

The MOST POWERFUL BRAND *on* EARTH

*How to Transform Teams, Empower Employees,
Integrate Partners, and Mobilize Customers
to Beat the Competition in
Digital and Social Media*



CHRIS BOUDREAUX • SUSAN F. EMERICK

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Praise for *The Most Powerful Brand on Earth*

“Social business is a complex undertaking that can overwhelm even the most seasoned executive. By focusing on people and processes, Chris and Susan get to the core of what social business is: people connecting with people in an organized way.”

—Scott Monty, Global Head of Social Media, Ford Motor Company

“We are fortunate to be living through the most important communications revolution in human history. The ramifications of real-time communications—instantly connecting every human on earth with every other human on earth—are even more important than the invention of moveable type and the printing press more than 500 years ago. However, most organizations aren’t set up to communicate in the ways that buyers demand. In their book, Chris and Susan share how you can reach people with the valuable information people want to consume and are eager to share—and how that will brand your organization as one worthy of doing business with.”

—David Meerman Scott, marketing strategist and bestselling author of *The New Rules of Marketing and PR*

“While creating fans and advocates is the goal for many brands, you can’t get there without having engaged employees who understand the value of your fans and how to build relationships with your most passionate customers. *The Most Powerful Brand on Earth* shows you exactly how to do this. Susan and Chris give you the exact blueprint and steps necessary to create a more engaged and socially active employee base. This is critical for cultivating fans and advocates online, and this book shows you exactly how it’s done.”

—Mack Collier, author of *Think Like a Rock Star: How to Create Social Media and Marketing Strategies That Turn Customers Into Fans*

“Business has changed. And change is hard. This book helps you create an authentically social brand in the wake of huge shifts in business.”

—Ann Handley, coauthor of *Content Rules: How to Create Killer Blogs, Podcasts, Videos, Ebooks, Webinars (and More) That Engage Customers and Ignite Your Business*

“Social business and enterprise social networks now play a key role in changing how we work, where we work, when we work, and even why we work. Chris and Susan’s book shows how these trends change the workforce and chronicles the impact to brands. This step-by-step guide tells you how to take your organization to the next level.”

—R. “Ray” Wang, Principal Analyst and CEO, Constellation Research, Inc.

“Fundamental to moving from ‘doing social’ to ‘being social’ for a brand is recognizing that people are the channel. Susan and Chris clearly put their deep, real-world experience to work and articulate how to empower the people behind the brand—your employees and partners—on social media. This book covers the why, what, and how with clear examples and actionable next steps. Must read!”

—Ragy Thomas, CEO of Sprinklr

“Today’s true leaders are not just the ones who create the best products, but also the ones who breed new generations of leaders, unleash the power of their employees, and empower organic advocacy. In the social era, advocacy is where the influence is. Pick up this book and learn how to become the most powerful brand on earth.”

—Ekaterina Walter, cofounder and CMO of BRANDERATI, *Wall Street Journal* bestselling author of *Think Like Zuck: The Five Business Secrets of Facebook’s Improbably Brilliant CEO Mark Zuckerberg*

“Social media are not just a collection of digital marketing tactics. They are the way a growing percentage of clients and prospects find the information they need to solve their business problems. Connecting your best experts to the clients and prospects with whom you want to develop a relationship is not optional. You either do it well or get left behind by competitors who do it better than you. If you really want to learn how to do it well, read this book.”

—James Mathewson, author of *Audience, Relevance, and Search: Targeting Web Audiences with Relevant Content* and the forthcoming *Outside-In Marketing: Using Big Data to Drive Content Marketing*

“*The Most Powerful Brand on Earth* offers communicators, marketers, and executives a thoughtful and complete understanding of the implications for their companies when it comes to activating and enabling a social workforce.”

—Ethan McCarty, Director, Enterprise Social Strategy and Programs, IBM

“I’ve had the pleasure of working with both Susan and Chris for years, and have always considered them two of the real leaders in social media—read this book to find out why. Every company wants to unlock the formula of unleashing their employees and customers in social media on behalf of its brand. Unless you’ve figured it out yourself, you need this book.”

—Mike Moran, author of *Do It Wrong Quickly*

“Brand influence has reached a nexus of Darwinian change, and *The Most Powerful Brand on Earth* is the guide for the evolved to succeed and thrive as a new species in the global business ecosystem, thanks to Ms. Emerick and Mr. Boudreaux.”

—Rawn Shah, author of *Social Networking for Business*; Forbes.com blogger: Connected Business column

The Most Powerful Brand on Earth

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The Most Powerful Brand on Earth

How to Transform Teams, Empower Employees,
Integrate Partners, and Mobilize Customers to
Beat the Competition in Digital and Social Media

CHRIS BOUDREAUX
AND
SUSAN F. EMERICK



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From Susan: To my loving husband, Mark, who has stood by me through all of life's opportunities and challenges with unwavering support. And to my beautiful daughters, Mary and Grace, may you come to realize that with passion, dedication, and hard work anything is possible—always stay true to yourself and follow your dreams.

