

Getting Started with Social Media



TH Design, Inc.



Introduction

Definition of Social Media*

Social media are media for social interaction, using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques. Social media use web-based technologies to transform and broadcast media monologues into social media dialogues. They support the democratization of knowledge and information and transform people from content consumers to content producers. Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein define social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content.” Businesses also refer to social media as user-generated content (UGC) or consumer-generated media (CGM). A common thread running through all definitions of social media is a blending of technology and social interaction for the co-creation of value.

Social Media includes both “outlets” and “tools”. Your blog is a “tool”. Someone else’s blog is an “outlet”. Tools and outlets include (but are not limited to):

Social Networks

Professional Networks

Discussion Boards and Forums

Blogs

Microblogs

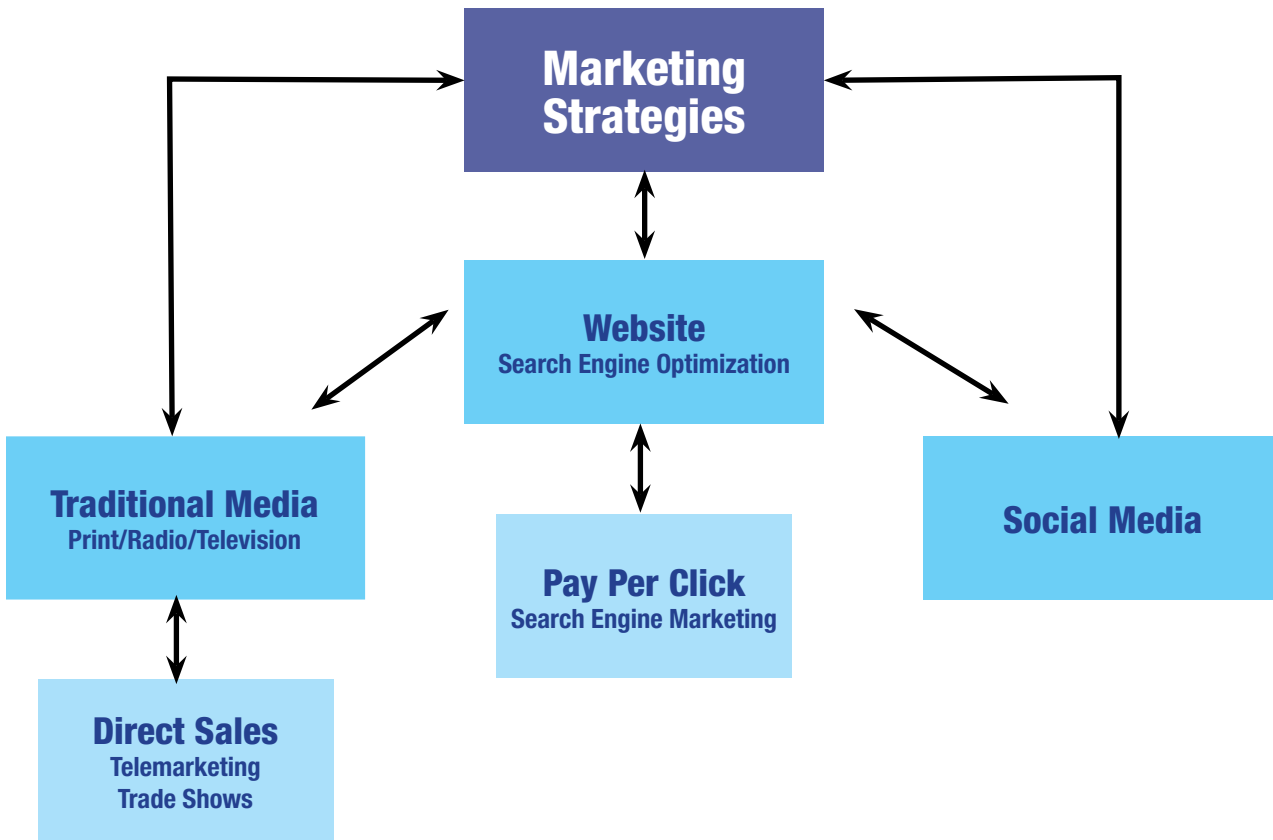
Video

Podcasting

Social Bookmarking

**From Wikipedia*

The Marketing Landscape



Where Does Social Media Fit In?

