

# The Social Marketing Construct

*evolving brands & emerging realities*

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# acknowledgements

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Please feel free to post this on your blog or email it to everyone you believe would benefit from reading it. Cheers & thank you!

-JG & SA

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# foreword

"The Customer is in control from here on out, and the Social Marketing Contract is smart, necessary, and most importantly, something that can be implemented **today** within most organizations. Jon and Sheryl have come up with a set of seven key actions that your organization needs to be embracing if it doesn't want to be left behind. Each item of the Contract is a crisp distillation of a core aspect of how your customers are forming markets using social media today (whether you know it or not), and what you can do to remain (or, in some cases, become) relevant."

-Christopher Carfi, CEO of Cerado, Inc. and author of *The Social Customer Manifesto*

<http://www.cerado.com>

<http://www.socialcustomer.com>

# same as it never was

Marketing and branding are changing. This is nothing new, but the relatively recent introduction of new marketing channels due to evolving technology and the Internet--mainly social media--is leveling the playing field for small and large companies alike. All brands have the opportunity to be more visible in the marketplace and to develop greater customer trust with the right approach to managing the new marketing mix.

This document highlights areas for consideration as you look to launch a new brand or better manage an existing brand in a social marketplace. It discusses the emerging realities for brand management given the advent of social media as well as provides some basic practices that you can implement to navigate the changing landscape for your marketing and branding efforts.

Don't you know  
They're talkin' bout a revolution  
It sounds like a whisper.

– Tracy Chapman

# it used to be simple

- Tell the market what your product is
- Spend to create brand awareness
- Brand management is owned by the CMO
- The marketing mix is about the product first and foremost
- Damage control is about spin
- Target your message to the media for increased visibility
- Broad-based messaging drives revenue

# sea change or blip?

No one really knows where marketing began; it is possibly one of the oldest professions and is potentially the quintessential capitalistic discipline. By its nature, marketing as a function is responsible for driving revenue and profit for companies. Marketing--as a group, discipline or passion--has typically been a balance of strategy and tactics. Execution of the 4Ps of marketing--Product, Price, Promotion, Placement--has always been relatively straightforward. Until now.

With an increasingly networked world, building a brand is necessitating a new mix of activities than many traditional marketers are struggling to understand and implement. Marketers in companies--both large and small--are under pressure to understand the role and value of a new player in the marketing mix known as social media.

The bravado and execution of marketers is often aggressive and innovative, but ultimately, more accepting of the realities of the market than other roles in a business. That being said, many marketers apply their personal biases to the initiatives they focus on and the channels they prioritize and something new may not be easy to accept. Regardless of whether a bias is from lessons learned or just personal style, introduction of a new channel presents potential risk but also reward, and social media is no different.

Ultimately, marketers--both old and new--will need to accept that brand development and management are no longer just a function of investment, but rather a collective definition of attributes that are assigned by the population or end-users. Recognition of this sea change may hold the key to a brand's ultimate success or failure.

# what is brand?

pr identity **feeling** thought image ads promotion

Alive messaging **service** category impression

product **differentiation** tagline quality **4ps**

logo **placement strategy** style **conceptual**

Promotion **changing** reflection Product

# people are gathering

At no other time has the consumer had the ability to interact, share product experiences and influence purchasing to such an extent. We did some research on this and based on our searching on the Internet, this certainly appears to be the case. Folks are gathering, talking and changing how they interact. This fundamental market change, due to the pervasive availability of access, is enabling smaller and smaller consumer segments to communicate and congregate.

One of the key market dynamics that social media is enabling is the power of a niche. While SEO and marketers speak to the long tail, it is now about how a community allows for people with like interests and access to get together and exchange experiences and opinions. Communities essentially become target markets. However, these are not buyer personas which you can speak AT, but rather share information.

The public's access to [brands](#), markets and products is being socialized, not through government subsidy, but through the active interaction of people online. Representation and placement of the brand is necessitating a different approach and different guiding principles. The socialization of marketing is increasingly impacting brand equity, product visibility and buyer decision-making.

