

How

**SOCIAL
MEDIA**

is

Changing

Everything



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NOTE: If you are not familiar with social media, read [Appendix A: Types of Social Media](#) for a primer.

Most marketers act like they've been asleep for the last 5-10 years.

It used to be that companies primarily planned their marketing via television, radio and newspapers/magazines, with an occasional foray into direct mail or outdoor advertising. These days, those options aren't even part of the mix for many new companies, who are nonetheless able to reach a more targeted audience and engage them in ways that traditional mass media can't.

That's not to say that the end of TV, radio and print is imminent. But companies that want to survive must embrace the new marketplace. They can't use the same media plan that worked so well a decade ago. It simply won't work, because the very nature of the conversation between business and consumer has changed. Companies that ignore this fundamental cornerstone of modern marketing will grow increasingly irrelevant and watch their business be siphoned off by smarter, more aggressive competitors.

The rise of what is commonly referred to as Web 2.0 and the convergence of vastly different media channels has caught most businesses flat-footed. Technology has thrown communications into an unprecedented turmoil. What works today may not work this time next year. As a result, many marketers are afraid to wade into the fray, instead choosing to wait for the dust to settle.

The problem is, the dust isn't going to settle any time soon. In fact, it's only going to get worse.

What follows is an extensive introduction to the new

rules of marketing, with new players, technology and opportunities for explosive growth that have never existed before.

For those that are smart and willing to make an effort, there has never been a more exciting time to be in business.

What is Social Media?

Isn't that just a bunch of teenagers "chatting"?

Social media is simply people using new technology to more efficiently do what they have always done: talk, create, argue and connect with other people in different ways. The main way that is done right now is on the web, but cell phones and what they are morphing into are quickly gaining ground.

Social media in all its forms usually has one or more of the following characteristics:

Inclusiveness

Everyone, including both the original creator of the content and the audience, is encouraged to participate. There is no one-way flow of information.

Evolution

The creation of the media, whether it's text, music, video, multimedia documents, software or other, is just the beginning. With audience input, it evolves over time.

Dialogue

Social media is usually an ongoing conversation among what can be any number of people. Traditional media is created and sent to the audience. Social media goes back and forth indefinitely.

Community

Like-minded people are able to build their own communities for sharing their common interest. With contributions from so many enthusiasts, members can often find more information suddenly at their fingertips than they would have been able to amass in many years or decades by themselves.

Perpetuity

Once something is on the web somewhere, it isn't likely to disappear. If someone makes a comment or contributes a video, for instance, it may reside on a server indefinitely. This can come back to haunt people later, as many politicians and criminals have found out.

Adaptability

The framework, not just the content, of social media itself is constantly growing and evolving. People are coming up with new ways to connect every day. Sites that are popular today can quickly be overtaken by newer sites that provide improved user experience, whatever form it may take.

Availability

Social media never shuts down. People are sharing files, making posts and viewing content at every second of every day. The internet and all its forms have become like a separate entity, transforming at breakneck speed, with billions of people every day helping with construction.

Convergence: Every line is becoming blurred

To understand social media, it helps to know not only what it is, but how we interact with it. A trend that is rapidly changing the rules as we know them is the convergence of media platforms, affecting both creation and delivery of content.

Think back to the invention of the printing press. Today we don't think about it much, but at the time it was truly revolutionary. People no longer had to go to church and listen to sermons they didn't understand - now the information could be accessed in other places. Suddenly the door was thrown open for the exchange of information between people who would never even see each other.

As new inventions appear, they often generate a lot of excitement, but how profoundly they affect our lives is something we often don't realize until much later. For example, when the VCR first appeared, people could watch the movies they wanted, *when* they wanted. They didn't have to hope to catch a showing on a network channel. Even if they did, it might be at 3 a.m., and it might be the TV-edited version. With the VCR, they could watch the original version when they wanted to. Exciting, yes, but this element of user-controlled viewing time was just a glimpse of what was to come.

The printing press and the VCR are just two examples of gaining greater control over media consumption. Today, the viewer has an incredible amount of control, and it's growing daily.

