

SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE INDEPENDENT BOOKSTORE

I don't know the future...I didn't come here to tell you how this is going to end, I came here to tell you how this is going to begin...a world without rules and controls, without borders or boundaries, a world where anything is possible. - The Matrix (1999)

THE WAVE OF THE NOW

Social media is continually redesigning how we interact with each other, how we buy, sell, and play. Social media is the term that is used to describe user-generated content. Wikipedia describes it this way:



At its most basic sense, social media is a shift in how people discover, read and share news, information and content. It's a fusion of sociology and technology, transforming monologue (one to many) into dialog (many to many) and is the democratization of information, transforming people from content readers into publishers.

Wikipedia, itself, is a social media site. Social networking falls under the umbrella of social media. Social networking focuses on creating communities of people who share similar ideas or experiences or who want to explore new ideas or experiences. In other words, social networking is what happens when people participate in social media. Facebook, MySpace, Flickr, YouTube, IndieBound, Yelp, and blogs of all types are just a few of the social networking opportunities available.

Twitter is the new kid on the social networking block; its popularity has exploded since its inception and official launch in March 2006. It has reached the 1.5 billion-tweet mark, and records 8 million tweets per day. This number is climbing so quickly that those numbers will be out of date by the time you finish reading this sentence. You can see the exact and ever growing number [here](#).

CEO of Zappo's, Tony Hsieh, says that Zappo's doesn't think about having a "social media strategy" to describe how they use networking tools in business, because they'd never use the term "voice media strategy" to describe using the phone as a business tool.

Social media is not the wave of the future; it is the wave of the now.

This new media has already changed the way the greater marketplace and the traditional media approach communication, public relations, and marketing. And it has changed how the public communicates. Again, social media is no longer a trend - it is ubiquitous. Amazon and Domino's each recently discovered this in a very public way when each experienced a PR disaster that played out on the social media stage.

If we learn anything from the fiascos involving Amazon and Domino's it is that, like it or not, the many components of social media have created a "third place" where people are gathering, whether it's Twitter, Facebook, or blogs, and where they have discovered a powerful voice. How can your store not only understand and participate in social media but profit from it as well?

As you struggle to discover where your business fits in this new media world, remember that you are not alone. Businesses of all types - from Wall Street giants to the corner store to your own trade association – are experimenting and trying to adapt to these new communication tools. This session will help you to start thinking in this way, or at least, become more aware of how these tools are changing our landscape – including our vocabulary.

A PRIMER TO HELP YOU GET STARTED



The Three R's of Social Networks: Relationships, Relationships, Relationships

Social networks are about one thing: relationships – that's it. Social networks are not primarily a bulletin board for sales, event announcements or product placement. If you use old media tactics with new media tools, you may not be trusted and may even generate some negative pushback from those you are targeting.



EXAMPLE: *"When consumers are invited to participate in online communities...they don't want to feel like they're simply a captive audience for advertising, and if they do they're likely to abandon the community."*

"The head of consumer research for a leading consumer-electronics organization created an online community...to discuss product-development and marketing issues. One of the key principles of the community, she says was 'not to do anything about marketing, because we weren't about selling; we were about conversing.'

"In short order, community members not only identified what it was they were looking for in the company's products, but also suggested innovations to satisfy those needs. The company quickly

developed prototypes based on those suggestions, and got an enthusiastic response: Community members asked when they would be able to buy the products.

"They didn't have to be sold on anything."

- Wall Street Journal (2/24/09) from The Secrets of Marketing in a Web 2.0 World

Where is the Value?

If you are not going to be pushing your store, your sales, and your products, where is the value? The value of these tools rests in the relationships they allow you to form, which in turn result in a higher profile for you and your store.

