

# DON'T BE THE OBNOXIOUS DRUNK GUY

.....  
A Social Media Primer for Business

*by*

TL Hines



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## A SCENE YOU MAY RECOGNIZE

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**You've been invited to a nice cocktail party, or a gallery showing, or some other nifty soiree. You've been looking forward to the event, but now that you're here,** it's getting...well...ruined. There's a guy who has bellied up to the hosted bar a few too many times already, and the event is barely half an hour old. He's telling everyone (although no one in particular, because people tend to skitter when he approaches in his bumbling zombie shuffle) about his incredible business accomplishments. Or his lack of incredible business accomplishments, due to the fact that The Man has been sticking it to him. Or his buddies back in high school and college. Or his lack of buddies back in high school and college, due to the fact that he was always bullied and his mother never loved him.

He's loud, he's boorish, and he's ruining what promised to be a fine evening for everyone. In short, he's that Obnoxious Drunk Guy who somehow seems to get into every party, even though no one can ever figure out who invited him in the first place. You know him well.

Keep that image in mind, because the world of social media is a giant party—maybe the biggest party ever. And you don't want to be that guy. At all. If you *are* him, you'll end up standing in a lonely corner at the end of the evening, cold and alone.

Maybe you'll even throw up on your shoes.



*Please note this is an  
equal opportunity archetype.  
You don't want to be the  
Obnoxious Drunk Gal, either.*

*When Obnoxious Drunks  
get wasted, so does an  
interesting party.*



## EXTENDING THE METAPHOR

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**While the image is still fresh in your mind, I want you to note two very important things that happen when Obnoxious Drunk Guy takes over the party.** First, he ruins the party for everyone else, as is amply evident. But also: *he ruins the party for himself.* He wakes up the next morning with a raging hangover, and he probably doesn't even realize how much of a/n (insert your own expletive here) he was the previous night.

In all likelihood, he'll find his way into another party and ruin it, because no one wants to tell him what an idiot he was. And so the vicious circle begins anew, with fresh people at fresh parties going through fresh hell.

Unfortunately, this all-too-often seems to describe companies and brands beginning social media efforts. They flood wall posts on social networks with a constant stream of meaningless "Check out our profile!" posts. They turn into comment trolls, littering blog posts with "Visit our site!" entries. They send out mass bulletins and emails to every contact at every site, reminding them their newest product is "Now available!" (And please notice they use exclamation points for everything. That's standard.) The odd thing is, I don't think they know they're being idiots, and doing themselves harm. I think they really believe they're doing all the right things.

So let's start there, and take a sober-eyed view of how to enter the world of social media...without peeing in anyone's punch.

## IF YOU'RE READING THIS, YOU MIGHT BE A...

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### I assume you fit into one of four categories:

1. You're a business owner or marketing person exploring this whole Social Media Thing, wondering if it's for you. If so: thanks for reading, and know the answer to your question is "yes." I know, because I've been there. I owned and operated a business for several years—an advertising agency, of all things—so I know exactly the challenges you face as a business owner or manager. And obviously, as an ad agency guy, I studied and employed many traditional mass marketing tactics on behalf of clients. (Find out more about me at the end of this book.) In short, I was once a mass media devotee. But I think mass media devotees will soon become mass media refugees—especially in the next five to ten years—if they don't become social media converts. If you're still thinking in terms of television, direct mail, and "Hurry, offer ends soon!" you need to expand your repertoire. You need to speak the language of mobile phones, status updates and "Leave a comment." Traditional, mass media marketing isn't going to die; I'm not some doomsday prophet telling you the end is near. There will still be a place for it. But it will—and frankly, it should—continue to shrink. I'll tell you why, give you a brief overview of social media, and offer some advice for getting started.



*If you've been wringing your hands, wondering if social media makes sense for your company, the answer is "yes." Trust me.*



*Might you be an Obnoxious Drunk Guy without knowing? Ask your friends. If they hesitate, the answer is “yes.”*

2. You're a social media person who has an all-consuming urge to read pretty much everything on the subject. If so: thanks for reading. I hope I can bring a different perspective, as a person with a history in marketing and publishing —two industries experiencing massive upheaval due to social media (and I'm not saying that's a Bad Thing at all). Perhaps you'll find something to add to your own arsenal.
3. You're a social media person, and you know an Obnoxious Drunk Guy; you want to find a nice, simple outline of some social media etiquette that will convince the person to stop ruining the party for everyone else. If so: thanks for reading. I hope you'll find the advice in this book useful, and feel it's worth passing along. (Incidentally, if you'd like to *anonymously* pass it along, just [email me](#) with the email/name of the person who should receive the book; I'll send a link without mentioning where I received the referral.)
4. You're that Obnoxious Drunk Guy, and someone has shared this document with you. If so: thanks for reading. Don't feel bad; we've all been obnoxious before. The important thing is, you're ready to sober up and take a look at everything with fresh eyes. Kinda like Step One in any 12-Step program: just admit you have a problem. I hope you'll find some advice to that effect herein, as well.

And if it helps you feel better, just pretend you're in category 1, 2 or 3.

## YOU'VE BEEN INVITED TO THE BIGGEST. PARTY. EVER.

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If you've been thinking stuff such as Facebook and Twitter are just for those texting kids, or if you're thinking this is all just another fad like the Hula Hoop, that ship sank long ago. Social media is big, and only getting bigger. As of this writing, a recent Harris Interactive Poll<sup>1</sup> found that almost half of adult Americans (48%) have either a Facebook or a MySpace account. That's *all* Americans, mind you, not just those meddling kids. (Among those meddling kids—ages 18-34—75% are on Facebook or MySpace.) If you covet a higher-educated demographic, it's 55% of people with some college and 52% of people with a college degree.

Maybe you're saying, "big whoop." That's only half of American adults, after all. Social media has a long way to go before it catches television, say, or even search engines.

Very true. But please keep this in perspective: right now, social media gives you the potential to reach half of all American adults with no cost (or very little cost). Television may be in 98% of American homes, but even phenomenally successful programs such as *American Idol* won't draw more than, oh, 16 or 17 million people. That's roughly 13% of adult Americans. If you want to buy an ad on *American Idol*, 30 seconds will cost you an average of \$623,000.<sup>2</sup> In comparison, you can buy text ads on both Facebook and MySpace for \$10/day (depending on the number of impressions or clicks you

*Half of Americans don't participate in social media. But: half do. And more are joining them all the time.*

### Harris Interactive Poll, 2009

Have a Facebook or MySpace Account	48%
Use Twitter	5%
None of These	51%



*Social media is now more popular than pornography online. Pretty sure no one saw that coming.*

purchase). But you don't have to pay a single dime to be on those sites or dozens of other social networks: you can set up profiles or pages for free. On top of that, people may spend several minutes exploring your offerings on Facebook and MySpace. They may even send you a friend request, telling you they're interested in an ongoing dialogue.

On television, you just get 30 seconds. And no interaction. And people are probably in the bathroom, or skipping your message with the help of another newfangled gadget: TIVO.

Now, I'm not saying there's no place for television advertising (or radio, or direct mail, or newspaper, or magazine) in today's marketing mix. But I am saying there's no place for a continued *mass marketing* mindset in today's world of, well, social media. I'll even go so far to say that I think *all* your marketing—yes, even those expensive television ads—should emphasize your social media presence. Social media, in unprecedented ways, helps you connect with, and converse with, like-minded people. If you're the kind of person who loves startling statistics (I know I am), here's one for you: social media is now more popular than pornography online.<sup>3</sup>

So: \$623,000 to potentially reach 5% of the population for 30 seconds, or \$10 (or less) to potentially reach 50% of the population for continued, ongoing interaction? Well, that seems to be an easy question to answer.

Unless you're drunk.

