.41%	2,072	414
Detroit	912,063	0.30%	1,476	295
San Francisco	808,977	0.26%	1,310	262
Minneapolis	662,196	0.21%	1,072	214

Chart created by Ryan Kazda & Kevin Nakao for WhitePages, Inc

Estimate the number of users available in your location before you commit. Of course, a high-tech conference that draws a huge number of users may be a one-time opportunity worth taking advantage of.

✦ **Prospective customers must be participating.** For example, the demographics of foursquare users are a bit surprising. According to Quantcast (www.quantcast.com), users are two-thirds female, and the majority are over 35. Like politics, all marketing is local. You may draw a large audience of foursquare users if you happen to own the pizza place across the street from the computer science department at the local college.

Miracles do happen. Joe Sorge of Milwaukee attracted 161 foursquare users to a "swarm" at his burger place, AJ Bombers. The 161 users, of fewer than 400 in the area, boosted his Sunday afternoon sales by 110 percent in sales. All he offered was the virtual swarm badge and a contribution to a cause. He promoted the event via Twitter, Facebook, video, Flickr, and viral mentions on other people's social networks.

✦ **Hardware is still a problem.** The usefulness of mobile apps depends on battery life. Continuous location tracking eats energy faster than the old *Pac-Man* games. Is the application you're considering practical? Other technical issues remain, too. Devices must know "where they are," which is sometimes more than where a satellite thinks they are. Second, satellite-positioning data must be translated into data that a user can understand, such as an address. Neither is trivial.

✦ **The temptation is great to "go geo."** Current estimates show that locally targeted ads may produce results ten times better than untargeted advertising. Of course, you can expect soon to pay ten times as much, too. At the same time, geotargeted inventory is limited. Some manufacturers don't let GPS be used for advertising alone; they require some customer benefit and functionality.

Applying social mapping to B2B

Most users of social mapping have been business-to-consumer (B2C) businesses in hospitality, tourism, and recreation. HubSpot Internet Marketing, however, identified four implications of social marketing for business-to-business (B2B) companies (`http://blog.hubspot.com/blog/ tabid/6307/bid/5815/Forget-Retail-The-B2B-Applications-of- Foursquare.aspx`):

✦ Location is likely to become part of search engine optimization in the future, so you may need to reoptimize content.

✦ Trade show marketing, which is about connecting and building relationships, may be affected because location apps do something similar. They may even change how to sponsor events — for example, the standard hospitality suite at the Consumer Electronics Show may be replaced with a foursquare swarm.

✦ Location apps may affect customer relationship management tools and databases, making it easier to schedule visits by salespeople to hot leads.

✦ Location data may affect the process of identifying prospects and facilitating lead generation. After you know where your target market "hangs out," you can easily connect with them.

TIP

If your analysis — or your curiosity — impels you forward with social mapping, check site user numbers in your area with both the service provider and a third-party source such as Quantcast. The numbers can fluctuate widely. Then select from one of the applications we talk about in the following section or many others that are blooming on the geolocation tree. Your best bet: Ask your customers what they are using.

foursquare

Foursquare, at `www.foursquare.com` is riding high at the moment, having reached 500,000 active users in barely a year of operation. This location-based game awards virtual "badges" to users who check in at targeted locations using their cellphones. It's now compatible with the iPhone, Android, and BlackBerry.

You'll have difficulty determining whether playing foursquare and similar games is a temporary geek-craze or will turn out to have long-term appeal to folks who simply needed a nudge (as in "discount") to try something new.

Early adopters, mostly local restaurants and bars, have lined up in certain locations to offer discounts to new or repeat customers. For some of these businesses, foursquare acts like a loyalty program. And, it's a useful way to fill a place during a slow time.

Foursquare offers self-service tools for business owners to create, manage, and track how their offers perform, at `http://foursquare.com/businesses`. You can choose from a variety of specials:

✦ **Mayor:** Can be used only by the "Mayor," the user who has checked in most often in the past 60 days, as shown in Figure 6-5.

✦ **Count-based:** Available after a user checks in a certain number of times.

✦ **Frequency-based**: Available multiple times after a certain number of check-ins per users.

✦ **Wildcard:** Always available, but the user has to meet certain conditions before receiving the special. A swarm badge, shown in Figure 6-5, is an example of a badge awarded for participating in an event with 50 others.