For instance, people can access the internet, watch videos, create documents, e-mail spreadsheets, play video games and listen to their own collection of MP3s *on their cell phone*.

We can talk face-to-face with people anywhere in the world with a cheap videocam for our computer. Some people can log on to their home's control panel and turn up the heat so it will be warm when they get home. If you want to go to a nightclub, you can view a live cam from the dance floor so you know you're not going to a dead scene.

You can shoot a video from where you're standing at the edge of the Grand Canyon and upload it instantly to your friends.

You can listen to your favorite radio station on your computer and watch your favorite newscast on your phone. You can set your DVR to record the shows you want to watch, then watch them at any time, not just when they're broadcasting.

The point is that the creation and delivery of content is changing rapidly. This is an undeniable reality, and for younger generations this is simply the way it's always been. These aren't new things to them, and every day the envelope gets pushed further.

If you're still thinking that the way to communicate in this world is to run a newspaper ad here or a TV ad there, you're in for a rude awakening.

Marketing or entertainment?

There is a new area of social media marketing that has taken off right under people's noses and they don't even know it - it's marketing disguised as entertainment.

Perhaps the best known example of this is the video showing Kobe Bryant jumping over the speeding car. If you haven't seen it, go to YouTube and do a search for "Kobe Speeding Car". In it you see Kobe stepping out into the street over the objections of his friend. Next an Aston Martin speeds into the picture and Kobe proceeds to jump over it. Then, Kobe and his friend celebrate.

The video "went viral", meaning massive numbers of people sent the video itself or links to it to their friends. It created a lot of debate over how it was done, and several people made videos to show how they thought it was accomplished. There are countless imitators and spoofs of it posted as well.

The upshot? It's an ad for Nike.

Suppose for a moment that you're in the marketing department at Nike. Your boss tells you that he wants you to put together an ad that will be voluntarily viewed millions of times, that will create a buzz and will still have people viewing it 6 months from now. It has to have a "cool" factor. It can't look like any other ad out there. Oh, and by the way we don't have a huge budget for the ad, so it has to be

done fairly cheap.

What now?

What Nike did with this video accomplished all those things and promoted the brand far more than a traditional 30-second TV spot.

If you spend any time on YouTube or other video sites, you'll come across more and more of these types of videos.

For instance:

1. A video that is a compilation of skateboarding wipeouts. They're very entertaining, but if you look closely, you'll notice everyone is wearing the same brand of clothes.

2. A video of a guy teaching advanced guitar techniques. Behind him on the wall, very visible throughout the video, is a poster for a guitar string manufacturer.

Watch closely and you'll find a surprising number of these videos. It's a form of "stealth marketing", where people are marketed to, sometimes on a conscious level and sometimes on a subconscious level.

It may seem sneaky or underhanded, but think about this: ads have traditionally been undesired. You just want to watch a show and every 6-7

minutes you have to wait through several minutes of annoying ads. With this new form of marketing, the advertiser gets their message in front of their target audience, and that audience gets to watch something they actually want to see. Doesn't sound so bad that way, does it?

How businesses are shaping the new 2.0 world

Social media allows businesses to talk more directly and more intimately with people who actually want to hear from them. It's not mass media any more, it's individualized, opt-in media. As a business, is there anything better than being able to communicate with people who have actually asked to hear from you?

Market segmentation has become much more selective, as people have voluntarily divided themselves into very specific groups. With mass media, you can broadcast to a group of likely prospects. The more general the broadcaster (network tv, general newspaper or general interest magazine), the less targeted the audience. As the subject gets more specific (a golfing show, for instance), the more likely the average viewer is to fit a profile. But even with very specifically themed shows, viewers will still vary greatly, and will all have one thing in common - they don't want to have their show interrupted by advertisers.

With social media, however, people who seek out content centered around their interests have self-identified as being part of a specific profile. These are obviously a high-value target for marketers. And the best marketers are those who know how to make their message "sticky", or something that will be sought out, retained and passed along by their market.

Here's a quick example. A consumer electronics retailer I consulted with started an online community for people interested in amateur videography. Most people don't know much about getting good results with their personal camcorders, this community was dedicated to helping them.