## SO, UH...WHAT KIND OF PARTY IS THIS, ANYWAY?

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**Relax. Social media isn't one of those parties that involves you releasing the negative energy inside with deep, cleansing breaths. (Unless you're into that—you'll find plenty of niche communities out there.)** Social media is more of a...well, I haven't really talked about what, exactly, social media is, have I? Rest assured, many people talk about that each and every day. (Go ahead and do a Google search. Or if you're a Microsoftee, do a Bing search.)

In basic terms, and in keeping with the ongoing party metaphor, social media is anything you can do at the party that begins a conversation with one or more of the other guests. Conversation is the essence of what social media is. So you might chat about light things such as the weather or why the Yankees won't make the playoffs with a couple people you meet by the cheese log; in online terms, that might be a blog or a forum. Or, you might get introduced to someone new by a mutual friend while you're all waiting for your drink orders at the open bar; that would be a social network such as Facebook.

We can just leave it at that: social media = talk.

Okay, okay. So I can't really leave it at that. I can hear someone asking what makes social media different from our old friends: search engines, web portals, and basic web sites.



*In social media circles, it's all about the conversation. And laughing heartily helps, too.*



Social media is also *ownable*. Most social networks, most social media tools, plug into individual passions. No one's on Facebook because they love Facebook itself; they're on Facebook because it lets them connect with like-minded people. Social media lets people who are running fanatics find other running fanatics. It lets poets and writers find other poets and writers. It lets Trekkies band together to marvel at how JJ Abrams actually pulled off a Star Trek movie. You get the idea. That will include groups of far-flung people congregating around topics ranging from the very broad ([last.fm](#): music) to the very narrow ([The Ultimate Goal](#): preparing churches and ministries for the 2010 World Cup soccer tournament). Whatever the topic, you can be sure there will be several people out there who are passionate about it, and who feel a sense of ownership. Social media brings those people together.

Third, social media is *shareable*. If swappability makes it easy for the two-way exchange of information, and ownability makes it easy for people to congregate around topics of interest, shareability is the oil that keeps all those wheels turning. Social media is shareable, because it's easy to pass along to other people. Social bookmarking sites (such as [Delicious](#)) give you the ability to share your personal bookmarks with the rest of the world. Social recommendation sites (such as [Reddit](#) and [Digg](#)) let you give a digital "thumbs up" to anything appearing on the internet, and pass along that thumbs up to friends. Web video sites ([YouTube](#)) let you "embed" the video on your own

*Social media is something you just gotta share with everyone around you. Sort of like a new bottle of bubbles.*



*Napoleon never worried much about being small. Maybe you should take a cue from him.*



pages to share with your site visitors. In this way, social media is just like a trip back to kindergarten: everybody shares.

Swappability. Ownability. Shareability. The three distinct abilities that make social media, social media.

### **DON'T LET YOUR BIG BUT GET IN THE WAY.**

.....  
“Okay,” you may be saying. “I get the numbers: social media has a huge upside, giving me the potential to reach the right people at almost no cost. But...” Stop right there; I can see where this is going, and I can probably guess what your big “but” is.

#### **A) But I’m too small/too niche-oriented.**

It’s amazing, to me, how many times I hear this from businesses and individuals. Somehow, people have the mindset social media is about sheer weight and volume, that only the Big Boys have the resources to do it. If that’s the case, I believe you’re still thinking in mass media terms. Social media is a great weapon, a great leveler, for smaller, more niche-oriented businesses. It’s the Big Boys who should be running scared, because smaller competitors can now reach audiences more easily than ever. Specifically, social media benefits small businesses because of *control*, *cost*, and *character*.

## Control

The big companies did well in the era of mass marketing, when messages were one-way: users “received” communication from companies in the form of advertising or PR spin. The companies themselves were in total control of the message.

Social media turned this model upside down, giving the end user just as much control as the company creating the message. Big companies have had a difficult time adjusting to this change in mindset, but small, regional and niche companies have always operated in this exact way; because of their smaller, more specialized markets, they’ve always had their fingers on the pulse of their customers. Social media is simply an extension of this, and if you run a small or niche-oriented business, you’ve always been more comfortable hearing from—and responding to—your customers personally. Your business model has prepared you for social media interaction.

Here’s something to sweeten the deal: social media is better-segmented than mass media. You can drill down to the neighborhood level with social media, targeting (for instance) people within a three-mile radius of your location. So if you can reach a significant number of the adults living within three miles of your location (or locations) using tools that are either free or very low-cost...well, that’s a no-brainer. Previously, that kind of selectivity

*Social media is a “power to the people” approach to interaction.*





*That old, one-way model of communication is sinking fast as people abandon ship.*

was only available through direct mail, and social media has none of the associated printing and mailing costs. Speaking of cost...

#### Cost

In the mass media era, when companies were in total control of the message, the cost of producing and disseminating those messages (television, radio, print advertising, PR firms) tended to be quite expensive. In this heavily-controlled, one-way marketing model, it was difficult for smaller, more niche-oriented businesses to compete. After all, it's difficult to keep your dinghy afloat when the Queen Mary is steaming by.

But now, there are literally thousands and thousands of dinghies just like yours on the ocean, and they're piloted by potential customers. Big businesses, on the decks of their giant steamers, have a much harder time turning their ships or hearing what's going on down at sea level. (I compared them to the Queen Mary, but in this particular case, the Titanic might be a better metaphor.) Smaller businesses, however, are right in the thick of the action. That's what social media itself is: building communities and dialogues among people with similar interests, allowing everyone to contribute to the discussion. Big business doesn't get to dominate the conversation, because it's no longer a one-way model.

### Character

You know all about brand. It's the personality of your company, in many ways. Big businesses have been at work for a long time, trying to build their brands, precisely because large corporations have no personality. Branding is a way of attaching a personality to something that's by nature impersonal.

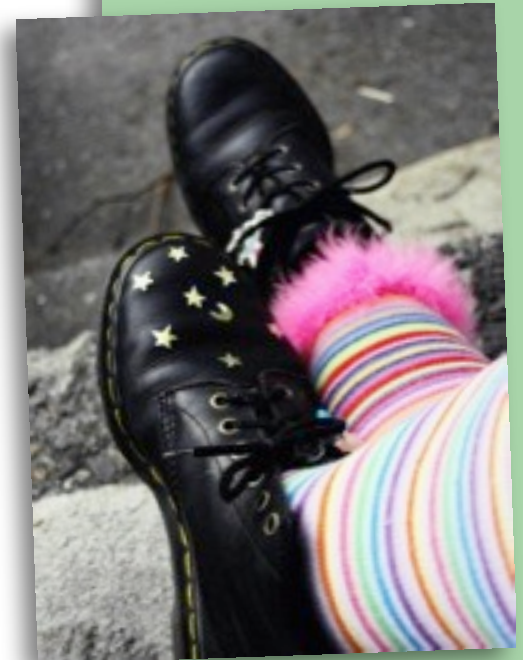
But if you're a small or niche-oriented business, you've got a much better handle on your brand, your personality. You're already plugged into your neighborhoods and circles of influence, and people in your markets likely have associations with your company based on their personal associations with you and your employees.

Once again, this is a huge benefit in the world of social media. It's easier for you to interact and communicate online as a personal entity, because you *are* a personal entity.

So, change your mindset about social media. You might think it's a huge numbers game, that participating on Facebook and Twitter and Meetup is about attracting legions of friends or followers. That's because you've been listening to big business...and the only language they speak is one of big numbers.

In reality, social media is the exact opposite. It's a way of establishing (and building on) connections with current and potential customers. And the better job you do of establishing connections, participating in conversations,

*Those monolithic old school titans are filled with boring old wing tips. Small businesses have more interesting ways to kick it.*





*In a world of prepackaged celebrities, we loved Susan Boyle precisely because she wasn't that.*

and soliciting input, the more your numbers will naturally grow. But social media is never, never about sheer tonnage and numbers.

