

OUTSMARTING SOCIAL MEDIA



Profiting in the Age of Friendship Marketing

EVAN BAILYN

Praise for *Outsmarting Social Media*

“Evan’s understanding of marketing psychology is impressive. Through the lens of social media, he makes key observations about how people search for information and why.”

—Richard Isaacson, Harvard-trained neurologist and associate professor of clinical neurology

“This book is eye-opening. It states, in simple terms, precisely how to dominate social media in your chosen field.”

—Dr. Stephen Gullo, national bestselling author and former Columbia University professor

“This book provides crucial insights and practical solutions for anyone looking to use social media as a platform to grow their business or nonprofit. It’s a must-read for anyone interested in seizing the immense opportunities made available by Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and all social platforms.”

—Darian Rodriguez Heyman, Editor, *Nonprofit Management 101: A Complete and Practical Guide for Leaders and Professionals*

“There are thousands of people running around calling themselves “social media experts.” The very fact that Evan has never done that speaks volumes. Evan lets his work on behalf of major-name clients do the talking for him.”

—Peter Shankman, founder of Help a Reporter Out, author, and marketing consultant

“If you have ever asked whether social media could help your your business reach potential customers, this book answers an enthusiastic “yes!” and then goes on to explain exactly how with imagination, ingenuity, and creativity. Evan Baylin provides a detailed understanding of the fast-changing online world of social networks and draws fearless predictions as to where it’s going and what it will mean to consumers and businesses.”

—Anne Kennedy, International Search Strategist and author of *Global Search Engine Marketing*

In *Outsmarting Social Media*, Evan Bailyn shines a laser beam on the new currency of the Internet. The new currency is friends helping friends decide what to do, buy, or try. Marketers, if you thought the Wild West was wild, this is wilder; saddle up and be prepared to ride at dawn.

—Roy Spence, Chairman of GSD&M and CEO of The Purpose Institute

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Profiting in the Age of
Friendship Marketing

EVAN BAILYN

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Indianapolis, Indiana 46240 USA

Outsmarting Social Media: Profiting in the Age of Friendship Marketing

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About the Author

Evan Bailyn is an Internet entrepreneur and author of *Outsmarting Google: SEO Secrets to Winning New Business* (Que Publishing, 2011, ISBN 9780789741035). Evan's web properties have been visited by more than 50 million people. After graduating from Columbia University in 2003, Evan taught himself about search engines, quickly discovering how to rank at the top of Google for any search term. He then established a network of education-related businesses, which he later sold.

In January 2006, he founded Cartoon Doll Emporium, one of the largest children's websites in the world. The company received an investment from Allen & Co. one year later, and by 2010, the company was sold.

Currently, Mr. Bailyn offers marketing services through his companies, First Page Sage and Good Media Co. Under his tutelage, clients have established the pre-dominant websites in their industries, become *New York Times* bestselling authors, and grown multimillion dollar product lines. His voice can be found on the social media pages of celebrities worldwide.

Mr. Bailyn has been interviewed on ABC News and Fox News and featured in the *New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Post*, *Crain's*, *Forbes*, and *Advertising Age*.

Dedication

To my wife Sasha–You inspire me every day.

To my big brother Brad–I couldn't have asked for a more capable and supportive partner.

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As the reader of this book, *you* are our most important critic and commentator. We value your opinion and want to know what we're doing right, what we could do better, what areas you'd like to see us publish in, and any other words of wisdom you're willing to pass our way.

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Introduction

I am not an author by trade. I'm an entrepreneur. For that reason, this book does not contain any highfalutin academic theory or smart-sounding tech jargon. Instead, it contains real, effective strategies that have made me and my clients millions of dollars and can do the same for your business. Every word of this book is based on years of being in the trenches, analyzing the algorithms and executive decisions at companies like Google, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. If used properly, this book can propel a person to the same level of knowledge as someone who eats, breathes, and sleeps social media. A truly creative mind can turn the information in this book into worldwide recognition for their brand.

Most companies that I've worked with have come to me with the same issue: They don't understand how to use social media. Well, using social media is fairly easy. You just need to have a genuine message for the world and start interesting conversations with your fans or followers. A greater challenge is building an audience. These same businesses, who have had tremendous exposure in the press, have never communicated with their customers directly. After working with my company, they were able to find the hundreds of thousands of people who would have loved to speak with them but didn't know they could. And better yet, they connected with new customers who noticed the attention they were getting and wanted to learn more about them. That's the beauty of the social Internet.

A good marketer is always a kind of social engineer, a beater of systems. It doesn't matter what the system is, or whether it's online or offline; they will find a way to get the advantage. They *always* do things ethically, but never take a rule at face value. There are some people who like to do things the safe way—take your time, spend a lot of money, and follow the road that many before you have taken. If you're one of those people, this book may not be for you. But if you are a person who is fascinated by the sheer power of social media as a marketing tool and are looking to leverage it for all it is worth, you're in for a good ride.

