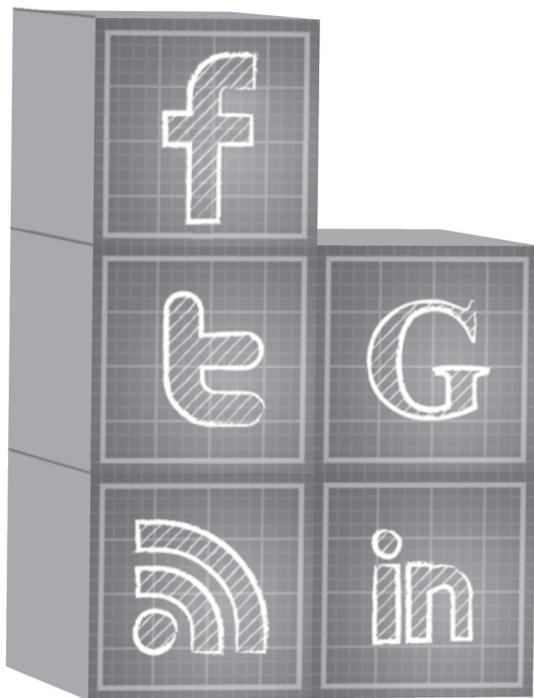


# THE SOCIAL MEDIA ADVANTAGE

## An Essential Handbook for Small Business



**Holly Berkley &  
Amanda Walter**

**Self-Counsel Press**  
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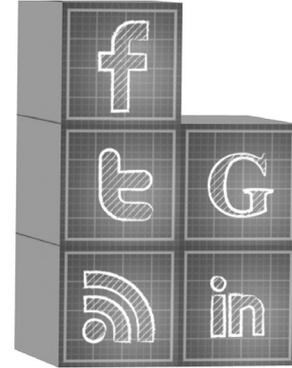
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# 1

## WHY SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING IS ESSENTIAL FOR THE SUCCESS OF TODAY'S SMALL BUSINESS

Social media is not just a marketing tactic. It's a social phenomenon that is here to stay. It is the way consumers find new products and services as well as receive the input they need to make that final purchase decision. Whether it's trying a new restaurant or seeing the latest summer movie, consumers have always relied on personal recommendations. Social media takes these recommendations to the next level. It makes what was once between two people, public. It puts word of mouth recommendations, both good and bad, out there for the whole world to see. While the voice of social media is personal, the reach is massive. And depending on what your customers are saying about you, can literally make or break your business.

To be successful in today's world of smart phones and constant connection, even small businesses need a social media strategy. The right strategy can not only help catapult your business ahead of your competitors, but also prove critical in avoiding detrimental business decisions. Social media puts the power back into the consumer's hands. And when consumers have that much voice, businesses need to listen, and act accordingly.

The Molly Katchpole story was a perfect example of how social media can magnify one customer's complaint, and force even a billion-dollar world corporation to pay attention. This is exactly what happened when the 22-year old college-graduate posted a complaint about Bank of America regarding the new \$5 per month fee for using her debit card. She turned to Change.com, a web site that allows people to use social media to post petitions and solicit signatures.

Mainstream media such as TV producers and newspaper writers turn to the social web to see what's trending and hot on the public's mind. They caught wind of Molly's story and as a result, she was interviewed on TV talk shows. In the interviews, she came off as a smart, respectable young American, who people could identify with — especially those living pay-check to pay-check that were tired of extra fees big banks were imposing on them. She became the voice of what so many Americans were already feeling. In about a month, she received more than 300,000 signatures from Bank of America customers who publicly announced they were leaving Bank of America in protest of the extra fee. In the end, Bank of America removed the extra \$5 fee, a decision that costs the bank more than \$3.4 billion in potential additional revenue.

So let's bring this back to you, the small business owner. If you have not yet started using social media, the time is now and this book will help you get started. If you are already using social media, this book will help you further amplify your messages and help you create a social media strategy in line with your business goals.

