The Beginner’s Guide to Social Media

An introduction to social media from a business perspective

By Wayne Smallman
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1. Introduction

Hi, my name’s Wayne Smallman and I’m going to introduce you to social media from a business perspective.

I’m the guy behind Octane Interactive, a web design & development agency that started life in June 1999. Something of a milestone by anyone’s standard.

But before going any further, I’d like to take you back to March 2005 when I started a web blog called Blah, Blah! Technology.

![blah, blah! technology logo]

This is the logo for the Blah, Blah! Technology blog.

Blah has changed shape a few times over the years, but what you see now is pretty much what I’ve always wanted it to be; a place for me to talk about science, technology trends, social media & social networking, search engine technologies — and basically anything else that interests me!

Earlier this year, I made the decision to use the Blah, Blah! Technology blog as a venue for my social media services, which is what you’re about to read throughout the course of this book.

Some of you will have heard of social media before; others won’t have. So I’m going to explain:

1. what social media is;
2. what social media can do;
3. the ways in which social media can impact on your business, and;
4. how to optimize your website or blog for social media.

Now, the sharp-eyed among you will have spotted the word “impact” in that second to last point. The thing is, social media isn’t suitable for every business, but it can have an impact, even on businesses that aren’t actually participating in it, which I’ll explain more about later. Ideally, we want that impact to be a positive one, and that’s something I’ll be discussing as we go along.

There’s a great deal to social media, but for the purposes of this book, I’m going to concentrate on the immediate things that you can try out on your business, and take control of pretty much straight away.

Throughout this book, you will see links within the text, which I encourage you to follow and read. These links often refer to related topics that are a discussion in their own right. So rather than include those discussions in the book itself, for the sake of brevity, I will simply reference them here instead.

So let’s get started...
What is social media?
2. What is social media?

Social media is a means of communication and marketing, made possible by the use of tools on the web that lets people share things like pictures, web pages and movies. Social media also allows people to interact with these digital items in a variety of ways, such as voting, commenting or reviewing. In really simple terms, social media & social networking are about communication.

Chances are that you’ve seen or heard of social media, maybe by another name. How many of you have heard of Facebook? Well that’s social media, albeit just one example. Facebook is a massive global service, which has its biggest audiences in the US and Britain.

Facebook is an interesting example, because it’s both a venue for social media, and it’s a social network, which essentially means it’s a place for people to connect on the web.

For the most part, social media is about sharing things (like music, pictures, video and web pages) with friends, family and work colleagues, and even customers.

And because this is about being “social”, you’ll have a profile on a website like Facebook, telling people a little about you, what you do and where you live. Social media is also a good way to promote ideas, projects, upcoming events etc., which we’ll touch on later.

Staying with Facebook for a moment, there are things like Groups and Pages; where people get together and talk about a particular interest. But a lot of people post photos, or send messages to each other, some of which are visible on their own Profile pages.

As well as having it’s own email service, Facebook has a chat service (sometimes called instant messaging), which is similar to sending text messages on a mobile phone, but it’s instant. So you text chat with people instantly. There are lots of people who use Facebook just for its email and its address book.

Also, because there are things like Groups and Pages, people as well as businesses can create a presence for themselves, around an idea, an interest, a product, a service or even a brand, which they get to share with everybody.

For now, I’m going to stop, because I don’t want to make this sound like a case study for Facebook! It’s a great example, with which most people seem to be familiar, but Facebook isn’t the last word in social media. There are many more out there.
What does social media do?
3. What does social media do?

Because there are so many different social media websites out there, it’s not so much a case of you asking the question “what does social media do?” It’s more a case of asking “what can social media do for my business?”

Here are a few examples of things you can do with social media:

- **Support** — use websites such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Ecademy for ad hoc CRM (Customer Relationship Management);
- **Publicize** — social media allows people to share things of interest with everyone, increasing the visibility of your business and yourself;
- **Integrate** — add social media into your broader marketing efforts;
- **Control** — detect and then prevent “leaks” (disclosures) as well as inadvertent privacy violations;
- **Enhance** — manage your company brand and reputation, either proactively as a function of marketing, or reactively as a preventative measure against bad publicity.

So remember the SPICE of social media: Support, Publicize, Integrate, Control and Enhance.

The really great thing about social media is that it has the potential to offer businesses a whole new world of opportunities that are affordable, measurable and on an international scale.
3.1. Social media websites

So which businesses like yours are already into the whole social media thing? Thousands from all over the country, and tens of thousands all around the world.

I’m a member of a business community website called Ecademy. It’s one of the older social networks, and it’s purely business-to-business. It’s a fantastic example of what can be achieved with a website that’s built around an idea and a community. That’s exactly what Ecademy is; it’s a community built around the idea of business people helping other business people. Ecademy is also a meritocracy; the more you help other people, the better your social standing. So it’s the “giver’s gain thing”, as well.

Similar to Facebook, there are lots of different ways of connecting with people, such as finding businesses in your area, advertising pages, email, forums and web logs. I often use Ecademy for business support. So if I’m stuck on something legal or financial, I post a blog article, or post a message on a forum and people usually get back to me pretty quickly.

Two other business-related social media websites that spring to mind are Ryze and Xing, but I’m sure there are plenty more out there.

It’s worth mentioning one other website at this point. While not strictly a social network, or really a social media website, LinkedIn is a formidable presence for connecting business people from all around the world.

LinkedIn has been described as a global address book, which is probably a little limited, but not totally off the mark. Its strengths are mainly in the connecting of individuals with a focus on finding people with very specific skills. But in recent times, LinkedIn has branched out, offering additional services, like the Q&A tools, leveraging the skills and the knowledge of its members.
3.2. On the subject of blogging

Maybe you’ve heard about blogging, but you’re unsure how a blog might benefit your business. If you’ve already got a website for your business, having a blog can help in a number of ways.