Beating a search engine or social network begins with what I call the Wild West Principle: There is always a place somewhere that is rich in gold yet has grown too quickly for its own good. Therefore, its rules have not had time to be tested, and it is ripe for mining. Google between 2006 and 2009 was very much a Wild West

for search engine optimizers. If you bought text-based links that pointed to your website, placing your keywords inside the text (for example: high heeled shoes), you could quickly reach the top of the search rankings. But by 2010, Google had fully blocked this technique, much to the chagrin of hundreds of companies who had used it to dominate the search listings. Even big businesses like JC Penney had been employing this strategy, and none were happy when Google ended the party.

But they should have expected it. That is how the Wild West works. There are booms and busts, and gold rush towns disappear overnight. The real question is: How much money did each company make before Google figured out how to turn the Wild West into a well-ordered society?

Some may be tempted to take advantage of a fledgling Wild West by scamming it. That's what hucksters have done to email over the years, setting up phishing schemes with fake stories about lottery wins and rich relatives in other countries. Unfortunately, many bright people have chosen to use their energy in this unethical manner. And sure, Wild Wests are wide open for them. But scamming—and in the context of the Internet, that means *spamming*—represents very short-term thinking. Spamming works for a little while and then gets you banned. Playing *within* the rules but stretching them a little bit is a far better course of action. The difference between the two is like the difference between holding up a saloon and starting a rival saloon next door that has better entertainment and stronger drinks. Both methods will make you money, but the latter will do far better for you in the long term, not to mention keep you out of trouble. In my opinion, it never makes sense to spam.

Social media, the subject of this book, is very much a Wild West. It probably will remain that way for the next few years, because it is so new and there is no concrete idea of how it will work yet. In the following chapters, I outline how you should be thinking about social media as it evolves, as well as the ways to use it to your economic advantage.

When writing this book, I was careful to create strategies that are likely to work not just today, but into the future. A lot of changes occur in the world of search and social media each month, but even more *doesn't* change. My theories and suggestions are based on this bedrock, the stuff that remains constant. Usually, that places my focus squarely on the things that drive revenue to companies like Google and Facebook. For example, we know that Facebook makes most of its money by serving small advertisements to its users. It is reasonable, then, to conclude that it will continue this program for a long time to come. That is why I have devoted a great deal of time, and a chapter of this book, to getting an advantage with Facebook ads. In contrast, it would not have made sense for me to meditate on Google Buzz, a social product that existed from 2010 to 2011, because Google never derived any real revenue from it.

Much of the information in this book may seem speculative to you, and that's because social media is still in its nascent phases. However, my theories are based

on a deep analysis of the companies pioneering the social age, statements the companies have made about future plans, and exclusive interviews with their current and past employees. I feel very confident that this book addresses most of the new products we'll see in the coming time.

If you are a marketer and are wondering whether this is the right book to be reading, ask yourself whether Google, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are important to your business. If they are, know that socializing the Web, in some form or another, is the biggest initiative that each of these companies is working on right now. Gaining an understanding of social media in its early stages will give you a tremendous advantage as it evolves to define the next phase of the Internet.

Here's the thing: We have reached the age of infinite information. More interesting things are produced on the Internet in a single day than you could consume in your lifetime. That's a problem Google, Facebook, Microsoft, and hundreds of other companies have been dealing with for years. But it used to be the goal.

Getting to the point where all the information we could ever want was at our fingertips was the great challenge of the first phase of the Internet. The next great challenge was organizing that information. Many companies offered us solutions. Yahoo gave us the portal—one place where you could check the weather, read the headlines, book a vacation, and buy a car. Search engines broke new ground when they offered us a way of sorting through every web page out there with one click. Blogs gave us the day's best content according to a single curator. Wikipedia gave us a group-edited, constantly updated, completely searchable encyclopedia.

Then we entered the third phase of the Internet, a time when social information became the center of our world. Twitter popularized the status update—a short report on what you are doing right now. Facebook redefined our social lives by allowing us to check in with everyone we've ever known, and took it a step further by defining the people in our lives by their likes and interests. Now we are swimming in a sea of information, not just about stuff, but about *us*, our unique circle of friends, and we've got more than we know what to do with. A new challenge is thus born: how to make use of so much seemingly useless data. Who will come along and slurp up millions of reports on what people had for breakfast, watched on TV, and thought about the latest political controversy, and give it back to us in a format we care about?

Both Google and Facebook are trying, and the stage is set for a clash of epic proportions between the Internet giants.