From Chris: To the most important people in my life: Zachary and Caroline.

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PREFACE

Brands that empower employees and customers generate significantly greater awareness and revenues while also decreasing the cost of marketing, selling, and customer service. However, employees must engage in public, real-time conversations. And most people are not professional communicators.

Enabling employees and partners in modern business requires new skills, business processes, governance, measurement, and infrastructure. In addition, leaders must learn new ways of managing risk while helping employees build and manage external relationships in real time. Nearly every industry is affected, and this book provides frameworks, guidelines, and case studies for people to navigate the change for their organization.

How This Book Is Organized

Chapter 1, Web of Trust: The Case for the Social Work Force, explains why a brand should consider empowering employees and partners in social media. We provide data from a wide range of sources to explain how (1) permanent changes in human communication are making online advocacy a critical priority; (2) people trust people, now more than ever; and (3) your brand's official communicators cannot do it alone.

Chapter 2, Help Your People Do Well, explains how to help your people create relationships and engagement that create business value. Specifically, we show how to plan the roles and skills you will need, then, how to attract, onboard, support, and measure the people whom you empower in social media.

Chapter 3, Influence: It's Complicated, explains (1) how the nature of online influence is often misunderstood; (2) how influence works online; and (3) reasonable expectations for how a brand can create and leverage online influence.

Chapter 4, The Power to Sway: Helping Employees Build Advocacy Online, provides a proven framework to plan, execute, manage, and measure

the development and optimization of relationships with online influencers through employees and partners.

Chapter 5, You Will Measure New Things in New Ways, gives you a framework for measuring (1) business outcomes; (2) the performance of your people; and (3) the performance of your social empowerment program.

Chapter 6, Safety and Security, describes the security, privacy, and regulatory issues that brands must resolve to ensure that employees, the brand, and other stakeholders are safe and secure when employees and partners engage in social media on behalf of the brand.

Chapter 7, How to Begin, explains how to get the support you will need from leaders, program participants, and other stakeholders in your organization. The chapter includes (1) how to build a business case for this kind of program; (2) how to align your program to the goals of the executives who will fund or support you; (3) how to use pilots to prove the concept and build support; and (4) how to use early adopters.

Chapter 8, Build Your Team, details the team that you will need in order to run a program that delivers business value through employees and partners in social media.

Chapter 9, Manage the Journey, explains the role of culture in this kind of program and how you can structure your strategy and your program to succeed within your organization's culture. Culture and change management will make or break your program, so the chapter also provides a proven framework for managing the change journey that your organization and your people will undergo.

Finally, **Chapter 10, The Future of the Social Work Force**, examines emerging or slowly evolving trends that will affect social empowerment programs five to ten years in the future.

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Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much. —Helen Keller

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Chris Boudreaux helps large brands transform their business operations for ROI through social and digital media. He also led development of social media offerings and served as a solution architect for social media solutions at a global management and technology consultancy. In past years, he led online product and market strategy efforts at multiple global technology brands.

Chris began blogging for business in 2005. In 2008, he developed his first Facebook app and created

SocialMediaGovernance.com to help organizations get the most from their social media efforts. In 2011, he coauthored *The Social Media Management Handbook* (Wiley & Sons), and his studies of social media have been referenced by corporations, governments, industry analysts, and nonprofit organizations around the world.

He also led business development and marketing at two online start-ups, including a digital advertising start-up acquired by Glam Media.

Prior to his career in digital and social media, Chris was an officer in the U.S. Navy, where he flew helicopters and led the anti-submarine warfare division aboard USS Yorktown.

Chris holds an M.B.A. and an M.S. in computer science from the University of Chicago, a master of aeronautical science from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, and a B.S. in management from Tulane University.



Susan F. Emerick leads global enterprise social business programs for IBM, a company with more than 430,000 employees. A passionate marketer, adjunct professor, and speaker, Susan enjoys navigating the redefinition of marketing “as we know it” driven by emerging technology and big data. She consults with marketers globally about applying social and digital media to foster long-term, high-value relationships with clients, prospects, partners, colleagues, and communities.

Beginning in 2008, Susan helped to establish the social insights practice at IBM to continuously apply social listening insights to marketing planning and social engagement strategies. As a result, IBM was awarded the 2010 SAMMY award for Best Socialized Business.

In 2011, Susan was named to the elite iMedia Top 25 Internet Marketing Leaders and Innovators, an annual list of cutting-edge creative professionals, strategists, and technology innovators. As an active member of the Word of Mouth Marketing Association Research and Measurement Council, Susan uses her expertise and creative curiosity to influence the standards and principles of word-of-mouth research and measurement.

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Web of Trust: The Case for the Social Work Force

“Before a revolution, everyone says it’s impossible. Afterward, everyone says it was inevitable.”