Members of the community had a wealth of information at their fingertips. They could watch how-to videos, read instructional documents, post and share tips with other members and much more. Members could even post their own videos to share and ask for help improving them.

The company had an employee whose job it was for a few hours a week to answer member's questions and direct them to information, products, classes and resources that would help them. Of course, the classes and products were almost always things the retailer sold. It was like having a group of people asking to be sold to. In addition, every time there was a sale or a special, every community member got an e-mail telling them about it.

Another benefit to the retailer was that community members bought other things as well, such as digital cameras, cell phones, flat screen TVs and so on.

In terms of ROI, the V.P. of Marketing told me it has turned into their most profitable marketing venture ever. They have shifted money away from their TV,

newspaper and radio advertising, which has seen diminishing returns for the past decade.

The job of marketing used to be simply to tell the consumer what he wanted. Today, the consumer is telling the business what he wants, and smart companies are providing it.

Traditional advertising isn't dead, but it is just part of what has become a much larger picture.

Research: A rapid revolution

One of the areas that has been most impacted is how research on consumers has changed.

Most traditional market research companies have changed their way of doing business or simply disappeared. In the past, research was done on large demographic groups which were seen as a block whose behavior could be predicted as a whole.

Today, the gathering, storage and usage of customer information has become significantly more complex. Companies are able to continually gather data from consumers, all of which is automatically added to a database. Instead of

dealing with John Smith, a 55+ male in a defined income bracket, companies now deal with John Smith, whose actual purchasing patterns, interests and personal details are known. Those details can be used to not only understand John Smith and people like him, but can predict what he is interested in and will likely buy.

Companies are able to see beyond focus groups and what consumers say they would be interested in - they can see fairly easily what consumers are actually *doing*.

The problem for businesses today has shifted from gathering information to utilizing it effectively. Companies are able to gather vast amounts of data, from demographic profiles to individual purchases, but the information still needs to be put to profitable use.

What are marketers actually buying?

Traditional media such as TV, radio and print are purchased on impressions, or how many people will be exposed to the message. New media can be purchased this way also, but there are many more options available to the new media buyer.

In the case of buying banner ads on a website, a company can buy them per 1000 impressions (individual web pages that a web user visits, with each visitor viewing a page counting as an impression.)

Another common way to buy banner ads on a click-through basis. In other words, the advertiser only pays if a viewer actually clicks on the banner and then visits the advertiser's website. This number will obviously be only a small fraction of the people who view the banner. The advantage for the advertiser is that they only pay for people who actually care about their ad. And by analyzing the data gathered from people who click through, companies can continually refine and improve their marketing.

Doing marketing this way allows companies to use a level of precision never before possible. Mass media can be effective, but it is by definition a one-way process, with only very broad measurability of its effectiveness. Getting feedback and knowing whether or not a particular marketing initiative is working takes time, and results may be skewed by coincidental factors. New media is more efficient

and offers real-time feedback and tracking.

The Death of (Some) MiddleMen

One of the biggest advantages that social media offers is the drastic reduction of the numbers of people and processes that come between producer and audience. Perhaps the best example of this is in the music business, which is in an extreme state of flux.

To give you an idea of how extensive the middle-layers in this industry are, consider that while the average music CD retails for around \$16, the average cut to the musician is around \$1. For every \$16 CD sold, the creator gets about a buck. Is it any wonder that musical acts are trying things on the web that at first seem like financial suicide?

For example, Radiohead released an album that you could download for free, and pay them whatever you felt like. It met with mixed results, but examples like this are becoming increasingly common.

A lot of groups release song tracks individually, so you can edit and remix them however you like. That's something that would have been virtually unthinkable a decade ago - giving away hit-potential songs to the audience and letting them do with them whatever they want.

The music business may look completely different in ten years, but people will still be making money. The business models will change out of necessity,

acts those acts and managers that are forward and aggressive thinking with reap the lion's share.

Established distribution channels are changing or disappearing altogether with incredible speed. In the new Web 2.0 world, everyone controls their own mass media channel in the form of their website. Whereas there used to be established channels for reaching masses or targeted groups, now anyone can go directly to their audience.