Most companies and organizations are just beginning to consider using Social Media channels. Large companies with deep pockets have been out front, exploring the possibilities and developing approaches that can be modified and applied by organizations of all sizes. They've also been at it long enough to have made a number of errors that we can learn from and avoid.

Your Social Media campaign should be treated as and be considered part of your overall marketing strategy. Anything you do that would fall under Social Media should complement and never contradict your other marketing efforts. Whatever you can do to cross-pollinate your Traditional Marketing, Web Marketing, and Social Media programs should be done. This may mean updating your marketing strategy. It may mean updating your primary website so that it can function as an effective central hub to all your online efforts. It may mean adding material to that website that can be the payoff to web users who find out about your outfit on Facebook or Linked In or a blog or forum or article or tweet.



The Social Media Landscape



Social Networks

In essence, social networks are online communities that allow individuals with common interests to connect, network, interact and share information. Examples include Linked-In, Facebook, MySpace, etc.

Social Bookmarking

Websites that allow users to share their bookmarked webpages with others. Examples include Digg, Stumbleupon, Delicious, etc.

Video Sharing

Websites that allow users to share video content. Examples include YouTube, VodPod, Vimeo, etc.



Photo Sharing

Websites that allow users to share photographic images with friends, relatives or the general public. Examples include Flickr, Photobucket, Picassa, etc.

Blogs

Short for “weblog”. A website (typically) dedicated to a single or general topic area/industry featuring—but not necessarily limited to—brief, diary-like entries commenting on current events or addressing specific issues. Blogs can be the work of one individual or members of a like-minded community/company. Examples include Daily Kos (politics), Deltoid (science), Pixel Acres (web design), etc.

Microblogs

Similar to blogs except entries are limited to a couple lines of text. Examples include Twitter, Tumblr, Plurk, etc.

Chat Rooms

Websites where participants communicate in real-time via text messages (as opposed to verbal communication). Examples include Chat-Avenue, TeenChat, etc.

Podcasts

Free, downloadable audio or video programs/shows. Thousands upon thousands of podcasts are available at numerous media websites and/or for example, through I-Tunes.

Forums

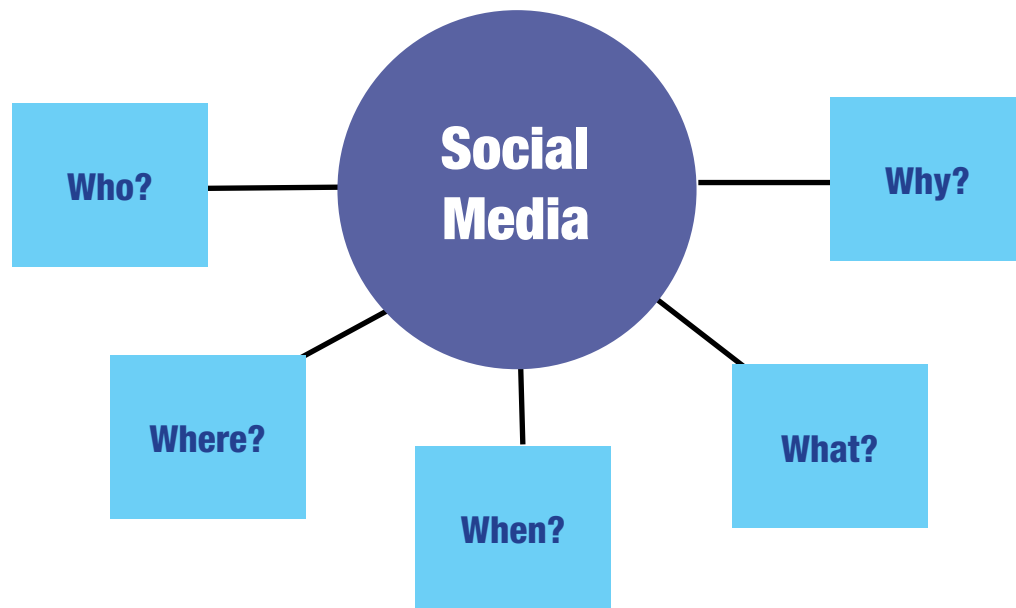
Otherwise known as message boards, forums typically serve a specific community, interest or industry. Many forums require users to be registered to post or respond to other messages. Content is often monitored to ensure compliance with pre-defined standards of civility or topic relevance. Examples include hobby forums (ModelRailroadForums), special interest forums (CivilWarTalk), industry forums (HighRankings), etc.