3.2.1. A company blog is a commitment

Much like social media and business as a whole, a blog is a long-term investment and is unlikely to bring immediate benefits. So it’s best to plan a strategy with long-term goals in mind, and ensure that this ties in with your other marketing activities.

Not only do I have my Blah, Blah! Technology blog, but I also have a blog for Octane, too. It’s a major commitment of time, but the benefits, though gradual, are visible. So before starting a blog for your business, you need to have some very clear objectives in mind to ensure your time is well spent.

Blogging is a remarkably simple way of publishing. It’s cheap, it’s easy to do and it’s something that your business can benefit from in so many ways:

- **Higher search engine rankings** — generally speaking, a regular stream of new articles is considered appealing by the search engines, who will pay more attention to your blog or website, ranking you more highly accordingly. The more pages you write, the more there is to be found. However, it’s an exercise in quality not quantity!
- **Gaining trust** — by writing informative and authoritative articles, over time you’ll build confidence, trust, respect and a sense of “expert status” around your business.
- **A sense of community** — you’re engaging with your customers in a conversational style that’s difficult to replicate by other means. And by allowing people to comment on your articles, you’re encouraging those people to participate, giving them a reason to return. In simple terms, a blog is a great opportunity for you and your staff to quickly share ideas, and maybe also get some feedback from your customers.
- **Better communications** — a blog is essentially a publishing platform, where you control the content of your articles, and also when those articles get published.
- **Cost effective** — in terms of communications, blogging is very low cost but has the potential for a high ROI (Return On Investment).

3.2.2. Five ideas for your business blog

There are plenty of good ways to use your company blog, which include:

These are just a few ideas. I’m sure you’ll think of plenty more.

1. Share up-coming events and promotional activities, presenting ideas and sharing future plans with clients and stakeholders, to gather feedback.
2. Quickly highlight issues pertinent to your industry or field, or to specific clients.
3. Give your staff a voice, so they can share their own thoughts and ideas.
4. Keep customers up to date with your blog feed, to which they can subscribe.
5. Give some of your knowledge away for free!
How can social media impact on your business?
4. How can social media impact on your business?

In so many ways! But with effort, planning and some dedication, the impact can be a very positive one.

4.1. The Cons

But let’s deal with the downside to social media first, from the point of view of a high street retailer.

4.1.1. The curious case of the “Super Advocate” and the high street retailer

For the average high street retailer, passing trade isn’t the only game in town. Now those same companies can sell their products on the web and make a good living from it.

So if we take ACME Inc. as our fictitious business, and we accept they’re appearing on the front page of Google when someone searches for: “green widgets” then they’re enjoying the electronic equivalent of passing trade.

Business is good, sales are up and rising, but there’s a problem! This recent batch of green widgets are faulty. It’s nothing major, but all the same, they’re not quite right. Anyway, regardless of this minor flaw, they’re placed in stock and continue to sell.

The following week, their in-house web guy notices a steady but rather pronounced increase in traffic from a very particular website. Usually, this is a good thing, but this is a website they sell green widgets through, along with the odd blue, red and the occasional yellow widget.

So their web marketing girl pays a visit to the web page to see what’s driving all of these new visits. Within seconds, alarms bells start to ring.

This website allows customers to review, rate and comment on the products they buy, just like Amazon do. Thing is, the recent reviews aren’t good. People have noticed the green widgets aren’t working the way that they should. And those disgruntled shoppers are airing their views very publicly.

Further compounding the company’s woes, one of the people venting their spleen is a very influential member of the website. What she says is often taken as law. When she talks, others listen.

She is what’s known as a Super Advocate and, like it or not, she can make or break your electronic retail ambitions.

4.1.2. The business of social media profiles

Back in early December 2007, I had a guest article on my blog written by security specialist Paul Maloney, who talked about how social media could change the internal culture and politics of companies forever.

The example Paul offered up was the venerable office Christmas party, the butt of jokes the world over.
Little has changed over the years. People get drunk, rivalries surface and embarrassing photographs get photocopied and placed strategically around the office.

But what little has changed manages to have a pretty profound impact. Instead of those embarrassing photographs being the subject of office gossip, they end up on Facebook, or even Flickr, which is a hugely popular website for sharing photographs and videos.

What was just embarrassing for those few people involved now has the potential to be an embarrassment to the whole company — only this time on a global scale.

This kind of situation requires some serious attention at the best of times, but when something like this is happening, there’s a whole layer of bad publicity you’re neither aware of, or able to control.

You’re probably wondering how a situation like this can be fixed. Well, you begin with some reputation management, which we’ll discuss later.

### 4.1.3. Social media isn’t Jesus!

When all said and done, and contrary to what you may have been told, social media doesn’t walk on water! So **social media isn’t for every business**, no matter how hard you or me or anyone else might try. But it’s all about context and content.

And as I mentioned earlier, Facebook isn’t the last word in social media! There are many, many more social media websites that serve some very specialized areas.

To give you a taste — and to name but a few — here are some of the major social media & social networking websites:

- StumbleUpon
- Digg
- Reddit
- Mixx
- Delicious
- Social Median
- YouTube

What sets these guys apart from a regular website? The very same thing they all have in common; they’re all driven by the popularity of the web pages people submit to them for others to visit, see and in some cases to review and vote on.

With the exception of Delicious, all allow you to vote on the web pages people have submitted. Which means the more popular something is, the more visitors those popular web pages receive.

And the amount of visits to those web pages can be truly **phenomenal**.

Of the seven mentioned, Digg is the one with the greatest potential, capable of throwing many tens of thousands of people to a web page in just a few short hours.