— Anonymous

Permanent changes in human communication are making trust-building and online advocacy critical priorities for brands. Trust in traditional media is declining while trust in social media is increasing. In addition, people trust information and official corporate channels less, while trusting employees more. The ways that brands connect with customers must change.

Social media are all about people and relationships—not brands, not technology. People.

While most of us understand that online advocacy drives sales, many people do not realize that *sales correlate strongly with the number of people who advocate for a brand, not the number of online posts or messages advocating for a brand.*

This is a critical point to understand: if you measure social media performance in terms of posts or messages or conversations, your decisions are potentially off track. If you really want to use social media effectively, you need to think in terms of *people*. Ultimately, social media should help your brand develop relationships with people.

And the most important strategy question that we must ask ourselves is, “How will our brand effectively and efficiently nurture relationships with people in social media?”

After all, relationships require effort. They aren’t always predictable. And they typically require at least two parties to give and take together.

In many cases, it is far more natural for your customers and other audiences to develop relationships with your employees and your business partners rather than with brand-owned teams or channels. Why? Here are a few reasons.

First, we all tend to form relationships with people we perceive to be like ourselves. When you expose the diversity of your employees to your audiences, you dramatically increase the chance that your audience will find and establish a relationship with someone they perceive to be like themselves.

Second, each of your employees has a certain expertise. Different people understand different parts of your products, for example. People trust experts, and they want to hear from those experts when they have a question or a need for information.

Third, a brand is not a person. Brands do not empathize. They do not feel passion. But people do.

Ultimately, brands that empower their employees in social media give a tremendous gift to their audiences in the form of expertise, diversity, and passion.

But empowering employees and partners in social media is not simple. You have to do more than write a policy, publish training, and give people permission to engage. In reality, including more people requires a different approach.

For example, when you add a large number of employees to your social media engagement, you can easily overwhelm your audience with repetitive content, producing a negative experience.

As another example, we have found that traditional PR approaches to influence outreach simply do not work when you start adding lots of employees and partners to the process. The tools are inadequate, and it takes new processes and skills to coordinate development of external relationships across a large number of employees.

If you want to empower employees to build advocacy for your brand, you'll need to provide a support structure—just as you would with any other organizational capability. In addition, large-scale empowerment in social media usually requires critical change management and cultural support, especially when your employees already have a full-time job. After all, most of your employees are not professional communicators.

And this is not just about your employees. Different industries use different roles to communicate with the market. Some brands use channel partners or suppliers. Insurers use agents in local neighborhoods or contact centers; technology companies use channel partners and sales people; pharmaceutical brands use sales people and researchers; and so on.

In the past few years, some people have suggested that brands should hire journalists to create compelling content on behalf of the brand. And we believe that many brands could bolster their marketing and communications organizations in that way.

However, that approach only goes so far and, in fact, simply will not scale to the levels needed by brands today. Specifically, it is far easier to train experts to publish than it is to train journalists to be experts. As stated by Shel Holtz, Principal at Holtz Communication + Technology, “It’s important to understand that SMEs-as-brand-journalists is *part* of the future. Great writers will always have value and companies will always be able to use them. But the idea of hiring writers to write about areas of expertise that are alien to them makes a lot less sense than teaching people who are *already* experts how to write well.”¹

Too many social media “strategies” today focus on tools that will be implemented; impressions, friends, or followers; or campaign goals they will

1. Holtz, Shel. “Subject Matter Experts Will Play a Big Part in the Future of Brand Journalism.” 23 October 2012. <http://bit.ly/Holtz-Experts>.

achieve. Too few social media strategies specify the relationships they intend to nurture and the business value that the organization expects to accrue from those relationships. We hope this book gives you the tools to change that within your organization.

In the remainder of this book, we explain how you can create a systematic program that empowers your employees and business partners to leverage their professional expertise and skills to build a web of trust that supports and protects your brand.

We show you how to select, train, and retain them. We also show you how to navigate the complicated world of influence and how to protect employees and your brand from online threats to privacy and security. We explain how you can build a program team that suits the scale of your organization—be it large or small—and how to evaluate the readiness of your organization as well as measure the contribution of employees engaged in social media. And we show you how to bring executives on board so you can get the funding and resources that you need to succeed.

Finally, we discuss emerging trends that will make the social employee a basic fact of life and a requirement to compete for almost all brands.

If you believe nothing else, believe this: online advocacy drives sales. And the most cost-efficient way to create sustainable online advocacy is to empower your employees. The remainder of this chapter explains why.

The Source of Brand Power Today

Online advocacy drives business. When advocacy increases, sales increase (with a 30- to 60-day lag). When advocacy decreases, sales also decrease. In fact, 53 percent of changes in sales can be attributed to changes in the number of people advocating for a brand online.²

The same holds true for any action that you want people to take, whether it's buying, voting, or applying for a job: when more people online endorse an action, more people are likely to take the action—online and offline.

