

Week 5: Social Interactions

In Chapter 9, “Social Platforms,” I presented personal and business networks along with white-label services through which you can build your own social spaces and applications. In Chapter 10, “Social Content: Multimedia,” and Chapter 11, “Reviews, Ratings, and Recommendations,” I presented the content that people create on the Social Web, content ranging from casual, short-burst conversations on Twitter and personal reflections like ratings and recommendations to more thoughtful blogs, reviews, conversations, and multimedia.

You can think of these as the nouns of the Social Web, the people, places, and things of interest to those who posted them and as well to those who commented on them and shared them with friends. This chapter is about the verbs, the connective threads that tell you what’s happening.

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Connecting the Dots

Social Interactions — the third big collection of channels making up social media — consist of the messages, feeds, and emails that flow as social content is created, discovered, consumed, repurposed, and shared. I used the expression “connective threads” in the introduction: on the Social Web anyone can make something and put it out there. But if no one knows about it, how social is it? The updates, feeds, and emails — the connective threads — tell you to go look, that something new is waiting for you.

Taken together, these activity indicators become social content in and of themselves. They not only represent and carry information, in many cases they *are* the information. For example, consider Seesmic, a video conversation service. Using Seesmic, you create and post a new video or video reply, and instantly it’s also pushed over to Twitter where people see the title of your video as if it were a post like any other. This secondary notice tells the participants in communities *outside of the one you are in right now* — in this case Seesmic — what you are doing at this moment, but somewhere else. *That is social content, just like any other post on Twitter.* This kind of information is what increasingly powers the Social Web, pulling people together and driving conversations, including those that you are interested in as a marketer.

As a more general example of the tools that make it easy to follow what’s going on around you, consider FriendFeed. FriendFeed simultaneously aggregates, organizes, and then directs information about social content from those who create it toward those who want to know about it. FriendFeed provides pointers to nearly all of the content that those around you create — Twitter posts, Flickr uploads, and more.



Note: I have used Friendfeed in this chapter as an example of the services that simplify the use of social updates. Ping.fm and SocialThing are worth looking at too. If they’re in beta, request a beta code from a friend.

You can usually find someone in your Twitter following who can set you up with an access code.

FriendFeed: <http://www.friendfeed.com>

Ping.fm: <http://ping.fm>

SocialThing: <http://socialthing.com>

What’s the benefit of a tool like FriendFeed to you as a Social Web participant? Instead of visiting a dozen places to see what someone that you may be interested has done recently, you subscribe to them via FriendFeed instead. When you see something new that interests you in the feed, you can jump directly to that content. Otherwise, if not interested, you just continue doing whatever you were already doing,

Through tools such as FriendFeed, Social Web participants are able to manage very large amounts of information: the updates literally flow to them, as they happen. As a marketer, you can efficiently follow the influencers that matter to you. It’s a lot

like fishing, but in this case the fish are jumping into your boat while you pay attention to more important things, as if there were more important things than fishing.

Tip: The Social Web is reorganizing itself: instead of setting up around specific properties like YouTube and Flickr, it's more and more running on the flow of social information *between* sites like YouTube, Flickr, and the social networks to which the audience belongs. Instead of visiting sites, these tools track new posts and *deliver pointers to the content*. You can then choose to act or not.



In the previous section, I talked about using tools that make it easy for you to keep up with the diverse activities of others. Using these same tools, you can also make it easy for others to keep up with you. By creating a feed of your own social actions, you can make it easy for your friends and followers (read “customers”) to discover the content you are creating. Through social interactions and the messages that carry the information about what is going on across the Social Web, niche content percolates out through the Social Web and finds its way to the specific individuals who are interested in it.

Managing Social Information

Chapters 9, 10, and 11 were dedicated to “things” — virtual social objects such as networks, communities, photos, and conversations. That’s the stuff that makes up the Social Web, right? Isn’t that social media? Yes, it sure is — but it’s only part of it. To be sure, social content matters — think for a minute about a post in a company blog relating to product safety. What matters as much or more than the post itself, however, is how that post comes to the attention of someone who needs or wants to know about it. The typical 20- or 25-year-old Millennial, no doubt an active member of multiple social networks, is also uploading pictures and videos, maintaining running conversations on Twitter, and monitoring a few dozen blogs and event sites for information on sports, music, films, and more. How do people keep track of this?

The common explanation is *multitasking* — the ability to perform multiple tasks or simultaneously divide one’s attention between seemingly disparate, parallel activities. Multitasking is part of it, and a lot of Social Web participants do exactly this as they hop from site to site — or window to window — to see what’s happened recently. Better, however, than “brute force” techniques such as individually checking a dozen sites each day or even tracking the specific updates that each site sends out is the ability to *manage* social information effectively. This means simplifying and making sense of a dozen sources information — each multiplied by the number of friends present, each of whom is also contributing their own content. That’s a lot to keep up with.

Think back to Chapter 4, “Web 2.0: The Social Web.” Most people live in a town with one or perhaps two newspapers, and probably some type of local entertainment

publication. It used to be that when you wanted to know what happened yesterday — or was going to happen this weekend — you grabbed one of these papers and looked it up. Perhaps you checked with a local TV station or tuned into the local news radio. The point is that you needed to check with only a relatively small number of information sources to get a complete picture (or, at the least, as complete as you could get) of what was going on. Now, in the technical vastness of the future, there are hundreds, thousands, *millions* of *active* blogs, a good number of which reference news, entertainment, sports, and so on. What if they'd been implemented as websites instead of blogs? The analogy here is that a newspaper, like most websites, is an isolated, unconnected document that assumes *you* will be visiting *it*. It would be literally impossible to go out and monitor a large number of sites — and difficult to do so for even a small subset — on a regular basis to see what's new. So, you'd pick your favorites, and having done so *you'd be limited to whatever they knew about* and chose to share, just as *you'd be influenced by their opinion* regardless of the thinking of others around you. Blogs, thankfully, aren't implemented like that.

