

# The Marketer's Dilemma

*It's ironic that as a powerful force — the Social Web — is emerging, the overwhelming share of media spending is still directed to marketing channels that don't tap it. Part of this is metrics, something I cover beginning in Chapter 7, "Influence and Measurement." Part of it is newness, and part of it is the continued performance of mass media. Regardless, the primary challenge facing marketers remains: cutting through the clutter. From the consumer's perspective, marketers are the clutter. By comparison, the Social Web is an oasis. The challenge marketers face now isn't just competition from other marketers. It's from consumers themselves, turning to each other, avoiding ads. Savvy marketers are turning to social media and the opportunity to market without using ads at all.*

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## The Roots of Avoidance

Growing out of clutter and media saturation comes a predictable viewer response: ad avoidance. Traditional marketers and media firms have largely ignored the issue of avoidance, favoring interruptive “tricks” such as the apparent volume boosts in the audio track of a TV ad, the use of an interstitial ad online, or an envelope promising savings on auto insurance based on a personal assessment when the contents are merely an impersonal pitch. Media mainstays like reach and frequency, neither a true measure of receipt or action taken have become surrogates for effectiveness, as if the simple act of *exposure* is somehow the same as *influence*. Viewership studies that confirm that Americans still watch plenty of TV too often add to the sense of complacency: According to Nielsen Media Research Study completed in 2006, American homes were connected to the TV for more time each day than a typical person spends in the office working.

As a kid, I sold boxes of all-purpose greeting cards door-to-door. I got used to “avoidance” early-on. I’d knock, someone would answer, and I’d introduce myself. I’d show my cards and ask if maybe someone was having a birthday or was sick or had passed away...and just about that time *SLAM* would go the door. Fortunately, there was always another house next door. But it did get me thinking about the product: How could someone not be excited to learn more about what I was offering? Perhaps I was selling the wrong thing, or maybe the sickness and death angle wasn’t all that appealing. So I did what any smart marketer would do: based on customer data, I re-evaluated my product and changed my pitch.

I switched to Christmas cards, pre-printed with the customer’s name and personal message. Bingo! All I needed to do was hold out that catalog and say “This year, you won’t have to sign 100 cards.” I was selling joy, and it was an instant sale. Even better, after ordering from me, they’d call their friends and refer me to them, too. What I discovered has stayed with me: If what you are offering has an obvious benefit and fully delivers on the promise, your customers will spontaneously engage and *talk with others about it*. The pure simplicity of genuine engagement, combined with the conveyance of real control *as they spread your word* to potential customers is at the root of the conversations that occur on the Social Web.

Ad avoidance isn’t a new phenomenon. A study done in Canada between 1975 and 1978 found that almost 60 percent of those participating “left the room” when a commercial came on the TV. They grabbed a beer, they headed for the bathroom, they refilled the chips...they did everything but watch the ads. Filtering — separating what we need to know from what we don’t need to know — is as old as humanity. That bad news travels faster than good news through an office is testament to our innate capacity to prioritize “lurking tiger” (bad news) over “tree full of oranges” (good news). Think back to the “3,000 messages” per day reference and the kinds of intense messaging that occurs in places like Times Square, shown in Figure 2.1, and in cities and along highways throughout the world.



**Figure 2.1** Message Overload, Times Square

Even if it's only partially true, absent our ability to filter, our heads would explode. There is actually a medical term — *hypermnnesia* — for people who “can't forget,” people whose heads are so filled with extraneous details that they have difficulty processing a normal information flow. Avoidance, selection, filtering...all are necessary human abilities. It isn't at all surprising that they are applied to your marketing message.

What is surprising is that marketers in many ways refuse to accept this basic premise, or choose to operate in ways that seek to make avoidance impossible. *It can't be done*. Recall Alex DeLarge in the film *A Clockwork Orange*, eyes propped open with mechanical lidlocks as he is reprogrammed through the Ludovico Technique by forced exposure to video imagery and music. In much the same way, out-of-home advertisers like skywriters, shown in Figure 2.2, refer to beachgoers in crowded spots such as Rio de Janeiro or Fort Lauderdale, FL, as “captive eyeballs.” As they see these potential consumers, there isn't enough room on the beach to roll over, so they pretty much have to look up!

