# PRSA 2008 International Conference:

## The Point of Connection Social Media Discussion

Thank you to everyone who joined Jamie Timm, Adam Denison and me in Detroit to discuss the opportunities and pitfalls in using social media.

Years ago — when we were first talking about social media — it was Friendster and blogs and not much else. People asked — is it really worth investing in? Or is this just something for early adopters? The province of geeks?

But somehow — while we were all busy finishing college or growing our business — **the world's most social people took over the Web and made it their own.**

The numbers are now not only compelling, they're trending toward the ubiquitous:
   – 86 million Americans use the social Web

   – Including 75% of college students

   – And 60% of wealthy adults

The problem now isn't whether it's worth it — it's that **it's so overwhelming, it can seem impenetrable.** Natives bounce from one social activity to another: navigating, publishing, connecting. All second nature.

But to start now? There's just so much. All of it tangled with what came before it and the buzz about what will replace it.

On October 17, **we started to unravel it.** To simplify the social Web and find practical ways to use it in our lives and businesses. To **keep the conversation going,** I've compiled this Q&A document — including issues from our live discussion and a few questions from the back channel that we didn't have time to address.
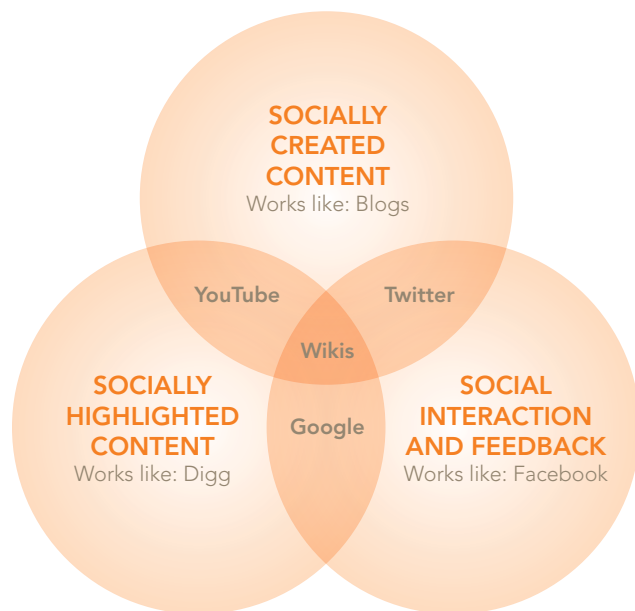
Please share these topics with colleagues and write back — or post — your own point of view.

The first test of a productive tool is:

**Does it fit with how people primarily use social media today? Or is it something entirely new that might take a lot longer to catch on?**

The ways people use social media today fall into three key categories:

SOCIALLY
CREATED
CONTENT
Works like: Blogs

YouTube

Twitter

Wikis

SOCIALLY
HIGHLIGHTED
CONTENT
Works like: Digg

Google

SOCIAL
INTERACTION
AND FEEDBACK
Works like: Facebook

– **Create:** Whether it's writing a blog about knitting, creating the next great viral video, or building a virtual world, social media meets the **human desire to create things** — things that will be saved, read and — if we're lucky — remembered.

– **Recommend:** Where once we trusted the opinion of 4 out of 5 dentists, today we want the opinions of their patients. Social media has elevated both the value of individual reviews and recommendations and the ability of networks of people to **elevate the very best content or ideas** with little more than the vote of their mouse.

– **Interact:** People to people. Asking questions, hanging out, trading stuff. **Interacting. It's the foundation of social media.** And, often, just the best thing about it.

## What is Social Media?

Social media is how people use decentralized, people-based networks to get the things they need from one another rather than from traditional institutions, like business or media.