Businesses promote their foursquare participation in many ways: on their own social media feeds, on signs at cash registers, and on sandwich boards in the streets. Foursquare notifies players by text message whenever an offer is available nearby.

Users can analyze their foursquare usage compared to others at `http://square.grader.com`. You can view foursquare badges at `http://square.grader.com/badge/summary`.

Gowalla

Gowalla is a location-based application in which players check in at places of interest. Using a GPS-enabled smartphone, iPad, or the Web, they can share their locations with friends and write comments about where they are via Facebook, Twitter, or Gowalla (`www.gowalla.com`). Figure 6-6 shows how for each location displayed on the screen, viewers can see how many other Gowalla Passport holders have visited and how many times they have checked in.

Standing
Sushi Bar of
Singapore
offers two
free pieces
of sushi to
the daily
Mayor of
the Moment
(top). A
swarm
badge is
awarded
to each of
50 or more
participants
checked
in at a
foursquare
flash mob
event
(bottom).

Standing Sushi Bar, Singapore (www.standingsushibar.com) Courtesy foursquare

Figure 6-6:
Gowalla searches for nearby locations by category.

Courtesy Gowalla (temporary) Map in screenshot © Google Inc.Used with permission. (temporary)

A reward system of "stamps" marks users' achievement based on the number and location of places where they check in. As a location game, Gowalla involves searching for virtual objects in the physical world (a twist on geocaching). It makes a nice application for tracking scavenger hunts, visiting national parks, compiling bucket lists, or making sequential stops on a tour that awards a prize for completion at the end. (Imagine *Around the World in 80 Days* using Gowalla.)

Local businesses can advertise with branded spots or directly target customers through specials, promotions, and loyalty programs. Branding campaigns may involve virtual goods, sponsorships, or custom "stamps."

Loopt

Loopt is another location-based social mapping service. It enables users to connect where they are with whom they know. Using their mobile phones, users can share location information, comments, photos, and personal recommendations with friends in real time. ("I found the car in row XX space 12 on the green level.") It claims to have more than 3 million registered users, partnerships with every major U.S. mobile phone carrier, and availability on more than 100 phone models and the iPad.

Its recommendation function, called Pulse!, provides reviews from multiple sources, and allows its users to rate places and leave tips.

TIP

The local review site Yelp, at `www.yelp.com`, has accomplished a similar result by adding a location-based, check-in feature to its cellphone version.

Loopt offers its own reward program to compete with foursquare and Gowalla. Called LooptStar, the program lets consumers compete with friends and win rewards from retailers by checking in to locations and meeting certain requirements. Rewards may be real-world coupons, branded items from participating organizations, or virtual achievements. Loopt has structured its new program as a "cost-per-visit" model.

Location apps on Facebook and Twitter

The importance of integrating social media with location hasn't been lost on Facebook, Twitter, or many other applications.

Twitter has already installed @anywhere, which lets users add geolocation information to regular Twitter feeds, whereas developers can add Twitter functionality to other location-based apps. Twitter plans to expand location information in other ways, including its own tool for organizing tweets by geolocation in real time. Both users and developers are expected to have more control over how their geolocations are used and to whom they are available.

Third-party developers already offer some location-based Twitter apps based on the locations listed in user profiles. Twellowhood (`www.twellow.com/twellowhood`) locates a list of tweeters in a specified area; TwitterLocal. net, an Adobe AIR client, filters tweets by profile location; and NearbyTweets (`www.nearbytweets.com`) sorts tweets by topic within a specified region.

Facebook plans to add its new Places feature to incorporate location information on Facebook pages. Though details are still vague, one aspect allows users to decide whether to share location information with friends; another provides software tools to third parties to develop location-based applications.

Meet-ups and tweet-ups

Meet-ups and tweet-ups bridge the gap between the cyberworld and the one we live in. They both make it easy for people with similar interests to organize meetings for fun, advocacy, or learning or simply to meet one another.

Meetup (`www.meetup.com`), which has been around since 2002, bills itself as "the world's largest network of local groups," claiming that more than 6 million monthly site visitors attend some 180,000 meetings located in 45,000 cities. The site reached great popularity as an organizing tool during the 2008 presidential election. Meetup charges organizers a fee starting at $12 per month for using its platform.