While this may be a relatively humorous (but factual) example, the core issue is the contradiction between “consumer as king” or “consumer in control” versus “consumer as target” or even worse, “consumer as object.” No one treats a king — especially a king who's in control — the way too many marketers treat too many consumers. When you stop and think about the language that most of us *in the marketing profession* use on a daily basis, it isn't surprising at all that consumers are expressing a fundamental objection to what they see as an encroachment on their personal lives. Customers once referred to by name have over time become “prospects” and are now called “targets.” Captive audiences are especially prized. Reach and frequency culminate in “saturation,” a measure of the brain's limit of meaningful absorption. Maybe lid-locks *are* what's next! According to Yankelovich, a firm known for its studies of consumer behavior, 65 percent of Americans say they are “constantly bombarded with too much advertising” and 61 percent think the quantity of advertising and marketing they are exposed to “is out of control.” Likely as a result, 60 percent reported that their view of advertising is “much more negative than just a few years ago.” Keep in mind

that this was a 2004 study: this data is a few years old, to be sure, but I haven't noticed any decline in ad density since it was conducted.



Figure 2.2 Crowded beaches make a perfect venue for skywriters.

What all of this points to — and even more so when combined with the technology within easy grasp of mainstream Americans, online and off — is the growing “acceptance of ad avoidance.” Network execs can cry foul all day long, but from a consumer’s perspective there is nothing wrong with skipping ads. Recall from Chapter 1, “Backlash,” that from 1930 to 1980 there was a relatively peaceful coexistence between advertisers and viewers. For 50 years, give or take, viewers accepted advertisements as a part of the otherwise “free” TV and radio programming that they enjoyed. Sponsors were central to the first shows. In fact, the “ad men” actually *created* the shows that the networks aired. From the movie *The Hucksters* comes the famous line, “If you [ad men] build the most glamorous, high Hooper rating show on the air, it ain’t gonna do us a damn bit of good unless you can figure out some way to sell soap on it.”

Pat Weaver, running NBC, changed this programming model when he moved content production to the network studios. In the process, he created contemporary network programming. In response, advertising agencies — and in particular those involved with TV and radio — increased the overall number of ads and products offered as many new shows were created. They reduced the length of spots and tied the advertising to *who was watching* rather than *what they were watching*. They created the current-day “ad pod,” the collection of two to eight short spots that run back-to-back every two to five minutes during a show. By the late eighties and early nineties, commercials were essentially on par with actual programming in terms of both content production values and raw airtime. If this seems a stretch, consider that commercials account for 10 to 15 minutes of most 30-minute shows. With a DVR you can watch

“The Daily Show” and “Colbert,” back-to-back, in about the same time as it takes to watch either one without the DVR. Ads became uninvited interruptions. Some “paid their way” by entertaining us. Others...were just “in the way.” As the clutter-factor came to the fore, consumers began to push back: Adbusters Media Foundation — started in 1989 by Kalle Lasn — originated in response to the timber industry using TV to plant the term “forestry management” in the minds of the public. This outraged Lasn, and Adbusters was born. Today, Adbusters Media Foundation is ironically a brand of its own but also still true to its roots as a source of dialogue on the appropriate role of advertising. Adbusters Media Foundation and other forums like it offer a point for marketers to heed: Consumers have attained a level of expertise and sophistication with regard to their judgment of advertising that far surpasses that of their fifties and sixties counterparts. Mistrust and avoidance are predictable endpoints for messages and campaign methods that fail to respect contemporary consumer sensibilities. From *Advertising Age* in 2004 comes this thought:

*“It is better for the industry to act voluntarily. Otherwise, after a long court battle, angry citizens will get rid of the commercial speech doctrine and replace it with the right to be left alone.”*

— Gary Ruskin, Executive Director of Commercial Alert, published in *Advertising Age*, April 26, 2004

Indeed.

## Early Online Word-of-Mouth

Perhaps in direct response to the growing sophistication of marketing and advertising — and our own growing consumerism — people began tapping the fledgling Internet as a place where they could share and extend collective thought. Early member communities — CompuServe, AOL, Tripod, and Geocities, along with legions of focused efforts such as SmartGirl Internette (now [smartgirl.org](http://smartgirl.org)) — evolved as the forerunners of the Social Web. Common to all of these was the *exchange between members* of information across a range of topics. On CompuServe it was technical; on AOL it was largely personal interest. What mattered more though, in the long run, was that *members were talking to members* rather than reading scripted or editorial content provided by experts. These early communities were built on the premise that the *members would make the content*. Email was the original “killer app,” a term describing an application of a technology that is itself so compelling that everyone simply has to have it. Email pointed the way for an interpersonal-communications-oriented network. Content is just now emerging as the primary activity for those online: Up through about 2006, communications — not content — led in terms of the share of time that people spent online. Think about the task-focused mom using the Web to compile and

evaluate household needs or the family in search of a campground in the mountains. This type of use stood in contrast to media like TV, where entertainment and entertainment-style news ruled. The shift to content that happened in 2006 was driven at least in part by the growth of consumer-generated content (and a good dose of professionally generated content) on sites like YouTube.