Indeed, the age we live in right now is one where our friends are soon to be the tastemakers in our online lives, the curators of all the information we care about. Whereas the holy grail of online marketing has always been a #1 spot on Google, the new environment necessitates that your company become a popular topic of discussion on social networks as well. The currency of the Internet is changing from one based on links—the symbol of trust in the eyes of search engines—to a

currency of likes, comments, pins, retweets, shares, and video responses. Simply put, virality is the new decider of business. Soon, we won't be looking for everything on Google as we do today. Instead, Google and Facebook will be actively suggesting things to us—often, things we never even knew we needed. Simply announce to the world that you have a cold, and you will find out that your colleague from work and your college roommate recommend Cold-eez, that your friend Danny likes an article about holistic cold remedies on WebMD.com, and that your mom is worried about you and wants you to come home.

While Google struggles to integrate these kinds of social recommendations into a platform that is slowly becoming a thing of the past—a traditional search engine—Facebook, the newer, cooler Internet giant, is at the cusp of technology, delivering social information directly to the profile page you keep open six hours per day, or better yet, through your mobile phone.

Indeed, the social search wars are on, and you, the consumer, need only sit back and watch. Before you know it, you'll be able to buy a drink for a friend who is across the country, get personalized movie recommendations whenever you're near a theater, and hear your college professor's description of a landmark simply by holding your phone up to it. An algorithm will understand not just your social preferences, but the preferences of the people you trust. You won't need to search for anything. You won't even need to think.

And yet, having all of this useful information at your fingertips will come with one small catch—the implicit duty to provide the same kind of recommendations to other people. Think of it this way: If your friends are always helping you out, don't you want to help them back? As the amount of personal information on the Internet grows, the leading companies in the social realm will be asking you to make that data useful to the people in your life. And then, predictably (but not as annoyingly as you would think), the same companies will use that information to advertise to you.

Telling your friends what you like, dislike, and recommend is a small price to pay for the incredible possibilities social data will introduce. Let me give you an example. If you were single and someone told you that they had found the ideal partner for you, who has many of the same interests as you, grew up in a similar town, and loves all of your favorite movies, wouldn't you jump on that opportunity? If I weren't married, I sure as hell would. What if you were looking for a job and someone told you that they had a friend of a friend who is the head of personnel at your favorite company? Wouldn't you be grateful?

Both of these examples are potential applications of the data that the world will be providing to Facebook, Google, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, and other Internet companies in the next few years. And the "someone" who keeps doing you these incredible favors is their next great innovation: social media.

What's In This Book?

This book consists of nine chapters that cover all the social media concepts and strategies you need to change the face of your business forever. The chapters are divided as follows:

- Chapter 1 describes the brewing war between Facebook and Google, why it matters to you, and how it has shaped the two websites we spend the majority of our time using. It also prepares you for all the material in the rest of the book.
- Chapter 2 illustrates the social landscape we are playing on today—where it is now and where it is quickly headed. This chapter explains how to build a massive audience on Facebook.
- Chapter 3 delves into the new ways we will be discovering information on the major social networks, and shows you how to use these paradigms to your advantage.
- Chapter 4 covers the sleeping giant of search: real-time search. It reveals why status updates matter and how you can use them to mine valuable data for your business.
- Chapter 5 discusses the best strategies for local businesses, outlining specific techniques that companies with a physical presence need to know.
- Chapter 6 gives you the best and most cutting-edge information available on translating social media into profits.
- Chapter 7 is a glimpse into the not-too-distant future. What will businesses need to be thinking about in 2017?
- Chapter 8 teaches you how to succeed with the most important advertising platform of the next five years: Facebook ads.
- Chapter 9 outlines the core strategies businesses need to harness the power of YouTube, LinkedIn, public speaking, and online reputation management.

Who Can Use This Book?

Outsmarting Social Media was written for the middle 80% of social media users. Total beginners—those who don't know what a tweet is or how to set up a Facebook page—might find this book a little over their heads. On the other side of the coin, those who are on the very cusp of new technology, reading all the tech publications and attending developer conferences in Silicon Valley, might find that they are already familiar with many of its concepts.

This book's ideal reader has a personal profile on Facebook as well as a business page; has a Twitter account, even if it is inactive; and uses search engines constantly. He is either a business owner or a marketer, with a desire to excel beyond his competitors using simple, commonsense tactics.

I will say that even if you are outside the target group—if you’re a novice or a ninja—this book was written to be interesting and readable, and I promise that you will get something out of it.

Those who are reading this book hoping to learn how to trick social media sites or engage in “black hat” tactics should look elsewhere; my techniques are meant to last for the long term, withstanding algorithm changes, interface enhancements, and social media flavors of the week.