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Meetup technology lets people find or start a group located near them. The system includes an easy-to-use interface to identify meetings within a certain distance and to reply by RSVP, find directions, and check out the history of a Meetup group. Meetup integrates nicely with Facebook events and RSVPs; it has an application for integrating Meetup with other applications. Figure 6-7 shows a Meetup search page.

In an inevitable mashup, Meetup now allows Groupon fans to hook up at "official" and self-organized events through `www.meetup.com/Groupon`.

What an easy way to find your target market in a location close to you!

The term *tweetup* has been part of the Twitter lexicon for a long time to describe a live meeting of Twitter users or, more generally, any face-to-face event organized by way of social media.

While there is not yet a nationwide site that facilitates connections the way Meetup.com does, local sites exist. For example, in addition to its feed at Twitter.com/BostonTweetUp (shown in Figure 6-8), Boston Tweetup maintains a calendar and reviews technology-oriented events at its Web site `http://bostontweetup.com`.

Figure 6-7:
A Meetup search for wine-tasting groups near Cleveland produces several results.

Figure 6-8:
Boston is serious about its tweet-ups.

Twitter is already influencing traditional gatherings such as large conferences and seminars. Small groups with a particular interest or agenda can now more easily meet with each other socially or in a rump session. And many attendees have started tweeting questions and commentary during presentations, using the hashtag (#) to mark tweets related to a particular session. This technique can either unnerve or energize presenters. Some tech-savvy people read the tweet stream as the session goes on, and respond to questions on the fly.

In either case, a tweet-up is definitely another way to take networking to the next level.

Marketing with meet-ups and tweet-ups

Meet-ups and tweet-ups offer you an exquisite opportunity to reach out to new customers. Contact meeting organizers to see whether you can

✦ Host an event at your restaurant or another event location

✦ Offer a discount to members or for the event

✦ Give a presentation or teach a class at a future meeting

✦ Provide information to members

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Attending a meeting first is helpful (but not required) to make sure that the make-up of the group fits your target audience and to meet the leaders.

Organizing a meet-up or tweet-up

Nothing keeps you from organizing your own meet-up or tweet-up — just don't make it overtly self-serving. Creating a successful event can bring you recognition as a leader, enhance your credibility, attract media attention, and quickly bring new followers to your social media sites.

To ensure a successful event, promote it from your blog and e-mail newsletter and all your own social media channels, as well as by way of Meetup, Facebook events, Twitter, online calendars, and ordinary press releases. The more promotional channels, the better. You can find a set of helpful tools at `www.twitip.com/planning-an-tweetup`.

REMEMBER

As with other location-dependent activities, make sure that a critical mass of local folks are interested in the event you're planning. In some cases, they may already need to be following you on the social networks you've identified as your promotion channels.

You can gauge interest by using Meetup to estimate the number of members in similar groups in your locations. Or take advantage of the following Twitter tools to help your planning:

✦ Geogtagging makes it easier for people to find you. Log in to your Twitter account and open your settings. Select the Add a Location to Your Tweets check box. For each tweet, you can now choose to enter a specific location, a general area, or no location. For more information see `http://twitter.zendesk.com/forums/26810/entries/78525`.

✦ The search function can help you estimate the number of local Twitter users within a city or radius. Go to `http://search.twitter.com/advanced`. In the Places section, enter your city; then select the radius in miles or kilometers (for example, Near: Albuquerque within 25 miles). It isn't a perfect system, but it's helpful.

At the event itself, do the basics:

✦ Check out the location ahead of time for size, lighting, quality, and service.

✦ Provide name tags and pens.

✦ Stay active, by facilitating discussions, resolving problems, making introductions, and generally acting as host.

TIP You may want to take advantage of other event planning tools, such as Eventbrite (`www.eventbrite.com`), Cvent (`www.cvent.com`), or Amiando (`www.amiando.com`) if you're expecting a large group. If you use ConstantContact for your e-mail newsletters, look at its Event Marketing tool at `www.constantcontact.com/event-marketing/index.jsp`.