**B) But my products/services aren't "exciting."**

I'll admit, many of the success stories you might hear about social media tend to be about, well, social subjects. Film. Music. Celebrities. But those kinds of stories get lots of attention because we're in a celebrity-obsessed culture. So Ashton Kutcher gets a million Twitter followers by promising to ding-dong-ditch Ted Turner's house, and it gets a ton of media attention. Is it any wonder businesses don't look at Twitter as a "serious" business tool?

Well, let me tell you: social media isn't all about pre-packaged celebrities. Case in point: Susan Boyle, who rose to worldwide fame on *Britain's Got Talent*...but almost entirely through the social media magic of YouTube. In the same way, there are tons of businesses out there—even "boring" businesses with thick, bushy eyebrows—building some amazing success stories in the social mediasphere.

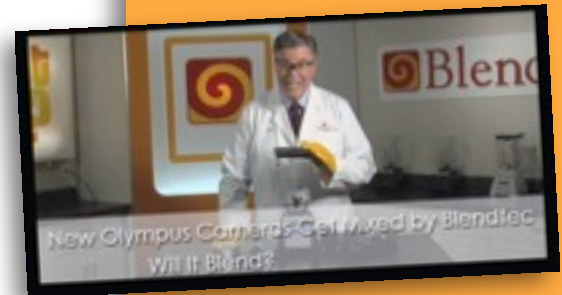
Think, for a moment, about blenders. Yes, blenders. Really, what could be more boring? When the fine folks at [BlendTec](#) decided to jump into the world of social media, you can be sure no one said, "Well, sure that will succeed, because *everyone* loves blenders." But that didn't stop BlendTec from creating a YouTube channel called "[Will It Blend?](#)" The basic idea is simple: drop various objects (everything from cell phones to skis) into the

BlendTec test lab blender and, well, see if it blends, a la David Letterman. It's an ingenious mix of product demonstration and social media, and it's resulted in more than 3,000,000 views on YouTube. Think BlendTec has maybe sold a few blenders as a result of those videos? More than a few. Within a year of introducing the videos, BlendTec sales increased *five-fold*.<sup>4</sup> So, if you're thinking it's impossible to make your company seem fun and interesting, remember the lowly blender.

**C) But I don't need to market nationally.**

Once again, one of those myths perpetuated by a traditional, mass marketing mindset. The beauty of social media is, it gives you a level of selectivity that simply wasn't possible before. You can make your net as big—or just as importantly, as small—as you need it to be. Consider the case of [Naked Pizza](#), a local parlor in New Orleans. Within the span of two months, they became a social media success by sending daily specials via Twitter—to customers within five miles of their store location. In a test run, they found 15% of their daily sales were a direct result of the Twitter promotion, without cannibalizing their existing sales.<sup>5</sup> In this case, Twitter + regional targeting = success. And the formula can work for your business, too. (Not coincidentally, Naked Pizza is now planning to roll out its stores as a national franchise, and social media is at the core of their rollout strategy.

*Blendtec asked: Will it blend?  
Doubters asked: Will it sell?  
The answers: yes, and yes.*





*Sometimes, you'll be blindly groping your way through this thing called social media. And that's okay; just keep learning, and keep groping.*

#### **D) But I'm afraid I'll fail.**

Brutal honesty time: you *will* fail. Not on an epic scale (I hope), and not on every project. But you're bound to have a few dry-fires as you learn the ropes of social media—especially because those ropes keep twisting themselves into fresh knots even as we speak. So: be prepared to upload a video or two on YouTube and have anemic views. Be prepared to write a couple blog posts and hear nothing but crickets. Be prepared to leave comments on Facebook walls and get no immediate responses. It happens to all of us. But if you stick with it—keep posting, keep commenting, keep staying involved—you'll notice the needle starting to move. You'll get more people interacting with you.

Returning yet again to the ever-present party metaphor: you just showed up. Lots of other people have been at the party since it started. Join a few conversations, make a few interesting observations, and you'll soon become one of the gang. But it's not going to happen overnight, and it's not going to happen the first time you open your mouth. Or the second. Or probably even the third. People need to get comfortable with your presence, and develop a certain level of trust, before they let you into their conversations easily.

**E) But it seems expensive/confusing/time-consuming.**

Expensive? Pffft. We already took care of that—social media costs a pittance compared to mass media. Spend, say, 10% of your marketing budget on social media, and you'll be able to do things you can't do with mass marketing and the other 90% of your budget.

Confusing? I suppose it is, if you fall for the old man-behind-the-curtain routine. The people who want you to believe social media is confusing are the people who are usually trying to sell you something—their training program/widget/special offer that can instantly demystify the wondrous magic of social media for you. Just remember the simple equation we talked about before: social media = conversation. You can carry on a conversation, which means you can succeed in social media.

Which leaves us with time-consuming. Well, yes, it can be time-consuming, especially as you delve deeper. But like any worthwhile venture, you can start small and build on your successes—and I think you'll quickly find that every minute you invest will be worthwhile.

I'll tell you what's worse than time consumption: pain. If you spend a lot of time worrying about how to get on the social media train, you won't board it at the station. And when you miss it, you may have to run to catch up, getting yourself mangled in the process. See? Pain. Better to board the train now and worry about how you're going to spend your time aboard later; once the train reaches full-speed, you'll already be on it.





*Start by listening, or start by throwing all your social media efforts in the toilet. Your choice.*

## **BEFORE THE PARTY: FIVE GENERAL TIPS FOR DRESS & ETIQUETTE**

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**Just one more thing to talk about before you check yourself in the mirror, grab your keys, and head out the door. Rules. Yeah, I know they're made to be broken. Yeah, I know mavericks define the rules rather than abide by them.** But the successful mavericks are people who fully know the rules, have abided by them to learn what they're all about, and then strategically decided to change the game by changing the rules. Mavericks are not the people who announce their presence by flagrantly disregarding the rules from the moment they show up.

That's what Obnoxious Drunk Guys are.

So let's just agree that the best way for you to begin a social marketing effort is to actually pay attention to the general etiquette and dress code for the occasion. You'll fit in...which will gain trust...which will help you quickly become a witty and charming part of the party. Here, then, are five general tips to help you along.

### **1. Listen first. Listen second. Talk third.**

Say you're standing around the punch bowl, having a nice chat about, oh, Keynesian Economics. Keynesian Economics is something of great interest to you, and you just happen to have found a circle of four renowned experts on the subject. You're learning a lot by listening to them, and enjoying the

flow of conversation. Now say someone else, someone new to the gathering, walks into the middle of your circle and says, “Hey, I just rolled into this party, and boy are my ribs sore!” Well. The conversation deflates at that point, doesn’t it? Everyone’s shields go up, because there is a stranger among you, and the nice, natural flow of conversation stops. Immediately, you probably hate the guy who interrupted the conversation, because he barged in and changed its character.

Well, the same general principle applies when you begin any social media activity. The first thing you always—*always*—do is listen. Get a feel for the conversations, the participants, the points of view, the people and personalities behind it all. Whether it’s a blog, a forum, a video sharing site, or a social network, open your ears before you open your mouth.

And then, when you do think of something to say, listen a bit longer. Make sure you’re immersed in the culture and cadence of the site itself. Do you see a link to “sticky topics” in the forum, or to “FAQs” on the blog? Read them; it’s part of the listening process.

## 2. When it’s time to speak, stay on topic.

This seems like the most basic and common-sense tip of all, but I think some people, perhaps in their excitement to get all that incredible word of mouth they’ve heard about, just can’t help themselves. They wander into a group

*See no evil, speak no evil,  
hear no evil. Mom was full  
of good social media advice.*



*Here's a trick: when you're trying to think of something to say, eliminate anything that begins with "my" or "I."*



dedicated to support and encouragement for survivors of sexual abuse and blurt out, “Hey, I have puppies for sale!”

It’s okay to be excited. It’s okay to be enthusiastic. It’s not okay to totally disregard the topic at hand; if you do, you’ll make enemies, and do yourself more harm than good.