Instead, blogs are built around the idea of conversation, and use RSS to make publication and consumption efficient. As a result, you can subscribe to a lot of them: instead of one or two sources of information, you have 5, 10, 50, 100, 1,000 sources... it doesn't matter. When their authors post something new, RSS will see to it that you know about it. All you do is follow your subscriptions. RSS-aware tools like Google Reader make it a snap to keep up with lots of blogs and the hundreds of individual posts they contain.

The same concept applies on the Social Web. Instead of running about and checking each individual site of interest, savvy social participants set up feeds and then aggregate those into cohesive streams. Figure 12.1 shows how someone aggregates the social content of three friends and their activities across separate social sites into one easy-to-follow feed, in this example using FriendFeed. The same thing — scaled up — lets people aggregate hundreds of friends with activities spanning dozens of sites. Some take it one step further: they route subscriptions to their phone or handheld, reading and then tapping out a quick reply while on the go when something interesting comes their way.

What does this have to do with marketing? A lot, actually. To begin with, what you create on the Social Web competes with what everyone else is creating. If you think TV is crowded, consider that when you buy a spot, you at least have some degree of certainty that your audience will actually see it. With social media, there is no such guarantee. To be seen, your content has to be chosen, and that in turn means it has to be visible and that your audience has to know it exists. Beyond that, a lot of what you create is going to be modified or repurposed for presentation in some content form other than what you originally posted. Your awesome 30-second spot, repurposed for the Web, is going to come across Twitter as a simple text message that says “Check this

out.” That short message — limited to 140 characters in all — is what connects the rest of your potential audience to what one influencer has found worth sharing. Because your original information is condensed down into a short summary — “Just the facts, ma’am,” as Sergeant Friday used to say — and because it is arriving with hundreds of other items, the recipient really needs to have a reason to notice it in the first place.

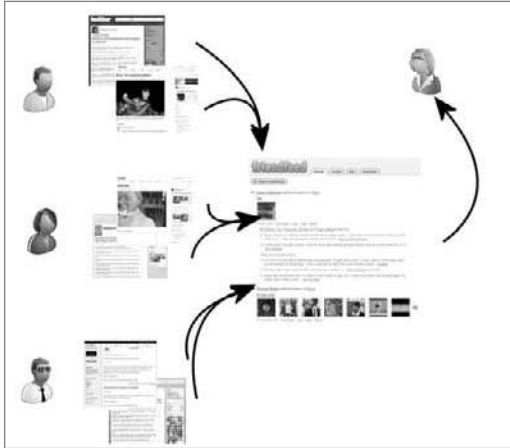


Figure 12.1 Feeds make following social activities simple.

Social standing — reputation — plays a role here. When your branded content is effectively wrapped in a plain brown paper, the social standing of the person who sent that content is the only basis that the recipient can use to decide whether or not to check out that content. Think about your well-meaning friends who routinely send emails with jokes: how often do you skip opening *anything* they send? On the Social Web, reputation is everything. It’s not just the clutter you’re fighting. On the Social Web, everyone, loosely speaking, is more or less equal. You’ll find yourself competing with babies laughing and mispronouncing words like “spaghetti,” or appearing to wield drums sticks to the beat, or talking in a deep voice with a Hungarian accent about world domination. Sometimes the babies win big, too, racking up a thousand times the views of your million-dollar spot. This is why building your own social credibility is so important.

All of this further suggests *not* using social media by itself. Social media is, in a larger strategic sense, a direct reflection of your business. Viewed this way, you might say it *is* your business. At a tactical level — where you are working here — the social media-based techniques that you decide to use are just one part of what is available to you for use in your overall, integrated marketing effort. The illustration in Figure 12.2 calls back to the holistic nature of social media and the importance of the marketing plus operations linkage. Applied, social media is an *accompaniment* to your existing awareness and point of purchase campaigns, not a replacement. Use TV, radio, direct mail, sports, and event marketing to seed the conversations, to set the expectations,

and to create the beginnings of a demand. Then, like a 1-2 combination, tap social media and the conversations generated by direct *experience* with your brand, product, or service to reinforce your messages based on the genuine interest and comments of others.

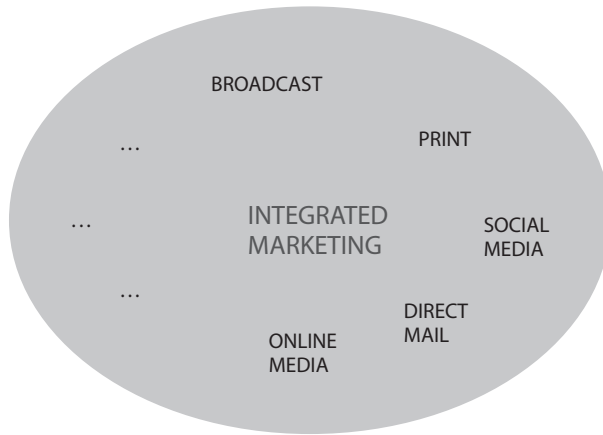


Figure 12.2 Social Media is but one component.

Understanding and using the social information flow that underlies all of this is becoming a fundamental marketing skill. Tap the Social Web and listen: understand your opportunities for improvement (and act on them) so that the conversation itself becomes increasingly favorable to you over time. Use social media to encourage and empower your evangelists so that they are more effective. These are the things you want to be doing: getting them done means keeping track of what is going on. Managing the information flows — for your own consumption — and understanding how others do the same to serve their own needs is key to fully engaging with your audience *and their friends* on the Social Web, and in the process to getting the most from your investment in social media. This where monitoring the feeds can really pay off. By using feeds to focus on influencers while at the same time paying attention to the larger conversation using tools like BlogPulse, Cymfony, Techrigr, or Google Alerts, you will stay in the loop. As a result you will find it relatively easy to guide your campaigns in ways that meet with public approval rather than rejection.