# a brand coup

It's not like any given management style will remain intact forever. That's just common sense. But how did coders become marketers? When did more t-shirts in the marketing war room out-number the tailored jackets?

This latest change certainly has an Darwinian feel. Survival of the fittest when it comes to being effective in the market appears to be the feel. Traditional investments are hitting flat and limited appreciation of social media is widespread. While the majority of the marketing essentials are still intact, brand management is definitely going someplace else or should we say being taken somewhere else and not by anyone on the payroll. Us marketers are a clique-y type, you got an AMA card?

So perhaps if it isn't a brand coup, we could definitely consider the change underway as a "re-launch" of brand concepts. Perhaps Marketing, as a discipline, is just in a late-stage market and requires a different approach. A different vantage point to look at is that brand positioning is no longer just about communicating your brand out with the message. Inside→out marketing may not be the accepted model for developing a brand, or at a minimum, can't be a stand alone execution model. The mix is fast becoming more of an outside→in approach for brand development; creating demand and discovery of your product.

**It is what your customers and competitors say about you and your authenticity which drives brand equity and value.**

# moving to the social brand

Yup, some black clad Madison Avenue type is declaring “We have a blog – we’re cool!” If social marketing is merely a technology bullet to success, then all we would do is just line up our capEx budget and headcount plans for next year to support “Social Media Stuff” and add a Social Media Manager, and be gold.

It’s not money that will make the difference, but instead doing the work--your labor is your voice. This isn’t a “send corporate message to Facebook and create a twitter pitch for the market” to solve the problem. It is about being authentic and real about your interactions--the kind that only happens with people and not PR. People interact, people influence and impact the brand within the context of a relationship. It is incredibly more interesting and powerful for a consumer, a trusted “friend” or the aggregate rating for your product and brand.

Sounds a lot like old school Word of Mouth (WOM), but this is a little bit different as this is real-time and trusted and impacts what product a person might purchase. This movement of brand is directly related to how people buy and discover your product. You may not be able to control what folks say about your brand, but you can listen and change your product to meet their needs, not what you thought they needed.

The conversation online in communities isn’t just about what is good or bad about products, but how to improve it. If you engage and listen, then it’s just possible your users/customers can help you differentiate your product.

**Making promises and keeping them is a great way to build a brand.**

– Seth Godin

# network investment

If it isn't technology and isn't corporate--how do you this? Interestingly, it is a commonly held asset prized by most marketing leaders--their network. One small change--it isn't the person's network, but their co-workers, customers, the media and the brands. It is these commingled niche networks where the brand is offered new communication channels, which are controlled by everyone but marketing.

As brand visibility and development transition to the collective voice, marketing needs to provide access and interaction to succeed. The network is the populous, and it is everywhere the conversation is going on. So where are you investing? Remember, the revolution will not be televised.

Corporations do not speak in the same voice as these new networked conversations. To their intended online audiences, companies sound hollow, flat, literally inhuman.

– Cluetrain Manifesto

Markets are getting smarter,  
more informed, more organized.  
Participation in a networked  
market changes people  
fundamentally.

– Cluetrain Manifesto

# the rise of social media

What is social media? A better question is, what isn't it? It's not big, it's not broad and it's not for sale for the most part. That's a HUGE problem for traditional marketers. To keep it simple--you know social media when you see it. The [Social Media Club](#) provides this definition/framework:

Social (from Merriam Webster)

*"1 : involving allies or confederates*

*2 a : marked by or passed in pleasant companionship with one's friends or associates social life b: SOCIABLE c: of, relating to, or designed for sociability*

*3 : of or relating to human society , the interaction of the individual and the group, or the welfare of human beings as members of society < social institutions>"*

Media (from Merriam Webster)

*" 1 : a medium of cultivation, conveyance, or expression;"*

Wikipedia defines Social Media as *"the online tools and platforms that people use to share opinions, insights, experiences, and perspectives with each other. Social media can take many different forms, including text, images, audio, and video. Popular social mediums include blogs, message boards, podcasts, wikis, and vlogs."*

By this definition, social media is essentially a set of infomediary channels. These conversational channels are equally available to individuals and corporations which makes "controlling the message" or positioning the brand a little more dynamic. The dynamic and egalitarian realities are requiring organizations to add corporate bloggers, community managers and SEO folks to the payrolls to shape the discussion. This latest corporate Internet frenzy does have a little bit of the "we've got to be there" feel of the early Internet, which spawned the explosion of webmaster roles in IT which transitioned to more creative roles in marketing in many organizations.

