



Social Media: An Integral Tool for B2B Technology Marketing

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Executive Summary

The use of social media in marketing to consumers is well documented and receives a good deal of attention. However, social media is growing in importance among **B2B marketers**, most notably with those involved in **technology marketing**. In the current challenging economic climate, B2B technology marketers have begun to turn to social media as a way to bolster business results. At the beginning of 2010, it is useful to take stock of where B2B marketers stand with regard to these new marketing approaches.

Key questions that warrant attention are:

- What are the current attitudes of B2B technology marketers toward social media?
- What behaviors characterize technology buyers' usage of social media?
- How can social media be integrated into the marketing mix to optimize business results?

In addition to answering these questions, this white paper will present new methods and approaches to address the challenges of incorporating social media into B2B technology marketing. This paper will:

- Define a process for expanding the use of social media by B2B technology marketers beyond limited tactical goals
- Provide a strategic framework for integrating social media into overall marketing plans in order to increase value
- Provide a prioritization approach and recommendations for the integration of social media into technology marketing efforts
- Discuss how to convey the value of social media to senior business managers
- Illustrate concrete success stories of the use of social media across three key areas of the marketing funnel:
 - Thought leadership and engagement
 - Awareness and demand generation
 - Deepening customer relationships and loyalty

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Social Media in 2010 – Moving Beyond the Experimental Phase

The current economic downturn has affected B2B marketers in a number of ways. There is greater pressure to reduce budgets, increase efficiency, demonstrate innovation and improve return on marketing expenditures. This pressure has led to experimentation with new marketing approaches, such as social media, to increase effectiveness while simultaneously reducing costs.

In early 2009, Forrester Research and MarketingProfs conducted a survey of B2B marketers that showed companies still relying heavily on traditional marketing approaches such as corporate websites, email marketing, and trade shows. However, the same survey also highlighted growing recognition of the importance of social media and the intent to shift expenditures from traditional to newer approaches such as search marketing, video/podcasts, webinars and other Web. 2.0 media (see Figure 1).

Throughout the remainder of 2009, we saw a number of technology companies begin to dip their proverbial toes into social media. Quite a few hired recent college grads to set up Facebook fan pages or use Twitter accounts. Others tried to let a thousand flowers bloom by encouraging their employees to blog. Some piloted private online communities. In a mid-year poll conducted by MarketingProfs, 57 percent of B2B marketers said they used some form of social media, up from 15 percent in 2007.¹

What were the results of all this experimentation? By the end of 2009, many of the same marketers were asking questions such as:

- My company has 1,000 followers on Twitter and 700 Facebook fans. So what?
- We invested time and money building an online community but no one joined. What do we do now?
- We encouraged our employees to blog but now we have no idea what they're doing and whether it's good or bad for our brand. How do we create value from all this activity?

¹Marketing Profs, July 21, 2009, <http://www.marketingprofs.com/charts/2009/111/b2b-marketers-latching-onto-social-media>.

Figure 1
B2B Marketers Slowly Turning to Social Tactics
(Source: Forrester Research, April 2009)



Base: 317 marketers at firms with 50 employees or more

While experimentation is generally a good way to learn what does and doesn't work, these early experiments in social media often fell short of achieving important marketing goals. In 2009 it was easy to get caught up in the hype surrounding social media, but it was much more difficult to establish effective social strategies, integrate social media with traditional marketing programs, and develop solid measurement and ROI metrics.

As we start 2010, it's clear that B2B technology marketers must move beyond toe-dipping tactical experimentation to full-body immersion. A more strategic approach is required to achieve important business outcomes.

Despite the challenges, there are two pieces of good news:

1. IT buyers are already in the deep end of the social media pool. According to research by the IT Services Marketing Association (IT SMA) and Pierre Audoin Consultants (PAC)¹, use of social media is among the first three steps that buyers now take to identify product and services options.
2. Social media marketing agencies and platform vendors are providing new methodologies and tools to facilitate a more strategic approach and impactful measurement.

¹IT SMA-PAC Survey, September 2009.



Social Media Strategic Framework for B2B Technology Marketers

In using social media for B2B technology marketing companies can focus on many different goals. Some of the most common objectives based on our experience include:

- Building thought leadership and community
- Driving awareness and demand generation
- Deepening customer relationships and building loyalty

The challenge for marketers is determining how best to develop social media programs that can accomplish these specific objectives. At Digital Influence Group, we have established a structured process for developing effective B2B social media strategies.