- *Enjoy Free PR:* Anyone can find out who you are, and what you provide through a variety of channels – website, email, Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, your blog, Flickr, IndieBound, Yelp, etc.
- *Create Goodwill:* The easier you are to find, follow, and communicate with online, the higher the probability that your customers will remember you when they need a book – be it physical or digital.
- *Create Connections:* As you participate in the online communities, you are creating excuses for people to interact not only with you, but with each other; this results in social currency. The more social currency you have, the larger your network becomes, and the farther your message will travel.
- *Become a Better Bookseller:* Your network already includes publishers and other booksellers. If you've been to the Winter Institute, you already know the value of socializing and chatting with others in the industry. Social Media tools can provide a similar context for learning from your colleagues and staying informed.

No Experience With Social Networking?



Start With Listening. Start your experiments with social media by listening to online conversations. Read a variety of blogs and note what works and what doesn't. Identify what appeals to you and what you think will appeal to your customers. Following are some ideas to help you create listening outposts:

- Search Twitter on <http://www.search.twitter.com>. Search for your store name, part of your store name, your town, other stores in your community, etc.
- Set up a Facebook page and spend time finding your way around it.
- Watch video blogs to see what you like, what you don't like, what works, what doesn't work.
- Create Google Alerts with your store name or whatever else you want to track. Use quotation marks to define your search. Example: "Doylestown Bookshop"
<http://www.google.com/alerts>
- BlogPulse is another tool you can use to track online mentions of your store or whatever topic you want to track. <http://www.blogpulse.com/>

Take Baby Steps

Blogging, using Facebook, being active on Twitter, posting videos, it all sounds great...but...how can you do it all? And what can you do if you are a smaller store without a large staff to help you? You take baby steps. Don't feel you must be active everywhere all at once. Pick something you feel the most comfortable with and dedicate yourself to this one tool. You don't have to be on the cutting edge of all new social networks, but you should be involved somewhere. Don't forget to tell your customers you are using the social platform you choose; update it at least daily.

The most important thing you can do is start.

The second most important thing is...**don't give up!**

Don't give up after you notice that your sales haven't gone through the roof after a month of blogging or participating on Facebook. Just like any relationship, these online relationships need to be nurtured. This takes time. Give yourself a trial for a year. Not only will you learn from your experience, you will, more than likely, branch off into other aspects of social media.

Say Goodbye to Controlling Content

In order to promote conversations and relationships, you have to say goodbye to controlling content. Your content will become a back and forth conversation and not simply a straightforward advertising. The one message you have is: Let's talk about **you** and what **you** like and what **you** need and what **you** want. If you nurture relationships

*"Controlling a message means
I'm not inviting you to participate."*

-Chris Brogan from the Tools of Change Conference.

<http://www.chrisbrogan.com>

and create friends, these people will have an invested reason to become customers. As friends, they know you are not going to take advantage of them with misplaced sale announcements, guilt trips, or seemingly corporate messages.

Contribute to Content Besides Your Own

It is easy to become consumed by your blog and your content. But who else has a blog in your community? Other indie stores? Museums? Humanitarian organizations? What about your current customers? Who is talking about books in your community? Participate where the conversations are; it doesn't matter whose blog it is. When you find a blog you like, explore the blogroll and look at who is contributing. You will gather a list to explore in no time.

*"We were born to unite with our fellow men,
and to join in community with the human race."*

- Cicero

Experiment and Don't Be Afraid To Make Excellent Mistakes

See where you can take a blog/Facebook account/Twitter account/video sharing/Flickr account. The glory (and the frustration) is that these tools do not come with rulebooks. See what other people are doing, get creative, and try something new. For instance, maybe you can start a virtual bookclub, use Twitter to handsell, set up a Facebook account that lets people behind the scenes of bookselling, the opportunities are as limited as your imagination, and don't be afraid to make "excellent mistakes" (as Daniel Pink says).

Remember that not everything you try will be a success, but don't let that stop you!

In order to make social media – or any new technology – work for you, you don't need to know it all. You do need to show your customers that you are trying, that you embrace change and new ideas, and that you are willing to meet your customers and your community in the new spaces that they embrace. Use these tools to further communicate what you do know: Books. Be real. Be transparent. Learn from your experiences.

"Just as the potential for embarrassment shouldn't keep you from taking chances and growing your business in other areas, neither should it keep you from exploring new marketing realms as they come to light."