To understand how profound of a shift has taken place, look at the following comparisons between the traditional and new ways of reaching an audience:

1. We used to only be able to get our writing in the hands of our audience if we got an agent, landed a book deal and were lucky enough to get shelf space at a bookseller. Hopefully we could get the right people interested in the book and sell a few copies if we had good promotion and support and hit the circuit. If we had something important to say, it would go in the next book.

These days, anyone can set up a blog in 5 minutes. Promoting the blog and gaining readership can happen in days or weeks versus the years that it took to go through the entire book writing/publishing experience. And it's possible to make a lot of money from a successful blog, whereas most authors fail to see their dreams of literary riches come true.

2. If you pursue writing articles as a means of promotion, it used to be that you would mail out query letters with your article subject, then sit back and wait at least 4 weeks, if you heard back at all.

Today you can make your pitch by e-mail and even include your full article. You're likely to hear back in a day or two, and if you don't, e-mail again. If you still don't hear back in a few days, you can assume the editor isn't interested and move on. The whole process should still take under a week.

In the pitch to the editor you should include links to your site or other sites where your writing is on display. It gives him or her a better idea of you and your expertise, again shortening the process.

3. What if you wanted to be on the radio? You would spend years building your platform before an editor would consider you enough of an expert to have on the show, then you would get your shot and it would be over, and you would start working on your next pitch. This is still a great promotional avenue for anyone who wants to promote themselves or their business, but these days we're able to do ten times as much in the same amount of time.

Today, with a minimal amount of software (or Freeware) anyone can produce audio recordings and make them available on their website. Interested listeners can subscribe to the podcasts

and can even be alerted every time a new one is posted. Whereas you used to be reliant on the radio interview to reach people, now you can go directly to them, and have more control over the content as well.

4. TV follows much the same process as radio. It used to be that it was very, very difficult to get your face seen via television. Today you can start a video blog and communicate directly with those who are interested in your message. It's always nice to say you've been on Oprah or The Today Show, but while you're working on that big break, you can be accomplishing an incredible amount.

5. How about focus groups? A decade ago, it was very expensive and time consuming to conduct a focus group, and the results were still suspect. Today any company can do extensive research and focus group testing online. It can be something as simple as searching what people are saying about the company to putting up a video or releasing a document and letting people respond via forum boards. One of the big advantages of the web is that, due to anonymity, people can be very honest with their responses. They're not going to try to tell the focus group or its conductor what they think he or she wants to hear. From the safety of their keyboard they can be as complimentary or as critical as they want to be. This can lead to some immature responses that are worthless and mean, but the advantages far outweigh the negatives here.

The point of these examples (and they're just the beginning) is that we all have access to an interactive mass medium channel.

What we do with it is up to us.

The Game is Being Played Every Minute of Every Day

Social Media allows things to be living and evolving on the web. Anyone, anywhere can be connected with anyone else, anywhere in the world. The constraints of time and space can be overcome in new ways, allowing for unprecedented levels of collaboration. Like minds can share and contribute to projects anywhere in the world, meaning that ideas, processes and inventions can be imagined, focus-grouped, tested and produced at unheard-of speeds.

Another advantage is that what is developed is getting constant feedback during the development process. Marketers that harness the power of the internet and social media can accomplish tasks never before possible without straining their own capacities. Web users and communities of like minded people do much of the heavy lifting, with marketers simply providing the framework, asking the questions they want answered and guiding the process to their desired outcome. It's something that in the past would have taken unsustainable amounts of research, development, focus groups and testing. These days, web users do the "work" voluntarily.

The end result is that the final product or service is much more closely aligned with what the consumer wants. There has been constant feedback and consumer input during conception and

development, so issues that would have taken several iterations of product development are resolved before the product even debuts.

But it only works for companies that leverage the power of social media technology.

The Rules have Changed Whether You Like It or Not

Here is one simple fact that every business must come to terms with if it's going to prosper: the consumer is in control.