### **3. Don’t make it about you; make it about them.**

Of course it’s about you and your company, product or service. That’s part of why you’re venturing into social media, and there’s nothing wrong with that. But shake those old P.T. Barnum tendencies. Don’t make everything you say about you, and don’t shout it through a bullhorn.

I’m a [novelist](#), so naturally, a lot of people I connect with in social media circles are other writers. I’ll be honest and tell you: authors are among the worst offenders in this category. I’ve followed many authors on Twitter, only to get a number of “New Review of My Book on Gobbledygook.com!” updates. I’ve friended many authors on Facebook and MySpace, only to get several wall posts telling me their latest book is “Now Available on Amazon!” I’ve read many author blogs, only to find the main blog topics are My Last Book, My Next Book, and Why My Publisher Doesn’t Do Enough For Me.

You’ve probably seen that, too (and not just among authors). Perhaps there’s nothing as grating as a person who unleashes a constant stream of me,

me, me. So, if you feel the need to be narcissistic for a while, go look in the mirror and tell yourself you look Maaaahvelous. Get it out of your system. When you're done, come back to the social media communities and talk about what people would really rather hear about: themselves.

If you're an author, chances are, a lot of people reading your stuff would probably love to be published. Use your blog to talk about how to get an agent, how to work with an editor, how to edit your own manuscript, how to write difficult scenes. Go to writing and reading forums and offer advice on relevant threads. Send out Twitter updates related to the publishing industry and its trends. Or, if you don't have any interest in being an authority, at least be entertaining/funny/controversial/interesting. See the difference? It's not just about you anymore; it's about your whole industry. You're tapping into a larger community as a participant. And people will be more likely to listen.

#### **4. Don't try to fake sincerity.**

No, I'm not being glib. (Well, no more glib than usual.) Sincerity is the heart and soul of social media; if you try to fake it, you simply show people that you're both heartless and soulless. Let me give you an example. As of this writing, Twitter is the current social media darling. I mean, it even got a cover story in *Time*—that's how much it's in the spotlight. If you're not familiar with Twitter, you essentially "subscribe" to short updates from other people by clicking the "follow" button on their pages. Currently, when I click



*Be interesting. Be helpful.  
Be entertaining. Just don't  
be boring. Or a jerk.  
Or a boring jerk.*

**newenglishwords** Hi thanks for the follow check out our website at dictionary.com we will publish here 1 new english word daily!  
10:36 PM Jul 23rd

*Another reason to avoid automated messages: because spammers don't. They're thankful I followed them. (I didn't.) I'm thankful to learn I've been spelling "dictionary" incorrectly all these years.*

to follow someone, a fair amount of the time—maybe about 15% of the time—I get an automated message to the effect of “Hi! Thanks for following me. Find out more about me at IWantToSellYouSomething.com.”

That’s right. An automated message. On a service that’s supposed to be about personal interaction. I won’t say that I automatically unfollow everyone who sends me an automated response, but it doesn’t get us started on the right foot. When I get an automated response, I feel like I’m being marketed to, being talked at rather than with. We all do. (That’s part of why so many people continue to flock to social media services: they’re opportunities for authenticity in a sea of fakery.)

So: no automated messages. No mass messages to everyone on your list. No overt sales gimmicks. Just be real, and you’ll do fine. There’s no need to thank everyone for following you on Twitter, or for “friending” you on Facebook. Just write authentic posts, offer authentic advice, respond to questions with authentic answers. That’s all the “thanks” anyone in the social mediasphere will want.

**5. Don’t be afraid to share.**

This is one of the most difficult mental hurdles to overcome. In the old days, under the old ways, any bit of knowledge we gained was treated as competitive intelligence. We tended to put it under lock and key, keeping it

for our own value and benefit. For those of us who have been in the corporate world a number of years, this is just simple business.

But social media operates on the exact opposite model. The key to success in social media is sharing information with your online circles and contacts. I'm not talking about your sales figures, employee data, and other privileged information, of course. Instead, I'm talking about the knowledge and data you have as a result of your products or services. Turn all that data loose in the social mediasphere, and people will notice. Run a garden center? Great; you have lots of information about lawns, flowers, plants, soil preparation, and so on. Produce videos and post them online. Make guide sheets and deliver them on your site as downloadable pdf documents. Send out Twitter updates with quick tips. Post common questions and answers on your Facebook page.

Accountant? Offer general advice about organizing your finances and keeping your records in order for tax time. Plumber? Tell people how to keep their drains clear, how to plan for remodels or expansions, how to tell when it's time to replace a faucet. Travel agent? Send out tips for cheap places to visit, track travel trends, post videos from clients.

You get the idea. Whatever kind of business you're in, you have valuable information to offer—valuable information that can attract people. This builds the kind of trust mass marketing has never been able to do.

*Sure, social media has a place for you as a plumber. Give those do-it-yourselfers advice on their problems, then be there to fix things when they fail miserably.*



*Yes, there are many tasty drinks at the social media party. But stick with a few polite sips when you're getting started.*



## **AT THE PARTY: SAMPLING THE HORS D'OEUVRES AND DRINK SELECTIONS**

.....  
**By this point, I hope I've convinced you that 1) This is a party worthy of attending; 2) You are a company/person/product/service worthy of being there; and 3) It's in your best interest to follow the generally accepted rules of etiquette for the party.** If you're still with me, it's time to actually look at some of the social media tools and techniques.

As of right now, there are several hundred tools any person, company, brand or service can use as viable social marketing vehicles. Next month, there may be several thousand. (To tell you the truth, there may be several thousand right now; I'm throwing out a wild guess.) In the grand scheme of things, though, a menu of a couple hundred, or a couple thousand, doesn't do us much good. Social Marketer [Peter Kim](#) has done an excellent job of narrowing this list down to 22 basic "types" of tools,<sup>6</sup> but even that's probably too many as a starting point. So we'll narrow down the broad menu to five general social media drink and hors d'oeuvres selections: 1) Social Networks; 2) Blogs/Microblogs; 3) Forums; 4) Sharing Communities; and 5) Social Media PR. If you're just starting social media, chances are, you'll begin with one or two of these, then expand from there.

Let's take a quick look at each of the categories, some notable examples, how they work...and how you should use them.

## Social Networks

Social networks are really just “collections” of smaller social media tools (most often, blogs/microblogs, forums and videos) brought together in one place, typically built around a particular industry, niche or interest area. Users create their own profiles on each social network, then share their content with other people in the community. Note these communities can expand and become huge (such as Facebook and MySpace), or they can remain very small and niche-oriented.

### Notable Examples of Social Networks

- [Facebook](#) (Started as college-oriented; now general)
- [MySpace](#) (Started as music-oriented; now general)
- [Flixster](#) (Movies)
- [LinkedIn](#) (Business/Networking)
- [Classmates](#) (Reunions)
- User-created social networks ([Ning](#), blog networks)

### What Obnoxious Drunks do on Social Networks

- Invite thousands of friends/contacts every day, up to the limit, so they can “build their list.”
- Leave hundreds of garish comments and wall posts on profiles every day, mentioning their products/services, and telling people to buy. Alternately,



*Everybody's talking about social networks these days. In some places, maybe a little too much.*



*She has a lot of places to blog this; by the end of 2008, there were more than 180 million blogs online.<sup>7</sup>*

leave hundreds of comments saying “Have a nice day!” or the like, hoping to pick up more friend requests.

- Send constant messages/updates/bulletins to everyone on their lists with Fresh New Pitches about the Same Old Stuff: Buy my stuff, or visit my profile.
- Join every group available in the network, and repeat all of the above steps ad nauseam.

#### What Responsible Social Network Members Do

- Offer something of interest or value to the community: free information about their area of expertise, links of interest, even simple entertainment.
- Send friend and contact requests based on common interests and geography.
- Contribute meaningfully to the groups they join within each community. Stay on topic, and stay off the “Hey, buy me!” pitches in posts.
- Listen to others. Respond to others. Start dialogues with others. All based on common interests, not on sales pitches.