## The Time To Get Started Is Now

We interviewed hundreds of owners of small businesses across the U.S. about their use of social media and how they plan to integrate it into their overall marketing and communication strategy. There were many similar responses:

“I don't have time.”

“We don't need it.”

“We just haven't gotten around to it yet.”

“I don't know where to start.”

Even today, with its wide-spread use, many small business owners are still claiming a lack of time, resources and understanding of social media tools, as well as intimidation by the vastness of the social media space as primary factors for not yet integrating a social media strategy into their communications efforts.

# How Professional Service Firms are using Social Media

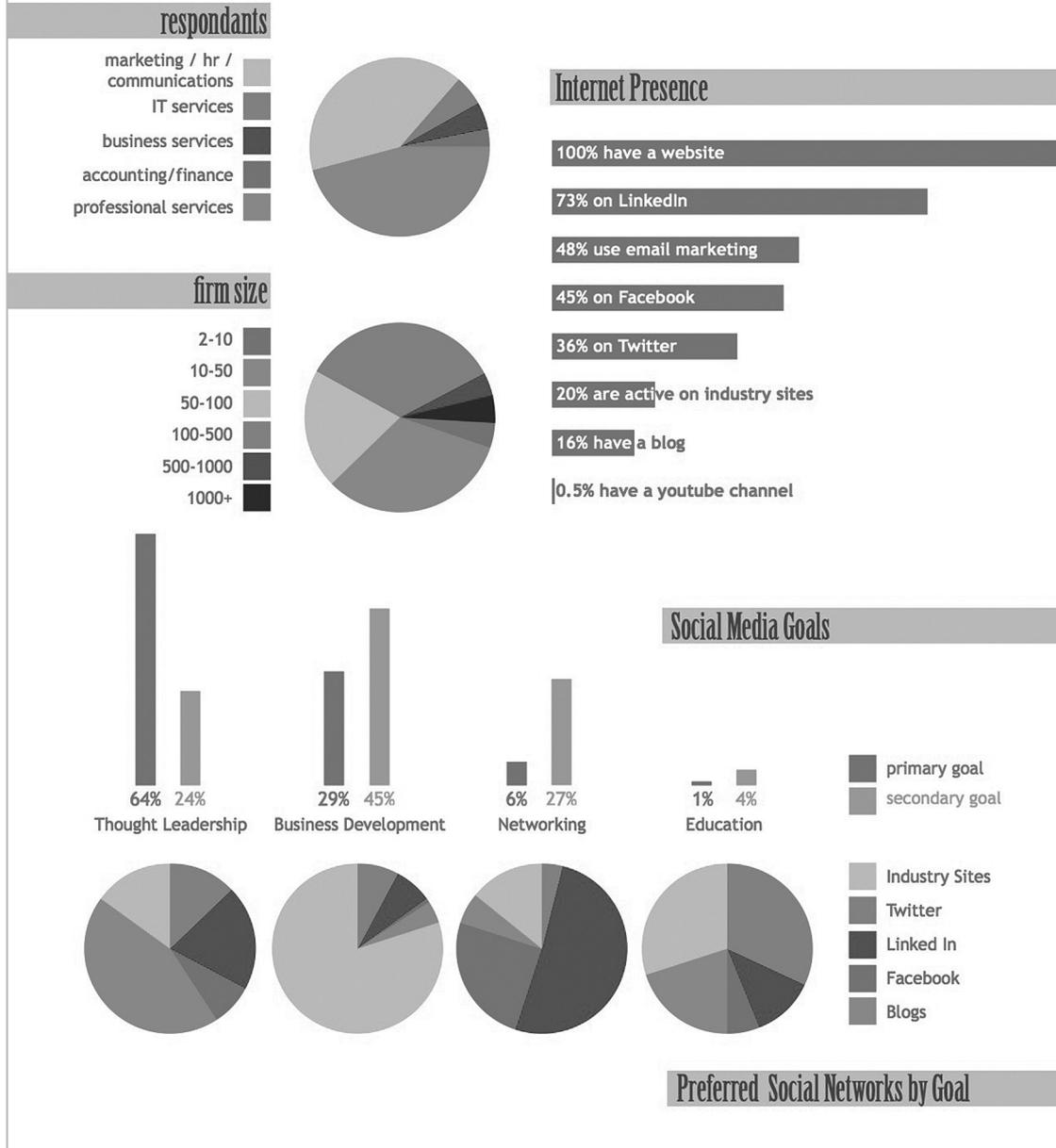


Figure 1.1: Results from the Social Media in Action survey conducted by ZweigWhite.

While some small business owners are still watching from the sidelines, cautiously dipping their toes into the waters of social media, there are millions of professionals who've already dived into social media and are riding that wave with some exciting results. These social media savvy professionals are watching their efforts exponentially ripple throughout the industry in powerful ways. They are successfully branding themselves as innovators in their industry by turning their social media connections into their most powerful advocates.

But like any tactic, the results are always better when they are directly connected to business objectives.

One of the major driving factors leading small businesses to investigate the effectiveness of social media as a communications or marketing platform has been the recession. "At the beginning of 2009, our phone stopped ringing," shared Laura Davis, architecture principal and director of marketing for HPD Architects in Dallas, Texas (<http://www.hpdarch.com/>). "It became apparent when 197 people showed up for a pre-submittal meeting that our chance for success in winning the project was dwindling. We realized we had to take action to bring in business." HPD included social media as a way to support their face-to-face networking and to expand the reach and influence of the firm's brand.

Howard Blackson, principal and director of planning for San Diego, California-based PlaceMakers (<http://placemakers.com>), a multidisciplinary planning and urban design firm with seven principals located in seven different cities, also points to social media as an asset for today's economic climate. He refers to social media as not only a way to conduct research and distribute thoughts and ideas, but as the core of their "New Economy" business model, which relies on the internet and social technologies to function with no overhead, no full-time office staff or central office. For PlaceMakers, social media tools allow them to run a more efficient business, bringing in expertise from all over the U.S. and Canada to easily collaborate on a single project.