But just as surely as they can send traffic, you could find your web page being “buried”, which is what happens when people aren’t interested, or find your web page objectionable in some way.
4.1.4. Just who are Dig, Stumble .. thing and Read It?

Never heard of Digg, StumbleUpon or Reddit? If you’re part of the senior marketing teams for the top 1% of businesses on Earth; like Apple, Nike, IBM, Sony, Jaguar, British Petroleum, Gap, Microsoft, Sky, Ford... I’m willing to bet your penny to my pound you would have!

Why? Because these guys have the money to make social media really do its thing for them. Some of the reasons for their success can be attributed to:

- Colossal brand recognition;
- Global market penetration;
- Inventive marketing teams;
- Something very unique about their product and / or service.

Also, these guys typically have a massive websites, all wrapped up in very slick viral marketing campaigns, along with legions of satisfied customers (companies like Apple are often surrounded by standing armies of Super Advocates), eager to see their favourite brands succeed.

This isn’t to say social media is a success beyond your reach. There are many kinds of success, which can be attributed to the ways in which the web is divided up along the lines of an interest, an idea, a people, a specific product, a brand or a culture, for example. Once you find your niche and your audience on the web, almost any business can enjoy some kind of sustainable success.
4.2. The Pros

OK, so you’re not Microsoft! But you’d like to know more about how those guys make social media work for them, right?

4.2.1. Social media marketing tactics

You can’t expect to compete with Microsoft, but you can replicate some of their successes on a smaller scale, just by watching what they do:

- Inject an element of fun, fear or controversy into campaigns;
- Offer something unique that you either know or suspect people will find interesting;
- If you’re aiming at a younger audience, find out where your audience is and target them on their terms and in their language;
- Viral marketing can be videos like the Cadburys advert with the gorilla playing the drums, which did pretty well on YouTube;
- Also, things like “linkbait” are controversial or wildly unbelievable stories that are so compelling, news websites want to link to your story, which can massively raise your profile;
- A list of something, such as: “Top 10 worst football moments” which people love because they’re instant and often funny;
- And lastly, give something away for free! Often, this is in the form of shrewd advice, or insider information.

4.2.2. Succeeding with social media — the Socialize Me! plugin for WordPress

Because I have a profile on some of those top social media websites, I wanted to be able to connect with all those people visiting my blog from those websites.

Back in January 2008, I wrote some software for a top blogging application called WordPress. The software is called Socialize Me!, and it’s a plugin that makes WordPress display a button showing the visitor that I’m on the same social media website or social network they just came from to visit my blog.

Recognizing that I’d created something unique, I decided to offer my newly created plugin for free, for a couple of reasons:

1. to further demonstrate my programming skills, and;
2. as vehicle for reinforcing my knowledge of social media and or social networking at their most fundamental level.

So now, when people visit a website which uses my plugin, they see a small button telling them that I’m on the same website, and that they can connect with me on that very same website.

4.2.2.1. Spread the word

As soon as I realized I was onto something, Kate (a former colleague who was instrumental in the successes that the Blah, Blah Technology blog enjoyed at that time) & I began to discuss the idea with friends, just to see if it was something they might be interested in — and everyone we spoke to thought it was a great idea!
That’s when Kate & I began a small, informal teaser campaign around the idea, mostly via messages on websites such as Facebook. This helped generate a little buzz, which would become important once we got closer to launch.

Once the software was written, we wrote an article for my blog, with a nice big picture, which was also the download button.

Next, we submitted the article to StumbleUpon and Digg. And with the help of the same people we’d shared our idea with in the beginning, they began to share with their friends, who in turn shared with their friends...

- Over the course of the initial 4 days, the article was visited almost 20,000 times, with a good portion of the traffic arriving from Digg and StumbleUpon.
- Between the 14th of February and the 6th March 2008, we had over 32,000 visits.
- To date downloads of Socialize Me! are well beyond the 800 mark, with a steady stream of downloads every day.

**4.2.2.2 Following up the success**

As soon as we knew we had a hit on our hands, we began sending people messages with links to the larger websites that were talking about and featuring the plugin. Also, we sent people the link to the Digg article, which was driving most of the visitors to the Blah, Blah! Technology blog.

Once people saw that we’d got onto the front page of Digg, which was our main goal, we had their attention. Basically, we were building further successes on the back of previous successes.

After the major tide of visitors began to abate, we began the process of following up all of the links from the different websites and blogs talking about the Socialize Me! plugin. This mostly consisted of thanking all of those people individually for the mention.

Also, there were those that didn’t particularly like or understand the plugin. So a few days later, we wrote a follow-up to the release of Socialize Me! addressing those concerns.

I then added a discussion area to the Blah! Page on Facebook, so that those people who were having problems installing and using the plugin could post their questions for me to answer.

What did we gain from all of this? A great deal, including:

- A huge amount of exposure and brand awareness;
- An increase in subscribers to the blog;
- An increase in the number of contacts, some who became friends;
- The added value of “expert status”, which helped to change people’s perceptions of Kate, myself and the blog;
- Thousands of links from websites and blogs, still accounting for a lot of residual visitors to this day. In addition to the visits, links are an indicator to the search engines as to just how important a web page is.
4.2.3. Managing the social media profile of a business

Fortunately for us, earlier on, security specialist Paul Maloney has already provided some sound advice for dealing with the negatives of social media.

1. Start with the training — show employees what damage thoughtless comments on a social network can cause to them, their colleagues and the company.
2. Guidelines — detail the things you expect them not to post about, and the things they can post about.
3. Useful examples — use the example of a guy called Kevin Colvin (a bank intern who’s indiscretions caused him great personal embarrassment and eventually cost him his job) to demonstrate the personal impact, his photo appeared in major newspapers around the world, potentially damaging his future career prospects.
4. Refresher training — follow up the training with procedures and guidelines to ensure everyone has the same understanding. The policies should detail the consequences of ignoring them, which could be potentially career-ending.