Our **Social Media Strategic Framework™** is a five-step process that can help technology marketers develop valuable programs that build thought leadership, support demand generation and deepen customer relationships.

Although these steps are sequential they are also iterative. In other words, to maximize ROI, you have to start with Step 1 and go through all the steps in sequential order until completion. At the end of the process you will have the data and analytics to measure results and optimize for the next iteration of the cycle. (See Figure 2 below).

Step 1—Research

The first step that marketers should take when expanding the use of social media for IT buyers beyond a tactical level is to conduct research. Actionable research should have four key components:

- Defining the audience
- Listening to target IT buyers and observing online behavior
- Listening to influencers that the buyers listen to
- Listening to the most relevant competitors

Define your audience. This is the critical first step to your strategy and the foundation for success. Is there only one IT decision-making audience or multiple audiences including influencers that you need to reach? For example, are you trying to reach mid-level IT buyers who research alternatives, oversee product evaluations and make recommendations? Or is the program targeting C-suite executives who have final sign-off on purchase decisions?

Listen to customer and prospect behavior. After defining your target audience(s), you need to observe and develop an understanding of their social media and online behaviors. Listening to your target audience across the social web requires that you ask and answer questions such as:

- How do your IT buyers make decisions?
- Whom do they trust to influence their purchase decisions?
- What content is important to them?
- What are their online behaviors?
- What social tools and platforms do they use and engage in?

As part of the listening, it is important to learn about the negatives as well as the positives related to your organization. Any negative feedback, comments or ratings are particularly meaningful for IT purchasers who rely heavily on peer-to-peer discussion and recommendations. A single negative comment on Twitter or a top influential IT blog can reach many viewers very quickly and spiral out of control.

Figure 2
Social Media Strategic Framework





Listen to influencers. Having identified who the important target audiences are, it is critical to listen to what the influencers are saying to them. Are they recommending particular products? Are they advising against purchasing certain services? What content is most valuable to the influencers and how do they prefer to receive it?

Listen to relevant competitors. It is also important to listen to what your IT competitors are saying and how they are using social media to engage your prospects and customers. Which of your competitors are most likely to be in the consideration frame of your target audience?

Step 2—Strategy

Once your research is complete, the development of strategic solutions for IT decision makers and influencers is the next step. Prioritization and focus are the keys to successful technology B2B social media programs. Whom do you want to go after and what do you want to accomplish – awareness, demand generation, consideration, lead generation, purchase decision, loyalty? In developing strategies you need to:

- Focus, focus, focus
- Establish specific and measurable goals for each target audience
- Develop clear strategies and programs that deliver on objectives that are based on the insights gleaned from the research
- Plan for evolution over time and develop a clear roadmap

Focus. Social media can do a lot of things, but it can't do everything for every audience. Don't try to engage all at once with too many audiences across the entire marketing funnel. Targeting and focus are even more important in B2B than B2C marketing. B2B technology buyers want and need specific content to inform their decision-making. Depth of content is critical and it requires substantial resources to create and maintain fresh content.

Establish specific and measurable goals for each audience. Be clear on what you want each audience to do. What are your goals for all buyers and customers (e.g., generate 100 new leads; get 10 referrals from existing customers)? Link the goals to economic value to help you prioritize.

Develop clear strategies and programs. Once you have done a comprehensive job of gathering information, it is time to take your research and

insights to the next level. Leverage your insights to develop clear strategies and programs to deliver on the prioritized objectives you have set. As part of this step you should:

- Establish key milestones that demonstrate progress and make adjustments as required
- Identify resources, including financial, human, and technical to achieve your goals
- Flag possible risks and develop strategies to mitigate them
- Design a measurement plan that includes what to track, how to track it, and how to report metrics and provide analysis
- Develop realistic budgets as part of a business case you make to management as to why they should invest in the social media program

Plan for evolution over time. Social media success takes time; it's a journey that requires ongoing sustainment to build trust and engagement with target audiences. One of the myths of social media is that it costs less than traditional marketing. While this can be true (especially when compared to television advertising budgets), a fully integrated, comprehensive B2B social media program does require meaningful financial resources to build and sustain. Planning up front for this activity ensures that you have the resources to support the program over time.

Step 3—Social Experience Design™

Effective use of social media for technology marketing involves more than just building a website or a Facebook fan page. It requires integration across all channels, e.g. from a Google search to your corporate website and micro-sites, from your website to a YouTube channel, from a Facebook fan page to your Twitter handle.