Buzzing Around

As traffic skyrocketed on Facebook, Google launched its own competing social networking site, Buzz (`www.google.com/buzz`), in February 2010. Users can easily share text, links, photos, and videos. Buzz leverages the Gmail platform, tying together an entire suite of Google applications such as Picasa, YouTube, and Reader, as well as integrating with Flickr, Twitter, and more.

With its instant Gmail user base of more than 100 million global users (compared to more than 400 million for Facebook and 75 million for Twitter), Google Buzz quickly climbed to more than 160,000 posts and comments per hour, more than 9 million posts in fewer than three days, and nearly 300,000 mobile check-ins daily. Convenient, familiar, and easy to use, Buzz was primed for success.

The Google Buzz button appears directly below the Inbox link for Gmail users, making it simple for people who have never explored social networking to stumble into it. Buzz is already compatible with Android and the iPhone and several other phone models, and it incorporates Google Latitude for social mapping. Google also plans a paid Enterprise-level version of Buzz oriented toward internal collaboration. Eventually, Google will probably add advertising to Buzz pages.

Adding one significant advantage, Google Buzz (see Figure 6-9) organizes message streams by threads, not chronologically, making it much easier to follow conversations. Clicking the link to expand a post produces not only the original post but also related comments.

Using Buzz for business

If you have already implemented other social networking accounts, you may legitimately question the benefits of adding Buzz. Consider some of these as you make your business and marketing decision:

✦ **SEO:** Because Google indexes Buzz profiles and content, sharing your content and obtaining inbound links may help boost your standings in search engine results. Remember that Google includes social media in real-time search. Because Google always loves its own solutions best, your profile and Buzz postings may rank high in search results.

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Figure 6-9: The Google Buzz page shows threaded discussions to the left. Its related links appear on the right side, along with a My Places map displaying its location.

Courtesy CraftyChica.com

✦ **Customer relationships:** You can take advantage of customers' and prospects' existing Gmail addresses to invite them to follow you and to start following them. Because of the threaded nature of the discussions, you may find that managing interactions requiring several back-and-forth messages on Buzz is easier than on other social networks. Threads make it easier to obtain highly focused feedback and to solicit answers to specific questions from a selected group of users.

✦ **Geolocation features:** The Google mobile version of Buzz points to the location you choose (MyPlaces on your profile). Another feature, the Nearby stream, identifies posts from people near that location even if they aren't following you. You may be able to generate a message to nearby users to draw them into your business.

✦ **Your customers use it:** This logic trumps everything. If your customers use Buzz, so must you.

TIP

Absolutely include Google Buzz within your sets of Follow Us and Social Share buttons. Most of the social share services, such as ShareThis and AddThis, already include Buzz as a choice.

Unless your customers are already on Buzz, don't rush headlong into it. In the meantime, Buzz is an easy-to-use platform for interacting with prospective customers, distributing keyword-loaded content, and gaining inbound links.

The initial launch of Google Buzz is oriented toward individuals, so you may need to tweak it a bit to meet your needs. Be sure to add Buzz to your Social Media Marketing Plan, discussed in Book I, Chapter 2, if you decide to use it.

TECHNICAL STUFF

Copy-and-paste buttons for Buzz are available at `http://buzz.google.com/stuff`. Follow the directions at the links for Post or Follow widgets. Select the button style you want and paste in the supplied code.

Opening a Gmail account

Buzz is intimately tied to Gmail. If you already have a Gmail account, you may want to establish a brand-new one that's strictly for Buzz business. Otherwise, you may find yourself automatically following your frequent Gmail contacts and having to unfollow them. It isn't difficult, but it's time-consuming.

However, without making much of a commitment, you can establish a Gmail account, build a profile for search benefits, and prepare a Buzz account for the future.

The steps are simple:

1. **Set up a new Gmail account at `www.gmail.com`.**

   If possible, use the same handle, or nickname, that you use at your other social media accounts; that name appears on your Buzz account. Verify your e-mail address via the e-mail confirmation message that Google sends you.

2. **Import business-related e-mail addresses that you might want to follow or invite to follow you.**

   Unless you have already segregated business e-mail addresses from personal ones, this process can be time-consuming. You can further segment your business addresses into groups to direct different posts to different groups in the future. Or, start over with a blank address book that grows organically from your new Buzz activities.