In earlier chapters, I presented social media tools, tips, channels, techniques, and other things that you can pick up and use in marketing. This week's work has a lot of that too, but as well includes several "survey" topics — things that may or may not be directly applicable to marketing but that you should know about nonetheless. The objective in presenting social interactions as a set of channels is to show you how the social content created through what I presented in the prior chapters increasingly finds its way to the recipients who will consider it when evaluating your offer. Some of this may not appear to tie directly to marketing, at least not at first. This is, however,

an important matter, and in particular for marketers who may be used to being able to *direct* the message, for example through a paid channel and ultimately an interruptive experience. The Social Web doesn't work that way. This week's discussions and exercises show you why it doesn't, and instead how it does work.

Events and Calendars

The information in event listings and calendars is generally made up of discrete data — dates, times, places, prices, and similar — along with a description and detailed information about the event itself. The core information — who, what, where, and when — lends itself to a feed, to a stream to which people interested in specific events would subscribe. Turning back to the purchase funnel, there is an important distinction to note here between awareness and consideration: Building *awareness* often requires more than the “facts.” The name of an artist and the performance date is generally not sufficient to pique interest in a new act that no one has heard of. A catchy name is as easy to come by as picking a character out of Dickens. A photo of the band is marginally better, a sound clip much better, and live video posted by a friend from prior shows is the best. Note the progression in the social components of the content, and the way in which that social factor helps drive real interest. Social content bridges awareness into the consideration phase — where social media is most effective. Combine this now with other information streams, for example, FriendFeed, Twitter, or a social calendar such as Eventful. If you know that your friends have a strong interest in seeing this new act, you may need little more than the date and the price to make a decision. In this case, you are tapping your friends' collective knowledge, provided to you through the flow of social information, to support your own decision making process. Keep that in mind as you head into this next section.

In the consideration phase, the marketing challenge is often reduced in part to spreading the word based on what a small number of influencers in a social group may have stumbled onto. Subscriptions to what these influential friends are planning play an important role, as they can make it much easier for an extended group to keep up. The trick becomes getting people to talk about — in the digital sense — what they are doing. In fact, this too can be automated using socially aware applications, as listings of likes and dislikes can be generated automatically based on individual preferences as evidenced by choices and selections made through social sites. For example, Last.fm, a self-directed music service, will convey (with your permission) your recent musical selections and purchases to Eventful where this information can be used to guide what is presented to you.

Tip: You'll find Last.fm here: <http://www.last.fm>.



Shown in Figure 12.3, the Eventful service imports artists from popular listening services and then sends subscribers notices when those artists come to town. Because services like Last.fm themselves import — or “scrob,” as they call it — music that you listen to through iTunes or Media Player in addition to Last.fm — your wider preferences in music become the basis for what Eventful is able to recommend. As a result, Eventful quickly figures out what you like and makes recommendations based on that. It may seem a bit weird or even scary at first: however, over time as you recognize that you and your friends are seeing more shows that you *like*, the benefit of these social tools becomes clear. At the same time, your decisions — and things you blog about as a result — make sharing your tastes and interests with friends as well as those who follow you online easier and therefore more likely. This is the collective at work (and at play!) through the social feedback cycle. This is a great example of individual preferences driving social content and ultimately commerce and, therefore, an example of how important being able to manage social information really is to marketers.

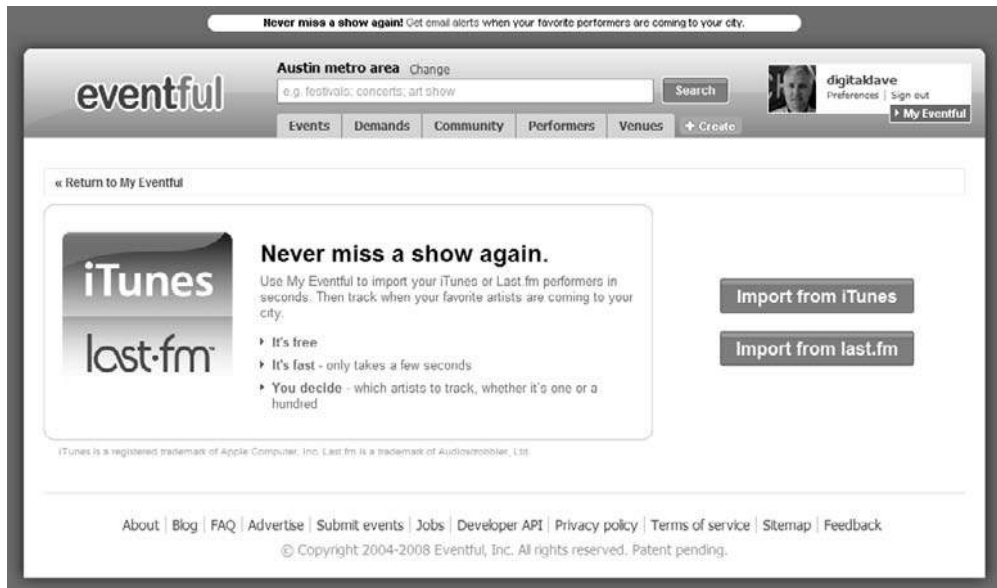


Figure 12.3 Eventful Imports and Notices

As a subscriber, event promoter, or artist, event feeds help you. Because feeds allow people to collect and manage information from a wide variety of sources, feeds can be of great benefit when trying to find specific information, or when trying to make others aware of it. This illustrates one of the challenges that marketers face transitioning from traditional or Web 1.0 online media to Web 2.0 and social media.

At the core of services like Eventful and Upcoming (now part of Yahoo!) is an information flow that potential customers can use when thinking about what to do,

where to spend their time, and where to spend their money. As the amount of information in circulation on the Social Web rises, managing it and keeping abreast of what's happening gets harder. As noted, feeds summarize, consolidate, and carry and implicit social ranking (the events in many cases would not be included if you or a friend hadn't put them there) and in the process bring order to the social information flow.

MikonMixers: Real-life meetups made better.

Want people to meet each other faster at your next in-person meetup or event? Powered by the Mikons social drawing tool that helps people create and share personal icons, you can create sheets of iconic stickers specific to your event that attendees affix to their name badges. The stickers help attendees to quickly initiate conversations with others based on common interests and shared event themes.