I am a firm believer that the best social media strategy is the most obvious: creating content with lasting value and sharing it consistently. However, it is not easy to conceive of all the ways to implement such a strategy, which is why you need this book. The product of years of trial and error, of success and failure, of epiphany and heartbreak, awaits you.

And while you’re on your journey, know that I’m there with you. I respond to all email, and can be reached at evanmbailyn@gmail.com.

An Important Note

A lot of people have asked me how I could put out a book that reveals my best social media tactics and still remain in business. It is true that if every social media entrepreneur put my strategies into effect, I’d seem to have lost my unique offering. Doyle Brunson, one of the best poker players of all time, wrote a book on poker that was so widely studied that it opened up the game of poker to millions more people—many of whom ended up taking money from him at the tables. He later said he regretted writing the book.

Well, I don’t know if this book will have the same effect on entrepreneurs, but I do have a bit of insurance: I know that very few people who read this book will actually do the work required to implement my techniques. Whether because of limited time, limited budget, or a subconscious fear of success, most people will admire good ideas but never actually do anything about them.

Despite this fact, I’m asking you to be a part of the group that does something with the knowledge in this book. I’m imploring you to push through the whirlwind of doubts and dismissals that say “I can’t do that; It’s too hard; It requires too much expertise that I don’t have; It probably won’t amount to anything anyway” and allow yourself to achieve more than you thought possible.

Every person reading this book has the opportunity to make their business thrive using only what is contained within. Some ideas might be new to you, but most will be easy to grasp. The decision to use the power of social media to your greatest benefit is yours to make—and I genuinely hope you take advantage of it.

Social and Contextual Discovery

When I first set out to write this book, I assumed it would cover, among other things, the evolution of search. But as I began piecing together a vision of the way we'll use the Internet in the future, I realized our habits are changing so substantially that before too long the word "search" won't even describe what companies like Google and Microsoft (Bing) do. Typing words into a box has become outdated, and websites assume a sort of passivity on behalf of the user, a reward for all the data the user has given to search engines and social media sites in the last decade. Information retrieval is becoming information attraction. Thus, social and contextual discovery have come into being.

Social Discovery

Social discovery is the sibling to social search. By definition, it is the act of a website presenting content that is predicted to be desirable or relevant to a person based on that person's social preferences. I like to say it's an algorithm that tells you what you want before you want it.

At the center of social discovery is Facebook. By encouraging people to "like" people, brands, and content, Facebook effectively controls an army of unwitting spokespeople. Your grandma Sue's innocent mouse-click, indicating a fondness for *The Joy Of Cooking*, finds its way into an ad that reads: "Sue Smith likes *The Joy Of Cooking*," with a picture of your venerable grandmother along with an image of the cookbook and a link to its page on Facebook. Without realizing it, Grandma has become an endorser, not unlike Michael Jordan sporting a pair of Nikes (but less tall).

There are two reasons social discovery exists. The first is that it is part of the natural evolution of the Internet, which has presented us information first in human-edited directories, then in a multitude of websites and blogs, then on social bookmarking sites like Digg and del.icio.us, and most recently on social networks. Now that we have so much data on our likes, interests, and connections, both social and work-related, we are ready for the next phase of information delivery, one that is even more convenient: the delivery of personalized results through search and discovery.

The second reason social discovery exists is that it is certain to be extremely profitable for the companies that get it right. Facebook in particular needs social discovery in order to succeed as a megabusiness. Whereas Google search is overtly linked to commerce because it is the tool people use to research anything they want to buy, Facebook is a utility people use to connect with friends, and there are far fewer commercial associations with friendship. There are, however, some, and Facebook has explored a number of the natural avenues. Gaming is one of the most obvious ones, because people love to play games with their friends. Serving ads for group-buying sites like Groupon has been another good revenue driver because people love to get deals with their friends.

Transitioning Facebook from a purely personal space to a business tool, which occurred in late 2007 with the introduction of brand pages and ads, was an essential move for Facebook. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Facebook's ad-targeting capabilities give it a true differentiator in the advertising world. However, Facebook's ultimate success will depend on the public's embrace of buying products and services they weren't looking for, that they serendipitously discovered and fell in love with.

If we break social discovery down into its most basic form, it is essentially a massive assembly of labels—or, in Internet speak, *tags*. Tags are notes that help us

expand our knowledge of objects on the Web, especially objects that a computer can't fully analyze. A picture, for instance, might be tagged with a location, resolution, camera type, and a description about what is happening in the picture. Any modern camera could automatically generate all those tags except for the last one. Subjective descriptions are still well within the realm of human-only knowledge, which is why tagging exists.