**Q: By 2010, a new generation of managers and supervisors will take center stage in their companies. These men and women will bring a greater understanding of and facility with Web 2.0. What advances can we expect in the use of social and digital media under their leadership in tomorrow's companies?**

The biggest change will be a **shift in values.** In the fundamental expectations we have for things and relationships. **New ways of thinking** about everything from content to collaboration.

| CONTENT | |
|---|---|
| FROM: | TO: |
| EXCLUSIVITY | MAXIMIZING REACH |
| EXHAUSTIVE | CONCISE |
| EXPERT | PEER |

| COLLABORATION | |
|---|---|
| FROM: | TO: |
| TEAMS | NETWORKS |
| CREATING | ITERATING |
| DO IT FOR ME | DO IT MYSELF |

| ACCESS | |
|---|---|
| FROM: | TO: |
| COLLECTION | COMMUNITY |
| PLANNED | IMMEDIATE |
| AGGREGATED | DIRECT |

| AUDIENCE | |
|---|---|
| FROM: | TO: |
| LISTENING | CONTRIBUTING |
| 9–5; AFTER 6 | 24/7 |
| DEPENDENT | EMPOWERED |

Consider access as an example. The way we gather ideas, insights and documentation is radically changing. We're moving **from personal collections** of email folders and paper copies **to collective environments** where entire teams have access to everything about a project in a single portal.

We're moving from cultures that create long-term plans for feedback and discovery to organizations that want answers now with customer panels on call and executive suites with open doors. And, we no longer want that feedback exclusively in percentages and segments. **We want 1:1. Real answers in real voices.**
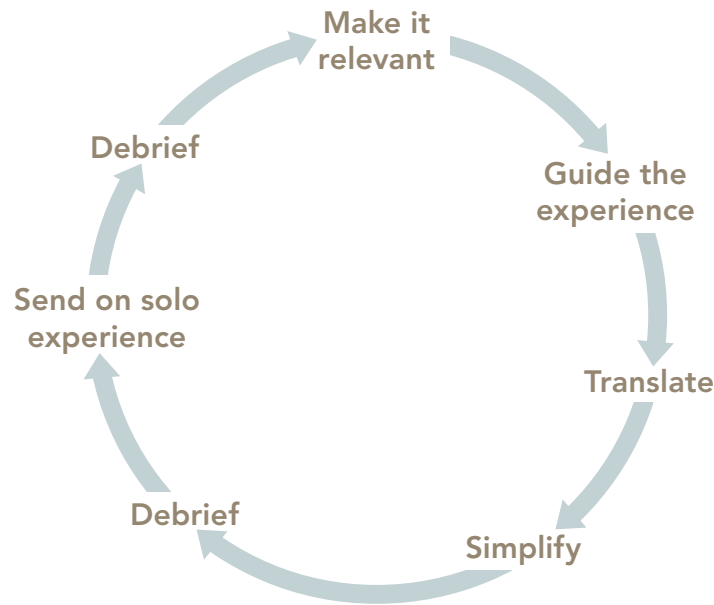
The single biggest workplace change to watch for:

Internal communications budgets on par with external marketing

As social networks further break down the barriers between work and life, the biggest managers of brand reputation in the social world will be employees who characterize their job satisfaction, share what makes them proud or disappointed in their workplace, and increasingly speak directly to customers in diverse media.

It's the process that makes the difference:

Make it relevant → Guide the experience → Translate → Simplify → Debrief → Send on solo experience → Debrief → Make it relevant

**Guide the experience:** Walk them through how it works in a live environment. *This is how you sign up, this is what a community looks like, this is how you search, etc.* And **tell relevant stories** about how people like them (as individuals or business leaders) have used these tools.

**Translate: Tell them how it works.** Not so many details that it's overwhelming. Just enough that you don't seem like a fantastical wizard full of secrets when really most of the concepts are pretty practical and straightforward.

**Simplify:** Now backtrack and **make what you learned really simple.** You want to explain it in 20 words or less. Words your new online buddy can repeat comfortably. Metaphors appreciated. (For example: You text message, right? Well, Twitter is a lot like that. You write a short message and send it. But, when you hit send, it goes to everyone in your address book vs. just one person.)

**Debrief:** Ask **open-ended questions.** What did you think of the experience? How could you see using this? What questions you have?

**Send them on a solo experience:** Okay, your turn. Log on, try it out yourself. I'll check in with you tomorrow.

**Debrief:** Repeat above.

The trick to teaching social media is finding opportunity.

Most people won't want to learn just to learn. It's your job to find **that one irresistible angle of relevancy** that flips the opportunity cost equation:

*Need to do research on the cheap about recent college grads? What about Facebook?*

*Need to find a new daycare for your kid? What about Angie's List?*

*Need to get a handle on the buzz about a potential new client? What about Twitter or blog search?*

*Need to talk to employees on a more human level? What about a blog?*

This one might take a couple of pages.