It’s now quite common for prospective employers or potential clients to use Google to perform research into you or your business. If people are saying bad things, Google will show those bad things as likely as it will the good.
4.3. Reputation management

If you’ve spent years building a reputation amongst clients and suppliers around a product, a service or your brand, what you don’t want to see is that entire investment of time and effort simply dissolve to nothing. I’m sure you’ve heard it before, but you really have to be proactive rather than reactive!

Remember the office Christmas party example from earlier? Here’s some advice as to how you can either manage or ideally prevent similar situations.

Now that you have all your different measures in place, the forensic analysis can begin.

1. **Manage** — use the search engines and social media websites on a regular basis to find information about your company. Use the company name, address, as well as any abbreviations or nicknames for your company, and also the names of employees.

2. **Repair** — see if anything breaches company policies that are currently in place. If you find something on the web that’s potentially damaging, contact the author and try to work out a solution.

3. **Vocal** — having a blog or issuing regular press releases will help drown out anything on the search engines that’s potentially damaging. It’s a crude tactic which, although it doesn’t address the underlying problem, can be effective.

Now that you know what to do, Brand Management really shouldn’t sound like a big scary thing! It’s a pretty simple bunch of activities built around best practice.

4.3.1. 10 Personal Branding habits of the pros

If you’re serious about personal branding and brand management, here are ten things you’ll see the professionals doing when blogging:

1. Comments on other people’s blog articles are your calling cards. Be sure to use these as an opportunity to draw the focus of the blog post towards your comment. Make sure you drop in a relevant link to an article of yours in the URL field. That way, you’re not just making a statement; you’re opening the door for bringing the dialogue to your own blog article. A word of caution here. Misuse of this idea can be misconstrued as being “spamming”, which you really don’t want it to. If you’re going to comment, then make sure you’re adding value to the article you’re commenting on, or don’t do it at all.

2. Think and act like a professional. Don’t get drawn into heated debates, unless you’re sure you can do so without just throwing away your dignity and losing some serious credibility into the bargain. That said, don’t be afraid of contradicting or correcting someone, but be sure that you’re right.

3. Have a theme? Stick to it! You don’t see too many truly successful general blogs. Most might start that way, but as those few that stick around longer than twelve months will attest to, some trimming of the excess fat inevitably takes place. The web rewards those that carve out their own niche. Working within a niche and becoming an authority within it is better than being one voice in a crowded room.

4. Be seen, be known. Make sure you’re to be found in all of the right places, such as Ecademy, Ryze, Xing etc. As a rule of thumb, if one of your competitors is there, you should be there, too.

5. Don’t be afraid to sing your own praise. Let’s face it, if you don’t, who will? To begin with, few people will know who you are, so you need to be seen. If you’ve had some recent successes (for example, links from a major website or blog) then talk about them. Use those successes as a driver to help you with the next one, wherever that may come from.

6. Be consistent with your image — every blog post, every comment, every instant message, every email. If you feel that you’ve got a ‘house style’ then apply that style wherever you go.
7. Be an opportunist. As an example, if you’re a writer covering a particular industry, and news breaks on a story that’s very much local to your topic of choice, make sure you’re there. However, it’s not a race, so be sure to put the emphasis on quality and not speed. There’s no point being the first in if all you’re doing is saying: “Hi!” Sometimes it’s as well to be fashionably late. Over time, as your reputation grows, those that know you will wait. Additionally, being bad-mouthed could be a chance to make friends and influence people. Charm the pants off them, schmooze and cajole! Win them over.

8. Get a blog and get ahead! Blogs routinely outrank websites on the search engines for a number of key reasons. The main reasons are that a typical blog has a constant stream of ever-changing content, there are a great number of out-bound links to other sources, and there’s usually a community of people commenting on your articles. In addition to this, make sure people can do stuff with your stuff. By that I mean make sure you have some way of syndicating your articles, either by a newsletter or from a feed subscription, which I’ll discuss later on in more detail.

9. Be seen, be known, be available. So you’ve got your audience, you’ve got some notoriety, but you’re aloof! Someone might catch a quick comment exchange with you occasionally, but that’s usually it. Make sure people can contact you. What you’ll have noticed is that some of these suggestions are about being a shamelessly self-promotional. Sometimes, that’s what you have to do.

10. Be yourself. Above all else, to make this kind of thing work, there are few a prerequisites, which I hope I’ve covered above. But there’s one prerequisite to rule them all. It’s there when you’re commenting on blogs. It’s there when you’re talking to someone and explaining yourself to them for the first time. It’s even there when things go wrong, and you then make that graceful recovery. That quality, that essential personal ingredient is you, yourself and everything that makes you who you are.

4.3.2. When businesses and Super Advocates collide!

Get Satisfaction is a website that lets people resolve problems with companies with which they’ve had problems:

“Get Satisfaction is a direct connection between people and companies that fosters problem-solving, promotes sharing, and builds up relationships.”

Back in May, a website called Pownce was having a lot of problems and people really weren’t all that happy. So someone started a discussion and a bunch of people chimed in with their thoughts. What’s interesting about Get Satisfaction is that not only can people share their complaints with everyone else, but representatives of the companies perceived as being at fault can also get involved.

As you’ll see from the ensuing discussion over on Get Satisfaction, the guys behind Pownce were working hard to reassure their users, and working even harder to address the major problems they were having with their software.

This is when reputation management really comes into play. For those businesses that invest a lot time in managing their image, websites like Get Satisfaction let them see what people are saying about them.