In an ideal world, we would tag every picture, video, and experience we have online so social sites like Facebook could have a full description of every person, place, and thing we care about. It could then easily cross-reference people's experiences algorithmically to suggest great new content for them. Because people aren't willing to do all that work for the benefit of social networks, these sites have had to invent clever ways to get people's opinions on things. Hence the invention of likes, +1s, upvotes, diggs, and other one-click indicators of preference. The point is to make it so effortless to supply data to websites that plenty of people end up doing it.

By substituting general positive/negative votes for the detailed descriptions they would ideally like, social networks miss out on a ton of social data that would help them advance in social search and discovery; but it seems they have concluded that if they asked the public to do anything more complicated than clicking a Like button, they'd get far less data. I think that remains to be seen. After people see the new world that social data can open up for them, I believe they'll be more willing to share information. That is why sites like Quora (a high quality question and answer site), which are social but require a huge output of information from its users, work: there is a feeling of community, that by putting out good information, you will get good information in return.

“After people see the new world that social data can open up for them, I believe they'll be more willing to share information.”

Indeed, Facebook is gearing up to ask more of its users. At the same time it consistently pushes users to accept a less and less private environment, it requests more data from them. If you think back a bit, you'll see what I mean. A few years ago, Facebook just required you to fill out a profile and add photos. Then suddenly it asked you to “tag” your friends, which felt like a bit of work at first. Next, it asked you to indicate all your interests using the Like button. Soon Facebook will be asking you to tag again, but this time it will want you to tag products. In May 2011, the first glimpse of this next phase of knowledge transfer occurred when Facebook announced the capability to tag your pictures with the names of brand and celebrity pages.

I believe that Facebook will eventually decide that it has habituated its users to sharing data well enough that it can begin getting more information from the start. While writing this book, I predicted that Facebook would start asking you to categorize your social connections the moment you add them as friends. In September 2011, they began doing so, offering you just “close friend” and “acquaintance” as options. I predict these categories will become more granular in time: perhaps “family member,” “close friend,” “acquaintance,” and “business connection.” I believe most people will go ahead and categorize their social connections. After all, doing so feels like filling out a personal questionnaire, which is fun. Figure 3.1 shows an example of what this might look like.

Facebook may even go a step further and ask you to rate how much you value each new friend’s opinion. If we aren’t comfortable sharing that information today, we will be a year or two from now. This is how Facebook will eventually learn who tastemakers are and enable social discovery to be more useful. In the coming months and years, expect to see continued movement toward social discovery and the commercialization of your social life.



Figure 3.1 *A possible way Facebook will collect more information about the affinity of each of your friends so it can better deliver personalized data.*

How Facebook Will Incorporate New Types of Social Advertising

Allow me to describe the landscape that marketers will soon be playing on. I expect the following five features to be incorporated into Facebook soon.

- Richer tagging
- New, purchase-related “stories” in the News Feed
- Better information on friends and their activities
- More personalized deals
- Birthday gift suggestions

Richer Tagging

The capability to tag businesses, brands, and public figures in photos is vital to Facebook's evolving social advertising vision, because it allows Facebook to see which brands people interact with most. After it has data on the brands people tag most, Facebook can ask those brands for advertising money whenever they appear in photos. It won't be long before all types of products, places, and even services are taggable. In the future, as people browse through each other's pictures (which is currently the most popular action on Facebook), they will be able to buy the products, services, or experiences they see.

Let's look at three examples of the ways these new tags will be used.

Example #1: A Product

Figure 3.2 shows a mock-up in which the sneakers worn by my fiancée and me are tagged and can be purchased on Facebook.

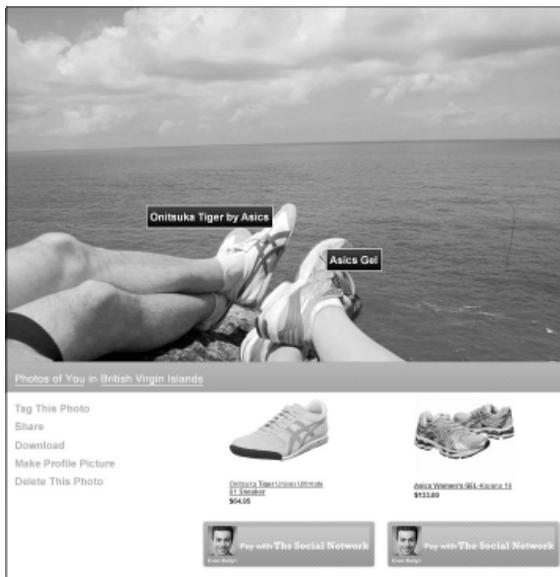


Figure 3.2 This vacation photo could end up selling shoes on Facebook.