# social platforms as channels

Is Twitter a market? Facebook? MySpace?

With increasing platforms for information exchange, more and more opportunities to market products appear to emerge as populations flock to these platforms. Where people gather, transactions happen--right? There are many example of this in the physical space: Burning Man, dead shows and Vancouver.

So, if people are gathering, there must be transactions to be made. Information as currency and messaging as a service continue to be the key commodities exchanged freely on social media platforms....

It's increasingly about brand access and the communal influence...

Networks don't have people, people have networks.

– Demian Entrekin

# sharing = spending

Community is about engaging and sharing, and as much as any other noun, social media is about community and the conversations which emerge. This means you want your favorite sites to be up, rather than down, (think twitter) and you understand it is the value of your network, not the size.

Social media is not so much about the direct influence of revenue, but more of a market optimizer--which DOES impact revenue. It's about current revenue streams AND future opportunities.

Essentially, social media aids in making marketing more efficient with pervasive communication, connectivity and real-time transaction capabilities. It is a fundamental change in market mechanics.

# interaction creates brand equity

Customer relationships are complex things--they drive revenue, impact profitability and can defer revenue and the social customer is a growing influence on ALL of these. If there is a shared identity or a better understanding of the influence of a user, marketers can use this data to prioritize online ad spend and drive a focused social media agenda.

Where is your brand?

Who is your brand?

How can folks interact with the brand?

Your brand is your presence online and the associated actions, reactions, discussions and relationships.

Community members drive brand awareness--an interesting new market mechanic. In abstract, they are the brand or at least supporters or detractors of the brand.....

Conversations in the marketplace happen whether you like it or not, good marketing encourages the right of conversations.

– Seth Godin

# brand personas

Buyer personas or profiles are complicated now with new ways to search for your product or brand. Most often buyers search for a set of capabilities or requirements and not for a given brand. So, identifying buyer needs and understanding their requirements is critical in positioning a brand in the realm of social media and marketing.

Similar or like-minded buyers/personas often congregate in communities of shared interests. These communities provide access to other buyers and the ability to share opinions/reviews. This would seemingly make targeting by groups a relatively easy promotional task.

The brand challenge is to position a community identity for buyers which is trusted and not commercial. Brands intersect with people in context of a platform, commercial relationship or common interests. These items/intersections effectively are the spatial relevance of a user/brand and the value of place and promotion online.

In the end, the myriad of interactions driven by relationship and community membership/participation further extends your brand to the people--all the people, not just your perceived target buyer.

It's easier to find products for people you know than it is to find people for products you know.

– Steve Johnson

# community as a commoditizer

Social media is changing relationships within a business and how everyone at a company contributes to success in the marketplace and how customers are re-defining old brands and showcasing new brands. The voice of the market is ever-present and changing the value of your product, one community, tweet or blog post at a time.

Markets traditionally are made less efficient due to brokers, intermediaries, limited access, price variability and the inherent transactional costs of exchanging goods. The fundamental mechanics of communication, value creation and brand management have been diffused into a community of infomediaries--customers, former customers, competitor customers, employees and former employees. For good or ill, access to people, information and influence impacts loyalty, awareness and product placement.

Downside--the risk of commoditization exists with the reduction of transactional friction in the market. It's now easier to compare, easier to shop--essentially consumers can accelerate discovery and their understanding of what product best fits their needs.

The transactional efficiencies of social computing, by its very nature, put downward cost pressure on goods. Ease of comparison, ease of purchase and ease of access to other consumers/product customers. Ease of discovery.