3. **Click Buzz in the left menu to get to your blank Buzz home page.**

4. **Click the Edit link next to your name at the top of the page.**

   You go to a Profiles page where you create or edit your business-oriented Google profile. If you need help with this step, we discuss profiles in the next section.

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REMEMBER

In any case, set up separate Google profiles for your personal use and for your business.

Setting up a Google business profile

After you have enabled a Gmail account, you need to create or update your profile. Because people may use this profile to determine whether they want to follow you, treat it as a marketing opportunity. For more information on profiles, visit `www.google.com/support/accounts/bin/answer.py?answer=97703&hl=en`.

TIP

At the moment, Buzz has no good search function; just wait a while. In the meantime, you can find mentions of your company on Buzz by going to `www.google.com`. In the Search box, enter **site:google.com YourCompanyName**. To limit results to relatively current mentions, choose Show Options⇨Updates in the upper left corner of the results page.

Go to `www.google.com/profiles` and follow these steps to edit your existing public profile:

1. **Click the Edit link and change the following information:**

   • Select the Display My Full Name and Allow People to Follow Me options. As a business, you generally want people to find you and to follow you.

   • Deselect the Display the List of People I'm Following and People Following Me option. In most cases, there is no reason to make that information public; the number of followers is still visible.

2. **Click the Photo link and do the following:**

   • Upload the logo or avatar graphic you use for your other social media.

   • Using the Photos tab at the top, you can upload additional photos from Flickr or Picasa or other services, or even your hard drive. These photos comprise a horizontal slide show at the top of your page.

WARNING!

Be cautious about using identifiable photos of people unless you have a permission waiver. Photos of employees or photos taken on public streets are generally acceptable.

3. **Click the About Me tab, and fill in the boxes with business information, wherever possible, just as you did for business profiles on other social networks.**

   For instance, use your business name for First Name and Last Name and your business address for Where I Live Now. Other Names should be the handle you use for other social marketing purposes. Enter your marketing tag under What I Do and your company name as Current Company. Ignore boxes for schools and other irrelevant personal information.

4. **If it isn't already verified, click to verify your e-mail address at the displayed domain name.**

5. **Incorporate your preferred search terms in the Short Bio box, which should include a brief summary of your products or services and a benefits statement. Enter preferred search terms or tags in the Interests box.**

   This step is important because Google scans public profiles for search engine ranking.

6. **Click the Contact Info tab. Add all your current contact information and make it publicly available.**

   Remember that this is your business identity, not your personal one.

   Add names to identify who can view your profile. If you wish, create Groups on this screen. (Click the View link and follow the prompts.)

7. **Click the About Me tab. In the Add Links area, enter your business Web site URL and all your other social media pages.**

   Make the anchor text a call to action, such as "Follow us on Twitter."

8. **Customize your profile URL, using your nickname, handle, or Gmail username.**

9. **Click Save to save your changes.**

   Your Profile page goes live. If you see a message at the top saying that your profile isn't eligible to be featured in Google search, reedit it to include more information until you get a positive result. You can easily edit your profile at any time by clicking the Edit Profile link.

To find Buzz, follow these steps:

1. **Click the Gmail link in the upper left corner.**

2. **If this account is new, click the Check Out Buzz box. Then click the Buzz link in the left navigation, directly below Inbox.**

3. **Click the Connected Sites link at the top of the inset box to incorporate feeds from other sites.**

   A dialog box with the names of services appears.

4. **Click the Add button for the accounts that you want to associate with Buzz, and click Save.**

   Your current location (from the Where I Live Now option in the About Me section) should automatically appear on the My Places map. If it doesn't, set your location at `www.google.com/latitude/intro.html` or use Buzz Mobile (`www.google.com/intl/en/mobile/buzz`) or enter **buzz.google.com** on your phone's browser.

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TIP

Cross-promote your Buzz account just as you do your Facebook, Twitter, and other social media accounts. Be sure to include Buzz as a destination for syndicating content from your blog, Twitter, and other social media accounts.

Now you're ready to start posting. You can easily use Buzz whenever (and only when) you use Gmail. As soon as you click in the box to post text, you see links to insert photos or links and to set the distribution for the post.

TECHNICAL STUFF

To see statistics for your Google Buzz account, go to your Google dashboard at `www.google.com/dashboard`. Sign in and navigate to the Buzz section for some basic data.