From a marketer's perspective, the important element driving the surge in word-of-mouth is "trust." Given the damage done by pop-ups and spam, along with the ad industry's relatively light response to the former and outright embracement of the latter, the value of "trust" between friends and colleagues gained in its role in purchase decisions. It is exactly this sentiment that drives word-of-mouth, and now social media. The dynamics of trust have long been part of the marketing conversation. Early studies on advertising and trust confirmed what many had suspected: advertising is a great way to hear about something new, but the information presented is not, by itself, considered "trustworthy." Hear about it in an ad, but then ask your friends if it's any good. Pete Blackshaw bought a Honda hybrid based on the ads and pre-purchase research. A whole lot of people since have purchased a Toyota Prius based on his well-documented post-purchase experience.

Word-of-mouth, from a consumer, is generally considered trustworthy. But what about when the source is a marketer? How can you use word-of-mouth in your own campaigns? This same question turns out to be fundamental to the use of social media. Parodies of "truth in advertising" aside, there is a basic, healthy human skepticism present whenever someone is making the case for why you need what he or she is selling. It's the cross-purposes of the transaction — in its most extreme an outright conflict of interest — that gets in the way. If I profit by your purchase, then I have at least one reason to push for closure that may not be aligned with my regard for your best interest. The interest in my *making a sale* invariably colors the transaction. Word-of-mouth marketing firms such as BzzAgent go to great lengths to ensure disclosure on behalf of their clients; that they have to do this in the first place makes the case for why nontransactional word-of-mouth is considered "trusted." By comparison, marketers — regardless of otherwise positive attributes of the brand — always have an incentive to make the sale. This is why *transparency* — the outright, unambiguous disclosure that you are in fact a marketer — is so essential in both word-of-mouth and social-media-based campaigns. It is perhaps the most powerful point on which you can establish trust. "*If I am willing to disclose my own self-interest, then there is good reason to consider 'truthful' the balance of what I might say.*"

Ironically, it's when the advertising and marketing is low-key or absolutely quiet that the "trust" factor is highest. "Here, I made this. It's for sale. Buy it and try it out. If you like it, great. If not, you can give it back and I will refund 100 percent of your money." More than a few brands have built themselves largely or purely on the

combination of a great product and word-of-mouth: Starbucks, Red Bull, Hotmail, and Amazon come to mind. In the case of Amazon, while they advertised early on, they felt the return did not justify the expense. So, in 2003 they dropped the ads and offered free shipping on orders over \$25. The result was explosive in terms of word-of-mouth. Instantly, everyone knew that “shipping was free” at Amazon, something that served them well on two counts. First, there was the obvious benefit of positive word-of-mouth. Second, the conversation centered on one of the central objections from the consumer perspective with regard to online shopping: the incremental cost of shipping versus buying from a store. By removing this objection from the conversation, Amazon had made itself the obvious place to buy. The rest is history.

In the same way, brands ranging from Old Spice to Craftsman have built themselves — *with* advertising — while following this same path: “If you don’t like it, or if it breaks, we’ll make good for it.” It works with basic packaged goods: “Try Old Spice. If you don’t like it, we’ll buy you whatever you normally use.” When I talked with Larry Walters, who created that campaign, he said he’d yet to be asked to buy a competing brand for a dissatisfied customer. This type of guarantee also works in more substantial purchases: Craftsman — the Sears in-house brand of hand tools — has long offered a simple guarantee: “If our tool breaks — if it *ever* breaks — we’ll hand you a new one. Free.” Remarkably, that guarantee will emerge in *any* conversation with *anyone* who uses Craftsman hand tools, *even though most have never had a Craftsman tool break*. Want proof? While I was writing, Hilary Powers, the developmental editor working on the book with me, shared the following:

*“My mother had a pair of pruning shears break after 20 years of steady use, and she took them along to the store to make sure she bought the same thing again. The clerk pounced on her and sent her off with a new pair free — and that tale got told and retold.”*

“Satisfaction Guaranteed” is a fundamentally powerful guarantee which at once conveys quality and largely removes the self-interest in the sales pitch. Yes, Sears wants to sell you a tool. But in the same transaction, Sears is also agreeing to enter into a life-long, binding, irrevocable contract of performance. That is the kind of transaction that builds trust. That is the kind of experience that gets talked about.