There is no such thing as a captive audience any more. Every consumer has an endless variety of TV channels, radio and satellite radio options, print media, DVR-recorded programs, MP3's and websites to distract their attention. No one has to view advertisements. They can pause, rewind and fast forward their TV programs these days. They have remote control for most of their media devices, with other channels available when an advertisement comes on.

We can watch TV on the internet, set programs to record without the commercials and set our web browsers to feed us ad-free content 24/7. There are too many options for blocking ads. You can't just show up with your ad anymore and expect anyone to even notice, because people aren't forced to sit through them any more.

Consider a typical teenager these days. She may be watching videos on YouTube while listening to music on her portable MP3 player, stopping every 30 seconds to text her circle of friends or casually glance through a glossy magazine.

The Consumer is King: Not just a slogan

Consumers can now control when, where and how they access their content. It used to be that a show was on a certain channel at a certain time. Now it can be on anytime the consumer chooses to watch it, wherever he or she chooses to watch it. We can record our shows and watch them any time, on the TV, web browser and even our phone.

The old rule for advertising was repetition, repetition, repetition, repetition. It still is, if you're talking with an ad sales rep. But the new reality is that repetition is being replaced by engagement. You either offer something that people want or they simply click away to someone who will. This is one of the reasons why advertisements, education and entertainment are converging, because they have to. People have always resented advertising - now they can do something about it.

No one is watching their favorite program, hoping to be interrupted by an advertiser telling them that they have friendly, caring professionals on staff. They never have, but they had to wait through the ad, which might catch their attention. As more and more marketers, entertainment providers and self

promoters fill the TV, web, radio, print and others, it's getting harder and harder to catch people's attention. That's always been the case, but with the explosion of bandwidth and content, the problem has been magnified exponentially.

In the current arena of marketing, consumers simply don't need you. You either play by their rules or they leave for a more desirable game.

The New Structure of Influence

The rise of wikis, user feedback forums and other commentary and feedback-enabled social media is truly revolutionary, though it may be some time before people realize how monumental the impact is. The traditional structure of information was well defined: “experts” offered their knowledge on certain subjects through well established channels. In most cases it took many years of promotion to become recognized as an expert on a particular subject. Then, once you amassed the credentials, you approached (or were approached by) media outlets to share that information with the public. People traditionally relied on a few of the gurus they trusted for their information and the shaping of their views.

These days, people are just as likely to trust a fellow internet user as a nationally recognized expert when it comes time to make a decision. Amazon.com helped popularize the use of user feedback and in doing so, set in motion a revolution that has changed the way millions, if not billions, of people make decisions.

Twenty years ago, if you were looking to make a purchase but weren't sure which way to go, what did you do? You might ask a friend, you might read *Consumer Reports* or you might watch or read a review by a critic.

Today, how would you make a decision?

The fastest, most objective way is to go online and find out what real-world users are saying about the product. Buyers today are more likely to value the input of someone they feel is like them, in their situation. If people like me are saying that a product is meeting their needs, wouldn't that be more important than the opinion of a paid professional, whose life and outlook are likely very different than mine?

Consumers are influenced less with each passing year by traditional media. They are able to block out or ignore marketing messages more effectively, even though they are exposed to more every day. Social media turns the tables: consumers are drawn to products and experiences that fit their needs.

Here's a quick example that you may have experienced yourself. I was looking for a place to take the family on vacation. After looking at the web sites of countless resorts, we narrowed our choices down to three that looked like they offered what we wanted. But how to make a choice based on what the resorts' websites showed? Each site looked amazing - of course they only showed us what they wanted us to see. So we visited several travel websites such as expedia.com and travelocity.com to see what people were saying.

What an eye-opener.

One of the resorts we were able to rule out right away, as visitors who had posted very recently noted that half the resort was still shut down due to recent hurricane damage, and the beaches were largely destroyed.

That's something we would never have know based on what the resort was showing us.

As for the other two sites, comments were made again and again that one of the resorts was more family-oriented, and it had better food. If it was just my wife and I, the nightlife of the other resort may have pulled us in that direction. But consistent posts from actual guests gave us an excellent idea of the true nature of the resorts. And once we got there, we had to agree.