2. Northwestern University and MotiveQuest. "Remarkable Implications: The Correlation between Online Advocacy and Offline Sales." Chicago, IL: Northwestern University, November 2011.

People Need to Hear a Message More Times to Believe It

But advocacy isn't easy to create. In fact, people are growing more skeptical in general and harder to convince of anything.

As of 2012, 63 percent of people need to hear something three to five times to believe it.³ In 2011, it was 59 percent, so it increased by 4 points between 2011 and 2012. Simply stated, people require more repetition to believe any new message that they hear.

As Figure 1.1 shows, 72 percent of people need to hear something three or more times to believe it.

The trend holds true around the world. For example, in Japan, 82 percent of people need to hear something 3 or 4 times to believe it. So repetition

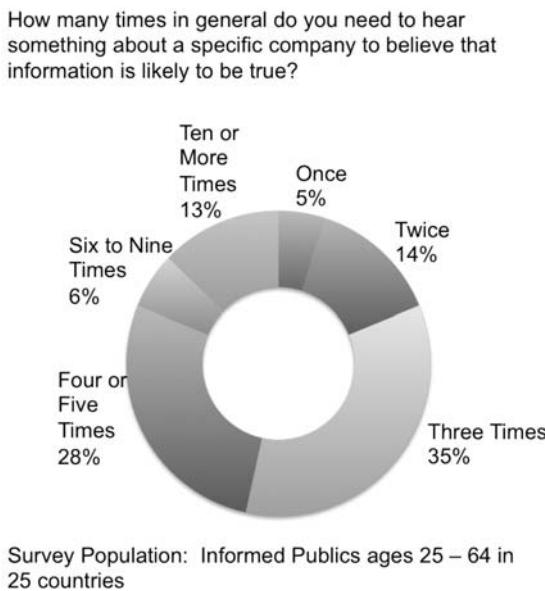


Figure 1.1 People need to hear information about your company three to five times to believe

Source: Edelman. "2012 Edelman Trust Barometer." <http://bit.ly/Edelman-2012>.

3. Edelman. "2012 Edelman Trust Barometer." <http://bit.ly/Edelman-2012>.

is key; if you want people to believe something, you probably need to tell them 3 to 5 times. Maybe more.

Traditional Media Are Losing Share to Social Media

At the same time, the McKinsey Global Institute reports that radio and television lost their shares of American media consumption, while social media gained significantly.⁴ In fact, more than one billion people spend an average of seven hours per week on Facebook alone.⁵

In addition, business decision makers, just like consumers, increasingly turn to social and professional networks as a primary source of news, information, ratings, and reviews of products and services.

In addition to spending more time engaged in social media, people are also trusting more in social media. While traditional media sources such as news are still the most trusted, trust in social media increased by 75 percent. Trust in other online sources, made up of search engines and news/RSS feeds, increased by 18 percent from 2011 to 2012 (see Figure 1.2).

Nielsen found similar results in its 2011 Global Trust in Advertising report⁶, which surveyed more than 28,000 Internet respondents in 56 countries (see Figure 1.3). In that survey, 92 percent of consumers around the world said they trust media such as recommendations from friends and family above all other forms of advertising—an increase of 18 percent since 2007.

According to the Nielsen survey, online consumer reviews are the second most trusted source of brand information and messaging, with 70 percent of global consumers indicating they trust messages in online reviews, an increase of 15 percent in 4 years.

In a survey of 1,500 Dutch consumers, nearly two-thirds (65 percent) said they find information posted on social media to be reliable, and 40 percent said that they find posts made on social media to be trustworthy. In addition, frequent social media users believe that financial posts on social media are just as reliable as information published in traditional online media, such as news sites and newspaper Web sites.⁷

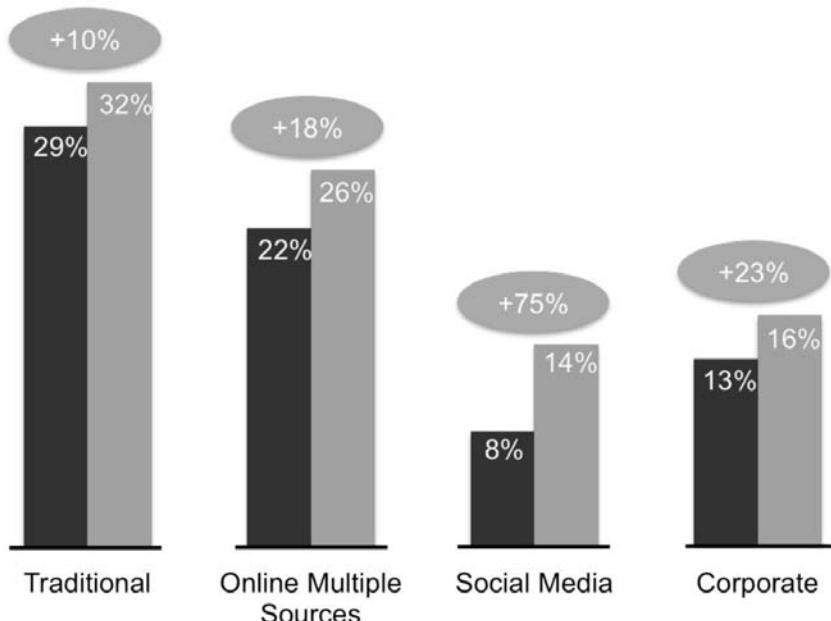
4. "Wordy Goods." *The Economist online*. 22 August 2012. <http://bit.ly/WordyGoods>.