Word-of-mouth applies to non-transactional campaigns as well: Advergaming — an early form of interpersonal media — is largely built on word-of-mouth. In 2003, Dial Corporation, working with our group at GSD&M Ideacity, released “Coast BMX Full Grind” (shown in Figure 2.3), a video game created by Wild Tangent based on the Activision title “Matt Hoffman’s ProBMX.” The game built on the action inherent in the underlying title, and featured added brand elements along with some new BMX tricks and riding areas created specifically for the adverage. High-score and “challenge

boards” ensured that the game — made available for free — would receive wide circulation. The most telling aspect of the game in regard to word-of-mouth and trust came, oddly, in a *complaint* from a player. As the strategy director for this project, I wound up fielding the complaint. It is always a good test of the mettle and prowess of a social media team when the challenge of handling objections arises. A particular player was absolutely livid with the fact that we had “ripped off” his favorite game (Activision’s ProBMX) and produced this “advertisement” based on it. He was personally writing to Matt (Hoffman) and urging him to sue us. I wrote him back, within an hour or so of the time he sent his email. I explained that we had worked with Activision, that the game was fully licensed, and that Matt was okay with this. I wanted to address first what he was upset about. But I also took a further step: I explained that we had built the game for him to share with his friends who didn’t have the game that he loved so much, and that we had created some new riding spaces and tricks that he may not have seen before. In other words, I connected him to the underlying objective of the campaign: participation with friends in something that is genuinely fun and totally on the up-and-up. I clicked “Send.” The same day, I got an email back. He not only apologized, he went on to become one of the highest scorers and biggest promoters of the game. He got the fact that we had thought about him and his friends, and built something for them to enjoy. As a result, we earned his trust, and he rewarded us by *talking about it*.



Figure 2.3 “Coast BMX Full Grind”



Compare this with examples where trust itself is feigned — only to be discovered as false. In 2002, Sony Ericsson launched a street campaign for its T68i that involved the use of actors presenting themselves as tourists visiting New York City. They got caught, and even then they tried to explain it away. Instead of two simple words — “I’m sorry” — the response tried to make light of the issue of transparency and reaction to the campaign. Given that response, they predictably made the same mistake again in 2006 with their “All I want for Christmas is a PSP” fake blog campaign. In 2005, Wal-Mart became entangled in a “fake blog” campaign. Dubbed “Wal-Marting Across America,” couple Jim and Laura blogged about their drive in an RV across the country with nightly stops in Wal-Mart parking lots. Overnight RV parking is something Wal-Mart has always allowed. This particular policy makes for great social press: RVers — who get together and chat nearly every evening — save both money and time by spending an occasional evening at a convenient Wal-Mart. It’s also a great business move for Wal-Mart. After all, RVers need supplies, right? Despite the “real” nature of Jim and Laura, the campaign nonetheless blew up as neither Wal-Mart nor its PR agency, Edelman, disclosed the connection between Jim, Laura, and Wal-Mart in the early stages of the campaign.



Figure 2.4 Wal-Marting Across America

Ironically, the Wal-Mart and Sony Ericsson campaigns probably would have worked if they had fully disclosed. “Hi. I work for Sony. Would you mind taking a picture of me and my friends?” Most people would have said “sure” and then *asked* about the camera phone. Wal-Marting Across America could have been really interesting, in the same way that any reality show or travel series is. On the Social Web, transparency is everything. For Wal-Mart, rightly or wrongly at the center of controversy over its internal and “secret” practices, getting caught in this campaign was doubly damaging. Not only did it tank the campaign — which could have played out through a contest or a variety of other cool and talk-worthy methods — it actually added credibility to those whose cause it is to *discredit* Wal-Mart.