#### **Blogs/Microblogs**

“Blog” is shorthand for “weblog,” which is really just a fancy way of saying an online diary. And that’s pretty much what blogs were when they first started gaining popularity: exercises in navel-gazing. Today they’ve transformed into true online publishing platforms. So, in addition to the

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personal, diary-like blogs, we now have blogs that are true journalistic enterprises, functioning as online newspapers, magazines, and gossip columns. We have blogs that act as political commentary. (Make that many, many blogs that act as political commentary.) We have blogs that act as corporate clearinghouses for information, online news rooms, and more. In short, the blog has morphed into the basic building block of any social media presence online.

A key component of just about any blog is the ability to comment; in other words, readers are encouraged to leave their thoughts. In fact, a blog without commenting or discussion features would likely be better categorized as a Web 1.0 platform, or a simple “dissemination of information” site.

Microblogs are a bit different. Call them blogs for people with attention deficit disorder, because typically, they have a character limit on how long the posts can be. (Twitter, the 500-pound gorilla of microblogging, imposes a 140-character limit.) Think of microblogs as broadcasts of “latest headlines,” similar to what you see running across the bottom of the screen on cable news channels. Your microblog becomes your running feed of what’s happening in your life, or what you find interesting, or whatever. Because of the restricted length of microblogs, they are often updated by mobile phone, which, as every wonk keeps telling us, is the Next Big Thing

*The power of Twitter:  
a site that gets people  
who aren't bird fanatics  
excited about "tweeting."*



*Smart phones: the sprawling world of social media in your pocket.*



in online communication. In many ways, we're moving away from desktop and laptop computing, and toward mobile computing (maybe you've heard of a newfangled device called the iPhone).

#### Notable Examples of Blog Platforms (Tools to Publish a Blog)

- [Blogger](#) (Part of the vast Google empire)
- [WordPress](#) (Open Source, i.e., "free")
- [Movable Type](#)
- Blog functions on social networks such as Facebook and MySpace

#### Notable Examples of Blogs (Popular Blogs)

- [Huffington Post](#) (Journalism. Mostly politics.)
- [Boing Boing](#) (Culture and technology)
- [Engadget](#) (Tech-oriented)

#### Notable Examples of Microblog Services

- [Twitter](#) (Pretty much invented the microblog)
- [Plurk](#) (Timeline-oriented)
- [Yammer](#) (Tool for creating private microblog networks)
- Status updates in social networks such as Facebook

### What Obnoxious Drunks Do with Blogs & Microblogs

- Write posts about themselves, their services, or their products only. Encourage people to buy. Use lots of exclamation points and all cap letters. Repeat daily. Sometimes hourly.
- Leave comments on other blogs, telling people to “Take a look at my blog!” Repeat daily. Sometimes hourly.
- Show no interest in ongoing conversations.
- “Follow” anyone and everyone on microblog sites indiscriminately.
- Use autoresponders to “thank” people for following their microblogs.
- Worry incessantly about increasing “followers” on microblogs.

### What Responsible Bloggers and Microbloggers Do

- Offer something of interest or value to the community: free information about their area of expertise, how-to articles, links of interest.
- Comment intelligently on other blogs in their industry and interest areas.
- Offer advice, thoughts, and opinions without resorting to sound bites.
- Send microblog posts that link to interesting trends, developments, tools and so on.
- Respond personally if needed, rather than with an autoresponder.
- Follow microblogs of people with similar interests and knowledge.
- Focus on quality of followers, rather than quantity.



*Some people are sinners the first time they sign on to Twitter. And every time after that.*

*At their best, forums can be as enjoyable as pleasant conversation over coffee. At their worst, they can be as enjoyable as the 12th Circle of Hell.*



## Forums

Forums are perhaps the oldest form of social media, having been a mainstay since the early bulletin boards and original iterations of services such as AOL. At their most basic, forums are simply gathering areas for discussion, based around specific topics and areas of interest. Those topics or interest areas are usually categorized into specific “threads” of discussion. Think of the forum itself as the general conversation topic, and the threads as individual conversations. So a general “car talk” forum might have different threads for individual cars or models.

Forums are notable for their freewheeling nature: heated debates, sometimes degenerating into “flame wars” (online versions of name-calling on the playground), are common. Almost every forum has one or more “trolls,” people who seem intent on starting flame wars in every thread. Yeah. Some people never mentally develop past third grade.

### Notable Examples of Forums

- [Gaia](#) (gaming-oriented community)
- [Craigslist](#) (classifieds)
- Groups on portals such as Yahoo and Windows Live
- Forums/discussions on social networks such as Facebook and MySpace

### What Obnoxious Drunks do on Forums

- Create massive “signature” blocks to go beneath every post they make, hoping to attract traffic/sales.
- Create off-topic posts promoting themselves, their products or their services. Copy and paste those posts in every thread.
- Create multiple accounts (“sock puppets”), trying to make it seem as if many people on the forums are talking about their products or services.
- Act as trolls, posting inflammatory comments just to watch the sparks fly.

### What Responsible Forum Participants Do

- Stay on topic.
- Acknowledge differences of opinion.
- Resist the urge to slide down the slippery slope of flame wars.
- Police their forums, help administrators weed out flame wars and trolls.

### **Sharing Communities**

Sharing communities are, in many ways, much like social networks. However while social networks more often focus on the general sharing of ideas, discussions and the like, sharing communities are more focused on specific *kinds* of content. This can include video and audio (delivered as podcasts or uploaded to sharing sites), photos, wikis, news items and bookmarks.



*Sock puppets on educational programming = good.  
Sock puppets on forums = bad.*



*Tagging is a convenient way to label and categorize content on sharing communities.*

In sharing communities, the content itself is really just a starting point, because numerous groups and channels form within sharing communities themselves. So, in a video sharing community (YouTube being the most notable example), videos get segmented into different “channels” such as comedy, education, how-to, sports, and so on. Photo sharing communities may separate into groups based on region, type of camera used, subject of the photo, and literally hundreds of other categories.

This categorization, more often known as *tagging*, is the lifeblood of sharing communities. People who create and upload the content label it with descriptive “tags” that help others find it. So if I upload a video about my cat being cute and cuddly (this is a hypothetical—my cat is neither cute nor cuddly), I might tag it with terms such as “cat,” “kitty,” “pet,” “funny,” “TL Hines,” and so on.

Please note that the concept of tagging is one of the mainstays of “shareability” I talked about earlier; most forms of social media rely on tagging in some form or another. Blogs, in many ways, originated the concept, and “corporate” sites such as Amazon have incorporated tagging. But I talk about tagging in sharing communities because it’s the real essence of this particular form of social media.

Finally, I’ll note that sharing communities aren’t always about just sharing content you create and upload. You can also share interesting links

through social bookmarking services such as Delicious, Digg and Reddit, or contribute to wikis—sites that allow all registered user to make changes to any entry. Wikipedia, the largest wiki, bills itself as a collaborative encyclopedia, and thats a fair description: wikis are works of collaboration among many contributors.

#### Notable Examples of Sharing Communities

- [YouTube](#) and its many video sharing brethren
- [Flickr](#) (photography)
- Podcasts (video and audio, most often shared through iTunes)
- [Delicious](#) (bookmarking)
- [Digg](#) (bookmarking)
- [Reddit](#) (bookmarking)
- [Newsvine](#) (bookmarking with a news/journalism slant)
- [Wikipedia](#) (wiki encyclopedia)

#### What Obnoxious Drunks Do on Sharing Communities

- Litter the “comments” sections of other videos, photos, etc. with “Hey, check out my site!” posts.
- Upload content that’s purely sales-driven.
- Label all of their uploaded content with misleading tags in an attempt to get more “eyeballs.”



*With sharing communities,  
users can spread the love.*



*Social Media PR encourages people to use Web 2.0 tools to interact with your company and products.*

- “Carpet bomb” other community members with constant come-ons for their products and services.