Better yet, you stand a good chance of meeting the really influential customers who are talking about you. So if you can win those guys over, chances are, you’ll be influencing a lot more people as well.

I suspect the team behind Pownce didn’t exactly welcome the very negative attention their software attracted. However, the importance of having a voice, and then having somewhere to share that voice with others is not to be underestimated. And this is the true power of social media.
4.4. Measuring your social media successes

Success in business rarely amounts to anything if you don’t know how to replicate that success. To do that, you need to know what you did right in the first place. And equally as important, you will also need to know what things you did wrong.

4.4.1. Analyzing the traffic to your blog or website

Things that you can know about the visitors to your company website or business blog include:

- What website referred them to you;
- How long they spent on your website or blog;
- What other pages they visited there;
- The web browser software and version they’re using (Microsoft Internet Explorer 7, for example);
- The size and resolution of their computer display (1400 x 900, 32bit, for example);
- What country they’re from and what language they speak;
- The operating system on their computer (Microsoft Windows Vista, for example).

Knowing these things tells you a great deal about your visitors. Once you get a clearer picture of where people are coming from, you can begin to plan your efforts around what you have learned.

Fortunately, there are some excellent tools available to you to help you track and monitor the visitors to your website.

Google Analytics is a free service provided by Google which offers a comprehensive set of tools to analyze and monitor the visits to your business website or company blog:

“Google Analytics helps you find out what keywords attract your most desirable prospects, what advertising copy pulled the most responses, and what landing pages and content make the most money for you.”
Optimizing for social media
5. Optimizing for social media

So you’ve written the best business advice article in the world and all your visitors are happily reading it and benefiting from your sage advice — now what? Well, you want those visitors to be able to share that article with their friends.

Above all else, letting people share your blog articles and web pages is at the very heart of what social media is all about.

5.1. What is SMO & SMM?

Social media Optimization is more commonly referred to by its acronym SMO. Similarly, SMM is an acronym of social media Marketing, which is all about making your web pages and blog articles more appealing to the users of Digg, StumbleUpon, Del.icio.us, Reddit etc.

5.1.1. SMO explained

Social media Optimization is about making your articles ready for websites like Digg, StumbleUpon, Del.icio.us, Reddit and more. Typically, this is about including things like buttons in the footer of your blog articles, which will allow your visitors to more easily submit those articles to those social media websites.

5.1.2. SMM explained

Among other things, social media is about sharing the things you find with other people, family, friends and colleagues. Here, people can potentially find your articles, share them with friends and colleagues, vote on your articles, comment, or subscribe to your blog via something like an RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feed or by email.

Critical to the success of any social media Marketing campaign is:

1. The utilization of friends and family to promote your articles and web pages;
2. The choice of social media website and / or social network;
3. Ensuring that you can remain responsive to a fast-moving campaign.

A structured social media Marketing campaign can help your articles become vehicles to deliver increased traffic to your business blog or website.

5.1.3. Social media & social networks

Key to the success of your articles is getting other people to participate, which I mentioned previously. If you’re looking to share websites and blogs with people, then StumbleUpon, Digg, Del.icio.us, Reddit, Slashdot, Sphinn, Furl and Ma.gnolia are the places to be. They’re all free to join and pretty simple to sign up to. These social media portals let you share websites and blogs with others, as well as comment, review and vote on them.

But if you’re wanting to meet people and become part of a community, then StumbleUpon, Ma.gnolia and Facebook offer you a huge collection of people from all over the world, some of are possibly already or could become your friends. Additionally, these social networks offer you the option to share websites and blogs with
people, as well as comment, review and vote on them, too.

Alternatively, there are micro-blogging services like Pownce, Twitter and Jaiku, which can help you keep in contact with the friends you’re going to make on the web. Put simply, micro-blogging is a way of posting simple, short messages to friends, and these messages can include links, files, and events among other things. These services are free to join too. However, some require and invitation to join, so ask around.

And finally, there are also specialist forums, which are often ideal for sharing ideas and finding solutions to common problems. These are mostly free to join, but some tend to require fees to access additional services, such as email, file storage etc.

5.1.4. SEO & SEM working with SMO & SMM

Acronyms are a staple of the web, and social media has something of an extended family! In addition to SMO & SMM, which you now know something about, there is SEO, which stands for Search Engine Optimization and SEM, which stands for Search Marketing Optimization. Knowing what you do now, I’m sure you can hazard a guess as to their respective purposes.

SEO concerns the process of enhancing websites and blogs so that they are more easily found by the search engines, in particular, Google. SEM is about using the search engines as a marketing platform, by enlisting the use of such things as advertising, for example. But to keep this book on theme, SEO & SEM will only be discussed in passing.

SEO & SEM and SMO & SMM can quite happily coexist side by side. In fact, they get along really well together.

To get the very best out of your business blog or company website, you need to work to a structured plan that includes the search engines as well as social media. So you’ll need to get your blog or website optimized for the search engines, which will form the foundations of any success that your blog or website is likely to enjoy.

5.1.4.1. The Social Loop — to write, share and promote

Getting the most out of the time you spend writing great articles, optimizing them and then being active on your favourite social network is an on-going challenge for just about all of us. Understanding the strengths and the order in which we use our social tools helps clarify how our articles fit into the Social Loop.

For sake of argument, let’s assume you’re actively building your presence in several social networks. Also, you’re a blogger, too. Your time can be characterized as:

1. writing articles and leveraging your social network to share and then promote them, and;
2. reading articles, some of which belonging to people in your social network and sharing them through your social network.

Sounds simple enough, right? Well we all know the challenge is right there, hidden in the region between writing or reading something and then seeing that article succeed.