Example #2: A Service

The mock-up in Figure 3.3 shows a horseback riding tour company that is tagged, and anyone who sees my picture has the opportunity to book the same trip from the company I used.



Figure 3.3 *Want to book the same trip I went on? Click the photo and you can.*

Example #3: A Place or Experience

The mock-up in Figure 3.4 shows me at a rock concert. The concert venue is tagged, as is the artist, and both businesses are advertised.

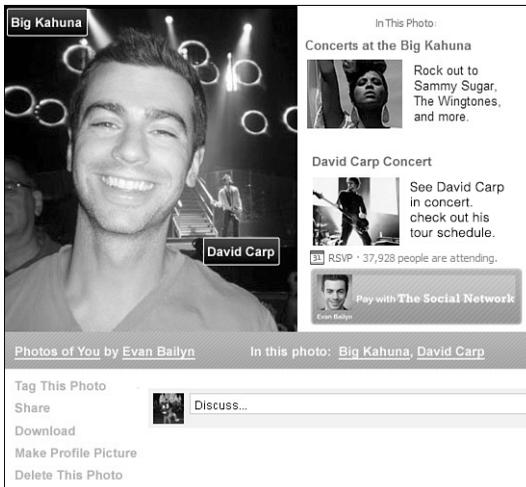


Figure 3.4 *Want to see this artist when he tours near you, or see another show at the same venue? Click the photo.*

This innovation in ads will be the best social advertising product on the market because it targets the excitement of interacting with a friend's picture, and happens to do so on the most popular photo-sharing site on Earth. However, affinity will be a crucial factor here; if I am a tastemaker to some of my friends, they are far more likely to want to purchase something I have purchased than if I am not influential to them. If Facebook can nail the affinity factor, it will give Google's ad product, Adwords, a run for its money. Not only would succeeding in social discovery be profitable, it would open up a whole new chapter in advertising. It would prove that you can generate interest in products when people aren't looking for them and aren't physically in front of them. After all, everyone knows you can persuade a person who is walking through Walmart to buy a set of knives if you wow them by cutting through a brick, but getting the same person to buy those knives simply by showing them a picture of friends using the knives is far quicker and more scalable.

“If Facebook can nail the affinity factor, it will give Google's ad product, Adwords, a run for its money.”

New, Purchase-Related “Stories” in the News Feed

Facebook knows that if it can find a way to add value to its users' experience by updating them about their friends' purchases, it stands to gain a great new referral model. Currently, the News Feed tells you what your friends like once in a while—such as, “Janice Cho likes Gilmore Girls.” But if it also told you what your friends purchased, the concept would be taken a step further. Anyone can like something, but would they *buy* it? It is possible this extra psychological nudge would trigger more ad clicks and dollars spent.

I think people would be very interested in what their friends spend money on. I can picture seeing stories like “Anna bought a Toyota Prius” and “Randy went to The Boom Boom Room” popping up, and I would enjoy reading about it as a kind of vicarious peek into people's lives. If the success of Foursquare and Facebook Places is any indicator, people love getting gossip about real-life things their friends have done.

One of the more interesting startups that is already allowing us to examine our friends' purchases is Blippy.com. Blippy integrates with your credit card company and announces every purchase you make to your social circle. The purpose is to allow friends to see what you buy so they can potentially buy the same things, and to generate conversation among people who have purchased the same items. Ashvin Kumar, Blippy's CEO, told me that he knows Blippy will take some time

to go mainstream, because it asks users to change their online behavior. “In the same way that Amazon changed the way people shop, Facebook changed the way people socialize, and Groupon changed the way people get local deals, Blippy will change the way people interact with their personal finances by making it into a social experience.” I think that Blippy is interesting because, as a company backed by some of the biggest venture capitalists in Silicon Valley, it represents a deep belief in the power of your social circle to influence purchases. It, along with a number of other startups whose names you don’t know yet, forms the foundation of a future where the packaging of data about other people’s lives makes you a more informed—and active—consumer than ever before.

Better Information on Friends and their Activities

At the 2011 F8 Developers Conference, Mark Zuckerberg made a few key announcements. Except for some design changes, all of the announcements amounted to Facebook’s attempt to capture more data in order to enrich their offering to advertisers. The new profile contained a timeline feature, which encouraged users to input information about themselves from the past, dating back to when they were born. And the new social buttons, called “gestures,” essentially meant that the Like button was to become the antecedent of a long line of verbs you can use to tell your friends about what you’re doing. Giving users the ability to express actions beyond simple approval (for isn’t that what “like” basically means?) allows advertisers to understand users’ views on their products much better. For instance, it is more powerful for a movie studio to know that 230,000 people watched a movie rather than just liked it. And it is more powerful for a political campaign to know that 150,000 people cheered their cause rather than just liked it.