CNET recently reported that 75% of Fortune 1000 companies will launch a social media campaign this year. Of course, they also noted that 50% of those campaigns will fail.

To stay in the right 50% of those campaigns, marketers, customer service advocates and brand czars follow one of **four proven models:**

## BUILD A COMMUNITY
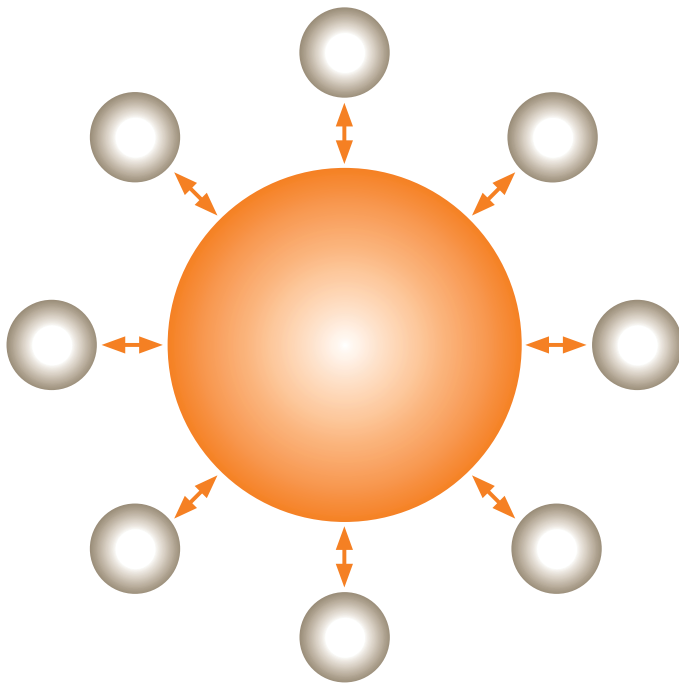


Let your **customers or employees support each other.**

**Pros:**
– Very authentic way to use the social Web

– Inexpensive to operate and can reduce customer service/ HR costs

**Cons:**
– Takes a lot of work to seed and build

– The crowd can turn on you if support or product development is unresponsive

**Make sure you:**
– Set expectations: What does success look like?



Best Buy's Gary Koelling and Steve Bendt had a fundamentally simple idea: **Use technology to enable employees to talk to and help each other.**

In their quest they developed **Blue Shirt Nation:** an internal communications platform that generated thousands of conversations across the company. The result: more information, more issues, more solutions, more ideas, more impact — and a corporate culture that is beginning to appreciate that **buy-in brings out the best in employees.**

Some brands have a leg up in social media. Their fans already consider them **part of their personal identities.**

Think sports fans wearing the team jersey. Bloggers at Google who just can't stop talking about how great their home base is. Proud graduates of well-known colleges proselytizing their campus brand.

For these lucky brands, the best course is simply **to motivate their fans** to take the brand into the social world by giving them the right tools, soapboxes or, heck, bling.

## ENERGIZE PASSIONATE FANS
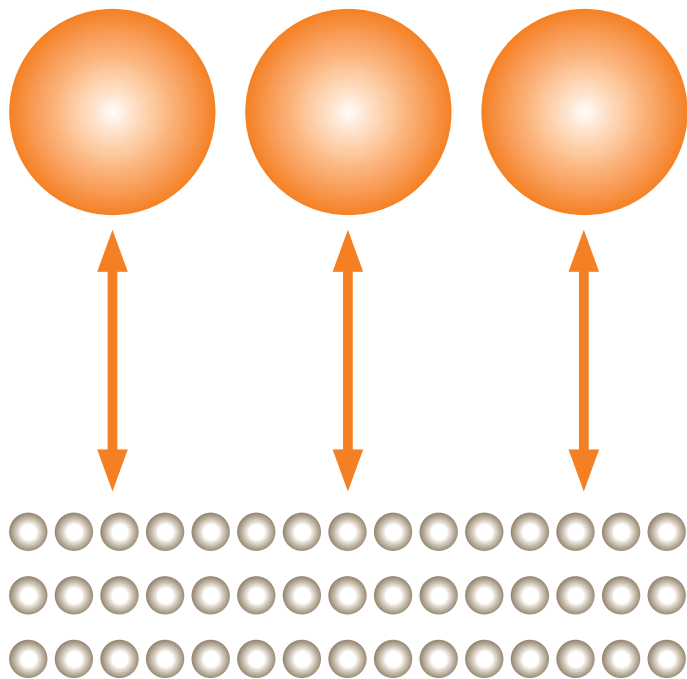
**Pros:**
– Builds relationships with your best customers