5. Gartner, Inc. "Gartner Forecast: Social Media Revenue, Worldwide, 2011–2018." Stamford, CT: Gartner, Inc., 25 June 2012.

6. Nielsen. "Global Trust in Advertising and Brand Messages." 10 April 2012. <http://bit.ly/NielsenGlobalTrust>.

7. "Impact of Social Media 2012." ING Bank, Social Embassy and InSites Consulting. 2012.

How much do you trust each of the following places as a source of information about a company?



"Trust a Great Deal"; Informed Publics ages 25 – 64 in 20 countries.

Figure 1.2 People now trusting multiple media

Source: Nielsen Global Trust in Advertising Survey, Q3 2011.

Although nearly half of consumers around the world say they trust television, magazine, and newspaper ads, confidence in each of those media declined significantly between 2009 and 2011. In fact, confidence in television fell by 24 percent, confidence in magazine ads fell by 20 percent, and confidence in newspaper ads fell by 25 percent in just 2 years. According to the advertising agency Edelman, in France and Germany, trust in television news and newspapers fell by ten or more points. China saw double-digit decreases in television as a trusted source, plunging from 74 to 43 percent. Newspapers in that country didn't fare well either (down by 20 points to 34 percent).

But trust in social media jumped: microblogging sites and social-networking sites went from virtual distrust at just 1 percent each to being

To what extent do you trust the following forms of advertising?

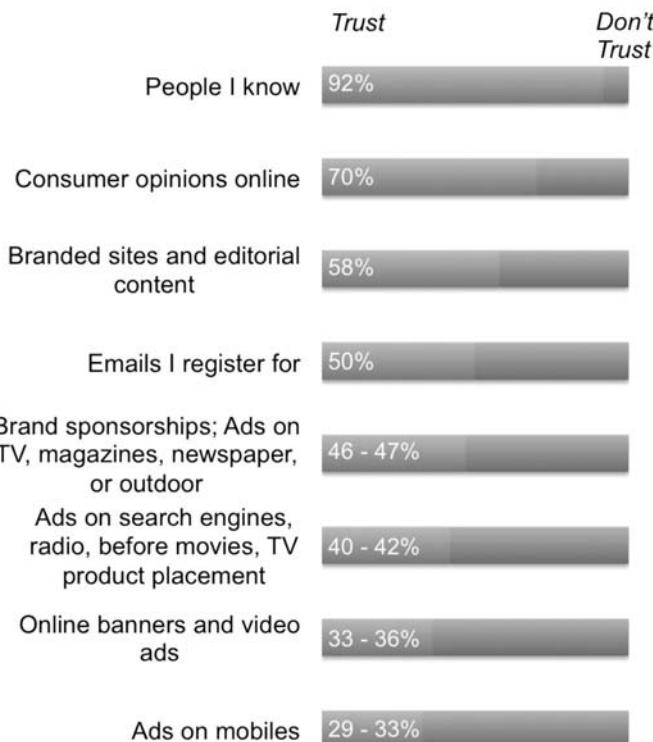


Figure 1.3 *Trust in different forms of advertising*

Source: Nielsen Global Trust in Advertising Survey, Q3 2011.

greatly trusted by 25 percent and 21 percent, respectively—a likely reflection of the rapid growth in social media usage within China.

As Liz Bullock, Director of Social Media & Community at Dell, describes, “After seven years of work in the field, we have concluded that social media impacts every aspect of the customer experience and life cycle in positive ways, and in some respects, impacts the customer life cycle more than any other medium.”⁸

Even our traditional source of news—journalists—relies on social media to get their information. In surveying more than 613 journalists in 16

8. Bullock, Liz. Personal interview. April 2013.

countries across North America, Asia and the Pacific, and Europe in April and May 2012⁹, Oriella PR Network discovered that more than half of journalists (55 percent) use social channels such as Twitter and Facebook to find stories from known sources, and 43 percent verified stories using these tools. Further, 26 percent of respondents said that they used social media to find stories from sources they did not know, and almost one in five (19 percent) verified work in progress from sources unknown to them. The figures are even higher in the United Kingdom, with 75 percent of journalists using social media to research news from known sources.