More Personalized Deals

Facebook knows precisely how important deals are (as does Google, who tried to purchase Groupon but got rebuffed). Think of the success that Groupon, Living Social, and all the clones out there have had by offering deals that aren’t overly personalized; if only they knew as much about you as Facebook does! Truly, Facebook has the capability to customize offers and deals to you like no other. And it will capitalize on that as soon as a critical mass of advertisers begin participating in deal-related advertising.

Birthday Gift Suggestions

How difficult would it be for Facebook to offer a list of suggested gifts for someone a week before his or her birthday? And how welcome and useful? Finding the right gift for a friend is an age-old problem that is ripe to be solved by a website that

knows what you like. More social data will be needed before Facebook can truly do justice to this idea—but Facebook will have it soon.

Facebook can grow its data set only through your participation, so expect to see more encouragement to “gesture” (“like” and all the other verbs), comment, answer questions, and generally interact with friends online. As the number of connections between people, places, and products becomes greater—and the social graph becomes richer as a result—Facebook will tie up that huge net and fill it with money. If you are a tastemaker to your friends, you will probably be pestered more than most to tag your pictures, participate in deals, announce your plans and purchases, and generally function more like a commercial user. In fact, I wouldn’t be surprised if there was some internal debate within Facebook about whether to share money with tastemakers. Although it is a risky proposition to turn friends into salesmen, it could make sense for some people, especially public figures. If Facebook can get friends interested in selling products to their friends—actively or passively—it will have created the ultimate referral machine.

“If Facebook can get friends interested in selling products to their friends—actively or passively—it will have created the ultimate referral machine.”

Thus is the path to world domination for Facebook—and a far more personalized experience for you. The trick will be maintaining an environment that feels increasingly more social and interesting without letting monetization become too obvious. If people feel like a wallet, they will abandon ship. But if Facebook can add value to users’ lives through social discovery *while* making money, it will have struck the perfect balance.

Contextual Discovery

Contextual discovery, a concept I first heard about through Google spokesperson Marissa Mayer at a developers’ conference in late 2010, is like social discovery but personalizes content based on *where* you are rather than *who* you are. So, let’s say you’re at the airport. A notification may pop up on your mobile phone telling you your flight’s status, as well as showing you a map of the airport. As with Facebook’s evolving social discovery product, there is a tension between providing value for the user and the temptation to capitalize on the user’s attention through advertising. And so, alongside the notifications that help you through your flight experience, you will probably be informed of a deal at the airport Starbucks or a discount on in-flight Wi-Fi.

More so than Facebook, I trust Google to keep the usefulness factor top-of-mind while downplaying the ads. Google has a history of making our lives easier, and the trade-off—having to look at little text ads alongside the experience—hasn't been that bad. Compare text ads to the annoyingness of a pop-up ad or a pre-roll video commercial and you'll see what I mean.

Contextual discovery is not a product that just any company can offer. In its mobile form, it either needs to be sewn into your phone by the software maker or be part of a location-based application. To deliver contextual information, a company must not only know where you are and what you're doing, but also have information to share with you about every place and activity. To do so, it would need a large bank of local data and a preestablished group of advertisers. Google is a natural fit. It seems likely it had contextual discovery in mind when it decided to create Android, its mobile phone operating system. Other natural fits are Foursquare and Gowalla, who have always based their business models on being able to serve you relevant ads wherever you are.

As with mobile payments, the company that can get you to remain logged in all the time has the competitive advantage. Whoever is always present in the background can easily add to your experience by offering information based on where you are and what you're doing. Google remains the strongest contender, based on this reasoning, with its nearly 200 million worldwide users (as of this printing); the majority of them are logged in 24/7. Although Facebook's users also tend to stay logged in, and there are three times as many, its core product is so social that it is unlikely Facebook would deliver purely utilitarian content like maps, menus, and guides. Truly, contextual discovery is meant to be offered by Google, whose mission is to make the world's information "universally accessible and useful."

In fact, I would call Google the original inventor of contextual discovery. Its AdSense ads, which "read" web pages and serve you ads that relate to the content on the page, were the first of their kind. I believe Google will continue to innovate in this area with its Chrome web browser (see Figures 3.5 and 3.6). After all, contextual discovery doesn't have to be mobile; it can also be in the browser. Soon we will be seeing notifications pop up while we're surfing the Web. If you are searching for a used car, for instance, your Chrome web browser might offer you a copy of the current year's Blue Book, which lists the values of used cars. Some of the content Chrome offers will simply be helpful and interesting, with no advertising basis. But ads will always be a part of the experience in some form.

“Google has a history of making our lives easier, and the trade-off—having to look at little text ads alongside the experience—hasn't been that bad.”