Businesses of all sizes are quickly learning that social media tools enhance the efficiency of both internal and external communication needs. A single tweet or post is not only quicker than traditional forms of communication, but can reach more people faster and has a longer "shelf-life."

According to a 2011 survey (<http://www.umassd.edu/cmr/studies/andresearch/socialmediaadoptionsoars>) from the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth Center for Market Research, more companies than ever view social media as an essential asset to business communications,

with 86% reporting that social media technologies were “very important” to their business and marketing strategies in 2010. According to the survey, 71% of businesses used Facebook in 2010, 59% used Twitter and more than half surveyed blogged. Of this group, 85% view Facebook as successful in helping them meet their business goals, while a whopping 93% report message boards as a successful tactic.

As one social media advocate, Vik Duggal (@VikDug), said “The internet is about 17 years old, just about to graduate high school and is about to really blow up.” Social media is even younger.

Although still young, social media has already become an essential piece of most business’s overall communications strategy. Business owners are sharing ideas on Twitter, growing their customer base with Facebook, promoting their expertise on blogs — and seeing measurable return on investment for their efforts.

Today’s social media tools aren’t only about technology. They are a direct response of today’s business world where communications happen in real time. Think of social media as the new cell phone. Just as each and every one of your employees and consultants has a direct cell phone number to power their everyday business and communications, social media can also be leveraged for this purpose — but contains a longer and stronger shelf-life than a single phone call. But unlike a phone call that is between a closed or private group, social media communications allow for outside input and influence, which will help your ideas and your business expand and thrive. Social media offers the ultimate “listening tool” to gain honest input from customers, feedback on your products or services and your business, as well as to discover new and more efficient ways of working.