Both examples — Wal-Mart and Sony Ericsson — point up not only the role of trust in word-of-mouth but also the degree to which campaigns that could have *succeeded* can take on larger-than-life proportions when trust is — *or even appears to be* — violated. This has huge implications for marketers interested in social media. Not only is trust the essential element, it is a sure bet that violators will get caught. The collective is simply too connected — and too skeptical. They’ll dig in and ferret out the truth given even a slight indication that the setting for any given social campaign is not what it appears to be.

This happens on the Social Web for two reasons: first, calling back to “my ownership of my inbox,” there is now a movement among people who actively seek out violators. Second, the connections back to the sponsoring brand tend to highlight themselves, in much the same way as the Wizard’s true identity was revealed in Oz when Toto pulled the curtain back *out of simple curiosity*. On the Social Web, it is just too easy to make the connections to *not* notice who is in fact controlling the campaign. Disclosure is therefore an essential element of any social-media-based campaign.

One final point about word-of-mouth and trust. I’ve selected this example because it shows how “deception” can be used “properly,” just as a creative writer properly withholds certain elements until the delivery of the punch line. To promote its “Madden 2004” release, Sega and its agency creative directors Ty Montague and Todd Waterbury created “Beta-7,” *a classic hoax* designed to pull people in and generate word-of-mouth. That it did. With downloads estimated in the millions, the campaign was successful in both building awareness of the game and expanding the audience for the game. The campaign played on the notion of “beta test” downloads, and then added the twist that some early testers had experienced personal problems as a result of exposure to the beta release. Fueling the conversation, early “testers” who had downloaded the software were then sent strongly worded “legal cease and desist” letters from Sega demanding the return of this beta software! This of course only caused them to spread the campaign further...and the game was afoot. In the end, people figured it out, and Sega confirmed the ploy. Unlike Wal-Mart and Sony Ericsson, however, there was little if any negative backlash. Why not? Because the campaign was ultimately

intended to be fully transparent. The deception was part of the allure and the campaign was so well done it was embraced by participants. If you are unclear on when or how to assure transparency, here is a simple rule to follow:

**Tip:** Create your disclosure plan first: make it a central part of your campaign.



If you can't disclose the campaign sponsor and motives, this is a clear signal that you are risking a public backlash on the Social Web.

### **Confused About Transparency?**

Although it may be tempting to conclude "On the Social Web I can lie as long as I don't get caught or can pass it off as a joke," bear in mind that your audience is smarter than that. This is your reputation, and it is through the combination of transparency and actual experience that your reputation on the Social Web is built. Being known as the "nice guy who will try and pull a fast one" isn't necessarily the best positioning you can establish. Sunlight is the best disinfectant, as the saying goes, and nowhere is this more true than on the Social Web.

I mention the Beta-7 campaign simply to point out that the Social Web is filled with people who love to be entertained and who do have a sense of humor. At some level, they understand the difference between fake actors or evidently less-than-transparent bloggers and a game. Was the Madden campaign itself a deception? Yes. Are the light sabers used in *Star Wars* also a deception? Ditto. Last time I checked, both were major hits. Core to the efficacy of online word-of-mouth — and hence to social media and the related advertising and marketing forms it takes — is the combination of an *authentic experience* and *something to talk about*. The Wal-Mart blog, like the Sony Ericsson street campaign, did provide something to talk about. However, they both failed on the "genuine experience" count. Unlike the Beta-7 campaign that delivered on experience and talk-value, the desired outcome of the Wal-Mart and Sony Ericsson campaigns was to inform or persuade *without letting the subjects in on the game*. The sole objective was self-serving: bolstering a reputation and selling more products. The consumer was considered a pawn, and it was for this reason that the subjects reacted as they did when the truth came to be known. The Beta-7 campaign involved consumers as actual participants. The experience was created for their benefit as much as it was to generate awareness of the upcoming release. When the campaign was "fully revealed," the reaction was "Wow! That was a blast! Can we all ride it again?" In fact, we can and we will. These are the kinds of campaigns that can be augmented with consumer-generated content, and the kinds that will succeed as a result on the Social Web. Keep in mind too that your

social campaigns are part of an overall integrated approach to marketing: it is the combination of what you say, and what your audience says, across all of the channels you use that determines the outcome of your overall marketing effort.