#### What Responsible Sharing Community Members Do

- Upload worthwhile content that’s informative, entertaining or useful.
- Share links to other content that’s informative, entertaining or useful.
- Leave comments on other content and bookmarks—even if it’s just to say “thanks for sharing.”

#### **Social Media PR**

The last main form of social media content isn’t necessarily an existing community or group that you join; rather, it’s a framework for developing content that can easily become a part of all that other social media.

Social Media PR refers to your efforts to “reach out” to the social media community. It differs from “traditional” PR in that you aren’t asking mass media to write or produce a story about you. Instead, you’re going to the content producers in the social mediasphere and asking for their attention. That means finding bloggers interested in your topics, and giving them the tools they need to write posts about you or your product. That means producing and uploading meaningful content people can share, and perhaps even use to create their own content. That means producing press releases built for social media, complete with tags and RSS feeds.

While the general social media community isn't involved in specific PR efforts daily (except on behalf of their own brands), you, as a company owner, marketing person, or other muckety-muck, will probably spend most of your time in this realm.

How you develop your Social Media PR efforts will determine, in large part, how you are perceived by the social mediasphere. This is what will label you instantly as the Obnoxious Drunk who must be ignored (or worse, ridiculed), or the company that "gets it."

And if you're still one of those people who aren't buying in to the whole concept of social media itself, here's the best part: incorporating Social Media PR techniques into your traditional PR can dramatically improve your search engine rankings.<sup>8</sup> So even people who aren't interested in any kind of social media whatsoever will have a better chance of finding you. Who doesn't want that?

### Notable Examples of Social Media PR

- The concept of the Social Media Press Release was "invented" by [Todd Defren](#) at SHIFT Communications; [download a copy](#) of his template to get a basic idea of how to organize a press release for maximum impact in the social mediasphere.



**SOCIAL MEDIA PRESS RELEASE TEMPLATE, VERSION 1.0**

<b>CONTACT INFORMATION:</b>	<b>Client contact</b> Phone #/skype Email IM address Web site	<b>Spokesperson</b> Phone #/skype Email IM address Blog/relevant post	<b>Agency contact</b> Phone #/skype Email IM address Web site
<b>NEWS RELEASE HEADLINE</b> Subhead			
<b>CORE NEWS FACTS</b> • Bullet-points preferable			
<b>LINK &amp; RSS FEED TO PURPOSE-BUILT DELICIOUS PAGE</b> The purpose-built delicious page offers hyperlinks (and PR annotation in "notes" fields) to relevant historical, trend, market, product & competitive content sources, providing context as-needed, and, on-going updates.			
<b>PHOTO</b> e.g., product picture, exec headshot, etc.	<b>MP3 FILE OR PODCAST LINK</b> e.g., sound bytes by various stakeholders	<b>GRAPHIC</b> e.g., schematic, market size graphs, logos	<b>VIDEO</b> e.g., brief product demo by in-house expert
<b>MORE MULTIMEDIA AVAILABLE BY REQUEST</b> e.g., "download white paper"			
<b>PRE-APPROVED QUOTES FROM CORPORATE EXECUTIVES, ANALYSTS, CUSTOMERS AND/OR PARTNERS</b> Recommendation: no more than 2 quotes per contact. The PR agency should have additional quotes at-the-ready, "upon request," for journalists who desire exclusive content. This provides opportunity for Agency to add further value to interested media.			
<b>LINKS TO RELEVANT COVERAGE TO-DATE (OPTIONAL)</b> This empowers journalists to "take a different angle," etc. These links would also be cross-posted to the custom delicious.us site.			
<b>BOILERPLATE STATEMENTS</b>			
<b>RSS FEED TO CLIENT'S NEWS RELEASES</b>			
<b>"ADD TO DELICIOUS"</b> Allows readers to use the release as a standalone portal to this news			
<b>TECHNORATI TAGS="DIGG THIS"</b>			

*The Social Media Press Release template updates the crusty, 100-year-old press release format.*

*Old school PR was about control:  
control the message, control the  
delivery, control the audience.  
My, how times have changed.*



#### What Obnoxious Drunks do with Social Media PR

- Build their list of PR contacts without asking to add those people as contacts.
- “Carpet bomb” bloggers and content producers with numerous press releases and/or pitches (usually sent as email attachments).
- Make no effort to categorize their contact lists based on interests and categories; send every press release and pitch to every contact.
- Set up schemes to pay bloggers and content producers in return for coverage, or participate in existing schemes that do so.

#### What Responsible Social Media PR Pros Do

- Ask to add bloggers and content producers to their contact list; manage their contact list judiciously and remove contacts (or preferably, provide an option for contacts to automatically remove themselves/update their preferences).
- Tailor pitches to specific interest areas and content producers.
- Provide, at most, free samples for reviews and other content. (Even doing this will raise the ire of some purists, who argue that providing something for free unduly influences the item to be reviewed. I’m not in that camp, but know that more than a few people are.<sup>9</sup>)
- Provide press releases replete with social media tools: tags, RSS feeds, related web videos and photos, and so on.

## THE 24-HOUR PARTY PERSON: PLANNING YOUR OWN FORAYS AND SOIREES.

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**After you attend a couple of parties, nosh a bit on the appetizers, and try a few glasses of wine, it's likely you'll start thinking you need to throw a party yourself.** Actually, it's likely you've already decided that, or you probably wouldn't be reading this. And really, you *should* start planning your own forays into the world of social media. The whole system is built on the sharing of knowledge, and the more people who are contributing to that, the better the system is for everyone.

So we're agreed that you should make a commitment to this party scene. But before you order the caviar and Dom Perignon, and put together a guest list of thousands, it might be best to host a couple of small gatherings first. Start with your basic veggie platter and cold cut tray; once you've figured out the basics and become a little more comfortable being a host, you can make plans to move up to the paté. Sound reasonable?

Here, then, are five basic "party starters" for your social media efforts.

### **1. First things first: a couple of housekeeping items.**

Before you rush out and start your conquest of social media, might I make a couple of suggestions? If you haven't already done so, get an email address through gmail, yahoo, hotmail, or one of the other big mail services to use specifically for social media signups. Don't use your "business" email.



*Email address for social media signups? Check. Logical and friendly user name? Check. Killer red lipstick? Check.*

*It's a perfect time to dive into social media. Just make sure you're diving into the deep end.*



Why? When you venture into the world of social media, you're likely to start getting plenty of updates from the services you sign up for, as well as friend requests, update notifications, and so on. At most of these services, you can control what kind of updates you receive, but trust me: you'll get more than you expected. And those are the "legitimate" emails you'll get; unfortunately, you'll start to see a rise in the number of spam messages as well. Most social media services do a good job of protecting your email data, but the phishing scams are never-ending. Better to be safe than sorry by having a "social media only" email address. (As an added bonus, your social media activities will be aggregated under this email address.)

Second, give some thought to a username. I think you should be consistent across the board, and try to use the same name at all the social media sites you target. No, I'm not going to tell you to generate hundreds of social media identities—in fact, I'd discourage you from concentrating on more than four or five social media tools—but it will benefit you to think about your brand in the social mediasphere ahead of time. Some companies sign up as a company name ([@jetblue](#) is a notable Twitter example), but I'd push you to use a first name and tie it to your company. If your company is Ace Plumbing, you could be AcePlumbingJoe, for instance. This makes you seem more human, which will serve you better in social media; remember, people (and especially social media people) will have a tendency to backlash

against anything they perceive as corporate-speak. Why put yourself in the hole by picking an overly corporate-sounding name? Also, as your social media efforts naturally grow, it will be a good idea to get other people at your company involved in social media circles. If you've associated names with your social media identities, you can have AcePlumbingJane, AcePlumbingKarbunkle, and so on and so forth.

## 2. Create a home base.

If you're going to be part of the larger social media family, you need to stake out a small piece of property to call home—a base where people can “land” if they want to find out more about you. You might be thinking it should be your “corporate” website, but I'm going to tell you it probably shouldn't be...unless your corporate website is driven by an online publishing system (such as WordPress, Blogger, Movable Type, Drupal, Joomla) with a commenting feature.

