



SEMPO's Point Of View (POV) on Social Media

KEY QUESTIONS

- What is social media and how is it relevant to brands/products?
- Where and how do search and social media intersect?
- How can marketers benefit from social media and what steps can they take to interact and engage with online communities?
- What is "social media optimization" and how can marketers optimize their brands for social media?

CONTEXT

Thanks in large part to the advent of blended or universal search, today's search results page is crowded with an ever-widening mix of text, images, video and user-generated content. With the proliferation of user-generated content, there is more being "said" about brands than ever before – by more people, in more places and using a greater variety of inputs. With social media facilitating interactions that give rise to collective opinion and search engines not only providing access to but also serving as the arbiter of this editorializing, brands face increased challenges in achieving prominence in search, getting their message across and making sure it is being found. At the same time, brands must acknowledge the reality that a two-way conversation is taking place, and respect, listen and respond to the voices of consumers.

"Social" takes many forms, including blogs (those maintained by individuals as well as corporations) and blog networks; forums and users groups where participants can post comments on topics relevant to the membership; content communities such as photo- and video-sharing sites like [Flickr](#) and [YouTube](#); social networks like [MySpace](#) and [Facebook](#); podcasts; wikis that can be updated and added to by anyone with interest in and knowledge of a given subject; and finally, location-aware applications and widgets for both desktop computers and mobile devices that help connect members of a group or network, such as [Google Latitude](#) and [Loki](#) (owned by Skyhook Wireless). Search engines and the latest releases of popular Web browsers similarly incorporate location-aware features to better target results and content for their users. In addition, the vast and growing number of sites, starting with del.icio.us, Digg and Twitter alone, that allow users to aggregate, tag, rank, share and comment on content constitute a vital link in the social Web.



In fact, referring to any media as specifically social is becoming redundant. Most experts agree that the future (if not the present) of all media is social, aided by the commoditization of devices, software and platforms that enable a simple process of capturing, creating, distributing and sharing content. Research firm International Data Corporation believes that within three years, 70% of all online content will be created by individuals, creating the possibility that consumers will exercise far greater control over what is read and viewed online.

In this context, "creation" also takes many forms, exemplified by user tagging, ranking and (re)posting of content. The increasingly social nature of online media is part of a larger shift in the way that consumers and businesses find, sort and access information. At the same time, social input like tagging and ranking guides not only what information search engines present in response to user queries but also the order and rankings of what they present, creating in the process a symbiotic relationship between search and social media.

OPPORTUNITIES

Because of the ways noted above that social media are becoming indistinguishable from media in general, social media optimization (SMO) and search engine optimization (SEO) are likewise becoming more inextricably linked. Any marketer planning a search campaign should integrate SMO tactics as part of the search campaign and tie their efforts to other online and offline marketing initiatives as well.

Social media provide opportunities for marketers and their agency partners to:

- Build and extend brands
- Protect brands
- Grow community
- Communicate with and engage with customers
- Increase search relevancy and online visibility

Most companies can find a reason for engaging with social media, but the why is more important than the what. Clear business reasons for incorporating SMO tactics and a detailed strategy for doing so are essential. Successful social media engagements require careful consideration and planning in order to be engaging. Above all, brands must offer end users something tangible in terms of entertainment, information or utility.



How and which type of social media to approach depends on the objectives and nature of the business. Some brands, for example, may be able to get a lot of mileage from submissions to image sites like Flickr, [Fotki](#) and [23](#) and video sites like YouTube, [Break](#) and [Metacafe](#). Article-sharing sites like [Digg](#) and [del.icio.us](#) can give company news and press releases longer legs. And a [Wikipedia](#) entry can and may be the first piece of information a user reads about a brand due to the fact that Wikipedia entries typically rank very high on search engine results pages. Moreover, the presence of a brand on several social sharing sites typically results in the creation of a number of brand-related URLs on third-party sites, which can provide a boost to search relevancy and improve a brand's visibility in the organic search rankings.