# the message is the medium

Marketing and brand management have historically been highly orchestrated strategies; social media is more reactionary and interactive. The plan changes with each add, tweet and reply.

Social media isn't about the strategy so much as it is about being part of the medium, the tactics. Prior to social media, marketing was far more a spectator sport. But, with the outside-in brand reality emerging, the traditional investment in marketing programs and measurements just isn't going to work. So the perceived need to relate social media to revenue, to tangible metrics or share of voice equivalent is not the right way to approach it from a business perspective. Customers might be a reasonable measuring stick...

The social media homerun isn't any single action--it is achieved by the culmination of your brand's ability to listen and participate online. To that end, social media is sort of a binary choice in the promotional mix--you're either in or you are out. Not being in the game is a clear loser. It has that old school carny: "You can't win if you don't play" reality. So with that baseline, there are three questions that just may sum it up:

- What is the downside of participation?
- What is the upside of NOT participating?
- How can you remain relevant without contributing to the conversation?

# return on interaction

The conversation is social media's share of voice, definitely old school PR--yuck.

The whole social media ecosystem centers on the key construct of conversation. A conversational approach is essentially the key differentiator from a market approach for new media folk and consumers in the channel. Just to let you know, it isn't that easy to define or develop a business justification document against conversation as a deliverable. I know--old school business--yuck.

Even the market metaphor is innately noisy. With increased adoption, diversity of voice and new use cases, some of these things will work themselves out. Over time, the market participants are become more diverse in their focus and capabilities and the message will morph, which will aid in developing more traditional business approaches on how to achieve a tangible benefit.

Perhaps, old school PR was right with share of voice, but repackaged now as share of influence. Working the way we have always as marketers may no longer be an acceptable execution model and may require a different context for execution. This new market mode/mix requires a new contract with the marketplace. The good news is that common sense covers most of it.

# making the shift

With the ever-growing importance of the online channel and its influence on a product and brand's place in the marketplace, interaction needs to be real and not contrived. Online outreach and engaging in conversations need to be done in a way that it is acceptable and not spammy. The easiest way to do that is to listen, track and understand before you engage.

It's sort of like a dinner party--you are talking with your friends and then in swoops a new person who was eavesdropping and he/she comes into the conversation abruptly and potentially without value. Brands need to not interrupt, but enhance the conversation.

To effectively engage and gain trust online, you need to ensure you are participating in the conversation and not dictating to the buyers. This is a tectonic shift that requires marketers to engage the marketplace in context of a new social contract for interaction.

Of course, no industry  
changes overnight. But it's  
never too late to start.

– Doc Searls

# the social marketing contract

- Give the market the opportunity to understand you and your products when and where they want to
- Provide access to your people, your product, your competitors and your customers
- Discuss openly your products and brand successes and failures
- Trust the market and your customers to differentiate your product
- Deliver a quality product based on the peoples' needs, not the perceived uses
- Listen to understand your product's place in the market
- Move your message to be relevant to the conversation

Socialism is the abolition of human self-alienation, the return of man as a real human being.

– Erich Fromm

# ...about the authors...

Jonathan Gatrell is a social marketer, writer and frequent conference speaker. Jon has published numerous articles on demand, supply and product management for both online and traditional publications. Jon has presented globally at over 50 conferences in over 10 countries and currently lives in Atlanta, Georgia with previous stops in Ann Arbor, Guatemala and a couple of other places along the way. Jon currently works as a VP of Product Marketing and Strategy for a technology company and actively blogs on marketing, supply chain and just plain junk.

Sheryl Altschuler is a marketing consultant with an extensive background in brand development and management at companies such as American Express, Carlson Companies and Inovis. Sheryl has over 20 years of experience launching products in the marketplace and has provided marketing/communication services and consultation to numerous Fortune 1000 companies and leading brands, including Orbitz, Equifax and CheckFree Corporation. A native of Wisconsin, Sheryl currently resides in Chicago where she maintains her loyalty to the Green Bay Packers.

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