That doesn't mean you need to re-tool your website and make it blog and comment-driven right away, but I think you'll want to add that functionality at some point (it's cheap—even free—and you can make the look of the blog match the rest of your web site). At the very least, consider an online publishing system to power a social media news room on your site, as we discussed earlier.



*WordPress is one of the most prevalent online publishing platforms—and a perfect choice for creating your social media news room.*

But again, that's something to keep in mind for down the road; right now, you're just starting.

The first step I'd recommend as of this writing: sign up for a Twitter account. I say this for a few reasons. First, Twitter is easy; you're limited to 140 characters (roughly 20-ish words) for each update you send. And, you can send updates from your mobile phone—no need to get knee-deep in geeky computer stuff. Second, Twitter is the current social media darling; it's growing at a much faster rate than just about any other social media tool,<sup>10</sup> so it behooves you to learn a bit about it. If you don't, you can be sure at least one of your competitors is. Third, Twitter has built-in selectivity, either by region or interest area; you can quickly find people to “follow” who match your existing customer demographics. Make sense?

Now, put all that on the back burner for the moment, because I'm not going to tell you to storm onto the Twitter scene and start posting updates every ten minutes. Your initial efforts on Twitter should be all about research and learning.

So, go to Twitter, pick your username, and [sign up](#) for an account. Now, here's an easy way to pick up your first follower: [follow me](#) on Twitter, and I'll automatically follow you back. Then, start searching for other people to follow. You know who your customers are, so start picking people who match your customer profiles. If you're Ace Plumbing serving Omaha,



*Main Twitter sign-up screen, complete with funky bird art.*

Nebraska, it probably makes sense to start looking for people in Omaha, Nebraska. The Twitter search function is a good place to begin. Don't bother with the search bar on the right hand side of the Twitter home page, and don't be sucked into the large "Find People" link at the top of the page. You want to scroll down to the bottom of the page and click on the small "search" link you find there. This takes you to the [main Twitter search screen](#), which is what's going to be most helpful. (Don't ask me why Twitter buries this at the bottom of their page.) Put "[near:Omaha](#)" in the search box and click. You'll get a list of Twitter messages posted in and around Omaha. Click through on the results, and as you find people who are interesting, follow them. Chances are, they'll follow you back.

But what if you want to narrow that? What if you just want to concentrate on Omaha itself? On the right hand side of the search screen, you'll see a small Google map with options below. Pick "[within: 1 km,](#)" and you'll get updates from Omaha itself. Because most Twitter updates are sent via mobile phone, you'll get very accurate tracking data on the results.

Now click on the "[advanced search](#)" link next to the search bar, and you'll get various options for filtering Twitter updates by key words, location, time of last update, and so on. Armed with this, you'll be able to find interesting people to follow.

*Search results showing recent Twitter updates ("tweets") around Omaha. No mention of steaks.*





*The absolute key to an ongoing social media presence: have a plan. If you don't, you'll end up lost, cold and alone.*

As you follow people, you'll start getting a list of updates ("tweets") on your main Twitter page. This is where your research starts. Look for patterns in the updates. What topics are dominating the conversations? What links are getting posted? Who's following whom? Start jotting some notes about what you're seeing, and you'll likely begin discovering ideas for ways you can add to the conversation. You're off and running.

### **3. Make a plan.**

Before you jump into Twitter and start sending mad updates right and left, it would be a good idea to develop a plan of attack for your social media efforts. Yes, I told you to jump on Twitter first, but I also told you that was for research. Before you go any farther, you should step back and make sure you know, exactly, where you're going.

It seems this is invariably where most people stumble. Because social media is large and sprawling, it's easy to just jump in, start building profiles at every site you come across, then head down the trail to the next stop. Just about everyone has done it; I certainly have. But at some point, you'll realize you should probably concentrate your efforts on no more than five or six tools you can use regularly. Why not save yourself some trouble and figure out the best tools to use from the beginning?

For my own efforts, I developed a framework for building a social media strategy I call [Social GPS™](#), which is really just what it sounds like: a

framework that helps you figure out where you are, and where you're going. In the Social GPS framework, you have six main sections: *Current Position* (overview of your company, products, customer characteristics), *Destination* (your social media goals), *Route Map* (social media tools you'll use), *Waypoints* (your "to do" list for the next three months or so), *Road Ahead* (your "to do" list for 3 months+), and *Travel Journal* (your section for ongoing notes and tracking). Using this kind of framework, you can begin piecing together a Social Media Plan that can be incorporated into your overall marketing plan.

So how do you find the best sites? Ah, grasshopper, that is a Big Question. But I'd start at [Alexa](#), which will give you sites ranked by traffic. You can drill down by region, and by topic, giving you a list of sites that target your particular social circles. Also check the latest [press releases and reports from ComScore](#), which regularly tracks the top search engines and social media sites.

#### 4. Expand your base.

Now it's time to start mingling and inviting guests to your own little corner of the social mediasphere. As a next step, I'd suggest creating a [Facebook](#) page. I don't think every company necessarily *needs* a Facebook page, but there's certainly not much of a downside. And, Facebook has two main advantages: you can create a page that operates much like an individual



*As of this writing, Facebook is the social media site receiving the most traffic.*

*Chances are, you want to talk about customer service and friendliness. Chances are, adding “Mafia Wars” to your Facebook profile doesn’t send that message.*



“profile” page on the site, and you can drill down to content/groups/users based on region and interest area.

Your username for a Facebook page should be your business or company name, plain and simple. After you sign up, don’t worry too much about putting a bunch of whiz-bang stuff on your Facebook page; the basics will do it. Add a photo or two, and basic information about your business. You’ll automatically get a “wall” where people can post public comments, and a discussion board, where people can start topics of conversation. As you progress, you can start creating notes (the Facebook version of blog posts), events, and other interesting content.

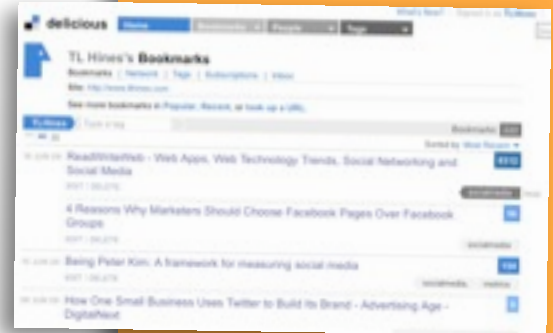
Because this is a business page, resist the invitations to add all sorts of third-party applications that will soon start flooding in. Some users will want you to join their mafia game. Some will want you to be a zombie. Some will want to send you pieces of flair, or hatchlings, or a million other things. If you want to do those things, great; sign up as an individual user and go crazy. But don’t clutter your business page with a bunch of add-ons.

Now, start integrating social media into your regular communication. Put links on your web site saying “Follow us on Twitter” and “Become a fan on Facebook.” Add links to your Twitter account and Facebook page on your email signature. Next time you need to print business cards or letterhead, add

the links there, as well. Those are the basics, and they'll help you gain new friends and followers.

Start working your plan for ongoing social media efforts. The basics of your plan should obviously include what social media vehicles you'll use, as well as a [plan for developing content](#). Sit down and write ten or so Twitter updates at a time, then plan to send one out each day for the next ten days. Look at your existing content. Do you have tip sheets/how-to documents/advice for your customers? Great; those will make good notes for your Facebook page. How about video content? Convert the videos and post those on Facebook, too, then send out Twitter updates to let people know they're available. Seminars and presentations you've given? Comb through them for nuggets of information that can be re-purposed online.

And that's just the beginning. For next steps, I strongly suggest you look at setting up that social media news room on your site, using a blog/online publishing engine to power it. Take a look at social networks such as [LinkedIn](#), which tends to be more business-driven. Create a [YouTube](#) account and post videos there. Start a [Delicious](#) account and page to save links specific to your company and industry. Add in one or two tools specific to your industry or region, and your own social media party will just be getting started.



