

Do it Yourself Social Media Marketing :: A StepForth Whitepaper

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SEO Meet SMM (Social Media Marketing) was the most information-dense seminar that I attended at SMX Advanced, a multi-day conference geared for advanced web marketing professionals. As a result, it has taken a while to view my footage and pick out all of the best tips to share with you. The SEO Meet SMM seminar was paneled with an all-star cast of [Rand Fishkin](#), [Neil Patel](#) and [Cindy Krum](#). Between these three incredibly bright people, and my own experience and research I have put together this whitepaper on how to use social media marketing (SMM) to your advantage. I believe this is the most current (timely), accurate and cutting edge information available for those who want to start marketing in this field.

The Concept

Social media marketing is a method of promoting your brand (be it yourself, a product, a service, or a company) by strategically making your presence known across various social media networks (such as [Digg](#), [Reddit](#), [StumbleUpon](#), [Myspace](#), etc). This may seem overly elementary but "making yourself known" is the kicker because each category of social media has a different, sometimes intricate method for effective promotion.

Business from Social Marketing is Indirect

A key concept to social marketing is that it is not designed to immediately provide business but instead it provides the visibility your brand needs to ultimately convert fans into buyers. I often get clients saying "I don't think being on MySpace will sell anything". The truth is that often they are correct. Having a commercial presence on MySpace that provides great content and interesting free tools (aka. widgets) serves to raise the awareness of your brand so that users remember your service for later and/or provides you with a podium to share the benefits of your brand. In short, it is important not to forget this essential concept: social media marketing drives brand awareness which later translates into sales.

Social Media Categories and Associated Strategies

Here is an introduction to the various top portals segregated into their appropriate categories and mated with a recommended strategy. Please keep in mind the following is only a partial listing of some social media sites. If you want a more comprehensive (but unorganized) list check out this [list of web 2.0 sites](#) which includes social media properties (very extensive list).

I have organized Social Media Marketing into the following categories or themes:

- A. [Social Networking Sites](#)
- B. [Business Networking Sites](#)
- C. [Social \(Collaborative\) Bookmarking Sites](#)
- D. [Content Voting Sites](#)
- E. [Online News Aggregation](#)
- F. [Collaborative Directories](#)
- G. [Video Sharing Sites](#), and
- H. [Photo Sharing Sites](#)

A) Social Networking Sites

The following social networking sites experience a volume of activity unrivaled in the social media marketplace. These sites provide it all; personal blogs, videos, music, classifieds, mail, and much, much more.



1. [MySpace](#): this site offers the widest variety of tools and social networking capabilities.
2. [Facebook](#): great for connecting with old classmates and creating a personal profile.

Associated Marketing Strategy

Each of these sites allow you to create a powerfully diverse and engaging web presence complete with photos, articles, and bookmarks. MySpace even provides the ability to 'skin' your profile! In other words you can actually brand it to make it totally unique; a powerful marketing capability (To view a great example see [Starbuck's MySpace account](#)). Assuming the site is already done it is best to then start linking to the site from key areas of the Internet so the search engines will have no problem finding and indexing it. You can do this by linking to it from a social media section of your website; a section that I believe will be part of the status quo structure (as ubiquitous as the About Page) of all new websites in the near future.

B) Business Networking Sites

These sites are devoted to networking business people and provide direct access to upper level management / executives for sales people and for those looking to create industry connections.

1. [LinkedIn](#): the premier business networking site where job profiles are shared, jobs posted, questions asked and then answered by industry professionals (my current favorite).
2. [ZoomInfo](#): a search engine index of company names and people. Find yourself (if you are there) and claim your space or create your profile.
3. [Spoke](#): a database of contact information for people at all levels of business.
4. [Jigsaw](#): a database of virtual business cards that can be traded and shared amongst members.

Associated Marketing Strategy

Create a personal profile on each of these sites and connect, connect, connect. The concept is so simple I could almost stop there but it is important not to forget that some of these services also allow for interactivity in forums and Q&A sections. I recommend participating as often as possible in these interactive sections in order to gain positive references and to further expand your network.

C) Social (Collaborative) Bookmarking Sites

Here are a number of websites that specialize in social bookmarking. When you register with the service the service will collect and organize the sites that you choose to bookmark and allow you to share them with other others. The social concept allows each service to create content-specific directories of user-selected content; which states (theoretically) the content is of a high quality.