Scott Kirsner, innovation columnist at *The Boston Globe* and author of *Fans, Friends and Followers: Building an Audience and a Creative Career in the Digital Age*, says, “I listen better to people directly involved than people paid to pitch. In-person connections are where it’s at. I want to see companies in their natural habitat: when they innovate, not when they have a PR agency.”¹⁰

Social Media Impact Search Engine Results

And if you care about your company’s placement in search engines such as Google, Bing, or Yahoo!, you need to understand that social media have a growing impact on where you land.

In 2010, Matt Cutts of Google gave the first official statement that Google uses links in Twitter and Facebook as a signal in placing search results.¹¹ At the time, no one was sure how social media really impacted search engine results.

On June 7, 2012, SearchMetrics published analyses of search results from Google for 10,000 popular keywords and 300,000 Web sites to determine the attributes that correlate¹² with a high Google ranking.¹³ The chart in Figure 1.4 shows the attributes that most correlate with high ranking in Google search results.

9. Oriella PR Network. “The Influence Game: How News Is Sourced and Managed Today. Oriella PR Network Global Digital Journalism Study 2012.” June 2012. <http://bit.ly/InfluenceGame>.

10. Scott, David Meerman. “Get Famous Fast: Helping Entrepreneurs Win at Media Relations.” WebInkNow.com. 19 November 2012. <http://bit.ly/Kirsner>.

11. Google Webmaster Help. “Does Google use data from social sites in ranking?” 17 December 2010. <http://bit.ly/GooMaster>. Video.

12. Correlation in this case means Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient, defined at: <http://bit.ly/SpearmanCo>.

13. SearchMetrics. “Facebook and Twitter Shares Closely Linked with High Google Search Rankings.” 7 June 2012. www.searchmetrics.com.

Most Influential Factors*Spearman Correlation: 0.25 – 0.37*

- Facebook Shares
- Backlinks
- Facebook Total
- Facebook Comments
- Facebook Likes
- Tweets

Second-Most Influential Factors*Spearman Correlation: 0.10 – 0.15*

- % backlinks rel = nofollow
- Keyword in Domain Name
- % Backlinks With Keyword

Third-Most Influential Factors*Spearman Correlation: 0.03 – 0.05*

- % Backlinks With Stopword
- Image Count
- Keyword in URL
- Keyword in Description

Figure 1.4 Social media impact search engine results

Source: SearchMetrics. “Facebook and Twitter Shares Closely Linked with High Google Search Rankings”. 7 June 2012. www.searchmetrics.com.

At the time of this study, social media created five of the top six factors that correlate with search engine rank.

So, if you want people to take a certain action, you need to create advocacy; and to convince people of something new, you likely need to give them the message three to five times. And you will need to use social media to do it.

In the past ten years, the world in which advertisers crafted brand messages to capture the imagination of a mass market and then broadcast those messages via one-way channels disappeared.

But that is not all. Oh, no. That is not all.¹⁴

14. Seuss, Dr. *The Cat in the Hat*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957.

Respondents who replied “extremely credible” or “very credible” to the following question:

If you heard information about a company from one of these people, how credible would that information be?

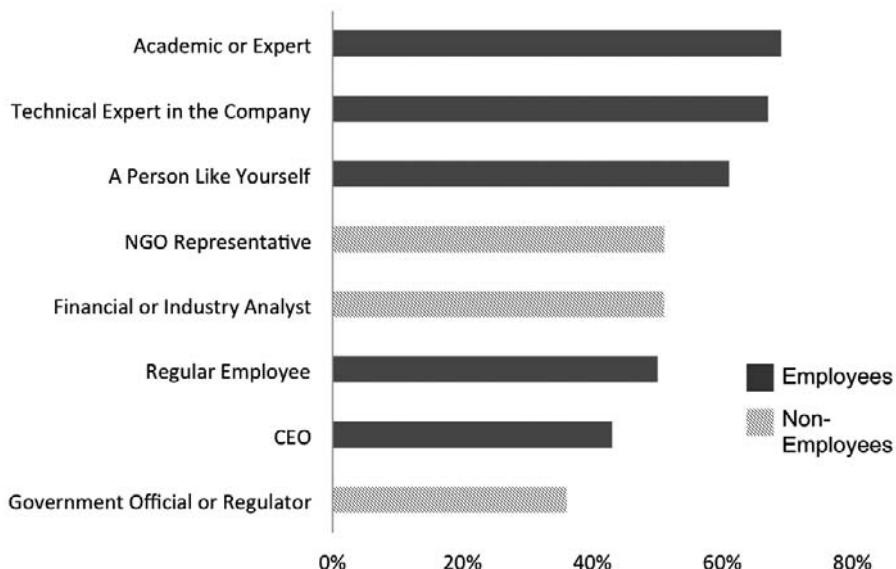


Figure 1.5 Credibility of sources for information about a brand

Source: Edelman. “2012 Edelman Trust Barometer.” <http://bit.ly/Edelman-2012>.