Our approach, **Social Experience Design**, differs radically from the traditional user experience design used for building static websites. Social Experience Design focuses on a virtual experience with social at its core. When designing a social experience, key considerations are:

- What kind of brand experience will your IT buyers and influencers have across all social channels?
- What content will be available that will showcase your thought leadership and practical applications of your technology?
- How will this valuable content be disseminated across the social web?



- How will the buyers and influencers engage with your content?
- How will they engage with peers at other companies? In B2B technology marketing, this is particularly important as peer referral is often the first step that IT buyers take in the buying process.

Along with designing and building the social experiences for your IT audience, this is the time when you need to get very specific about your content strategy and publishing calendar. Valuable content stimulates dialogue with your brand's unique perspectives and it is the medium of exchange in the social media world. In addition to establishing strong thought leadership for your company, your content should be shared in impactful, entertaining ways.

Don't limit yourself to a collection of case studies or white paper PDFs but rather think of the ways to use that intellectual capital in different forms across the social media channels. These can include proprietary and third-party blogs, SlideShare, YouTube, Twitter, as well as the standard white papers. When developing new content, planning up front on how the content will be used and disseminated across the social web will allow you to be much more efficient with your content creation dollars.

This is also the time to design measurement hooks and metrics into all your social media programs so that data specified in your measurement plan can be captured downstream and will allow you to optimize the program around deepening engagement with your key IT decision-makers and influencers.

Step 4—Social Activation™

Much effort has been invested in building social platforms and developing great content for your IT audience. Now it's time to make sure that the content gets to your customers and prospects where they want it – which is likely not limited to your corporate website.

Social Activation is our term for both bringing social media experiences out to target audiences and bringing target audiences into your social media experiences. Building an experience for your customers without a plan to reach them and stimulate their engagement is like building a fantastic restaurant in the middle of the woods with no roads to and from it.

Four core elements make up the foundation of B2B social media activation:

- IT influencer outreach
- Broad-based content distribution
- Non-traditional media partnerships
- Ongoing sustainment

IT Influencer Identification and Outreach. In the Research phase, you should have discovered the key online influencers for your target audience(s). In Social Activation, you need to develop an outreach plan for each influencer as there are many ways to engage. For example, bloggers can:

- Serve as program experts within your branded experience where they can write about and comment on specific technology issues
- Become brand ambassadors as they better understand your offering
- Test new products or comment on new services
- Provide guidance prior to product or service offering launches
- Mention your product/service in a post on their own sites or blogs

Content Distribution. The key to successful content distribution is to think broadly about the many ways in which the relevant content can be parsed, repackaged and disseminated. For example, good content on a new IT service or product can be presented via a webinar, a YouTube video, a downloadable white paper, a SlideShare presentation, discussed on Twitter and Facebook, and much more.

Media Partnerships. In Social Activation, the goal of paid media is to bring the social experience you have created out into the marketplace. While we typically recommend that traditional paid media budgets be kept to a minimum, media partners can offer other ways to reach your targeted IT audience. Rules of the road when thinking about media partners include:

- Research deeply the relevant IT-related properties you are considering
- Negotiate differently by partnering with media organizations early in the process, escaping the traditional CPM approach
- Spend differently and use budgets and valuable content to leverage new spaces to reach your IT audience
- Focus on meaningful impressions over mass impressions
- Go deeper with a few key partners to bring the integrated social experiences to life



Social Sustainment™. Part of Social Activation, Social Sustainment describes the day-to-day activities that drive the ultimate success of social media programs. Very different from traditional marketing, Social Sustainment involves daily and weekly review of program results, and identification of opportunities to improve the experience – e.g., new content, new distribution channels, new influencers or deeper audience engagement through surveys. Marketers should plan on dedicating resources or hiring an agency to support all these ongoing activities.

Step 5—Measurement

Major social media challenges cited by B2B technology marketers are an inability to determine ROI against business goals and a lack of metrics to determine traditional vs. social media successes. It is no longer enough to just capture traffic data. You need to measure business impact.

Our measurement approach focuses on two key categories of social media metrics:

- Social Activation and Distribution metrics
- Business Outcome metrics

Social Activation and Distribution Metrics.