1. [Del.icio.us](#): bought by Yahoo in 2005, Del.icio.us is the web's leading bookmarking site.
2. [StumbleUpon](#): in the past when my best content got 'stumbled' by users I found this community to offer the highest quality response in terms of traffic and buzz.
3. [Yahoo! MyWeb](#): Yahoo's huge following has made MyWeb a popular bookmarking property and a top property for promotion.
4. [Backflip](#): started in 1999 (or possibly earlier) this site is the one of the granddaddies of bookmarking but it came on harsh times and was sold to passionate employees who maintain it now. This is not a leader in the industry but it was my first bookmarking site way back in '99 so I feel I owe Backflip a little time in the limelight.

Associated Marketing Strategy

Create a personal profile on each site and then spend some time using them as though you were a potential customer of your own service. In other words, search for terms you target in your SEO campaigns or ask questions you or your target market asks regularly. After a while you will see a trend in the results you receive that you can use to your advantage.



For example, after typing in “marketing tips” on [StumbleUpon](#) you may notice that many of the articles that are getting positive reviews are written like tutorials whereas the other articles are getting little or negative feedback. This type of observation will give you the insight you need to write quality articles that are more likely to get positive ratings; which ultimately translates into increased traffic to the article source (your website perhaps). In addition, you can go back and bookmark tutorial content you have already written (as long as it is still viable).

If you are not writing your own content at the moment it is still advisable to find other great content and bookmark it for your profile. Why? If you create a reputation for providing excellent bookmarks it is more likely you will get additional, positive attention when you ultimately feature content of your own.

D) Content Voting Sites

The following are the top sites used for people to vote ‘on the fly’ for any content they find useful online. The resulting vote then adds the content or increases its visibility within each resource so that others have a chance to read the content. Once something has received a certain number of votes (this is a moving target) the visibility of the content may gain momentum as others have a chance to read and vote on it.

1. [Digg](#): currently one of the most popular social media websites in the world and has been known to show a high degree of technology-based news.
2. [Netscape](#): is in many ways a successful clone of Digg but Netscape has been accused of providing more entertainment news rather than technology news.
3. [Reddit](#): the news here is more politically inclined and the site has a very strong following.

Associated Marketing Strategy

First a caution: it is crucial that you pay attention to the etiquette of these content voting sites; otherwise your promotions could backfire and/or you could be banned. To read up on etiquette visit the associated help files for each site (i.e. [How Digg Works](#)) and the FAQ – these will give you the necessary background info to get you started.

To make these sites work for you I recommend participating in each group for a while in order to pick up on what articles do well and don’t do well in your selected industry. In addition, creating a respected profile by bookmarking new and interesting content and posting thoughtful comments on other people’s bookmarks will go a long way to improving your chances of success on these sites. Once you have a respected profile you can ask other respected users to check out your new content to see if they deem it worthy of a thumbs up. Whatever you do, I do not recommend voting on your own content due to the obvious bias and potential damage it could do to your profile’s reputation.

E) Online News Aggregation and Sharing Tools/Sites

These sites serve as private news hubs where information is collected (aggregated) from blogs or other syndicated content that the user has decided he/she wants to be kept up to date on. The users are also provided with simple methods to share their chosen feeds with other like-minded users.

1. [Technorati](#): the grandfather of the lot, Technorati is a search engine that specializes in providing current content from millions of blogs from all over the world.
2. [Bloglines](#): subscribe to feeds, groups, or websites and share your favorite content. Bloglines also allows you to create a custom blog within your profile.
3. [Newsvine](#): this excellent site is similar to Bloglines in that you can submit your own articles and have your own blog hosted within their system(s).
4. [Google Reader](#): add a multitude of feeds, categorize them and share them (if you wish)



Associated Marketing Strategy

Each of the above sites has varying characteristics that should be considered separately when marketing:

- **Technorati:** first setup a free account at Technorati and claim your blog. Once it is claimed ensure that you tag each of your blog postings using categories or labels depending on the blog software you are using. If your software does not offer tagging functionality Technorati has a [tagging help page](#) that will provide you with instructions to add custom Technorati labels to each blog posting. Once your blog is set up appropriately try to use descriptive keywords when tagging your posts so your content is more likely to be found.
- **Bloglines & Newsvine:** create a profile of your favorite web feeds and articles including your own (if they are of a high enough quality) and share them with the community. Create a custom blog and separately post teasers of your articles that link to the main article on your own site.
- **Google Reader:** create labels (aka. tag) using keyphrases that are popularly searched and then share the labels with the general public; label sharing is found in the “Settings” and then “Tags” area of [Google Reader](#). Then attach top quality content from your own site and other sites that you find in your day-to-day online activities.