– Gets real people talking 1:1

**Cons:**
– Scale is limited to your biggest fans and their personal networks

– More difficult to listen to the conversation about your brand because it is widely dispersed

**Make sure you:**
– Encourage fans to be transparent about any direct contact they have with you, samples they receive, etc.

Most of the top "fan" pages on Facebook are bands and celebrities — not your typical consumer brands. But #8 is a brand you've probably seen a lot of if you spend any time around teenage girls: Victoria's Secret Pink. A **quintessential passion brand,** the girls wear it, talk about it, are fiercely loyal to it. So it's no surprise that over **half a million of them have linked to it** from their own Facebook pages and thousands are talking directly to it online.

Imagine if you could get the very best development or marketing **ideas you'd never thought of from people who actually use your product?**

This is the killer "listening" app of the social Web. It works lots of ways:
- **Finding conversations** that are already happening and pulling ideas from them
- Creating opportunities for vast communities to **offer and edit their own ideas**
- Using captive marketing groups to **deeply understand human behavior** and test new concepts and products.

## FIND A GOOD IDEA
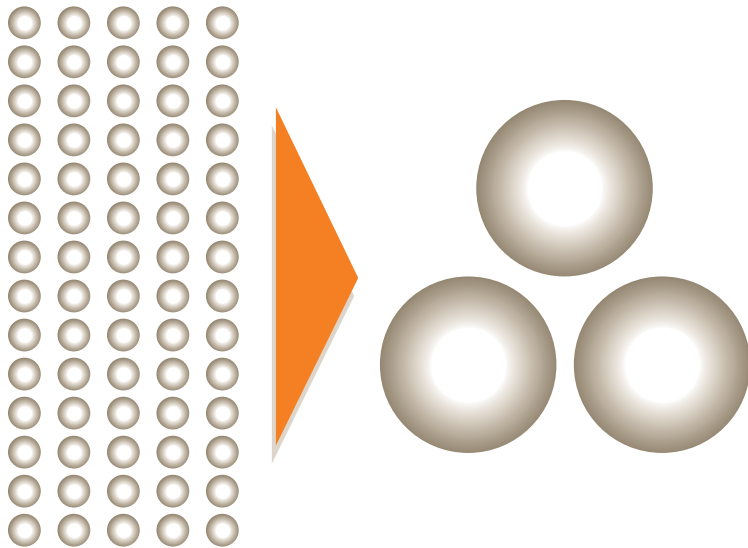
**Pros:**
- Connects you to the best ideas inside your own company and in your larger community

- Often very cost effective, leveraging resources you already have

**Cons:**
- Can generate overwhelming amounts of content

- Can take your brand in inauthentic directions. Need to make sure you balance what the market wants with what's true to who you are or what your product does

**Make sure you:**
- Have a very savvy filter for the input, either by letting the community vote or by finding someone who can translate ideas into insights

The CEO of Bell Canada believes in getting feedback from the front lines. It started as small meetings, one-on-one interactions. But, quickly that became unscalable, particularly as employees came to the table with more and more ideas.

To bridge the gap, Bell Canada created a suggestion system internally. **Any employee can submit an idea. And all employees are encouraged to log on and evaluate ideas.**
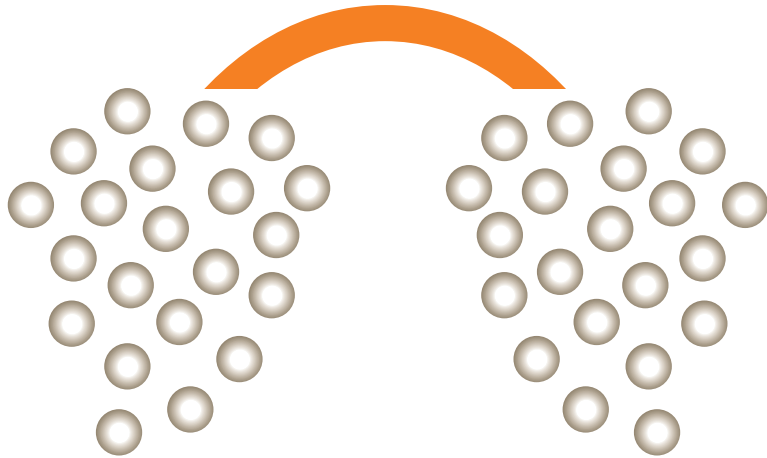
Those that get the best community feedback are taken directly to the executive team.