These metrics determine the effectiveness of campaign elements in reaching and engaging the target audience. These metrics include:

- **Reach** – users reached, site visits, unique visitors
- **Sentiment** – reviews and comments, fans and friends, ratings and votes
- **Engagement** – content downloads, content views, content shares, repeat visits, participations, time spent

Business Outcome Metrics. These determine effectiveness of the overall campaign in driving business objectives and include:

- **Attitudinal** – brand awareness, product awareness, brand affinity, brand perceptions, purchase intent
- **Behavioral** – sales, market share, customer satisfaction, program loyalty, category growth

In the end, the important questions to address in determining the efficacy of a social media program are:

- Did the program meet your company's marketing and business goals?
- What was the ROI?
- Did the program change buyer attitudes and drive behavior in the desired manner?
- What aspects of the program worked and did not work and why?
 - Was the strategy correct?
 - Was the site/application built effectively?
 - Was activation and sustainment successful?
 - Did the built-in measurement hooks worked as desired?



Success Stories in B2B Technology Marketing

Some B2B technology marketers have successfully used social media to advance business goals. In this section, we highlight three case studies illustrating the use of social media to:

- Build thought leadership and community
- Drive awareness and demand generation
- Deepen customer relationships and build loyalty

Building Thought Leadership and Community

Marketers need to be sure that their value proposition and thought leadership materials are available wherever buyers are in the digital world. Many B2B technology companies have extensive collections of intellectual capital that buyers and influencers would highly value. Typically that knowledge is scattered throughout the organization and not well organized or easily located. Frequently a company's own employees have difficulty finding specific content. To establish themselves as thought leaders, marketers should:

- Create compelling ideas and trend-based content
- Provide easy and ready access to valuable content through broad distribution
- Help clients establish a knowledge base on key business issues facing them
- Arm partners (e.g., resellers, developers) with effective content

Social media channels provide an ideal platform for companies to establish and effectively disseminate thought leadership and other valuable content. In addition to positioning the brand, these channels also provide a way for companies to establish their viewpoint on the key issues decision makers and influencers are evaluating. In addition, with social media insights from subject matter experts and research findings can be easily shared with potential technology buyers and prospects.

Case Study: IBM – Connecting with Mid-Market CIOs

IBM is an example of a company that has used social media to change its perception within a specific target audience – mid-market CIOs – and thereby generate new business opportunities for IBM.

Historically, IBM focused its marketing efforts on very large corporations. As a result, mid-market CIOs felt disconnected from the company. To grow in the mid-market category, IBM needed to change these longstanding perceptions.

The approach used by Digital Influence Group with IBM (and IBM's partners) was to create a multi-platform social engagement program to connect and build relationships with mid-market IT leaders. The program, known as infoBOOM, allowed the mid-market CIOs to connect with their peers as well as with experts at IBM. The engagement was built as a central hub (see Figure 3) and extended engagement across social web platforms (such as LinkedIn). It also integrated with traditional touch points – IBM websites, traditional marketing programs, media and content partners, and events.

Figure 3
IBM infoBOOM Website





Results of this approach have been:

- Steady growth in participation levels on infoBoom, which has exceeded original expectations
- CIOs spent an average of 10.5 minutes per visit on the site, showing the value of the content and the opportunity to engage in peer discussions
- Access to these insights, relationships and connections in the mid-market represents a significant opportunity for growth for IBM

Driving Awareness and Demand Generation

In the awareness and demand generation stage of the marketing funnel, buyers clarify objectives and solution specifications and identify alternatives. Relevant content – available through multiple social channels for the buyer (not just on your website) – becomes critical at this stage as technology buyers are now finalizing short lists, soliciting RFPs and evaluating alternatives.

During this phase of the marketing process, take into consideration ways to:

- Make it easy for prospects to get ongoing relevant content
- Develop and implement coordinated, multiphase, multichannel lead nurturing programs
- Turn qualified leads over to sales
- Track/measure all leads based on established protocol

Social media can support demand generation through a variety of venues: micro-blogs, forums/groups, communities, peer-to-peer engagement and gated communities with exclusive privileges.

Social media can be integrated with events, as demonstrated by the following case study of a Cisco Router Launch.

Case Study: Cisco Router Launch

Cisco is example of a company that successfully used social media to help launch a new product line – its ASR 1000 Router Series. By utilizing a variety of social media venues, Cisco’s marketers staged a highly successful launch at a significant savings over a traditional approach.

Leading up to the launch, Cisco used a mix of online teaser ads and a series of humorous videos to build excitement and drive launch event registrations.