Again, that isn't knowledge we could have gotten from looking at the beautiful websites of the resorts, or from the slick brochures they both had available. Even visiting a travel agent wouldn't have helped as his or her opinion would have been just that - the opinion of one person. By looking at user reviews, we were able to get input from dozens or even hundreds of people, with unbiased, unpaid opinions.

And one last bonus - based on specific tips from several responders, we were able to avoid timeshare presentations that were arranged for unsuspecting guests.

For the consumer, this is a true gift. For the smart marketer, it can represent an incredible opportunity. Unfortunately for many businesses, they either don't realize this shift of power to the consumer or don't know what to do about it. For those that don't figure it out, and quickly, times are going to get very tough.

The main point is that the realm of opinion maker isn't at all what is used to be. By providing information and opinion that users find relevant, nearly anyone can quickly become a trusted resource. It doesn't take years of toil and the right media contacts. But it does take a willingness to understand what people's real needs are, and the ability to satisfy them.

APPENDIX A: Types of Social Media

Social media is growing and changing every day, but there are currently 7 categories that most fall into. The following pages are a brief introduction to those categories for those who are not already versed in social media.

Blogging

Most blogs are simply the author typing his or her thoughts on a particular subject. It's kind of like having a Microsoft Word document that you keep opening up and adding to, except that it's online, with your most recent entries at the top.

Blogs exploded in popularity because they are easy to do and they are immediate - you can communicate with anyone, anywhere at any time.

Blog types - personal, business, political, media articles

In addition to written blogs, video logs, or vlogs, are becoming popular. They are simply a self-made video that is posted online. An advantage to video blogs is that the videos can then be included on a MySpace or FaceBook page, or uploaded to YouTube where people looking for videos about your subject can find them.

Blogs often include places for feedback, so people can comment on what has been posted. These comments often take on a life of their own independent of the original post.

Another form of blogging is MicroBlogging, which is simply a small blog entry that may be created on a computer or a cell phone and then broadcast to those who have signed up to receive it. An example is Twitter (twitter.com).

Blogs are relatively easy to set up, whether you choose to use a third party site such as blogger.com or install the blogging software yourself. Either way, there are options that are free.

Useful Blog Sites:

www.blogger.com

www.wordpress.com

www.twitter.com

www.blogspot.com

Social Networks

Social networks are sites such as MySpace or FaceBook, where users can create profiles of themselves and put up nearly any content they want to share with the world. They can easily find people who share their interests and build friendships and communities.

The idea behind a social network is that people can post information about themselves, including what they like, content they've created and any information they want the world to know. Facebook even lets users post their own applications (software) free of charge.

People invite real world acquaintances to join their network, as well as anyone who shares a common interests. With social networks, it's easy to find people who may share specific interests and begin communicating with them. It's also a place where many people (especially younger people) go to learn more about someone. Entertainment personalities often communicate extensively through their MySpace pages, and anyone who wants to send a fan letter, complaint or other communication can do so easily through the page.

Bebo is another popular site that is aimed at school-age children, billing itself as " Bebo is a social media network where friends share their lives and explore great entertainment." Sharing lives is a common aim with social media. People can be semi-connected at all times, even with those who

are far away.

LinkedIn is a networking site for business purposes. The idea is that you invite everyone you want to stay in touch with on a business level to join your “circle”. Then, every time you want to communicate with your business network, it’s easy to do so. There is also a viral aspect to it, as your associates in turn have their associates who you may eventually get to know.

Social networks are often thought of as the domain of pre-teens and teens who spend their lives in front of the computer. Still in their infancy, they are growing rapidly in members and complexity. Once again, convergence is taking place as people are using these sites for more and more purposes. For instance, a network of people trying to lose weight may keep their fitness and weight loss journals on a site, with other members able to see their progress. The same site may have instructional videos, user-created videos, links to gyms and fitness equipment, support forums and downloadable diet guides available. Users share a large and intimate part of their lives with other users. This again blurs the line between forums, content and community, as well as how people keep track of their progress and how they interact with instructors and fellow members. It’s easy to see this has gone way beyond teens “chatting” and will continue to do so.