The toughest way to use social media is also one of the best: **give people something they need.**

Fill a gap, provide a bridge, be **the tool people can't live without.**

## MEET A NEED TO MAKE A CONNECTION

**Pros:**
- Tends to create significant conversation and word of mouth

- Builds brand perceptions and attachments rather than acting as direct marketing

**Cons:**
- Hard to do — it's finding the idea that will challenge you

- Tends to be a long-term commitment, not a campaign

**Make sure you:**
- Test the concept with users of social media before you go live. This is one area where being a little tone deaf to the medium can have very negative results.

FedEx wanted to participate in social media, but needed a relevant way to do it. So, they studied how people use the various tools, **looking for a gap.** They found it on Facebook.

One of the limitations of Facebook is that you can't attach a document or image to a message they way you can in email. So, FedEx built an application called "Launch a Package" that **met that need and fit their core brand perfectly.** The results were immediate: 100,000 installs in 48 hours, first branded app to make #1 on Facebook's Most Active page, and over 50% of users returning more than 10 times after install.

Ah, the big question.



VALUE TO CLIENT

VALUE TO CUSTOMER

EFFECTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY
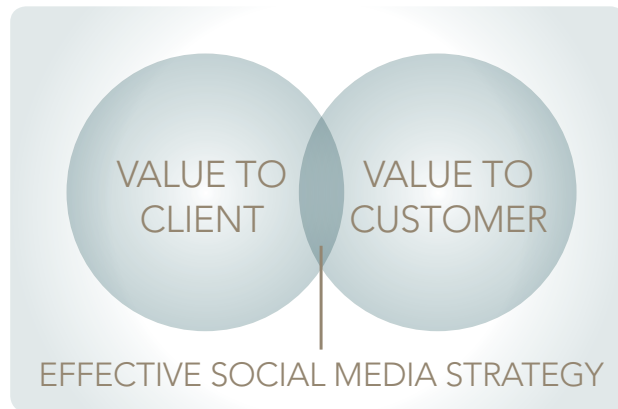
There's really just one essential thing to keep in mind: **It should provide value to the customer *and* to the brand.**

Looking at it another way, the circles could read: **true to the core of your brand** and **new or unexpected.**

Landing in that happy middle is tough to do. And, it often has more to do with a commitment than a campaign.

• **Too far to the left/Just information:** Most corporate Web sites (after all, they were designed to communicate specific information, not to be part of a social conversation).

• **Too far to the right/Just buzz:** The Office Max elves. Remember those delightful holiday dancers? People made over 100 million of those custom elves, helping Office Max win the distinction of being the #2 holiday greeting site two years in a row. The problem? It **had nothing to do with the brand.** Despite the enormous number of impressions, same store sales dropped 7%.

• **In the happy middle/Real social:** Zappos. You can't talk about social media and not talk about Zappos. CEO Tony Hiesh has **set out to do nothing less than create personal 1:1 relationships** between his team and people who use the social Web (and wear shoes). His thesis is that **people want to interact with people** — not call scripts or advertisements. They want to feel a connection to the places they spend their money and the people who help them do it.

So hundreds of Zappos customer services employees are on Twitter. Some solve real service problems. Some just build relationships. Thirty to forty more are writing blogs. Getting the Zappos culture out to the people who want to connect to it.

Ask yourself:

– What do we need to accomplish?

– How will people engage with what we do? What will get people interested enough to participate?

Of course this question was asked to me — the most senior member of our panel. So, I started where any other social marketer would start: **talking to college students.** I broadcast on Twitter, networked in real life, and followed every link and idea I was sent.