- Jennifer Laycock, Editor of Search Engine Guide

An example of a member bookseller who is experimenting with new technology and making it known is Wendy Hudson, owner of Nantucket Bookworks (Nantucket, MA). The following is a screen shot from the Bookworks website:

The screenshot shows the Nantucket Bookworks website. On the left is a navigation sidebar with links like 'Award Winners', 'News', and 'Indie Next List'. The main content area features an article titled 'E-Books Are Going Mainstream' with a sub-headline 'Love them or hate them, the future is here'. The article text discusses the availability of e-books, the author's experience with a Sony eReader, and the challenges for independent bookstores in the digital age.

Do Not Give Up

...and do not expect a 25% sales jump after a month or two of blogging.

Because online social networking is about creating relationships, making friends, and making your community aware of your presence, it's not going to happen overnight. Think about how you met your closest friend. Developing a close friendship takes time. Similarly, as you engage in social networking, you need to be in the conversation constantly for people to take you seriously. It's for the long haul or you will not be taken seriously. Take time with this. Everything you do through social networking is creating social currency.

- Remember that as you blog, tweet, or friend people, you are allowing your community to access your 'personality', to learn about who you are, and to see how you participate in the community 'in real life.'
- Also, remember that you need to participate fully. If you create a blog this means not only blogging, but also responding to other community blogs. If you join Twitter you should eventually stop lurking and start tweeting. If you join Facebook, you should not only update your status, but also comment on the status of your 'friends.'

WARNING: All this back and forth with your community may change the way you operate your business. And it should! You exist, as a business, to meet the needs of your community. If you are meeting these needs, you will find this out. If you are not, you may get suggestions. Respond to these posts, ideas, complaints, and praise. This is an opportunity to get feed back on the services you are providing. Following is a screen shop from the Hilton Longboat Key Beachfront Resort. The manager responds to all reviews, good or bad.



People Are Talking About You And Your Store. Join The Conversation!

People post, IM, chat, and tweet...about you! (If you don't believe me, check your store rating on Yelp). Be part of that conversation, but remember because this is relationship-oriented, it will take time. Don't expect a blitz of new customers or sales overnight.

"Experience is the mother of knowledge."

-Cervantes

ANALYTICS

There are some things you can do to see how your efforts are stacking up. The following are some of the free tracking options for your website and/or blog:

- Google Analytics
<http://www.google.com/analytics/>
- ClustrMaps
<http://www.clustrmaps.com>
- BlogPulse
<http://www.blogpulse.com/>

Explore the options and find the one that suits you the best. These sites will allow you to see more in depth reporting on who comes to visit you, when, how long they stay, what key words got them to your blog/website...etc. Do the majority of your hits coincide with specific content such as new staff picks? Bestseller lists? Event notices and reviews? Through analytics you can find out what people are looking to you for.



BUT WHAT ABOUT THE SOCIAL MEDIA BUBBLE?

The Social Media Bubble and Social Media Fatigue are two terms you may have come across. They describe a perception of social media that sees it growing quickly out of control with no foundation for the future. As more social networking sites and sharing sites come online, and as we feel the pressure to interact everywhere (for the sake of business or personal life or both), we will start to withdraw, leave communities and the bubble will burst. If this is a possibility, why bother to spend energy and staff time with something that may not be around in two or three years?

The answer is the sociology in social networking. Technology doesn't change human behavior – our needs never change (social or other) - but the way we meet those needs does change. In other words, technology influences our behavior. As technology continues to evolve and provide new ways for us to create connections, we will use and build on these technologies. From the advent of the telephone to the first dial up connection, we have used technology to establish and grow our social networks.

While social platforms like Facebook and Twitter and Youtube may change, the principle behind them will not. If you are to continue to be a bookstore with social significance, you can't ignore the social shifts that technology will continue to create. Again, don't feel the need to be everywhere (avoid fatigue), but be somewhere! **Focus on one social networking tool, tell your customers you are using it, use it daily, and you will have the foundation to shift as the technology shifts.**

EXCITING EXAMPLES FROM THE FRONT

Bob Jansen, Middlebury College Bookstore: *A Paradigm Shift*

"Our Facebook Fans Page represents a paradigm shift in how we do business. Instead of having customers we have fans and friends. Instead of traditional advertising and publicity alone, we focus on creating events and groups. We network; we listen; we respond; we have conversations with those we want to engage; we seriously consider the ideas and concerns of our fans and friends."