## The Social Web Blooms

The backlash against traditional advertising that is powering the rise of the Social Web is a backlash against intrusions, against falsehoods, and against a lack of respect for the *individual*. Jack Myers, a writer for *MediaPost*, talked in 2004 about “the new media technologies that attack the foundation of intrusive advertising.” Note the word “intrusive.” Advertising is simply one way that consumers learn about new products and services. Advertising is, in a sense, a start into the process of learning about what is out there, about things you may want or need. The more we know about them, the better informed we are. No one sets out specifically to make poor choices when it comes to purchases. Instead, the real driver for social media and the marketing forms based on it is the near universal objection to intrusions combined with the belief — correct or incorrect — that the information needed to make a smart choice is available on the Internet.

Think about what is probably the number-one “social skill” development for a toddler: learning *not* to interrupt. “Please, not right now, I’m on the phone. I’ll be just a minute.” We practically make a ritual of this in preschool: sitting quietly, raising your hand, and not blurting the answer out. Then we turn on the TV. It’s no wonder kids have a hard time understanding what we mean by “wait your turn.” Every 3 minutes, with zero social grace, now arrives before us a commercial. Late night (not that kids should be watching late-night TV) it’s even worse: the apparent sound level is boosted to pull you back from the sleep state you had nearly attained. Then comes the high-speed reader who in the last 0.7 seconds of the spot explains why none of what you just saw actually applies to you. It is these practices that people are pushing back on, and it’s the Social Web that is emboldening them to do it.

So far in this chapter, I’ve provided a basis for the backlash against traditional advertising (but wait, there’s more...) and made the case for the role of trust. I’ve hinted at what makes for a successful social campaign. My hope is that it’s clear at this point that the backlash is *not* against mass media per se, nor is it really an objection to advertising. Two separate studies conducted by Ferguson and Perse on “Audience Satisfaction among TiVo and ReplayTV Users” — the first in 2000 and a follow-up in 2004 — speak to this. The 2000 study found that people with DVRs actually watched more TV each day — a finding confirmed again in a 2005–2007 Nielsen study — and used their DVRs for recording programs that they would otherwise not see and only to lesser extent for skipping commercials. The second study went on to note that commercials airing during recorded shows were often watched. Further, commercials aired during “live” viewing

that piqued interest were often rewound and viewed again. Both underscored *the value of user control over content and the newfound ability to selectively watch “good” content while skipping over fluff*. Ad avoidance is less about skipping ads than it is about skipping irrelevant or intrusive ads. This is an important point to keep in mind as you consider moving onto the Social Web. On the Social Web, irrelevant equals invisible.

Apart from the Social Web itself — its content and its applications — it is important to note the manner in which the Social Web also connects more people than would be possible otherwise. LinkedIn.com and Spock.com are examples of the value *not of direct connections* — save the occasional hermit, we’ve all got at least a few direct connections — but rather *connections to connections*. These networks multiply the networks we’ve already built. Amazon directly leverages this: it’s not the reviews that provide the real value. It’s the *reviews of the reviews*. To be sure, for a lot of purchases the reviews themselves are in fact helpful. If they all say is “this is the worst product ever” then chances are a) it is, and b) you’re not going to click “Add to Cart.” However, for most purchases, there is a mix between “I love it” and “I hate it.” To make sense of these, Amazon offers “reviews of reviews” along with insights of the reviewers themselves. *Amazon extends your network*. Using this extended network, you can actually go one social-level deeper and sort out for yourself which of the reviewers you are most like and pick out the reviews that most other people like you found helpful. This helps you make a better, more informed choice *given your specific needs*. It’s that ability to connect as an “individual” that consumers had been looking for back in Chapter 1.

The Social Web, as it expands and exerts itself over at least a portion of contemporary marketing, is driving interconnectedness to new levels. This is the fundamental learning: your customers, using the Social Web, can talk with each other about you and about your products, services, and brand. You can’t control it directly. Your messages are only present in these conversations if your customers choose to bring them there, or choose to bring you there. It’s a party to which you *can* get invited, and it’s on this point that I find so many otherwise solid marketers have difficulty. The most common objection that I hear when talking about “social media” is that “We aren’t ready to let our customers talk about us in an open forum, and in particular one that we appear to endorse.” In Sections 2 and 3, I will share specific strategies and tactics for seeing this challenge in a new way. For now, I’ll simply say this:

**Tip:** Your customers are already talking about you. The fact that you aren’t participating is your implicit endorsement of whatever it is that they are saying.