The results surprised me. I identified three types of brands students thought of as social media stars, and noted that some of their favorites — like Apple — were among the clumsiest early adopters of the technology:

**Brands college students admire:**

Nike • Apple • Dell • Dove

**Brands actively connecting with individual users in the social Web:**

Zappos • PINK • Starbucks • Comcast

**Brands using technologies to make micro connections:**

New York Times • Obama • Mad Men/AMC

Don't let age fool you.

75% of college students actively use the social Web. That means 25% don't. When rolling out new tools and technologies in the workplace — or segmenting online experiences — it's essential to know *your* audience, not just their age group.

First the good news:

**People want companies in the social Web.**

According to the 2008 Cone Business in Social Media Study, 93% of social media users believe a company should have a presence in social media.

– 85% think a company should interact with customers via social media.

– 43% say companies should use social media to **solve customers' problems** (like customer service and tech support).

– 41% want companies to **solicit feedback** from customers on products and services.

– 37% think companies should develop new ways to interact with their brand.

The bad news is that it's **not as easy as cutting and pasting your offline tactics onto the Web.** For example:

| Offline | Online |
|---|---|
| Send a press release | Connect with a blogger on a topic they care about — send them a brief email |
| Run a TV spot | Create a longer-form video that delights or changes how people think about your brand |
| Wait for people to call in with product complaints | Find people already talking about challenges and proactively fix their problems |

"Please stop sending us press releases."

— A message from the worldwide community of bloggers

Short answer: It depends on your brand.

General answer:

**30% responding**

**60% listening**

**10% talking**
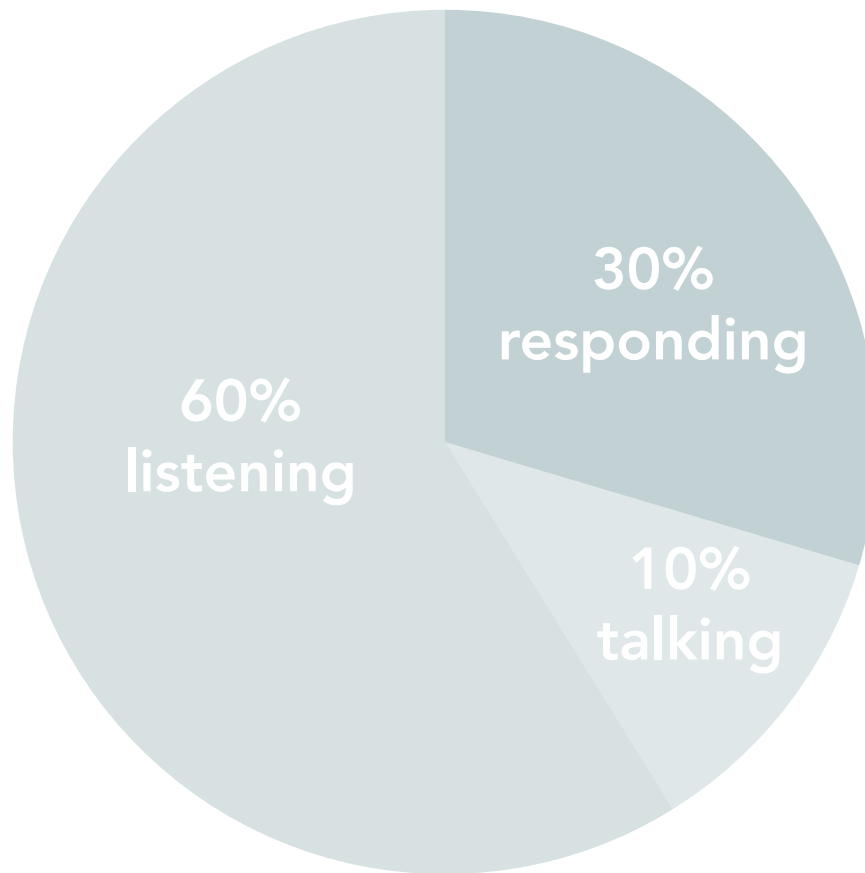
Social media is **fundamentally shifting consumer expectations.** Right or wrong, increasingly people expect to enter **"informed conversations."** Ones where each party has already researched something about the other. Ones that are **personal from the very start.**

Saturn sponsors a Ning community for its customers and employees. There, people share what they love about their cars, support each other and generally talk Saturn.