<http://www.mikonmixers.com>

You can benefit from services like Eventful and Upcoming — as a marketer. You can use these services directly: make sure that your events are listed and that the listing is accurate. You can also use these services to plan or schedule your events. Eventful features a “demand” service shown in Figure 12.4. Eventful members interested in specific types of events can “demand” that a performer, show, or any other event come to their locale. You can use this to help sort out where the demand for your planned event might be highest and then build your event schedule around that.

The screenshot shows the Eventful website interface. At the top, there's a search bar with 'Austin metro area' selected and a search input containing 'e.g. Rolling Stones; Feist; Jay-Z'. Below the search bar are navigation tabs for 'Events', 'Demands', 'Community', 'Performers', 'Venues', and '+ Create'. A user profile for 'digitaklave' is visible in the top right corner.

The main content area features a prominent message: 'You have demanded The Subways in Austin metro area. We just sent the details to dave.evans@digital-woodoo.com. Check your inbox!'. Below this, there are several sections:

- Please help The Subways:** Encourage your friends to join the demand. This section includes icons for 'My Top Artists', 'Bulletin on MySpace', 'Share on Facebook', and 'Embed a widget'.
- More on your demand:** Join the conversation with other demanders in your city. Includes a 'See your demand' button and a link to check out the schedule and profile for The Subways.
- Congrats! Your demand is confirmed.** This section includes a 'Next step... Get your friends to join' button, a 'Spread the word' section with links for Email, Facebook, MySpace, and Widget, and a 'Local hot spots' list.

The 'Local hot spots' list shows:

- 1 parish (390 events)
- 2 The Continental Club (140 events)
- 3 Emo's (121 events)

At the bottom, there's a section for 'Events around Austin' with a 'See all' button.

Figure 12.4 Eventful Demand



Tip: Don't forget: You can use these services yourself. Assuming you have a life outside of work (not always a given...) you can use all of the social channels presented in this book for personal use, and in so doing learn how to make more effective use of social media as a marketer.

Use the services you've seen here yourself. By signing up and using Eventful, or any of the other tools and services mentioned in this book for that matter, you can quickly gain experience. *Participating* will give you a first-hand perspective on what social media is all about and, thereby, make you better able to evaluate the tools likely to work for our business applications. Using what you've now seen — especially in a personal context — adds to your knowledge and gives you a jump start.

Monday's One-Hour Exercise

Today you're going to look at a cross-section of event and calendar services. Some feature a basic listing of events: this means you need to visit the site in order to see new listings. Others offer subscriptions to a feed or an email alert along with tools that generally help site visitors do more by more efficiently managing their information flow.

Spend the next hour visiting each of the following sites and answer the questions presented. Think of an artist or type of event that you'd like to see or go to and then try and find information about it on each of the following sites. You are, of course, free to look for whatever you want: make the exercise interesting and relevant to you.



Tip: This exercise isn't directly related to marketing: instead, it is intended to show you how various social management tools make it easier to find out about events that interest you. Consider using these tools as a starting point for your own exploration of social media.

For the next hour, visit the following sites:

- CitySearch (<http://www.citysearch.com>)
- Eventful (<http://www.eventful.com>)
- Upcoming (<http://www.upcoming.com>)
- The website for your local arts and events guide;
- Any other event or calendar site you'd like to visit.

As you visit these sites, consider and answer the following:

- How quickly were you able to find events?
- Was “sponsored” content presented? If so, how relevant was it to what you were actually looking for?
- How many pages did you look at in total? Was all of the information you needed presented on a single page?

- Which sites encouraged you to add your own ratings and reviews? Were the ratings and reviews of ordinary people presented more or less prominently than those of professional or celebrity critics?
- Which sites offered feeds or alerts?
- Which sites offered the ability to import your existing preferences related to the type of event you were looking for?
- How could you use the services you visited today to promote marketing events that you may be planning?

Monday's Wrap-Up

Having worked through the exercise today, you should see clearly that social commentary — reviews and supporting insight into the people who created it — is worth a lot when it comes to evaluating a choice. As well, being able to subscribe rather than having to come back and check makes it easier to keep up with what is going on. At Eventful, for example, if you search for “The Subways” you may or may not find information. The Subways may not be playing near you anytime soon. However, you’d be able to *subscribe to your search*. Even if nothing was found in your area today, when a listing for The Subways is added later, you’ll be notified automatically, without having to come back and do the search again.

Today you saw examples of the way in which an individual’s interests can be used to pull relevant information from the Social Web. This enables people to keep up with numerous, diverse content sources and therefore find the content that relates directly to the specific interests that they have. It is through the tools you used today and similar others that social content ultimately connects with the people — in this case, at live events — who really want it and who make purchase decisions based on it.

SMS and Mobile Communications

Yesterday you looked at events and calendars — services that tell you about things going on in the community around you. Today you’ll turn it around. You’ll be looking at services that operate primarily on mobile devices and let you tell others what you are doing — and where you are doing it — right now. As the notion of “community” increasingly shifts toward an inclusion of “virtual” — for example, the virtual community comprised of someone’s friends at Facebook — it’s a natural extension to combine the online and offline experiences. To be sure, you can always ask your real friends who also happen to be members of your favorite social network what they are doing this weekend. That is one way of linking online and offline activities and relationships. But what about people you know less well, or with whom you have only limited if any actual contact with even though they may be nearby and may share many of the same interests that you have? What about people *you want to meet*?

New, mobile social services are emerging that combine location-aware devices such as mobile phones with online social networking concepts like friending and privacy. The result is a network that combines online as well as offline behaviors. This happens informally on Twitter, a service you saw in Chapter 9, where I regularly see posts among the people I follow — for example, “Just landed in DC. Anybody want to get a coffee?” I’ve met more than a few friends from Twitter for the first time in person at ad-tech conferences this way.