When social media tools are leveraged in the right community setting, whether that includes employees of an organization, a group of people with a common interest or goal or a community of residents sharing the same town or neighborhood, members are compelled to interact and share their perspectives. Listening to those conversations and ensuring that you are engaging on topics that matter most to your core audience is the essential ingredient for making full use of social media as a multi-directional communications tool.

This new way of thinking is an opportunity for all businesses to reorganize their overall communication strategy, decision-making authority and how information flows out to the public, customers, your supply chain and employees. During your deep dive into social media, you will start interacting with customers and colleagues in a way you have never done before, and as a result you will start to build deeper

relationships. Ideally, these deeper connections will be the online advocates who will carry your message further than you ever could have imagined on your own. After all, people prefer to buy from other people, not impersonal mission statements, statistics, websites and corporate logos. This new form of media is not a trend. It is the way businesses communicate.

## Where Do I Start?

Time and intimidation were the main reasons businesses gave us for not having integrated social media into their communication strategies. Small business owners said they were so busy running their business and day to day operations that taking extra time to update a blog, find connections on LinkedIn or post a tweet was just too much. Plus, since many industries are still finding themselves on the tail end of a major recession, priorities are on selling through traditional offline methods. For many business owners, these types of traditional approaches to sales feel safer. However in this book, we'll show you how social media can open your business up to a wider group of potential customers, and provide more reach than a single hand shake and paper business card ever could.

Social media isn't a stand-alone program; it should come alongside a company's strategies and business objectives that are already in place. Once you know what you are trying to accomplish, the most important piece of advice for jumping into the social media world is this: You don't have to be everywhere. It's better to have a strong, influential voice on a handful of social networks where your target audience lives than to try to be everywhere at once. There are so many channels of information available; not only would trying to excel at each be overwhelming, but it is impossible. As shown in figure 1.2. Trying to be everything to everyone will not help you be effective in your social media use. In fact, it will achieve the opposite. It will dilute your overall influence in your online social circles. Focus your approach on a specific objective.

## Getting Company "Buy-In"

Before you sign up for your first Twitter account or register a name for your blog, define what your business's overall communication goals are. Just like any marketing and communication vehicle, you have to plan for how you will use social media and how you will measure the success of your efforts.

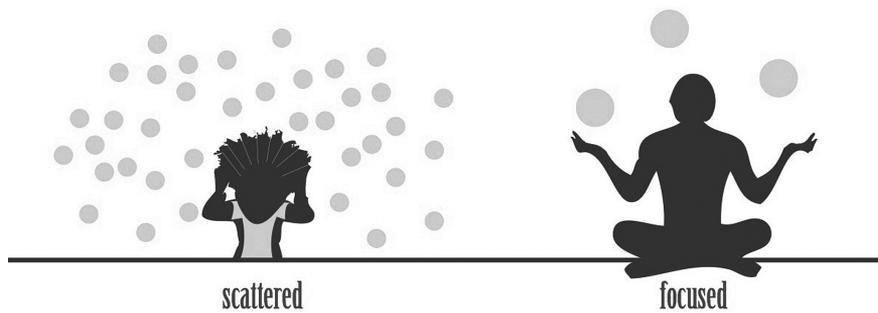


Figure 1.2: Trying to excel at each channel is impossible.

You should also recognize that there is a misconception about social media: that engagement is cheap or even free. Although the social media tools themselves are free, building solid online community profiles takes company buy-in, organization and an investment in time and resources. Your business's social media cannot be run by your high-school aged child or some random intern. What goes out on the social networks must reflect your company's intellect, quality, brand, mission and be aligned with your overall business goals. Therefore, the content and messaging needs to be managed by someone with a vested interest and passion for the company and the topic at hand. Social media, when used correctly, can effectively support the communications for most groups within your organization, from PR and marketing to research and development, and from knowledge management to internal communications and recruiting.

## The First Step

Start with the end in mind. It's essential to understand your goals and objectives. These will drive the decisions around your target audience and what you are trying to get them to do.