The important thing to remember from a business standpoint is that the target market has self-

assembled into one place. Business models are widely varied and continually changing when it comes to what to offer to entice people to become part of a network, as well as what to charge for. Businesses that are reluctant to give anything away will find their customers taken away by businesses that offer useful information and content to potential members. The trick is to give away content that is perceived as high value but costs the provider little or nothing. Businesses such as FaceBook simply provide the framework and members do the rest.

It's a strange new world for many business owners.

Social network site examples:

www.myspace.com

www.facebook.com

www.bebo.com

www.linkedin.com

www.twitter.com

Content Communities

Content communities are organized for the purpose of sharing some kind of content, such as videos (YouTube, for example). The communities may be very broad, such as sharing videos of any type, or can be specific, such as sharing sports highlights videos or original songs. It's up to the creator of the community what will be shared, and up to the creator or moderator to warn or exclude people who violate that intent.

People visit content communities for varied reasons, and the posting of promotional and business videos is commonplace. While content that is nothing more than a commercial for the poster will often be flagged by users, content that offers something of value for the viewer can be very popular, even if it promotes the creator's business. In fact, giving away content that contains promotion is proving to be a very successful activity for many businesses. For instance, suppose you wanted information on how build a treehouse for your kids. You can view videos about it online, some of which contain web addresses on the screen or that direct you to businesses that can supply the lumber, tools and other supplies. You get the information you need and the marketer promotes itself to a very interested party. The other point to make is that the video only has to be created once and can then be distributed for as long as it contains relevant content, which can be indefinitely.

Social networks lend themselves quite naturally to self promotion. MySpace, for instance, was popular very early with musicians and unsigned bands, who were suddenly able to promote their work to a mass audience. Product and personality promotion has grown at a rapid pace as well as people have begun to grasp the potential that social networking offers them.

If something has been broadcast via mass media, there is a good chance it has been captured and posted to a content community somewhere, especially if it had a large viewership. Copyright infringement has quickly become a muddled territory as content distribution has evolved to something that would have been unrecognizable a decade ago.

While many users simply visit a content community such as YouTube to entertain themselves or waste time, they can still be marketed to, assuming you provide content they choose to see. The line between entertainment, education and marketing is becoming very blurry, a trend that will only grow stronger over time.

Content community examples:

www.youtube.com

<http://slashdot.org/>

www.download.com

www.thepluginsite.com

<http://broadbandsports.com/>

Video Games

Multi-player games have evolved rapidly on the internet. What started as just being able to go online and challenge someone to a two-player game has evolved into massive multiplayer alternative realities such as Second Life, where people can create a detailed fantasy world. Programs such as this, while set up as games, have evolved for many into a world that is as immersive and time consuming as their real world.

Many video games are used simply to draw users to a particular website. If the site creator can keep people there long enough, he or she can either get them comfortable with the brand or at least charge advertisers who are trying to reach the sites visitors.

Sites aimed at children employ this tactic extensively, often with great success. If you visit www.disney.com or www.crayola.com, for instance, there are a lot of things for young users to do there. They can spend countless hours playing and exploring, all the while learning more about the company, its products and promotions. The games are an excellent way to draw in their target market.

Video games have become so immersive and complex these days that players don't passively watch a story the way TV viewers do, they actually *create* the story themselves.

Other sites such as virtual reality games are an end

unto themselves. In many of these, users can set up their online lives and create 3D representations of themselves (avatars) that can interact with other avatars. They can buy virtual property, run for virtual office and even declare virtual war! What surprises many people is that there are real dollars being used for some of these activities. Marketers also set up virtual advertisements, virtual products and virtual business locations that users can interact with.

Product placement is another way that users are marketed to, often without them even noticing.

Like other social media, these virtual worlds are created and expanded by users. The site creators provide the framework and game players populate the world itself.

Virtual worlds are also making a push for business uses. SecondLife, for example, tells viewers that their business “can create its own space for communication, collaboration and community engagement. Use the Second Life Grid to hold virtual meetings and classes, construct product simulations, provide employee training and lots more.”