The life and times of an article

As illustrated in the follow-up to my Socialize Me! plugin for WordPress, there’s a cycle to content generation, which I call the Social Loop.

In closing this Social Loop, we’re attempting to bring people to the content from known venues like Digg, StumbleUpon, Pownce, etc., and presenting them with the option to connect with you.
Fortunately for us, the lifetime of an article is characteristically cyclical and often long lived, punctuated by a series of closures for some of the more time-sensitive aspects.

However, for the purposes of this article, let’s look at the lifetime of a fictitious article over a 30-day period. Enough time to be seen over your social network, shared and promoted through social media websites, as well as appearing on all of the major search engines.

We can look at all of these different ways of promoting your content as channels that are either short-term or long-term. I’ll be mentioning some terms which might be new to you. Don’t worry — I’ll be explaining them in more detail later on.

Short-term channels:
1. Linkbait — sudden, extremely high traffic, but short lived.
2. SMO (Social Media Optimization) — websites such as Digg, Reddit, Del.icio.us, often marked by sudden high traffic that is short lived, but can then provide residual traffic over the long-term.

Long-term channels:
1. SEO (Search Engine Optimization) — optimizing your articles for search traffic, working to or anticipating search trends, such as timing articles to coincide with current news topics.
2. SEM (Search Engine Marketing) — if you’ve committed to your link building strategy, here’s where that will begin to yield results.
2. SMM (Social Media Marketing) & social networking — websites such as StumbleUpon, and micro-blogging platforms like Twitter and Pownce, building relationships and forging alliances with influential players.
   Breaking down the long-term strategies like social networking and micro-blogging further:
   a. Twitter — status updates throughout the day, piquing interest, generating buzz.
   b. Pownce — piquing interest, generating buzz, bouncing ideas around, which sometimes turn into larger discussions.
4. SMO (Social Media Optimization) — social media successes often become continual cycles of high-traffic exposure, creating spikes in subscriber numbers and friend requests on social networking websites and services.
In general terms, SEO (Social Engine Optimization) and SMO (Social Media Optimization) lay the foundations for SEM (Search Engine Marketing) and SMM (Social Media Marketing).

The following chart is a representation of the kind of traffic patterns observed here on the Blah, Blah! Technology blog over last year or so, offering an anecdotal / general impression, rather than actual data.

The length and strength of a gradient signifies the period over which traffic continued to flow inwards towards a particular article and how quickly that traffic then fell away. Also, there's a reverse effect for those channels that accrue traffic over time, rather than in the short term.

There’s more than a generous overlap between social media and social networks, in terms of the type and volume of traffic they can generate. This can complicate matters when you begin the process of analyzing the web traffic to your blog or website.

StumbleUpon is both a social network (people can send messages to each other, as well as discuss a myriad of topics in the variously-themed groups), and a social media website (referring its members to popular websites and blogs based on a number of different options, such as tags and topic categories, or as suggested by their friends).

However, in my experience, it’s within social networks that traffic continues to flow for a longer period if time, and here’s my interpretation of why that might be:

1. Websites like Digg have a time statute on the relative popularity of successful articles, in that after a given period of time, they are relegated from the front page. This is a mechanical process, which imposes rigid limitations on the period within which any kind of success is likely to occur.
2. People are the driving force behind social networks, and as such, time zones, work schedules and personal issues all play their part in when we either choose to, or get the time to firstly read and then suggest web pages and / or blog articles to our friends.

**Getting feedback in the Social Loop**

The truly wonderful thing about all of these channels is that most of them feed back into each other. As an example, a properly optimized blog will help contribute significantly to search engine rankings, which may trigger someone to submit or vote for one of your articles via a social media website, or share with friends via their social network.

Similarly, a successful social media campaign often triggers residual “front page” successes elsewhere, which will generate a cycle of sharing and promotion. To put it another way, SEM can and often does actively reinforce your SEO efforts. Similarly, both SEO & SEM are often foundational to social media strategies.
5.1.4.2. Using “linkbait”

Sometimes a great article is a simple article. Sometimes all that’s needed is a simple numbered list of items that highlight something no one else knew at the time you presented it. Sometimes you’re simply talking something up, or even scandalizing and scathing!

At the beginning of 2007, I wrote an article which was a transcript of a podcast, highlighting 15 things about Adobe Apollo, which is now called Adobe Air. This one article attracted the interests of a writer and technology blogger for ZDnet, who managed to throw a lot of traffic my way.

The key linkbait ingredients were:

1. A numbered list of items of new, interesting information — I offered up something no one else knew about at the time.
2. A simple title which featured the “[n] things...” format, which tends to work well.
3. The article was brief and easy to read.
4. The article was timely and topical.

Obviously, there are other factors involved in creating strong linkbait, but at least you now understand the very basics and what’s involved.

5.1.4.3. Syndicate your articles and web pages via RSS, email

Most modern blogging software (often referred to as a platform) like WordPress, Google’s Blogger, Movable Type etc. support what’s known as RSS. Depending on who you speak to this acronym either stands for Rich Site Summary or Really Simple Syndication, which is a method of collecting all of your content into a type of file that other people can subscribe to and read, either through their web browser, or via software that you can download.

A very popular and free way of reading RSS feeds is Google Reader, which allows you to gather all of your subscriptions into one place and then share them with friends. By using something like Google Reader, you don’t have to continually visit those websites to which you’ve subscribed. Similarly, if you’re using a feed service like Google’s FeedBurner, you can allow people to subscribe to your articles via email instead.

As illustrated, a common symbol used to depict RSS is a round-cornered orange square, with the white broadcast graphic in the middle. This symbol is also commonly used as a button, which when clicked will prompt the visitor to make some kind of selection to choose the kind of subscription method they prefer.