If you do not know your goals, conduct a thorough analysis to set them. There are several widely published methodologies for goal setting, like the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis that can help you narrow your focus; or the SMART method—Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time sensitive—which is an acronym to help you check that your goals are result-oriented. Regardless of how you approach it, this step is essential. Before

starting any communications engagement with clients — whether we are looking into social media or not — we begin with a question and answer session to get to the heart of what they want to achieve and what vehicles are best suited for their goals. See the *Objective and Strategy Setting Worksheet* sidebar for an outline of questions that drive these conversations and tips for setting objectives.

## Objective and Strategy Setting Worksheet

Jumping into social media without forethought and planning is perhaps the biggest, and most common, mistake that a small business can make. Without an objective and a strategy, there is no real way to measure, test, achieve success or determine failure. We use the principles of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) combined with the information we've come to rely on for marketing or communications campaigns to help assess the landscape and zoom in on a good approach. This fact-finding assessment can take a general, company-wide focus or it can be specific to each market sector or service offering.

### Establish Objectives

What is your mission statement, values and/or brand attributes?

- What are your business goals?
- What are your marketing goals?
- What is the reputation that you aspire to have?
- What parts of your business support these goals? Examples are core competencies and differentiators.
- Who in your company is instrumental to reaching these goals in roles such as a subject matter expert or inspiring leader?
- What has the company done and/or is currently doing to advance toward these goals?
- Who are your clients? Who is the decision maker of these client firms and who are the influencers? What is this influencing-person's background? What does their job entail?
- Who are your competitors? How are they communicating? Is it effective?

- Are there sensitive issues or topics that perhaps we need to keep in mind or avoid talking about in public?

## Establish a Strategy

- What does success look like?
- What assets are unique to your business? These might be research and development, image library, events, marketing programs, breakthrough projects.
- What are your resources that can be assigned to this effort? Examples are in-house staff and outsourced resources like agencies or consultants.
- Who are these resources and what is their background, areas of expertise, interests? How much time are they allowed to spend on it?
- What networks or organizations are your company and/or its leaders actively involved in? What is the nature of the involvement such as a sponsor or board member?

There is an old advertising adage that states a person needs to see a message seven to 12 times before they commit it to memory. It is important to find multiple ways of reaching your audience to make your messages stick. Social media should not be an isolated program and it should not replace your existing communications channels, rather it should integrate with them. Your social networks are simply communications channels. The content that you use on the social web should complement, pull from, and promote the pieces of your existing marketing programs, such as your newsletters, direct mail and events.

Finally, before starting a social media campaign you must be prepared for flexibility. Social media tools and rules change frequently. Although you are not expected to be a social media expert, your company must be able to make a quick decision and respond in real time to crises as well as positive PR opportunities that arise.

Proper use of social media is about decentralized decision-making where everyone in your company can contribute and have a voice. However, before letting just anyone in your organization tweet or post on your company's behalf, defining guidelines and core messaging is essential. Setting up the right internal structure and goals before you engage in the social space is key to making it work for your company.

We'll get into the internal behind-the-scenes tactics for generating ideas, recruiting contributors and empowering employees in Chapter 4.

You rely on the knowledge and success of individuals within your company as a pillar of the firm's reputation. In Chapter 5, you'll find strategies that are being used at some of the most recognizable businesses that are positioning their experts in front of their brand. We'll address the risks and benefits of this approach, how some are embracing their thought leaders, and the changes they are seeing because of it.

Social media tools continue to grow and evolve based on the needs of today's business user. The most exciting thing about social media is that unlike any other form of media, you can track the results of your effort instantly. As you engage in social media, you'll learn that a simple tweak in the way you compose a blog post headline, or the time of day you tweet can make a significant impact on the results you will see.

As you engage in the tactics outlined in this book, we'd like to hear how you are doing. Find us online at [www.The-Social-Media-Advantage.com](http://www.The-Social-Media-Advantage.com) to connect with us via your favorite social network. Here you will find links to share ideas and ask questions. We look forward to hearing from you.