On launch day, a live event on Second Life (Figure 4) allowed a global audience to go inside the product for a virtual technical test drive. The launch was also supported by a widget with rich content and links to reach bloggers; community links on Cisco.com to a Twitter feed, Facebook group and blog; an “Ask the Expert” online discussion forum; and an interactive 3D game, Edge Quest 2.

Post-launch, Cisco spurred dialogue among communities through creative outreach and by continuing to provide fresh content. A two-week long global Edge Quest 2 tournament continued to keep the technical audience engaged.

Figure 4
Cisco ASR 1000 Router Launch

Second Life Launch



Edge Quest Game





Results² of this approach were:

- More than 3,500 attendees of the launch event and over 7,000 registered participants
- More than 1,000 members joined the Facebook group allowing for ongoing engagement and nurturing
- 40,000 users played the Edge Quest game
- Significant savings: a similar traditional live launch event would have cost five times as much

Building Deeper Customer Relationships and Loyalty

We have seen in the IBM and Cisco case studies that social media can be used to drive thought leadership, generate leads and launch products effectively. The social web can also be used post-purchase for ongoing customer nurturing and relationship building and the evaluation of customer satisfaction and loyalty.

In the post-purchase marketing phase, effective social media programs provide the tools that make it easy to allow brand advocates to convey positive messages to others. Links can be created to customer reference materials where satisfied customers tell positive stories that are disseminated across select social channels frequently visited by customers and prospects. Ways to drive deeper engagement and loyalty include:

- Provide tools to measure progress and ongoing value delivered toward customers' key performance indicators
- Allow peer-to-peer problem solving and post sale support
- Manage advocacy, reference and community-building programs
- Work with sales to monitor and nurture customer satisfaction as feedback is received from social media venues

The following case study explains how a technology consulting company set up a successful user community to solidify customer relations and enhance loyalty.

Case Study: CSC WikonnecT

CSC set up an online community for its insurance industry clients. Launched in September 2008, WikonnecT³ helps CSC clients in the insurance industry get the latest product updates and collaborate in real-time. Clients and CSC employees have a collaborative space where they can solve problems together on a 24x7 basis.

Although CSC's insurance industry clients compete against one another, they work together on issues such as regulatory requirements and business and technology standards.

Members of the WikonnecT community can:

- Interact around the clock with peers and CSC
- Access client support sites
- Get product information
- Rate new software enhancements and deliveries
- Voice opinions on topical issues through quick polling and blogs

The site meets the needs of CSC's diverse client base of property and casualty carriers and life insurance and annuities companies. When the site launched, specialized user communities quickly sprang up, and within the first nine months, WikonnecT counted more than 7,000 registered users from nearly 500 companies. The site boasts more than 100 interest-based communities.

³<http://www.slideshare.net/petra1400/case-study-highprofile-virtual-viral-visual-product-launch-strategy-from-cisco-asr-9000> and <http://www.slideshare.net/lasandra5/building-a-community-with-social-media-and-web-20-part-ii>

⁴http://www.csc.com/features/stories/30338-social_network_fosters_customer_collaboration



Conclusion

The current difficult economic climate, combined with the social shift in marketing, is driving both B2B technology buyers and marketers into the social media world. Needing better information to make the best possible decisions, IT buyers are increasingly turning to the social web to find it.

Marketers want to be where their customers are across the social web, while simultaneously needing to reduce costs, increase efficiency and demonstrate greater return on their marketing investment. Now is the time for marketers to move beyond experimental use of social media tactics and focus on strategic social media programs that are integrated into their overall marketing plans. With the right approach, insights gained through a strong research program and solid strategies, marketers can take advantage of the fundamental shift toward social media in IT marketing. Our case studies show that B2B technology marketers who incorporate social media into their marketing programs can harvest impressive results – often with significant cost savings and always with deeper engagement.



About Us

Digital Influence Group

Digital Influence Group is a digital marketing firm that helps companies leverage the power of social media to generate business results: sell products or services, build customer relationships, and connect with key stakeholders and partners.

As an increasingly important element of an integrated marketing strategy, we use social media to cultivate rich online experiences around your brand and products to drive stronger emotional connection, deeper engagement, and preference. Building experiences for the long-term, we constantly measure and optimize all that we do. For more information, go to www.digitalinfluencegroup.com.

Racepoint Group

Racepoint Group is an award-winning global public relations agency that harnesses the power of the new communications landscape to drive results for our clients. We do transformative communications for companies, communities, causes and countries that are making a difference in their markets or in the world. For more information, go to www.racepointgroup.com.