Dodgeball is an example of the new mobile applications. Dodgeball, now part of Google, is a service oriented toward friends meeting friends, and one that let’s you tell your friends where you are by posting a quick text message from your phone. Likewise, you’ll be notified when they post their current location. Dodgeball helps you clue your friends in with regard to “knowing where the action is.” Likewise, it helps them catch up with you as you roam from your office to a happy hour and on to a restaurant or a club. At the annual South by Southwest Interactive Festival in 2008, I used Dodgeball with friends and colleagues as I moved around Austin between conference venues. Each time I found a great party, I posted the location. Each time one of my friends found one, they posted that. Together, we covered a lot of ground.



Tip: When considering the use of any of the mobile services—text or otherwise—be sure that you have a data plan for your phone that is appropriate given this increased activity. If not, you could be in for a nasty surprise when you get your next bill. I kid you not.

Brightkite, another mobile social service, takes the mobile social network concept one step further. With Brightkite, you “check in” (post your current location) by sending a quick text message: your friends with whom you have *specifically trusted* can then see where you are. You can post photos and share comments about that location, or arrange an in-person meeting, or “meetup.” You can see some of my friends around the world via the Brightkite service in Figure 12.5.

Via these mobile, location-aware applications you can inquire about nearby business services. Sending “? Starbucks” as a text message after you’ve checked in at some location will instantly return a list of the closest Starbucks to wherever you happen to be right now.

As a marketer, compare this experience with Mapquest, one of the early leaders in location-based services. Mapquest offers many marketing programs and services: retailers can include the location of stores on its maps. Coffee shops, donut shops, casual dining restaurants, and electronics retailers have all used this. Although this works great on a device that reasonably supports a graphic interface, for many mobile

users graphical interfaces simply don't work. By comparison, SMS/text-based services work on nearly every phone in existence. Even better, *text services are very fast*. You may be thinking that texting and SMS-based services will be replaced by better phone-based browsers. Try texting. It's so fast, and so easy that it is likely to be a mainstay medium for at least a while yet. By using Brightkite to locate the nearest Starbucks, you can be drinking a latte before Mapquest loads its first page. Sometimes less is more, and in the case of coffee, quicker is definitely better. Again tapping the collective, Brightkite has "seeded" its database with franchise and store locations; over time, as individual users check in and further define specific locations, the number and accuracy of listings will grow as the users themselves find and label specific physical points.



Figure 12.5 Friends Map on Brightkite

Tuesday's One-Hour Exercise

Today you're going to check out Dodgeball and Brightkite to get an idea of how people use location-based information services. Although you can obviously spend a lot more than one hour doing this, the exercise is focused on exploring a few of the basic features of two representative services.



Tip: To complete this exercise, you'll need an SMS/text-message-capable phone. Be sure to check your data plan: unless you have an unlimited or similar plan, you'll quickly discover that a la carte text messages are among the most expensive things you can buy with your phone.

During the next hour, you're going to sign up (if you haven't already) for Dodgeball and Brightkite. *The services are free: your messages may not be. This is your third and final warning.*



Tip: You'll find the sites for today's exercise here:

Dodgeball: <http://www.dodgeball.com>

Brightkite: <http://www.brightkite.com>

1. Sign up for Dodgeball and Brightkite.
2. Once signed up, go to the Brightkite website and log in to your account.
3. Check in on both services following the instructions they provide. In general, this is a simple process: You'll send a text message like "@ street address" to the SMS number they provide.
4. Using Brightkite, see where you are after you check in.
5. If you have friends using Brightkite, add them: after they've accepted your friendship request, you'll be able to see where they are. (You may or may not be able to complete this part today.)
6. *Using your phone*, send a "? Starbucks" or similar request via Brightkite — note the response that comes back and how simple this is to use.
7. Go and enjoy a cup of coffee with your friends.

Tuesday's Wrap-Up

Today was a survey exercise: you took a very brief look at location-based services that connect people and link online and offline communities. The objective was simply to experience them and how they are used — to participate, however briefly, in the kinds of services that people spending time in social applications are using to meet up with each other, share information, and build more-durable relationships. Now that you are signed up, look for other ways to use these services. Again, the best way to understand the Social Web and social media is to participate.

Today you also got to see where location-based online marketing is heading. Rather than clicking through pages with sponsored locations that someone else wanted

you to see, the services like those you looked at today allow you to quickly request the nearest location of the places you want to go and to quickly and easily arrange to meet up with your friends once there. As these kinds of services become more common — to be sure, they are still a bit new — creating an excellent experience so that your customers will take the few extra seconds to look you up rather than making do with whatever competitive service is nearby will become more important than ever. Read that last sentence again: as more complete information about competing options becomes easier to gather for purposes of making purchase decisions, the quality of the experience will gain in importance as the convenience of “I have a favorite, but this other place is nearby” ebbs.

Location-Based Marketing

In a decidedly real-world approach to location-based marketing, Applebee’s locations outnumber Chili’s by about 2:1. The strategy is evidently that wherever you are now, between you and Chili’s is an Applebee’s. Mobile services upend this: at your fingertips you now have the exact location of the nearest Chili’s. Instead of driving around hungry and choosing Applebee’s because you found it sooner, you confidently head straight for what you really wanted in the first place. More information — available when and where needed — leads to more genuine choices and less “making do.” *This emerging mobile channel, as is the case with social media in general, drives product and service improvement.*

Status Notices and Bacon

Just how much wood could a woodchuck chuck? I have no idea, but if the varmint had a Facebook account, we’d all know the answer. People can and do post the strangest things in response to common social networking questions like “What are you doing right now?” “Chucking wood,” says WoodChuck264.

On the Social Web, questions like “What are you doing?” are conversation starters — they get people talking. Whatever it is that people are doing right now, they post it and send it to their friends, through feeds or status updates. The thinking is that if you see a friend doing something that interests you, you’ll respond with something like “Hey, I’m doing that right now, too.” The result is a conversation. When someone makes a change to their account or adds a new application or makes a product recommendation, the fact that they just did that is often sent to their friends who can then act on this information, joining in the process and further spreading the underlying message.

Bacn, anyone?