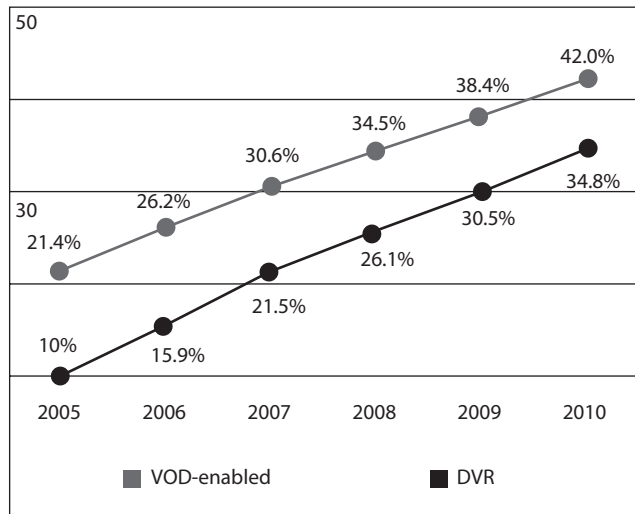
Not participating on the Social Web is effectively saying, “I know what is being said, and it’s okay with me.” I don’t know about you, but as a business owner when I

think about that, I sit up and take notice. How many times have you been in a meeting, been asked for comments, failed to comment, and then told later, “You had your chance to comment, and you didn’t, so this project has gone ahead.” Marketers, ignore *your invitation to participate* in the conversation at your own peril: This is your chance to be part of it and to influence the outcome through your participation.

### Nielsen Shows the Way

I’d be remiss if I didn’t talk about *media measurement*. Next to “How do I market on the Social Web,” the most often-asked question I get revolves around three letters: ROI — the return on investment that’s so important to everyone in business. Measurement is the first step in showing a return. One of the best things about the Social Web, social media, and social-media-based advertising is that like online media it is fundamentally measurable. Industry leaders like Nielsen have put real measurement practices in place. Beginning in 2006 and continuing today, Nielsen provides estimates of DVR usage in its standard reporting: in mid-2006, about 9 percent of the Nielsen households had DVRs. This projected adoption compares well with current data: Nielsen reports approximately 25% actual adoption in 2008. As shown in Figure 2.5, eMarketer goes on to project a DVR penetration of about 30 percent by 2010.

DVR and VOD-enabled Household Penetration in the U.S. (% of TV Households)



SOURCE: eMARKETER, NOVEMBER 2006

Figure 2.5 DVR penetration

When you consider the demographics of households with DVRs — for example, residents of Los Angeles are more likely than average to have a DVR, as are households with home theater and similar entertainment centers — the projected penetration

will have significant impact in the ways in which TV and video-based advertising is viewed. That Nielsen and others are adding alternatives to traditional TV to their reporting mix is a very good thing.

For traditional marketers, it means that there is a path from the data you are used to getting to the data you'll be getting and using as you develop your social media metrics. Firms like BuzzMetrics (now part of Nielsen), New Media Strategies (now part of Meredith), Intelliseek (now Nielsen as well), and Cymfony (now part of TNS Media Intelligence) all made early contributions as innovators in the measurement of online conversations. Each of these firms offers a robust platform that provides the data you need to gauge effectiveness in a way that is similar to the measures you are used to in traditional media.

For example, traditional media metrics address questions like “How many people saw this?” Combined with planning tools, you can launch campaigns with the expectation of very specific delivery parameters, among them being reach and frequency and the degree to which your intended audience received your message.

While social-media-based campaigns are not “purchased” in the traditional sense — you can't order X-million people to talk about you — you can measure who is talking, what they are saying, and how often they are saying it. For example, using the Cymfony metrics platform you can measure the degree to which your message is positively or negatively received by looking for specific phrases in the blogosphere coincident with the nearby occurrence of words or phrases that suggest polarity. Using the BlogPulse tool from Nielsen|BuzzMetrics, you can quickly gauge the degree to which your message is getting picked up in blogs. Using this data, and then trending it over time, you can build “best practices” around your use of social media. I'll go into measurement in depth in Chapter 13, “Objectives, Metrics, and ROI.” Rest assured that measurement will be part of the social media campaigns you'll be building.

## Chapter 2: The Main Points

- Marketers are facing a dilemma: Giving up control in order to gain a presence in the conversations that matter.
- It is the *interruption* that is driving the backlash that advertisers are feeling.
- The importance of disclosure as a means to establish trust cannot be overstated.
- Trust is essential to any form of conversation on the Social Web.
- Robust metrics and measurement are available that can be used to track and prove the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of social campaigns.