Wikis

Websites in which a community of users are invited to create, edit and update the content. While registration is often required before users can post contributions or make edits, stringent qualifications in terms of education, experience and expertise are not necessarily required. Examples include Wikipedia, Wikispaces, Scholarpedia, etc.



Social Media Strategies



Key Points to Understand From the Start

Social Media (collectively) is a marketing *tool*—there needs to be an overall marketing *plan* or *strategy* in place before jumping into the Social Media pool. The Social Media arena is a slow-build medium; results will not be instant; one-size does not fit all. *First*, determine where your customers or potential customers congregate online. *Then*, decide what social media channels will best enable you to engage your audience. It's better to nurture a couple of channels consistently over an extended period of time than spreading yourself thin over multiple channels.

Where are relevant people gathering?

Figure out whether your specific company/org. is being talked about online at all, and if so, where. If no one is talking about your specific outfit, find out if your competitors, industry in general, etc. are being discussed. (Tools to use: Google Alerts, Google Blog Search, TweetDeck, Social Mention, Board Reader, Blinkx, Twitter Search, Digg, Newsvine, Stumbleupon, Yahoo Pipes). Your object is to determine where to concentrate your energies. For example, although nearly everyone has heard of Facebook, it's quite possible your product/service is not being discussed by anyone there. On the other hand, there may be forums or specialty blogs that talk about your products/services 24/7.

What are they saying about you, if anything?

If your company/product/service/industry *is* being discussed, is the tenor of the conversation positive? Negative? Mixed? Are people saying they don't like your product? Do they like your product but think your service is sub-par? Or, is your problem no one has heard of you? Where are you starting from?



Set Goals for your Social Media Program.

What do you want to accomplish? Improve overall branding of your company? Increase awareness of a product/service you offer? Counteract criticism or correct misinformation about your product/service? Increase traffic to your primary website? Increase downloads of a specific white paper?

Develop content to help you accomplish your goals.

Social Media is about people sharing opinions and information. Your job is to give them something to work with; something to talk about. You can:

- ◆ Create “how to” articles, podcasts, videos, books;
- ◆ Post helpful, substantive, ongoing blog posts;
- ◆ Create white papers;
- ◆ Conduct surveys and share results via articles, blog posts, white papers, forum announcements, etc.

Specify goals to begin to measure results:

How many downloads? How many new contacts? How many mentions on Digg or Delicious or Stumbleupon? How many “likes” on Facebook, etc.

Finalize your list of tools and outlets (specific blogs, forums, social sites, etc.).

The Social Media landscape is vast. There are hundreds of social media outlets with new ones cropping up nearly every day. Choose at most a handful of outlets in which to focus your efforts.

Engage.

Patience will be required. Social media is collaborative and you can't force the pace. Trust is required and building trust takes time.

Track.

Use your web analytics tools to track downloads from your website, visitors to your blogs, comments on your blogs, etc.

Make sure to synch your Social Media efforts with your more traditional marketing efforts.

Your website should interact with your social media campaign. Print materials can discuss/promote your online/social media activities. Radio spots can discuss/promote your online/social media activities. Press releases can discuss your latest white paper, survey, article, etc. Make an effort to coordinate your activities across the various marketing channels.



Create an Awareness Network

Social Media is not a Direct Sales medium in the way that, say, Google Adwords is, but it can be a potent portion of your marketing mix. Effective use of social media will increase sales or lead to sales but those are byproducts of the process. Social Media is about building awareness and creating trust. If you properly target your efforts and you nurture them for a period of time, you will see results.

TH Design can help you develop and implement a Social Media marketing strategy. For more information, call us toll-free at 877-811-7437, or locally at 330-869-4680. Let us help you get started in exploring and utilizing the exciting new world of Social Media.

About TH Design

TH Design is a design and internet marketing firm located in Akron, Ohio with expertise in website design and development, corporate identity and branding, print design, web marketing and social media. Since 1993, TH Design has worked with a variety of companies (large and small) in Northeast Ohio and across the nation.



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