

Do it Yourself Social Media Marketing: A StepForth Whitepaper

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 [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Google Plus](#), 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 often indirect

A key concept to social marketing is that it is not designed to immediately provide business. Instead it provides the visibility your brand needs to ultimately convert fans into buyers. I often hear clients saying “I don’t think being on Twitter will sell anything.” The truth is that this is often true. Having a commercial presence on a social platform that provides great content and interesting free tools (aka. widgets) raises the awareness of your brand so that users remember your service for later, and it also 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 list check out [Knowem](#) which includes social media networks in a variety of categories.

I have organized Social Media Marketing into the following categories:

- A. [Social Networking Sites](#)
- B. [Business Networking Sites](#)
- C. [Social \(Collaborative\) Bookmarking Sites](#)
- D. [Content Voting Sites](#)
- E. [News Sharing Sites](#)
- F. [Collaborative Directories](#)
- G. [Video Sharing Sites](#)
- 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. [Facebook](#): this is a powerful platform for brands to build reputation and awareness, and encourage fans to be highly interactive with them. Facebook advertising is a good way to promote products, drive more likes on a page, or simply boost brand recognition.
2. [Google+](#): this platform allows pages to put other users into groups and then distribute relevant content to each group. Because it's a product of Google, G+ is integrated into search, and it's easy to place a +1 button on any third-party sites. Page managers have access to comprehensive page analytics to monitor what's working and what isn't.

Associated Marketing Strategy

Social networking sites allow you to create a powerfully diverse and engaging web presence complete with photos, articles, and bookmarks. In other words you can actually brand your profile to make it unique to your brand; a powerful marketing capability.

B) Business Networking Sites

These sites are devoted to networking business people and provide direct access to upper level management and 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. [BranchOut](#): a Facebook application where users share their job profiles, history and skills much like LinkedIn. The difference is that it connects you with your entire list of Facebook contacts.

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; the users decide (theoretically) which content is of high quality.

1. [StumbleUpon](#) is a discovery engine that finds and recommends web content to its users. In April 2012, StumbleUpon announced that it had over 25 million registered users of the service.
2. [Digg](#) was rebuilt from the ground up in July 2012 to improve the user interface and overall experience. There is now increased support for sharing content to other social platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.



3. [Reddit](#) offers user-generated news links that rank by votes. As of June 2012, commentary is particularly active, often running into the hundreds on some submissions.
4. [Delicious](#) Originally founded in 2003 as a social bookmarking service, Delicious was acquired from Yahoo! in early 2011 by AVOS. The site was rebuilt from the ground up and re-launched in fall 2011 with a new focus on curating and discovery.

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 that 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 relevant).

If you are not currently writing your own content 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](#) is currently one of the most popular social media websites in the world and has a particular focus on technology, politics and entertainment news. Users “digg” stories they like and, over time, posts with more diggs gain higher visibility.
2. [Reddit](#) ranks posts according to votes up or down, total votes, and the age of the post. Users can subscribe to specific sub-communities to follow only topics that interest them.
3. [StumbleUpon](#) is a community that helps people to discover interesting websites. Users select topics of interest and then “stumble” through pages recommended by others.

Associated Marketing Strategy

First a caution: it is crucial that you pay attention to the etiquette of these 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 which articles are and aren't successful 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 help to improve 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) News Sharing Sites

News sharing 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](#) is the grandfather of the lot. It is a search engine that specializes in providing current content from millions of blogs from all over the world.
2. [Delicious](#) lets you create and share a list of your favourite sites. Users can subscribe to other users' lists and discover content by searching for tags.
3. [Google Reader](#) allows you to add a multitude of feeds, categorize them and offers the option of sharing them publicly or with specific people.

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 post. Once your blog is appropriately set up, try to use descriptive keywords when tagging your posts so that your content is more likely to be found.
- **Delicious:** bookmarks can be accessed from anywhere online. When setting up an account for the first time, you can import any bookmarks that you already have stored in your browser. Organize your resources so that they're easy to find when you need them again.
- **Google Reader:** create labels (tags) using key phrases 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.



F) Collaborative Directories

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

1. [Wikipedia](#) is an online reference/dictionary where the content is created by volunteers.
2. [Open Directory Project](#) the oldest human-edited directory of websites on the Internet.

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, register for an account with Wikipedia and create a profile; make sure to provide an encyclopedic viewpoint. Wikipedia [discusses](#) in detail the type of writing that will be flagged as spam. 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.

G) Video Sharing Sites

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

1. [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. It offers a free video editing package to its users along with decent payouts to those whose videos appear on the front page.
3. [Vimeo](#) is geared toward those who are passionate about creating high-quality video. The platform restricts uploads and allows only professionally created footage. Users enjoy high rates of feedback from their peers.



4. [DailyMotion](#) 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 I'm sure you're familiar with at least a few videos that have gone viral. What I can tell you is that whatever you 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 be careful not to spam the site; craft your tags very carefully in order to be found in the dirge of competing content.

Once you have uploaded all of your videos, share the video across your various social profiles. Create a slick introduction to your video on each of these profiles and then link it back to your main blog where the 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](#) is extremely popular and by far the leader in this industry to date.
2. [Picasa](#) is owned by Google, and it incorporates functions such as facial recognition and geotagging.
3. [Photobucket](#) goes beyond standard photo sharing sites; users can upload video and create slideshows, and share content directly through their social profiles.
4. [TwitPic](#) allows users to post photos and video and immediately share them via Twitter. It can be used independently of Twitter, though many of its features make it compatible to use in sync.
5. [Instagram](#) allows users to apply digital filters to photos and then immediately share them through their social networks. Images produced here are confined to a square shape reminiscent of Kodak Instamatic photos, giving them a vintage look.

Associated Marketing Strategy

Pictures are optimized much the same way as videos: carefully craft a title, a description, and keyword tag that best represent the image and piques the interests of your target viewer. 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 sell cars you could benefit from posting your photos from the most recent car show you went to, including a note that you will soon have the cars available on your lot. It is useful to provide a link to your own website so that it's easy for viewers to further



investigate you when their interest is piqued. Showing that you are interested and active in your industry 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:

“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 that features your services, testimonials or even your resume. Using social media you can build your online reputation by allowing you to participate on 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.

“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, post it to a blog and place a snippet into your social media profiles in such sites as Facebook and Twitter 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 emphasize the original posting on your flagship site as the original article, as well as heighten its visibility. 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.

In each of the cases above I also recommend participating in answer forums like the [LinkedIn](#) Answers area or [Quora](#) 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 Q&A forums 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 you'll need to force yourself to set aside time 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 focus on. Whatever you decide to do, start out small and increase your social marketing workload only when you know you have the time and patience to do the additional work correctly.