The Saturn team pushes content out but also listens to spot trends and responds to customers.

In one memorable case, a Saturn employee saw a live post from a customer who had money in hand, but wasn't receiving any service at his local dealer.

The product manager called the customer personally, apologized and set up an appointment for him at another dealer.

Talk. Listen. Respond. = Customers for Life.

Social media isn't right for every company.

That said, it's creating a lot of intriguing tools that can be **repurposed to meet your goals.** A few examples:

– **Recruit.** Ernst and Young is one of the leaders in using social media tools to both streamline its qualification process and appear more relevant to new grads. E&Y attends all the big job fairs and then points candidates to its Facebook page, where they can ask questions, find contacts and prep for the interviews that will start their professional lives.

– **Support a cause.** Even if your corporate brand isn't social, your philanthropic commitment may be. Use the work you're doing for the greater good to **build your community reputation** in social media.

– **Power internal communications.** When your team leaves the office, they take your brand into the world: to cocktail parties, to the dinner table, even — whether you like it or not — onto the social Web. Use the tools they know to keep them informed and on message.

– **Bridge silos.** Use technology to **connect isolated departments** to the organization's best ideas — starting conversations, sharing upcoming projects, posting challenges in need of solving.

– **Enable project teams.** Wikis, simple communities, and chat rooms can all power more effective, efficient development — whether their on the WWW or tucked away on your intranet.

**EXXON**

20 years after the Exxon Valdez oil spill, there was still a lot of oil on the ocean floor. The problem was that Exxon couldn't figure out how to separate frozen oil from water. So they worked with a social platform called Innocentive to put out an open call for a solution. **Anyone who considered themselves a problem solver could respond** to the challenge on this social platform.

An Illinois chemist from the concrete industry saw the problem and quickly **scribbled an idea on the back of a napkin.** He sent that scan in with a half-page write-up about a certain kind of oscillator working at a certain speed and solved the problem Exxon had been wrestling with for 20 years.

The number one challenge facing government online is criticism. Specifically that the naysayers tend to outpace the productive discussion in social forums. Believe it or not, it is a challenge unique to government. On average in the social Web, the positive commenters greatly outnumber the negative ones.

Three tactics to try:

- **Make a personal connection:** Encourage key staff to **engage with citizens in social media in personal, authentic ways** that:
  – Give people a real view into a day in the life of that person (humanize)

  – And actively seek input (engage)

  *For example:* Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm uses Twitter in that very way. The actual posts and sorting of the feedback are done by her chief of staff, but the input is all Granholm.

- **Start a movement:** People naturally **connect more to causes than to institutions.** Energize your community by focusing your social media investment on key initiatives that have a short-term, powerful focus. Get the next NCAA tournament. Save the opera. Build a new stadium. And so on.

  *For example:* The City of Asheville's tourism effort was boosted by a campaign called the "Five-Day Weekend" that featured lots of research about the power of relaxation. It was so popular, that people created their own events and social media sites around it.

- **Be ready for crisis communication:** Instill confidence in your community by actively preparing to communicate in a crisis via the social Web. Start a blog, a Twitterbot, or an email or text message signup list.

**Social media engagement guidelines from the UK's Civil Service:**

**1. Be credible**
Be accurate, fair, thorough and transparent.

**2. Be consistent**
Encourage constructive criticism and deliberation. Be cordial, honest and professional at all times.