If you’re using Microsoft’s Internet Explorer, Apple’s Safari or Mozilla’s Firefox web browsers, you may have noticed the RSS symbol from time to time. This is because they’ve automatically detected a RSS feed, which you can subscribe to.
Speaking of FeedBurner, by using such a service, you have at your disposal various methods of managing and tracking the number of people subscribing to your blog, which will be a critical element of any internet marketing strategy.

For the serious blogger, this kind of service is essential — the people who subscribe to your blog are those that value your content the most. And it’s those people who are the most likely to submit your articles to Digg, Reddit, Del.icio.us, StumbleUpon etc.

Additionally, the number of subscribers to your blog is a metric — a means of measuring the value or success of your blog, much in the same way as the amount of visitors it receives.

Google have a great introduction to feeds, which I’m sure you’ll find very helpful.

5.1.4.4. Encourage your visitors to share

You can’t always count on the people visiting your web page or blog articles to share everything they find interesting. So it’s a good practice to encourage them to do just that! To help them along, it’s as well to make the process as simple as possible.

A good idea is to place buttons at that bottom of your articles, that link to the top social media websites. Most of these websites offer buttons with special links to submit your articles.
Also, to ensure you’re not just confusing people with too many options, find out which are the top five social media websites that deliver the most visitors to your business website or company blog and add a button for each of them.

If you’re using FeedBurner, there’s an option to include a list of text buttons. But to do this, you’ll have to add a small portion of code into the page itself, which isn’t too difficult to do, as FeedBurner provide an easy-to-follow tutorial explaining how.

5.1.4.5. Reward those that link to you

As recognition of your blog or website grows, you’re likely to get links coming in from new visitors. It’s considered polite as well as good practice to recognize their kindness by thanking them. When someone links to your content, it’s an indication that they trust your content enough to associate it with their own.

This isn’t always the case, though. Sometimes you may get a link from someone who is criticizing you in some way. However, if the website or blog that is linking to you is visited by many people and ranks highly in the search engines, you and your article will most likely win extra trust and recognition in the process.

So if you’re able to track those people down via a social network, a simple thanks would be a start! Also, some people have a weekly or monthly round-up, whereby they discuss the week or month in review and give thanks to those that linked to them by linking back!

And if you’re going to link back, make sure you make that link count by using strong keywords, for example:

“And a warm thanks to Kate Carillo, marketing blogger and copywriter...”

Another example would be:

“With praise to David Bradley, science writer and ‘life hacking’ blogger...”

Also, if you’re going to link to them, then link to a related article, rather than just their main website or blog. In general terms, there’s much more value in doing so.

The search engines use links for a number of reasons, not least as a means of finding new websites, web pages, blogs and articles. The number of links to a web page or an article acts as an indicator as to their relative popularity.

Additionally, the text used in the link is also taken into consideration. So if the article or web page is about fresh fruit, link text containing those words, referred to as “keywords”, will act as an indicator to the search engines that the web page or blog article being linked to is of value and that fresh fruit is the main theme.

For more information about SEO, read my 6 five minute SEO guides for business websites.

5.1.5. Be an active social networker

As a blogger, you’ll have to decide on a topic or a group of topics you want to discuss and write about. You’ll have also noticed that there are probably others out there writing about the same things.

These people aren’t your enemy. In fact, they’re probably your allies! Find out where they hang out, what blogs they’re likely to be seen commenting on and who they know, why and how, if possible. Also, look to the social media websites and social networks to meet people and share the things you find. Keep in mind that reciprocation is a key part of social media.
Whether you choose to write about a small, well-defined niche, or something larger, is up to you. But it’s essential for you to establish who and what you’re up against — you don’t want to be a small fish in a big ocean, or a loud voice in an empty room.

However, it’s more than likely that you won’t be on your own. Actively seeking out those with similar interests, tastes, styles etc. will put you in good stead.

The thing to remember is that most business bloggers probably want to succeed in some way. By collaborating with those in your niche, you can build a strong social network of people who will often quite happily help promote your articles.

Also, your social network can be a great source of new information about issues related to your industry or niche — use this knowledge. Additionally, being active in your social network can move you into the position of being an influencer, the kind of person that sets the agenda for others. In such situations, be generous towards those that influence you.

By giving someone a worthwhile, quality link in any article that you feel they have helped you to write, you’re endorsing them as a person, which not only adds credibility to them among those in their social network, but the same credibility and recognition is seen by the search engines too, having an appropriate, if somewhat relative, effect on their ranking.

5.1.6. Commenting on blogs

When you comment on a blog somewhere, you’re leaving a calling card. Through your comments, you say a little about yourself. How you comment — such as the tone and style — is as important as what you actually say.

As mentioned previously, and to reiterate on those points, here’s some further advice on commenting on blogs.

Think of your comments as an extension of your personal “brand”, which is how you’re going differentiate yourself from the other person commenting.

And managing your personal brand takes time and effort — just like in the real world, how you present yourself to people will influence their perception of you. So of the things you can control, control them wisely.

On most blogs, there’s the option to leave a link to your own. Some blogs have house rules about what links you get to put in there. Personally, I normally leave a link to a related article of mine, which reinforces either the article I’m commenting on, my own comment, or more ideally, both the article and my own comment. Some blogs take exception to this practice, so make sure you check first.

In turn, people will inevitably comment on your blog, and from time to time, those comments will become heated and angry. Here’s where you need to take a step back and plan your responses, because knowing how to manage bad comments is essential, and that knowledge feeds back into your efforts to build a positive, consistent image of yourself.

But what happens to all of those comments out there? If you become a regular commenter, people will begin to click on those links, following you all the way back to your own blog. If you’re able to build a rapport with your fellow bloggers, the chances are good that they will want to read your stuff, too.