In each case where you create a unique blog or share a label make sure to link to these pages from a social media section of your website and/or site map. These links will provide the search engine spiders with crucial access points to your socialized content. After a while, gauge the success of each social site for driving traffic or backlinks by checking your backlink reports ([Yahoo](#) or [Google](#) webmaster areas) as well as your own [website analytic reports](#) and add more backlinks to one if it is standing out as a particularly positive performer. These extra backlinks should not be from your own site but from offsite areas such as forum signatures, online bios, syndicated articles, etc.

F) Collaborative Directories

These directories are compiled with recommended sites or content maintained by online volunteers.

1. [Wikipedia](#): an online reference/dictionary where the content is created by volunteers.
2. [Open Directory Project](#): the oldest human-edited directory of websites.
3. [Prefound](#): a directory of shared favorite sites from a wide variety of categories.
4. [Zimbio](#): a directory of fed content from external and internal blogs and shared favorites.

Associated Marketing Strategy

Each of the above sites has varying characteristics that should be considered separately when marketing:

- **Wikipedia:** check to see if your company name is already in the Wikipedia index. If it is make certain that the link to your website is active and the content within the profile is correct. If a profile for your company is not online yet then sign up with Wikipedia and create a profile while making sure to provide an encyclopedic viewpoint. Wikipedia [discusses](#) in detail the type of writing that will be flagged as spam so don't waste your time being promotional because your write up is likely to be flagged as spam or removed if you are. What you want is a link to your website from Wikipedia and a profile that properly describes your offering and company history. You can add links to external websites but do so sparingly.
- **Open Directory Project (ODP):** check www.dmoz.org for your website listing by typing in your company name or the name that you are most likely to be listed under. If you find your site listed make certain the listing is accurate. If you do not find your site listed then you need to submit it by finding the most appropriate category (only one is generally allowed per URL) and submit your listing via the “Suggest URL” link at the top of the page. If you need to make an alteration use the “update listing” link where you will have to explain the reasons for the change – they have to be good to have any chance of success. I also suggest checking for a “weblogs” or “newsletters” category for your industry where you can separately submit your blog(s) and newsletter(s). Links from the ODP are useful because



they are often well indexed by search engines and offer direct unblocked links to your website.

- **Prefound:** create an account and document sites and content related to your profession that you find particularly interesting. Befriend users within Prefound community that regularly contribute to categories related to your industry. When you write a blog and you believe it has enough merit to benefit other users then ask others within your community to consider your content for addition; it is generally not a good idea to add your own content but on occasion, if your content is extremely relevant I see no reason to avoid doing so.
- **Zimbio:** while setting up your account you will be prompted to enter the URL of your own blog. Once you have completed the setup you will have access to a list of your recent blogs which you can then, one by one, categorize into their various 'wikizines' which are essentially topic-focused pages within Zimbio. Now, don't just use Zimbio to publish your own work but try to find other great content out there which adds value to the site. There are easy "add to Zimbio" buttons you can add to your various browsers to populate your profile with new content regularly. If you create a clean mix of both external and personal content you will have a far higher chance of creating a useful profile at Zimbio.

G) Video Sharing Sites

Video sharing is one of the foremost methods of social marketing and it requires different technologies from the previously discussed content-based social marketing formats. The following are some of the top video sharing sites:

1. [YouTube](#): YouTube is the premier video sharing website exponentially out-distancing its competitors in terms of traffic and popularity.
2. [Metacafe](#): claims a global audience of 16 million unique visitors and offers a free video editing package to its users along with decent payouts to those whose videos appear on the front page.
3. [Break](#): similar to Metacafe, this site is well laid out and offers payments to users for videos that appear on the front page.
4. [DailyMotion](#): it has a jam-packed home page and [according to Alexa](#) it has a very strong following.

Associated Marketing Strategy

Videos have the power to catch on and travel through millions of desktop screens within a matter of hours. I am not going to tell you how to create a quality video but as the incredibly popular Apple videos have shown, even a commercial video can perform famously online. What I can tell you, however, is that whatever you do create for video sharing sites should be uploaded to as many sites as possible – there is no harm in doing this. Furthermore, when you upload each video it is crucial that you creatively populate the video title, description and keyword/label fields with words that both ignite the interest of viewers and allow the video to be found. Did what I just say sound familiar? It should, after all optimizing a video for the Internet is currently no different than optimizing a page was using META description and keyword tags back in 1997. Just do not assume that spamming is just as successful as it was back then; these days you have to craft your tags very carefully in order to be found in the dirge of competing content.

Once you have uploaded all of your videos embed a copy within each of your online blogs. Which video source to embed is up to you. You may want to mix it up and use YouTube on your main site but some of the others on your satellite blogs (i.e. Newsvine, Bloglines, etc.). Another option would be to create a slick introduction to your video from each of your blogs and then link them to your main blog where your video is embedded.