Pronounced “bacon,” *bacon* signifies the “email you want, just not right now.” Think of *bacon* as being “better than spam.” In the email world, there are the emails you know you don’t want (spam) and the emails you know you do want, like the email you received from Google telling you they are interested in acquiring your new start-up. In between these two are the emails you’ve asked for but don’t need to open right now: travel alerts, sale notices, and subscription updates. Added to this is the relatively large number of messages arriving in the Inboxes of the socially active: update notices from Facebook, friend requests from MySpace, follow notifications from Twitter, Brightkite check-ins, and many more. These are all examples of *bacon*.

How does *bacon* tie to social media? Put simply, *bacon* is the carrier of a lot of what happens on the Social Web. *Bacon* plays a social role by keeping you informed as to the activities in your various online communities. This in turn helps keep you involved, which is of course what drives these communities.



Tip: One of the recommended best practices for the socially active is the use of Inbox filtering: setting up rules to automatically route *bacon* to a specific folder. It’s easy to get a hundred social updates in a day. Even when it’s *bacon*, that’s still too much of a good thing. Route it off to the side and deal with it later.

Status notices are useful in a social context, especially so when they reflect things relating to what you have done — for example, posting new content, sending invitations to friends, or installing new Facebook applications. Like the whole notion of “feeds” and the consolidation and management of social information that they allow, status notices help you keep tabs on what is going on. Consider LinkedIn: members get LinkedIn requests — “so and so wants to join your network” — on an irregular basis as they are driven by the actions not of that member but by those of people who want to connect to that member. By sending these notices, members are made aware of these requests so they can deal with them in a timely and convenient manner, improving the membership experience for everyone.

So what do updates and the issues around *bacon* have to do with marketing? For starters, the increasing number of status notices — many of which arrive via email — raises everyone’s awareness of the increasing burden of email. Outright spam is, of course, dealt with largely at the door — for example, through a personal, enterprise, or ISP-based spam filter. Spam filters reduce the level of incoming email to a manageable level automatically. With the increasing use of subscription services, networks, and similar — many of which send regular updates as activities occur — the number of inbound emails is creeping back up. As a direct result all of your email communication — sales notices, order tracking, new product announcements — will come

under increasing scrutiny as the number of “status notices” coming from everyplace increases. Given the impact of status notices and other forms of bacn, it’s evident that everything you do needs to be more relevant, more impactful, and in general more about *the recipient* and less about *you*.

Tip: If you are shipping bacn, be sure that you think through the actual content and how it will be used. Getting a note that says “Some event just happened” that lacks a direct link to the action point—for example, a URL where whatever just happened can be seen and acted on—is maddening for the recipient. It’s a lot like a voice mail that says “Hey! Important news! Call me.”



Email Management

If you’ve got a pile of email sitting in your Inbox, you’re not alone. Countless methods and practices espouse the virtue of reducing your Inbox to zero (nothing unread, nothing laying about waiting for action.) One of the most useful and practical books I’ve found is Mark Hurst’s *Bit Literacy*. I reduced my Inbox to zero in the spring of 2008 and have held it there since: it’s an amazing feeling.



Wednesday’s One-Hour Exercise

The exercise today is about awareness: specifically, your awareness of how much bacn others are sending you. Getting a handle on how much bacn is really coming your way — I can almost assure you that you will be surprised — will raise your awareness of what your communications look like to your recipients. In particular, as you raise your social activity level while working through this book, you will gain an appreciation for today’s exercise.

Using your own Inbox, look through all of the email you received last week.

Using a tally sheet, mark off each item according to one of the following:

- Urgent: Read right away and acted on to the extent possible
- Important: Read, acknowledged, either completed or results in a new “to-do list” item
- Not Important: Filed; perhaps read, perhaps tossed
- Spam: Anything routed to your junk or trash that you never actually saw

Tip: With regard to spam, you may need to look in your Junk folder and Trash for these items. If spam is automatically removed by your enterprise email system, skip this tally and focus on the first three instead.



When you have completed your tally sheet, add up the totals in each group. Then divide each of the subtotals into the total and compute the share of email in each group. For example, 87 spam emails out of 146 emails is about 60 percent. You may want to repeat this exercise once a month. As you become more active on the Social Web, the group marked “not important” will grow relative to the others. As a further extension of this exercise, repeat it, but this time do it at home, using your personal email. Compare the results.

Wednesday’s Wrap-Up

Today you looked at the number of status notices, alerts, and similar emails *that you have asked for* in relation to the email that you know you must act on. Compare the percentages and think about the implications: chances are, the “not important” emails account for the biggest share, even after the spam has been removed. As your days get more demanding — as your need to be ever more efficient about how you manage your information grows — what are you going to cut out? Chances are it won’t be the Urgent/Important email.

This same situation exists for your customers and potential customers. They too are swamped with information, and they too will need to prioritize what gets attention — and what doesn’t — if they aren’t doing this already.

Feeds

As you’ve been working through the exercises this week, it should be clear that in addition to creating and posting content — even to the extent that this is only done by a minority of Social Web participants — the task of keeping up with it all is significant. Further, this is a task that falls to everyone with more than a few friends. Quite seriously, dealing with bacn — simply knowing what to look at or what your friends have recently done — is a real challenge. Perhaps ironically, people are looking for ways to streamline the information that is being sent their way *even as they simultaneously choose to expand their social circles*.

Using Feeds to Monitor Twitter

Pete Blackshaw has integrated a Twitter feed on the site that supports his newest book. The twist that you should note is that Pete’s feed, shown here, extracts *only company data* from Twitter. Instead of the normal personal conversations, this feed is exclusively “company posts.” You could use this same technique to create an internal intranet-based Twitter feed that follows your competitors, and keeps everyone in your business current on competitive activity within this channel.



FriendFeed, shown in Figure 12.6, builds on this concept to make it easy for your friends to keep up with you. Rather than aggregating the content created and placed by others, FriendFeed aggregates your content — across the social sites that you participate in — and then makes it available to those who have subscribed to you. Through FriendFeed, people can publish a single stream that contains pointers to their content as it changes. Social media (specifically, content and actions) is thereby diffused through the Social Web, always being pulled in the direction of relatively more interest.