Don’t be afraid to contradict someone, or tell them that they’re wrong. Again, a good approach is essential, but it’s all about providing demonstrable evidence of your knowledge and expertise to your peers.
But as I said earlier, don’t forget to offer praise, too! Thanking someone for their time commenting on your blog, or for a helpful article can only do good.

An additional benefit of all of those comments out there is that you’re increasing the chances of being seen by others and by the search engines.

### 5.1.7. Managing your social profiles

To establish a presence in any social network, you’re probably going to need to be a member of one website or another, such as Pownce, Facebook, Digg, StumbleUpon etc. Here is where you create for yourself a personal social profile, detailing those things about you that you feel matter.

#### 5.1.7.1. Privacy

Managing your personal social profile will inevitably include sharing some information about yourself with others. What information you choose to share is important.

In the same way you wouldn’t tell a complete stranger your home address or telephone number, you might not want to share with others those details on the likes of Facebook, for example. There are real world implications related to sharing information about yourself via Facebook:

> “In less than five years the office Christmas party photos have gone from being printed at the local chemist and shown to everyone through being e-mailed and shared on the office servers all the way to being blogged and Facebooked.”

Is this the kind of thing you want potential or current employers, or even clients to see?

Additionally, there are potentially more worrying repercussions, such as identity theft, which can be accomplished with some very simple details about you.

By choosing carefully what information you would prefer to share, with whom and where should be a prior consideration, not one after the fact. The search engines tend to have very long memories and what was once in plain sight but now hidden can be found again, retrieved from the cache of Google, or some other search engine.

#### 5.1.7.2. Consistency

A compliment often paid to me is the consistency of my presence on the web. I often use my full name as my username on various websites, I use photos of myself and not some obscure avatar, and I use consistent messages and dialogue.

Consistency can easily be seen as being boring, but look at how the likes of Sony, Apple, Nike or even how Jaguar and Audi manage their brands:

> “Everyone is an individual in one way or another. And one of the goals of Personal Branding is to accentuate those unique, positive and luminous characteristics of yourself. In fact, truly unique personalities are in many respects like top marque car manufacturers.

> So are you a Pinto or a Pontiac? Maybe an Austin Allegro or an Audi? Or are you a Reliant Robin or a Rolls Royce?”
By emulating the efforts of these companies, you’re adopting their carefully-crafted and well-funded branding efforts, which often cement them in their niche and help them stand above their competitors.

Think of your social profiles as being adverts. From these adverts, you’re attempting to sell yourself, through which you will ultimately be selling your ideas, knowledge, experience and expertise — all of which should be residing your blog.

As always, you should be making things as simple as possible for us, the poor unfortunates who often sit there trying to recall that woman’s username:

“Hmm, was it KitzLuv899, or LoveKats998?”

If recollection fails them, which is highly likely, they’ll then leave feeling frustrated, hoping that Google can help them. However, as smart as Google can be, if you’re scattered around the web under a myriad of unintelligible usernames, Google will be none the wiser, either.

If you intend being found, help Google and all of the other search engines help you.
5.2. Beyond SMO & SMM

Once you’ve become familiar with the basics and have started to make friends, you will begin the process of building your sphere of influence.

Being a major contributor to your field or industry is your ultimate goal. By stimulating debate and setting the agenda, you’ll be the one everyone is talking about — your thoughts and words will be the very thing people are sharing in their own social networks via the social media websites with which you’ve become so familiar...
Conclusion
6. Conclusion

Like it or not, social media can touch your business, sometimes from the other side of the world. Whether you feel social media has any place in your business is entirely up to you. But at least now hopefully you’ve got a better grasp of what social media is and how it can affect you, your staff and your business.

I do hope I’ve answered most of your questions about social media. But if you’d like more information, feel free to contact Wayne Smallman any time. For more information about our full range of services, please visit the Blah, Blah! Technology business services page.

If you’re resident in the British isles, you can call Wayne on 0870 755 0004 between the hours of 9am while 5pm Monday to Friday.
About the author

Wayne Smallman is the man behind the Blah, Blah! Technology blog: a focal point of his passion for technology, and a hallmark of his business mentality, writing style, and adeptness at making complex technology issues approachable and accessible. He is the principle founder and managing director of Octane Interactive, a Web design, Web applications development, and Internet marketing agency established in 1999 and based in Yorkshire, England.

Recently Wayne has been providing a consultancy service to a diverse selection of regional, national, and multinational businesses from a wide range of industries looking to make the most of their Web presence – particularly those in need of specialized Web applications for business-to-business and business-to-consumer services. To his clients, Wayne is considered more of a business partner than a supplier. He has earned several qualifications, including a Bachelor of Arts degree with honors in industrial design, product design, and electronic media. Beyond his work and his blog, he is currently authoring a science fiction trilogy as well as developing a cutting-edge Web applications platform for the creative market.

Recommended reading

- The value of business blogging
- Social media Marketing & Optimization
- Social media & social networking — good for business?
- WordPress plugin: Socialize Me!
- The future of social networks
- 10 Personal Branding habits of the pros
- Facebook ventures into Instant Messaging
Acknowledgments

I would like to personally thank the following people for their contributions to the creation of this book:

- Carl Grint, for his patience, perseverance and his sheer willingness to just help out at a moments notice.
- Baxter Tocher, for his formidable command over the written word.
- Heidi Cool, Andy DeSoto and Chris Martin for their valuable observations, pushing me towards writing a simpler, more accessible book.
- Steve Wilcox of Wave Creative (print design partner to Octane), for the reintroduction to QuarkXpress after so many years away, so I could create the very book you’re reading right now!

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