"The paradigm shift is leading us to develop a global strategic vision. Instead of having in-network fans and friends alone, we will cross over into other networks, striking alliances and partnerships. We will advance social and environmental causes by partnering with like-minded groups. We will partner with vendors and create positive change through the distribution of products. We will establish a new global change alliance that will positively impact the world through the actions of its members."

"The Bookstore is moving towards a matrix of integrated technology as a vehicle of social networking."

(quote from Middlebury College Bookstore, Facebook)

- Website: <http://bookstore.middlebury.edu/home.aspx> with a link to Facebook Fans Page

Martin Schmutterer, Common Good Books: *Just a New Way To Sell Ideas*

Common Good Books has found Twitter to be an excellent way to communicate. Tweeting customers have used Twitter on more than one occasion to request and order books. "Twitter is a great marketing tool if you don't use it for marketing. The powerful part of Twitter is that it is a real way to build social capital. For us as indie booksellers that is the most important part. If anything is going to keep us alive, it is trust, giving people a sense of who we are, seeing things with a bit of humor, being transparent and being aware. Twitter allows this."

Martin is not hung up about protecting the store image in his tweets, and he says, "That goes into the realness of it. I edit some nasty comments I could make, but I'm not going to completely whitewash what I say. I'm going to be honest, and customers need to see that."

And just how much time does this non-twenty-something manager devote to Twitter while at the store? "I keep it fairly limited – roughly 2-5 tweets a day. Sometimes I'll use it from home. Twitter is a medium that appeals to me because it does not feel as age-restrictive as Facebook." That said, the store does not focus exclusively on Twitter when it comes to social media, and Martin is working to integrate all of the stores social media, which includes a blog, an e-newsletter and Twitter.

Advice to new users: "You just have to start tweeting. Remember that you can lurk, but at some point you need to jump in and start. This is a community-building tool, and if people follow you it is because they expect you will have something to say. **We deal in selling ideas, and this is just as new way to do that.**"

- Common Good Books website: <http://www.commongoodbooks.com/>
- Twitter: commongoodbooks

Social Networking Professional Chris Brogan reports how his local comic store is using Twitter to handsell: *How Crazy Is That!*

"I live in small town and like to buy comic books. And comic book store owners, I mean the little guys, only live if they know what their clientele wants because they can't afford to buy all of product. So they have to buy the right product and push the right product. I had no idea this guy was reading my blog, until I went in and he mentioned one of my posts. So I blogged about him. I took a nice picture of him, and I called it *Small Town Super Heroes* (<http://www.chrisbrogan.com/small-town-superheroes/>) and wrote about what it is to have nice, personalized service - that incredible bit of customer service where you really feel like there is a rapport.

"And he ended up getting on Twitter, and he used the picture from the blog as his avatar. And I thought, 'oh, isn't that cute, he's on Twitter.' That bastard. You know what he did? This is awful. At some point my wife is going to go down there and pull the internet out of his store. He'll send me a message on Wednesday, because apparently Wednesday is comic book day: '@chrisbrogan House of Mystery Two just came in. You should come get it.'

"And then...

"And then he names like five others he thinks I'd like.

"IT IS LIKE THE BAT SIGNAL GOES OFF, and I go to the comic store. And 26.00 dollars later or however much he pulled out of my pocket, I say to my wife, *They just followed me home, honey. Can I keep them?*

"He isn't sending me a mass email of all of his titles; he is cultivating my interests. How crazy is that!"

(transcript from 2009 Tools of Change Conference)

- Chris Brogan's blog: <http://www.chrisbrogan.com/>

After this, there is no turning back. You take the blue pill - the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill - you stay in Wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit-hole goes. – The Matrix (1999)