The image of the social misfit sitting in a dimly lit room spending endless hours in virtual reality is being replaced by the emerging reality that these sites have uses that are just beginning to be realized.

Social video game site examples:

www.secondlife.com

www.forterrainc.com

www.kaneva.com

<http://www.vmtv.com/>

<http://runescape.com/>

Wikis

Wikis are user-created repositories of information. The best known is Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia that lets users define and edit the entries. There are many different wikis, focused on different subjects, but they all share the fact that they are created by the users.

No matter what you want to know about, somewhere there is a wiki entry by a user to tell you about it. It is true democratization of information - anyone can contribute, either creating a new entry or modifying or adding to one that is already there. What is a virtue can also be a curse - anyone can contribute. Unfortunately, not everyone who

contributes is a competent source. But in a similar manner, not every “expert” you see is a competent source, either. Many just have a knack for self promotion, or an endless pursuit of it.

The beauty of wikis is that, at their best, they allow the most knowledgeable among us to contribute knowledge simply for the good of others. And since they are user-regulated, erroneous or misleading information is usually edited out or replaced quickly.

Wikis can serve as content directories also, with contributors adding media of different types along with their text. Not only can a viewer see written descriptions of the subject matter as well as links to related sites and technical documents, but are often able to watch videos and listen to relevant audio files as well.

Wikis often have versions in different languages. Users around the world can visit sections of many popular wikis that are in their native language. This, again, bypasses one of the major drawbacks to the spread of information: language barriers.

Anyone can start a wiki, focused on whatever subject interests them. The site can then be built by site visitors who contribute their own input. Some sites allow you to create a wiki for free while others charge. Wiki site providers offer a wide range of options, with some allowing a high degree of control over things such as who can access the site, who can post and what content can be used.

Wiki site examples:

www.wikipedia.com

www.wikispaces.com

www.wikihow.com

www.wikibios.com

www.wikiindex.com

www.wikidot.com

www.wikitrip.com

Podcasts

Podcasts are audio or video files that are made available for streaming or download. Users are often given the ability to comment on the content, or even download it and use/remix it for themselves.

One of the most powerful aspects of podcasting is the use of RSS. RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication. Whenever a content creator posts a podcast, everyone who subscribes to the podcast is notified via an RSS feed. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to contact everyone on your list every time you made a new podcast. RSS does the work for you, and those who want to know about the new content are automatically notified.

Podcasts represent yet another example of the time-shifting power of social media. Earlier generations had to be present and tuned in at the time of broadcasts, or arrange to record and store them for later. With podcasts, the files are generally available whenever the user wants to access them. Downloading the files and storing them is also a simple task.

Mashups

Mashups aren't themselves a type of social media, but rather an example of how it evolves. A Mashup is when two or more pieces of social media are combined in a new way. Mashups are defined on Wikipedia as the combination of an original site and a data provider that feeds information that overlays it. For instance, one well-known mashup is RadioClouds (radioclouds.com). It is a site that provides a thought-tree structure for subjects. Each subject has several spokes emanating from it to related subjects, each of which has its own spokes, and so on.

A different type of mashup is when someone takes a song and creates their own video for it. Search for a popular song on YouTube and you'll likely find several viewer-created videos for the song. YouTube even has its own video editor at www.youmashtube.com. Users can deconstruct and remake videos in limitless ways.

The production of the original content is just a start. The record companies have largely taken a hands-off approach to dealing with mashups. Traditionally, record companies have strenuously objected to people distributing artist's work. But a quick search of YouTube will show you there are millions of people taking original work, altering and distributing it online. This is the new reality. Some artists even actively encourage it.

Want to find out how your business can effectively use social media? Call 303-809-0053 or email derek@velocitymediainc.com to:

- Find new customers
- Sell more to existing customers
- Increase customer loyalty
- Communicate regularly for little cost
- Promote your business to whatever audience you choose
- Initiate low cost customer retention programs
- Start customer based communities
- Dominate your marketplace

Face it: even if you're not doing things from the list above, your competition is or will be.

Call 303-809-0053 or email derek@velocitymediainc.com to find out how to get started.