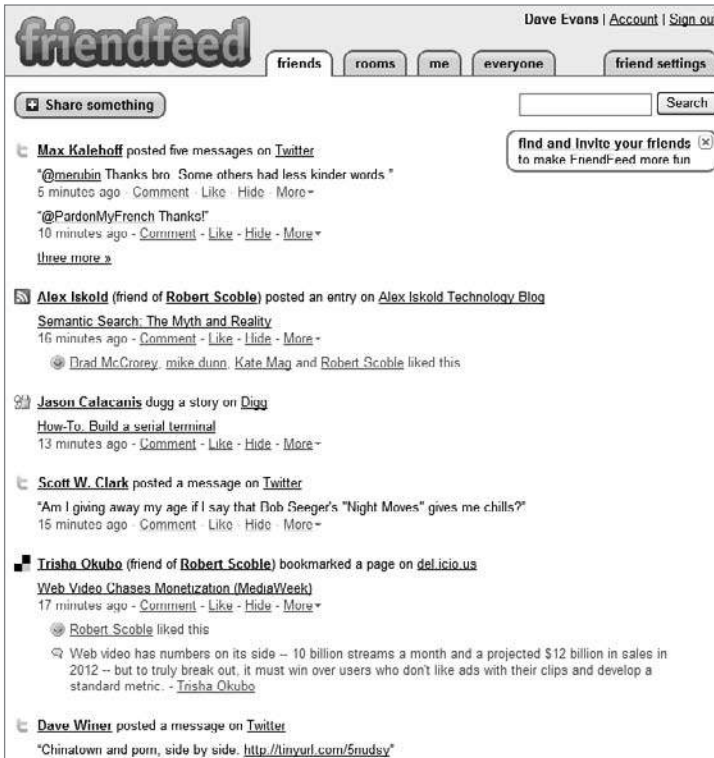


Figure 12.6 FriendFeed

Thursday's One-Hour Exercise

Today you'll spend time with FriendFeed. Beginning in Chapter 9 and continuing in Chapters 10 and 11, you've been signing up for and using social sites. You should have accounts now at places like Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube, Seismic, Brightkite, and a half-dozen blogs and support sites. Using FriendFeed, you're going to create a single feed that consolidates your activities across many of these sites. With that done, people who are interested in what you have posted can subscribe to a single feed and be notified when you post anything new on any of the sites you've added to FriendFeed.



Tip: At this point, depending on how you are using this book, you may or may not have actually set up the accounts referenced or posted content to them. If you don't have any social accounts, you can either create personal accounts and use those, connecting them to FriendFeed, or subscribe to my FriendFeed stream: <http://www.FriendFeed.com/evansdave>.

If you have accounts and have content posted to sites that you can use for this exercise, then proceed with the exercise. If you have or are about to set up personal accounts at the sites suggested, go ahead and do that now and then come back to this exercise.

If you'd rather subscribe to my feed, then complete steps 1 to 3 below and then check my FriendFeed feed periodically to see what I am up to. When you have ultimately set up your accounts, come back to this exercise and connect them to your FriendFeed account as well.

For the next hour:

1. Go to FriendFeed: <http://www.FriendFeed.com>.
2. Create an account.
3. Search for people whose activities and content you'd like to keep track of (search for "Dave Evans" to find me) and add them to your subscription list. You will now see the activities of these people.
4. Using the Services menu, add the services (social sites) that you have established to your feed. These people will see your activities.
5. Create an imaginary friend — this is a special friend at FriendFeed that allows you to track people who aren't themselves part of FriendFeed. Using the Imaginary Friends feature, choose a Flickr profile, for example, associated with a competitive firm that you are interested in and add this profile to your FriendFeed. Even though this profile may not itself be a part of the FriendFeed service, you can still monitor activity via FriendFeed.

Thursday's Wrap-Up

Today you set up an account at FriendFeed. The objective was for you to see how people can easily manage the diverse activities of others on the Social Web, and how you can make your own activities easily accessible to others. From a marketer's perspective, the take-aways from today's exercise are the following:

- It's relatively easy to keep track of the activities of a large number of friends using services like FriendFeed. You can use this to track competitors or other content sites that interest you. Using FriendFeed's Imaginary Friend service, you can track the activities associated with profiles that are not members in FriendFeed.
- You can make it very easy for your customers to track what you are doing: simply offer a link to your FriendFeed profile and encourage them to subscribe to it.

Between these two applications of FriendFeed and similar services, you can significantly reduce the amount of effort required to keep up with what's going on the Social Web, and in the process make it easier for your customers, vendors, and suppliers to keep up with you.

Social Information and Marketing

In addition to social platforms and content, both of which are likely now finding an application within your marketing program, you have an additional set of capabilities that will help you track and manage social information. This week you worked through calendars and event listings along with mobile services through which you can connect virtual communities with things going on in real places. You looked at the issues around bacn and what it means for your current email programs, and finally at the use of feeds that allow you and others to consolidate large amounts of social data into very manageable streams. Taken together, the sources of information that define the happenings on the Social Web are as integral to social media as the content and networks that make up the more visible aspects of the Social Web.

As you're thinking through the application of social media in your marketing program, the challenge is to think beyond the photo or community or campaign: the challenge is to think through the entire life-cycle of what you are putting in place. At its core, the Social Web is all about relationships, and relationships take time — and information — to build.

Social Media and the Development of Relationships

Just as relationships take time to build, how you manage and end them is equally important. In traditional media, using a third party to build and manage your online ad programs is common. So to is running a campaign for a limited time period and then abruptly ending it.

On the Social Web, it's different. Yes, you can use third-party providers. But at the same time, it's essential that you stay involved: you are building relationships that will be associated with your brand *long after your campaign has ended*. Think about the campaign itself and about the end of the campaign: If there is a defined end-point, tell participants upfront. If their community simply "closes down" without warning, they are likely to experience this as betrayal and will then talk about it as such.

Don't write a check and walk away: get involved and stay involved. Think through the entire life cycle of your social media programs.