SOLUTIONS/STRATEGIES

Any foray into social media should be carefully tailored not only to the brand but also the audience the brand is trying to reach. Targeting the right audience will result in better quality traffic. However, there are some basic best practices that marketers and their partners can and should consider, some of which require limited additional marketing or IT resources beyond what may already be included in brands' existing budgets:

- **Actively listen to what is being said about the brand:** This applies not only to mentions taking place on blogs and in online communities and networks, but also to the kinds and sentiment of results that come up in search. Use social networks to gain unfiltered ideas, criticism and praise for your brand, products and services. Consider that the latent actions consumers either take or do not take often come as a result of what they discover through search. A list of fee-based online monitoring tools can be found in the Forrester Research Wave report "[Listening Platforms, Q1 2009](#)" (subscription required to read full report). Many free tools are also available, including [Social Mention](#), [spy](#), [Icerocket](#), [Artiklz](#) and [WhosTalkin](#). The list of tools for monitoring Twitter alone grows by the day. Some to consider include [Monitter](#), [TweetDeck](#), [Twist](#), [Twilert](#), [TweetStats](#), [Twitt\(url\)y](#), [Twitscoop](#), [TweetVolume](#) and [Twitter StreamGraphs](#).
- **Create a steady supply of relevant content:** Developing the website into an information hub with feeds, reviews and articles about the company and enabling the distribution and sharing of this content with bookmarking buttons likewise help to build a large quantity of natural links. Having different sources, such as blogs, link to a site tells search engines that it is a trusted, quality resource, and helps the engines to perform their role as arbiter of content.

- **Submit content to online communities:** Enabling viral distribution of content on a brand site can help in building links, but marketers should also take the additional step of creating and submitting content directly to communities. For a news-related community like Digg or del.icio.us, brands may get more mileage by writing a timely piece with an attention-grabbing title and short, snappy points for the content rather than simply repurposing existing site content. Active participation in a community, such as submitting articles, commenting on posts made by others and developing a strong network of friends, can help build trust and increase the chances of having a submitted article voted on by others.
- **Optimize press releases for search:** This includes tailoring the language of a release with content relevant to specific queries and topics as well as including tags, links and photos that can easily be spidered by the engines as well as picked up by bloggers. Part of the goal here is to enable communities to spread a message on the brand's behalf, which helps to build natural link equity and hence enhance online reputation.
- **Track the right metrics:** Sentiment (positive; negative; neutral) is central to social media analysis, as are visibility and presence (number of mentions; number of links; natural search position data); engagement and participation (number of comments; number of downloads, such as of a widget or application); reach and influence (number of views, friends, followers, connections; number of diggs and del.icio.us bookmarks; authority score on Technorati; number of trackbacks); velocity (rate at which an idea, post, Tweet, message, etc. spreads from its origin into wider arena of public interaction and opinion); share of voice (presence of brand or product versus competitors within a given conversation).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Social media can be a highly effective means for brands to engage with as well as drive traffic to their websites. Social media optimization plays an important role in a brand's link building strategy and can help brands to earn greater search relevancy and, by extension, greater online visibility. By offering users something of value in terms of entertainment, information or utility, social media engagement can also provide a positive boost to brand and reputation management efforts, and as such, should be linked to other search as well as on- and offline tactics to achieve prominence for the brand. As all media become more social, SMO and the solutions noted above should assume a pivotal place on the to-do "checklist" of any brand's online campaign.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Organizations

[Search Engine Marketing Professional Organization](#) (SEMPO)

[Social Media Advertising Consortium](#) (SMAC)

[Word of Mouth Marketing Association](#) (WOMMA)

Websites

[Mashable](#)

[TechCrunch](#)

Whitepapers

"[Brands in Networks](#)" – Antony Mayfield, iCrossing UK

"[Social Media Ad Metrics Definitions](#)" – Interactive Advertising Bureau

"[Tracking the Influence of Conversations: A Roundtable Discussion on Social Media Metrics and Measurement](#)" – Jeremiah Owyang, Forrester Research and Matt Toll, Factiva

"[New Media, New Influencers and Implications for Public Relations](#)" – Society of New Communications Research with support from the Institute for Public Relations & Wieck Media

"[Social Media or, 'How I learned to stop worrying and love communication'](#)" – Trevor Cook, Jackson Wells Morris and Lee Hopkins, Better Communication Results

Books

[Twitter Power: How to Dominate Your Market One Tweet at a Time](#) – Joel Comm

[Secrets of Social Media Marketing: How to Use Online Conversations and Customer Communities to Turbo-Charge Your Business!](#) – Paul Gillin

[Groundswell: Winning in a World Transformed by Social Technologies](#) – Charlene Li and Josh Bernoff

[The Cluetrain Manifesto: The End of Business as Usual](#) – Christopher Locke, Rick Levine, Doc Searls and David Weinberger



[Now is Gone: A Primer on New Media for Executives and Entrepreneurs](#) – Geoff Livingston and Brian Solis

[The Wisdom of Crowds](#) – James Surowiecki

[Marketing on the Social Web: How Digital Customer Communities Build Your Business](#)
– Larry Weber

[Anatomy of Buzz](#) – Emanuel Rosen

["20 Free eBooks about Social Media"](#) – compilation by Chris Brogan