



## Understanding Social Media

I wrote this for you. You need to attract new customers and haven't quite seen how social media fits into your marketing strategy. My goal here is to clarify your understanding of social media and demonstrate its growing relevance in marketing. Because it has a place in **every marketing strategy**.

Social media is confusing at first glance because it describes a new, different way people are communicating online. It is the differences, which I'll explain, that make it difficult to use effectively for business. At first.

### Social media is not:

Social media is not Twitter. Or Facebook. The same way television isn't CNN or The Food Network.

### Social media is:

Simply, social media is a new way people congregate and communicate online. As such, it's a new way you can communicate with your target market online. People are forming ad-hoc groups or networks with people they know, people who share similar interests and people they find interesting. And they're communicating: sharing photos and links to interesting websites; asking their network about everything from house painters, software and marketing consultants to computer guys, cell phones and internships. You name it, they're talking about it and looking for it.

Basically, you want to be where your market congregates, right? If I said "Hey, your customers are starting to read this new magazine called LinkedIn, you need to buy an ad," you'd take a look at it, right? Well, hey, your customers are starting to consume information about what you sell a different way, they're starting to use social media, of which Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, to name a few, are a part. You can't buy an ad in them, but you can create a presence in them. **Okay, so, you better take a look at social media. Right?**

### What makes social media different, and difficult:



Social media was born from the internet, so it is very different from the other marketing and communication vehicles we've used. **Before the internet, the communication model was what I'll call event-oriented one-to-many.** Huh?! **Event-oriented** = an ad runs, a mailing is sent, a commercial airs, a marketing event takes place. **One-to-many** = you send your mailing to 10,000 prospects, your ad is in front of 65,000 subscribers, you send your message to many people.

The internet changed all that, and social media is the latest incarnation of how people communicate and consume information online.

**Social media is best understood as a stream or conversation.**

People are having a conversation about what you sell or the problem you solve on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and other sites. It is a constant stream of communication. Now, in addition to people "Googling" what you sell, they ask their networks about it.





To extend the **conversation metaphor**, think about social media by imagining yourself at an industry conference. Except, at this conference everybody is both presenter and part of the audience. Everybody has something to say and something to learn.

To find new customers you need to be a part of that conversation, or stream. But, again, you can't accomplish this by sending a mailing or buying an ad. You participate. Additionally, it's very bad form to pitch your product. You contribute instead. If people perceive you as interesting and knowledgeable, they

will ask for more information. Think again about being at the conference. You wouldn't walk up to somebody and say, "Hi I'm Hamilton, I have the great new product I want like to sell you." Don't do it online either.

### **The reality around social media:**

The people who buy what you sell are using social media to learn about and find what you sell. Even though you may not fully understand social media right now, you need to start using social media. Just like a few years ago when people told you about the internet. Even though you didn't fully understand it, you knew you needed a website. So, like it or not, you need to jump in. Now.

There is another part of the reality around social media. YOU have to do it. The participation in the conversation--the voice--needs to come from inside your company. You can hire an outside firm to train you how to use social media, and you should, but an outside firm can't participate in the conversation for you.

So, now what? If I've convinced you you need to jump in, jump in. Open accounts on Twitter, Friendfeed and LinkedIn. Follow 25 people on Twitter, subscribe to 25 people on Friendfeed and join three groups on LinkedIn. Watch the conversation. And get some good social media marketing training.



**Hamilton Wallace** is a small business marketing consultant in Scottsdale, Arizona. He is an expert in direct response marketing, including sponsored search, SEO, direct mail, message and story, and in creating elegantly simple, effective marketing solutions for small businesses.

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