*Mmmm, there's nothing quite as delicious as a fresh bookmark. Except a nice MLT: Mutton, Lettuce and Tomato sandwich.*

To build traffic, consider promoting your Facebook page with ads in the Facebook network (which can be targeted by topic or region). Consider a similar campaign with Google AdWords, also easily targeted by topic and region. Consider creating and releasing your first social media press release. Know that there will always be new ways to drive people to your site, and know that you will continue to discover them as your party continues.

The screenshot shows the Facebook Ads Manager interface for an ad named "Be in a TL Hines Book". The ad is in the "paused" state. Below the ad name, there is a table showing "Daily stats for the week of" with columns for Date, Imp, Clicks, CPC, Avg. CPC, Avg. CTR, and Spend. The table has three rows: "09-27-2009", "09-28-2009", and "Lifetime". Below the table, there are three sections: "Targeting", "Social Audiences", and "Locations".

Date	Imp	Clicks	CPC	Avg. CPC	Avg. CTR	Spend
09-27-2009	107,290	26	0.02	0.02	0.24	15.50
09-28-2009	171,080	27	0.02	0.02	0.16	17.68
Lifetime	278,369	52	0.02	0.02	0.24	33.18

**Targeting**  
This ad targets users:  
• who live in the United States  
• who like accounts, books, clubs, bands, photographers

**Social Audiences**  
This ad will overlap with Social Audiences from:  
• TL Hines, Author of "How to Be a TL Hines"

**Locations**  
This ad will overlap in the:  
• All Spain

*Facebook ads can help you attract fans to your page for as little as five bucks a day. You probably spend that on your morning latté.*

## A FINAL THOUGHT: THE PARTY DOESN'T START UNTIL YOU DO

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Going back to the beginning, you're possibly reading this document because you're trying to decide if social media makes sense for your business. I hope I've convinced you it does. But please keep this in mind: analysis paralysis has killed many a wonderful project or idea. Don't obsess too much about the how and the why and the where and the who; just keep the basics in mind and jump in, because nothing happens until you start *somewhere*. So just make a commitment, and do it now; it's okay to learn as you go along. We're all learning as we go along, because social media is continuing to grow and transform all around us.

Someday soon—maybe in a few months, definitely in a few years—this big party will look different. But we'll all be different, won't we? I'll be there, casually sipping a drink—but never, ever drinking too much and looking for the nearest lamp shade to put on my head.

I hope you'll be there, too.



*Social media is changing the way we communicate. This is no time to be a couch potato; get your feet in the starting blocks now.*



*Can you spot the author, cleverly hidden in this photo? (Hint: I'm the one without bark.)*

## **PARTY FAVORS: CONTACTS, RESOURCES, AND CREDITS**

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I'm TL Hines, and I wrote this guide. Which leads to the question: why? I'm a novelist, but I'm also a marketing guy and an incurable technology geek. I can still fondly recall signing onto the Missoula Area Conferencing System (a bulletin board system) with my good ol' Mac Classic while attending the University of Montana in the late 80s. I was one of the early members of AOL. I registered my first domain name when registrations were free. I designed my first web site in 1995. I wrote my first blog post in 2003. I created one of the first blog networks to promote book reviews in 2005.

I say all this to let you know that I've been a part of this developing thing we call the Internet for a long time. And I believe social media is truly the most significant shift we've seen since the "early days." Recently, I began a service called [Social Media Scout](#), working with businesses to help them develop ongoing strategies in this Brave New World. That's how much I believe in the possibilities. If you have questions, comments, concerns, or recipes to share, please feel free to contact me. Or, if you have suggestions, additions or corrections for this document, please [let me know](#) those, too; I'll reference you as a source in future editions.

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[www.tlhines.com](http://www.tlhines.com) • [www.socialmediascout.com](http://www.socialmediascout.com)

## Other Resources (A Sampling)

*People who offer sensible social media advice:*

- Chris Brogan - [www.chrisbrogan.com](http://www.chrisbrogan.com)
- Todd Defren - [www.pr-squared.com](http://www.pr-squared.com)
- Peter Kim - [www.beingpeterkim.com](http://www.beingpeterkim.com)
- David Meerman Scott - [www.davidmeermanscott.com](http://www.davidmeermanscott.com)

*Sites specific to social media trends:*

- Mashable: [www.mashable.com](http://www.mashable.com)
- ReadWriteWeb: [www.readwriteweb.com](http://www.readwriteweb.com)
- Social Media Club: [www.socialmediacub.org](http://www.socialmediacub.org)

*A few “must-read” articles:*

- *Why You Have to Engage in Social Media, Even if You Don't Want To* (Jason Cohen)  
<http://blog.asmartbear.com/blog/why-you-have-to-engage-in-social-media-even-if-you-dont-want.html>
- *A List of Social Media Marketing Examples* (Peter Kim)  
<http://www.beingpeterkim.com/2008/09/ive-been-thinki.html>
- *Starting Points for Online Presence* (Chris Brogan)  
<http://www.chrisbrogan.com/starting-points-for-online-presence/>
- *Participation is Marketing* (Todd Defren)  
[http://www.pr-squared.com/2007/05/participation\\_is\\_marketing.html](http://www.pr-squared.com/2007/05/participation_is_marketing.html)



*At the social media party,  
lasers are entirely optional.  
And please don't point the  
lasers at anyone's eyes.*



*The true power of social media is its ability to go viral and “infect” thousands, even millions, of people when it’s in the right place at the right time. Kind of like H1N1, but without all the public panic and nasty symptoms.*

## End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *Just Under Half of Americans Have A Facebook or MySpace Account* (Harris Interactive)  
[http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris\\_poll/pubs/Harris\\_Poll\\_2009\\_04\\_16.pdf](http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/pubs/Harris_Poll_2009_04_16.pdf)
- <sup>2</sup> *American Idol’s Ad Costs are TV’s Most Expensive...* (Reality Blurred)  
[http://www.realityblurred.com/realitytv/archives/american\\_idol\\_8/2009\\_Apr\\_12\\_ad\\_revenue](http://www.realityblurred.com/realitytv/archives/american_idol_8/2009_Apr_12_ad_revenue)
- <sup>3</sup> *Porn Passed Over as Web Users Become Social* (Belinda Goldsmith)  
<http://www.reuters.com/article/technologyNews/idUSSP31943720080916>
- <sup>4</sup> *YouTube Videos Stir Up New Sales for “Will it Blend?” Maker,* (Marianne Kolbasuk McGee)  
<http://www.informationweek.com/news/internet/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=202102372>
- <sup>5</sup> *How One Small Business Uses Twitter to Build its Brand* (Jeff Leach, Randy Crochet and Brock Fillinger)  
[http://adage.com/digitalnext/article?article\\_id=136957](http://adage.com/digitalnext/article?article_id=136957)
- <sup>6</sup> *The 22-Step Social Media Marketing Plan* (Peter Kim)  
<http://mashable.com/2008/11/07/social-media-marketing-plan/>
- <sup>7</sup> *State of the Blogosphere / 2008* (Technorati)  
<http://technorati.com/blogging/state-of-the-blogosphere/>
- <sup>8</sup> *Social Media and SEO: 5 Essential Steps to Success* (Lee Odden)  
<http://mashable.com/2009/04/15/social-media-seo/>
- <sup>9</sup> *A Running List of Sponsored Conversations* (Jeremiah Owyang)  
<http://www.web-strategist.com/blog/category/ethics/>
- <sup>10</sup> *Twitter’s Massive 2008: 752 Percent Growth* (Adam Ostrow)  
<http://mashable.com/2009/01/09/twitter-growth-2008/>

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*Naked Pizza: a notable example of a small business using social media successfully. They don't actually make the pizza while naked. I checked.*





*Just look at how the social media community celebrates when businesses integrate naturally.*

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