People Trust Employees More than Official Brand Sources

Although trust determines where people buy, people don’t trust brands or CEOs as much as they used to. Instead, people trust employees. In fact, people trust any type of employee more than the CEO. See the chart in Figure 1.5 from the 2012 Edelman Trust Barometer.

In one example of how this can really impact a business, IBM found that online traffic generated by IBM experts in social media converted seven times more frequently than traffic generated by other IBM sources.¹⁵

15. Emerick, Susan. “IBM Select Social Eminence Program, 3Q 2012 Measurement Framework Pilot.” Detroit, MI: IBM, September 2012.

As stated by Scott Monty of Ford Motor Company:

We know that word of mouth is the most powerful method of marketing, as raw and uncontrolled as it is. We also know that having advocates who can represent the brand through their own passion points is crucial. What better advocates does a company have than its own employees, who are usually engaged in word-of-mouth marketing, whether or not they realize it? Harnessing that enthusiasm and knowledge, and specifically encouraging and empowering employees to apply what they've always done to social media, has to be the foundation of any company's efforts if they want to survive.¹⁶

In the words of Scott Roen, Vice President of OPEN Forum and new product development at American Express, “Businesses may not have supreme power, but they can work with those that do, the individual influencer.”¹⁷

So, if you want to convince people of something, you need to do the following.

- Tell them three to five times—maybe more.
- Use social media.
- Let your employees do the talking.

Your Brand’s Official Communicators Cannot Do It Alone

In our experience, roughly ninety percent of the posts within most online conversations mention no brand. Instead, most of the posts discuss the category and the motivations that drive people within the category.¹⁸

For example, in online conversations about saving for college, more than 90 percent of the conversation mentions no brand whatsoever. Also, in the online conversation about diets, more than 90 percent of the conversation mentions no brand names. In any conversation, you can typically expect that less than 10 percent of the conversation will mention any brand name.

16. Monty, Scott. Personal interview. February 2013.

17. Dubois, Lou. “Why Social Influence Matters to Business.” 31 March 2011. Inc.com.

18. Northwestern University and MotiveQuest. “Remarkable Implications: The Correlation Between Online Advocacy and Offline Sales.” November 2011.

Can your dedicated marketing and communications staff keep up with all of that? Probably not, for two reasons: (1) you can't produce enough content, and (2) in social media, people—not brands—are the channel.

You Can't Produce Enough Content

In 2012, author and marketing consultant Mark Schaefer¹⁹ wrote:

Here is the sneaky little secret of content marketing. You don't need to have the best product or service to win. You don't need to be the best marketer to win. You don't even have to create the best content to win. You just need to be first and overwhelming.²⁰

But most brands struggle to keep up. According to the Content Marketing Institute (CMI) and MarketingProfs, 29 percent of North American marketers surveyed said their biggest content marketing challenge is producing enough content.²¹ That challenge—up from 20 percent of respondents in 2011—supplanted concern over content quality, which took a big drop from 41 percent of respondents in 2011 to 18 percent in 2012. Overall, the report showed that almost two-thirds of B2B content marketers find it difficult to produce enough content, while about half are still struggling with producing the kind of content that engages.

In Social Media, People Are the Channel

Your employees have connections that your brand does not. Think about the total connections your brand has on all the social networks where you have brand-owned accounts. How many connections does your brand have? Now, think about all of your employees who are active in social media. How many connections do your employees have? And who has more in total: your brand, or your employees?

19. Mark Schaefer was named a Power 50 social media influencer by *Forbes Magazine*, a Power 150 marketing blogger by *Advertising Age* magazine, published two books on social media, one of which earned the Book of the Year award from B2B magazine.

20. Schaefer, Mark. "The Ultimate Content Marketing Challenge." 6 November 2012. <http://bit.ly/ContChallenge>.

21. Pulizzi, Bob, and Handley, Ann. "B2B Content Marketing: 2013 Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends—North America." Marketing Profs and Content Marketing Institute, 2013. <http://bit.ly/B2BBench>.

For nearly every brand, the employees have far more connections online. They always will. Why? Because, in social media, people are the channel, not brands.

Dion Hinchcliffe of Dachis Group said it best in our interview, declaring, “In social media, companies don’t have much social capital. People do.”²²

The IBM example on page 11 demonstrates that content in social media is far more effective when it flows through real people—not brand-owned, officially logo’ed, social accounts.

But you can’t just blast your corporate messages through your employees’ social media and expect your audience to engage. In fact, it takes much more than compelling creative, and clever messaging to get your audiences to advocate for you; it’s about relationships, not transactions.

Further, a brand is not a person, and a brand-owned social media account is not the same as a personal social media account. If your content is to be effective, then, when it passes through your employees, it will change in at least the following three ways.