Figure 3.5 A likely application of Google’s contextual discovery, which Google calls “Google search without the search.” Here, the user is being offered a peek at the menu while he is browsing the restaurant’s website.

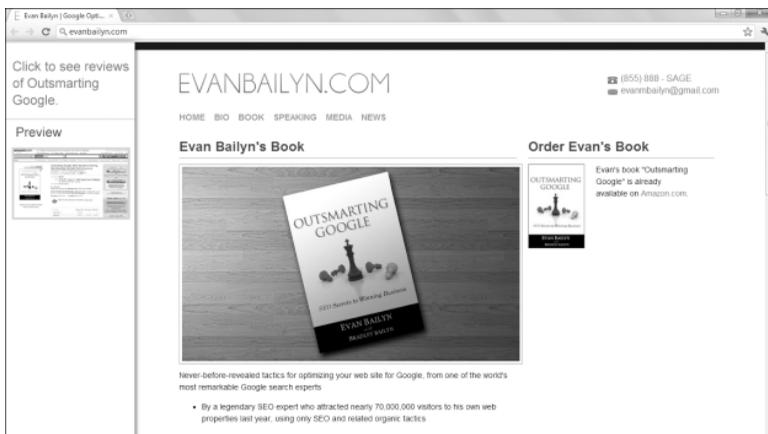


Figure 3.6 Another likely application of contextual discovery. This web browser offers reviews of the book the person is viewing.

Google bills contextual discovery as “Google search without the search,” and it will undoubtedly be an important part of the company’s future. I can imagine it applying to travel guides, TV programming, cooking recipes, reviews, and much more. As a predominantly mobile service, I can picture it expanding to useful suggestions about other parts of your phone, as well. For instance, because I live on both coasts, it would be useful if my phone “knew” that upon landing in New York, I usually want to call a taxi; and that in the taxi, I often call one of three or four people to let them know I’ll be home in a little while. Then, at home, I like to “check in” through Facebook to announce to my New York friends that I’m back. With

contextual discovery, all these actions could be offered to me instantly, and I could accomplish each one in a single click!

As you can see, there is a lot of potential in contextual discovery—but how can it be useful to marketers?

Capitalizing on Contextual Discovery

Because contextual discovery is all about providing useful content to users, a marketer who wants to capitalize on it will need to create such content. Doing so fits nicely into the most effective philosophy for both SEO and social media: “Content is king.” That’s an old adage, but it has become more true than ever with the rise of social media and Google’s recent algorithm updates. When you have a landscape where the dominant search engine is focused on promoting valuable websites, and the dominant social media site is focused on people recommending valuable websites, there is pretty much no choice but to put your time and energy into creating something...well, valuable.

To give you an example of a website that is truly useful to people, look back at Figure 3.5, where Google’s Chrome browser offers a menu to its user while the user is looking at a restaurant site. The winner in that equation is the site that is offering the menu. They are getting a traffic boost from Google’s referencing their site. Why? Because they provide something with real value—an informational aid. If your site is a high-quality review site, news site, guide, or anything else in the category of a “resource,” it has the chance to be used by Google in its contextual discovery product.

Because most resources generally don’t make money, I do not advocate creating a superb guide to such-and-such solely to receive a traffic boost. The correct course of action is to make your site, which sells products or services of some kind, into the authority in its niche. *Supplement* what you sell with a resources section, and place ads on all the pages in that section that lead people back to the place where they can make a purchase. For instance, suppose you sell flowers. Apart from your main product pages, which show pictures of the types of flowers you sell, have a Flower Guide, and spend a while making it one of the best resources about flowers out there, with crisp pictures, detailed descriptions, and other fun extras. The last part is the most important. If you simply list hundreds of flower types and write a sentence about each one, people would have no reason to come to your site; they could go to Wikipedia instead (which, by the way, will be the ultimate recipient of traffic from contextual discovery for obvious reasons). But let’s say you included on the page for each flower a special section that describes the occasion each flower

type works for best. Maybe daisies are great for graduations and daffodils are best to say you're sorry. Who knows? *You* do, if you make a guide. And if Google sees sites linking to it and people +ing (i.e. "liking") it, it will be used by contextual discovery and bring your site a windfall of traffic.

Because contextual discovery is closer to local and mobile search than it is to web search or social media, the companies that should care most about optimizing for it are the ones who serve local economies or aggregate local information. TripAdvisor, Fodors, Yelp, and Zagat are the most prominent examples in the space. If your company serves a local market or is intended to be viewed on mobile phones, you should care about contextual discovery.

And, at the risk of repeating myself, like social discovery, contextual discovery will rely on people's recommendations. If you hear from people that they love the information provided on your company's website or app, you will be positioning yourself to get new business from many different sources.

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