H) Photo Sharing Sites

Digital cameras are everywhere from pocket sized point and shoots and cell phone cameras to popular digital SLRs that appear to be around the chest of every tourist. Unfortunately all of these pictures take up a great deal of digital space that the average amateur photographer cannot accommodate. As a result, the photo sharing marketplace has exploded to provide numerous homes for avid photographers to host their stash of family, business and artsy pics. The following sites stand out as serious performers in this socially-driven field:



1. [Flickr](#): extremely popular and by far the leader in this industry to date.
2. [Webshots](#): has a strong following and requires free software download to upload photos.
3. [ShutterFly](#): offers an excellent interface with image editing tools and a whole host of photo-related services.
4. [PBase](#): has been around since 1999 and offers decent functionality to a moderate user base.
5. [SmugMug](#): according to Compete.com it has experienced rapid growth over the past year (41.6%) – great design!

Associated Marketing Strategy

Pictures are optimized much the same way as videos: carefully craft a title, a description and keyword tag that best represents the image and piques the interests of your target viewer. But the question that I often consider is, “what is the best way to make photos generate business?” My first recommendation is to use pictures to show your interest in your field. For example, if you sold cars you could benefit from posting your photos from the most recent car show you went to along with a note that you will soon have the cars available on your lot. In this regard it is useful to provide a link to your own website so viewers can investigate you when their interest is piqued. Showing that you are interested in your industry and that you are active within it implies a level of knowledge that many viewers may find comforting.

Create a Plan

Now that you have an idea of the various social web properties and their potential marketing application(s) it is important to identify what you want to get out of social media before you market in this space. Be sure to ask yourself the following questions:

What is your ultimate goal?

Consider the objectives that come to mind. Here are some examples of common answers and what they might mean to your planning efforts:

1. *“I want people to know my name and acknowledge my expert status.”*
In this situation you may want to drive traffic to your main website bio where you feature your services, testimonials or even your resume. Using social media you can build your online reputation by participating in sites that appear to have a strong following of potential customers; provide answers to their questions, find associated content that you know will help them and bookmark it. All-in-all you want to make friends and create a personal profile above recrimination.
2. *“I want my company name to be found within all of the major social media sites when my industry-related keywords are typed in.”*
There are a variety of ways to achieve this end result but I expect the most effective is to create quality content that no one can help but link to. That is far harder than it sounds but the fact is that company names don't rise to the cream of the Internet crop without blowing people away with helpful and thoughtful content. Once you create the content use a blog to disseminate it quickly while placing a snippet (say the first 3 paragraphs) into your social media profiles in such sites as MySpace, Bloglines, and Newsvine along with a link to your main article (where readers can continue reading). By only providing a teaser for your article and pointing readers to your website for the full article you will be emphasizing the original posting on your flagship site as the original article and as well, you will heighten its visibility.

TIP) Be sure to work hard to create a network of friends within each social community. You can leverage this community by letting them know you have just released an article they may be interested in.
3. *“I need to get the word out on my product/service.”*
News releases are not mentioned within this article but I would be remiss not to mention them. Use [PRWeb.com](#) to submit a carefully crafted press release to the web. Next go to each of your established profiles and tell your friends



about your launch and perhaps even offer them a free product or trial of the service. Whatever you do the ultimate goal is to make it unavoidable for them to help you market it.

In each of the cases above I also recommend participating in answer forums like the [LinkedIn](#) Answers area or [Yahoo Answers](#) where people (and in turn their businesses) can prove their worth to questioners. In fact there are people whose sole income comes from impressing people in Yahoo Answers and getting their business. Indeed, each of those programs offers a point system where, if you are providing top answers you can rise in their ranking of your industry brethren which will increase your company's visibility significantly.

How much time are you willing to commit to social media marketing?

This is a crucial question because it will determine just how big you want to make your social media plan. If you are doing this yourself then force yourself to set a few hours aside every day or every two days to keep your profiles active. If that is too much work then consider hiring someone to help you keep the profiles fresh OR just select the top social media websites to market. Whatever you decide to do start out small and then increase your social marketing workload only when you know you have the time and patience to do the additional work correctly.

Get Out There and Participate!

As I researched this whitepaper I found myself blown away by the sheer number of social media websites that appear to be prospering and are regularly adding new incredibly creative methods to share and receive great information. This whitepaper will likely be out of date within a few months (at best) but for now I am confident it will provide many with the necessary roadmap to get started in social media marketing. Keep in touch as I regularly update the [StepForth SEO blog](#) with breaking news in the social media realm and provide tips on new techniques that will keep you one step ahead of your competition.

Sincerely,

[Ross Dunn](#)

CEO/Founder

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