By participating, by using feeds, by connecting your virtual events to the real world and involving the *people* who make up your audience, you can build strong meaningful relationships over time, relationships that will in turn help you build our business.

Featured Case: Vespaway

In 2006, Vespa created and then terminated its “Vespaway” blog campaign. The campaign was great: it was transparent, it was engaging, and it was popular. Unfortunately, it was also abandoned, left to die a slow death, giving rise to what ClickZ Network then-editor-in-chief Rebecca Lieb called “derelict blog” syndrome. It was shame to see participants, who once powered the blog, slowly lose interest when they realized they were no longer supported. They turned negative, and the results are now forever captured in the Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine. Preventing derelict blogs is easy: Craft a plan to continue the campaign if a real community takes hold, or set the expectation in advance that this effort will end at some point. Either way, have a complete life cycle plan.

You can read more about this campaign and see the derelict conversation in my related ClickZ article here:

<http://www.clickz.com/showPage.html?page=3628705>

Friday’s One-Hour Exercise

Today you’re going to go back through the services you looked at this week and sort out which fit, and how you can use them. The same caveat applies here as in earlier exercises: if you’re reading through the book, or aren’t actually working with a real brand product, then you’ll have to tackle this last exercise theoretically. Otherwise, work through the following and note the results in your developing social media marketing plan.

- What events have you planned that could be listed and promoted through a service such as Eventful or Upcoming? If you added a link to Eventful’s Demand It page, could you build a schedule around that?
- How can you use location-based services? You’ve probably seen the Wi-Fi “Warchalking” signs shown in Figure 12.7. Look at the symbol at the bottom of Figure 12.7: that one doesn’t actually exist, but it should. What if you owned a café and posted that symbol on your door or on table tents, next to your Wi-Fi markers? Would more people remember to use their mobile phones to tell others to come and join them? You’ll never know until you try.
- Finally, how can you apply feeds? As you look across the channels you are considering, how many of them have frequent updates? What if you create a feed and promote it on your website so that people easily follow all of the things you are doing as they go and look at what interests them?

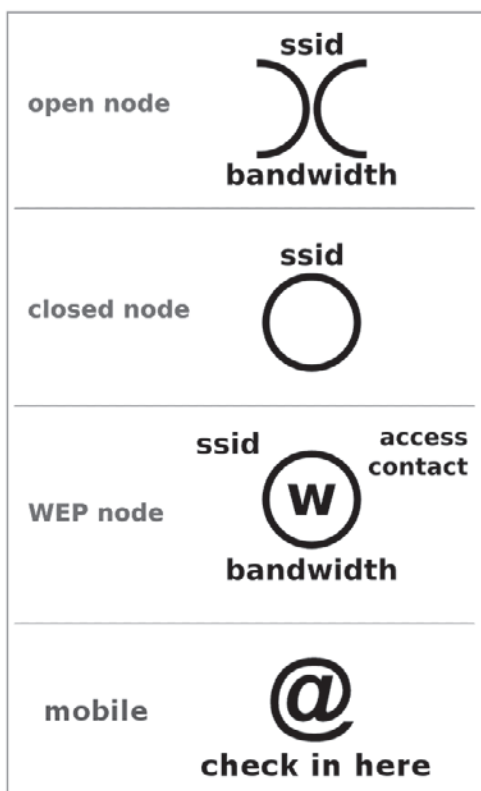


Figure 12.7 Mobile Warchalking

Warchalking: Early Social Media

Around the turn of the twentieth century, *hobos* (the men and women who traveled by rail seeking to find work) developed a code of ethics and symbolic language to make life on the road a bit easier. The symbolic language, typically drawn using chalk or charcoal, told others who were following what to expect. A triangle with hands meant “homeowner has a gun.” Other symbols indicated dangerous dogs, hostile police, or fresh water and campsites.

This hobo language gave rise to the Wi-Fi warchalking marks that are used today. Interested? Read more at Wikipedia under “warchalking.”

Friday’s Wrap-Up

Three things should come out of your work this week. First, a lot of content is floating around the Social Web: You’ve seen some of the tools and services that help people manage it. By making the information about the content (the update notices, for

example) more accessible, the content itself becomes more accessible. Second, mobile access to the Social Web is changing the way that people use online and offline communities. Someone can be sitting in a coffee shop, in the physical context of one community (the other people sitting around) and be equally present in a virtual community (those connected by virtue of the network). This happens frequently at conferences: Twitter, used as what social media and Web 2.0 change agent Ynema Mangum calls the “visible back channel,” can beneficially shape or outright interfere with the actual conversation happening on stage by merging — very visibly — the conversation of the audience with the conversation of the panelists. Finally, the amount of information coming off the Social Web — update notices and status reports — is putting increased pressure on your existing communication programs, and especially email: the more email that comes in, the more likely people are to filter aggressively.

What all of these have in common — especially when you consider the idea of creating a feed to represent or point people to your social content — is that the way in which marketers must now approach messages and creative elements has changed. The typical TV or print ad is not meant to be manipulated by the recipient, nor is it intended to be shown in any form other than its original. On the Social Web, both of these presumptions fail. Social media belongs to the recipients the minute it leaves your hand. In the case of the feed data, while your content — for example, a product shot uploaded to Flickr — won’t necessarily change, the description in the feed — which certainly will change — may be all that the recipient ever sees. How do you get your message across in that case? *By creating a delightful and durable experience.*

You’ve worked through each of the elements of the Social Media Starfish. Thinking back to my opening question in Chapter 8 — “If you couldn’t interrupt me, how would you reach me?” — the answer ought to be getting clear.

Chapter 12: The Main Points

- By combining social knowledge with real-time presence, mobile social applications are changing the way people interact in real-world settings.
- Feeds make it possible for you to manage large amounts of information. You can use feeds to keep up with customers, competitors, partners, and suppliers.
- Feeds make it possible for your customers to keep up with you. As you create social content, consider adding a feed to make it easy to track and discover.
- Social media forces a rethinking of branded content: what does it mean when recipients have a hand in the creative and when the content itself is reduced to its purely informational state?