- First, your people will modify the content to fit what they know about their audience, which will be slightly different than what you know about the larger audience that you target.
- Second, they will modify the content’s language or form to make it unique, such that the audience is not overwhelmed by repetition.
- Finally, your people will modify the content to fit their personal style and how they engage their audience.

To understand why, let’s explore the evolution of music.

Your Content Must Change to Fit the People Who Channel It

David Byrne of Talking Heads published a book in 2012 in which he explains that music evolves to fill the space where it is performed.²³ In general,

22. Hinchcliffe, Dion. Personal interview. November 2012.

23. “Byrne, David: How Architecture Helped Music Evolve.” February 2010. <http://bit.ly/12rRaj6>. Video.

writers and performers evolve the style of their music to fit the venues where they usually perform. For example, Byrne explained that the music he wrote that sounded great in the nightclub CBGB didn't sound quite right when he performed it in Carnegie Hall. In CBGB, the audience yelled, danced, and fell down, and there was very little reverberation in the room. Therefore, the music that sounded best at CBGB was loud, with clear rhythms. When venues like Carnegie Hall came into prominence, audiences were expected to be very quiet, and the room created significant reverberation. Therefore, the music was able to support extreme dynamics; quiet parts could be heard; and the music did not need to be as rhythmic.

Have you noticed that we often refer to different online social properties as venues? And have you noticed that different types of content tend to prevail in each social venue?

In general, the kind of content that works best in these different venues is very different than the kinds of content that worked well in traditional online venues. In social media, the venue makes the content evolve into something that works well within that venue. Just like music evolved to fit each new venue, for as long as music has existed.

Gregorian chants would not be successful in CBGB, and marketer-written, copy-pasted tweets will not work when simply passed through employee social media accounts.

As David Meerman Scott explained in his WebInkNow blog:

[S]uccess using the different forms of online content is evolutionary to the way the content is consumed. The best content evolves to fill the new media (such as blogs, YouTube videos, Tweets, photo sharing, and the like). Each new way to create content means a new form of content is best suited for the media.²⁴

Of course, the critical difference between social venues and traditional online venues is the fact that people are inherent in the venue. Actually, people *are* the venue.

24. Scott, David Meerman. "How Content Works." 26 September 2012. <http://bit.ly/ContentWorks>.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 | Permanent changes in human communication make online advocacy a critical priority |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">More than one billion people spend an average seven hours per month in Facebook alone¹63% of people need to hear something 3-4 times to believe it, an increase of 4 points from 2011 to 2012.²Costs of digital production are so low that any employee can establish a global audience, on their own53% of changes in sales can be attributed to changes in the number of people advocating for a brand online.³Customers and potential customers can advocate for a brand at every stage of the purchase funnel. | |
| 2 | Online advocacy drives sales. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">Trust determines where people buy.People trust people, now more than ever.Trust in social media grew 75% between 2011 and 2012.²When hearing information about a company, the most trusted sources from within the company are (1) a technical expert in the company and (2) 'a person like yourself'.²Social media make it easier for all of us to access opinions of people like us, thereby increasing our reliance on people like us | |
| 3 | Your brand's official communicators cannot do it alone |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">One-third of all marketers and two-thirds of B2B marketers feel challenged to produce enough content90 percent of online conversations are not about brands at all—they are about categories and the motivations that drive people within those categories⁴In conversations about any brand, the brand typically creates less than 10% of the conversationEmployees have connections that the brand does notEmployees who are recognized as thought leaders can decrease the costs of engaging external audiencesBrands already have the most difficult asset to develop: enthusiastic and knowledgeable employees | |

[1] Source: Gartner Forecast: Social Media Revenue, Worldwide, 2011 – 2018. Gartner. June 25, 2012.

[2] Source: 2012 Edelman Trust Barometer. <http://www.edelman.com/trust>.

[3] Source: Remarkable Implications: The Correlation Between Online Advocacy and Offline Sales.

[4] Source: "Beyond the Dashboard: Remarkable Implications. The Correlation Between Online Advocacy and Offline Sales". MotiveQuest. November 2011.

Figure 1.6 Summary of reasons why brands should empower employees in social media

Your Next Steps

1. Understand the extent to which your brand is trusted relative to other brands in your industry.
2. Determine the potential impacts on your brand if your competitors empower their employees and partners in social media.
3. Determine the areas of your business that might benefit from more socially empowered employees.
4. Identify programs in which your brand plans to invest, which could benefit from socially empowered employees; understand the results they plan to achieve, and how socially empowered employees could help to advance the programs' goals.
5. Determine the extent to which you use social media to develop relationships with audiences, versus simply broadcasting brand messages in social media.
6. Determine the extent to which journalists engage your brand as a source of news about your industry, not just news about your brand.
7. Determine the extent to which you are deliberately using social media to improve your brand performance in organic search results.
8. Determine how much value your brand could achieve by migrating investments from traditional paid media into socially empowered employees.

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