**3. Be responsive**
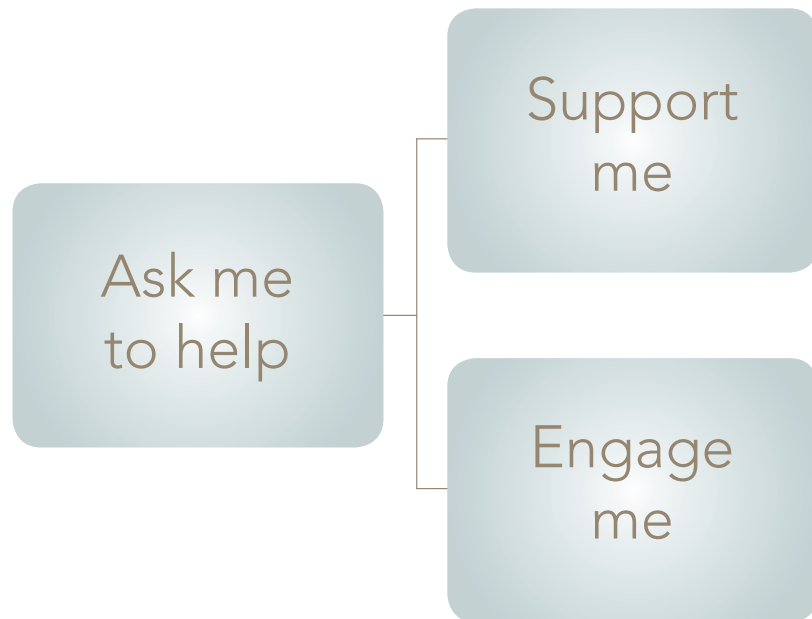When you gain insight, share it where appropriate.

**4. Be integrated**
Wherever possible, align online participation with other offline communications.

**5. Be a civil servant**
Remember that you are an ambassador for your organization. Wherever possible, disclose your position as a representative of your department or agency.

Ask me to help

Support me

Engage me

**The number one thing to do: Ask.** Most **people want to help** their companies be more successful. Tell them how they can — in simple, honest ways.

Then: **Support them.** Give them access to the tools they need, **ideas to talk about** and corporate cover.

**And engage them.** What have they been up to? **How have people responded?** What ideas do they have?

Ford's "Drive One" campaign was both an advertising campaign and a powerful internal engagement project.

Employees were asked to talk about the brand. To invite their friends and family to test drive it. To be personal ambassadors for Ford.
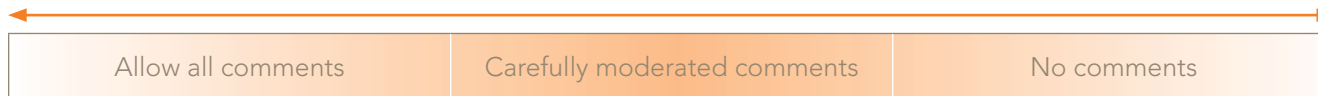
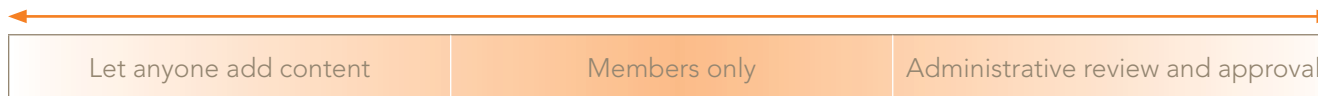The same ways as anyone else.

In a way that's authentic (honest), relevant (to your job or goals) and comfortable.

Speaking of comfortable, this is probably a good opportunity to talk about control. Social media may work best when it's an entirely organic conversation, but that doesn't mean it always has to be that way. Almost all of the social media tools out there allow you to have as much or as little control as you want:
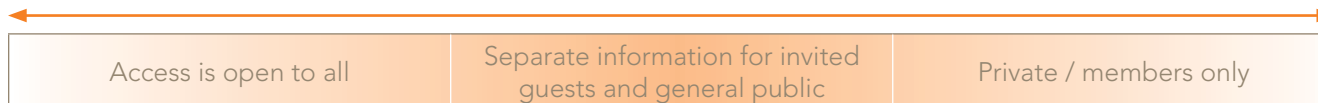
Blogs and video sites:

| Allow all comments | Carefully moderated comments | No comments |
|---|---|---|

Wikis, Flickr and collaborative spaces:

| Let anyone add content | Members only | Administrative review and approval |
|---|---|---|

Twitter and Facebook groups:

| Access is open to all | Separate information for invited guests and general public | Private / members only |
|---|---|---|

As for what platform is right for your CEO, I generally recommend a podium — a place where she can exercise leadership and still field questions or comments:

- A blog (what she thinks)

- A podcast (what she says)

- A Flickr library (what she sees)

Zappos CEO Tony Hsieh to other CEOs considering using Twitter:

"Just be real and use it as a way to connect more deeply with people. Don't think of it as a marketing tool you have to leverage. And you actually have to be passionate about Twittering or it's not going to work. So if you're not passionate about it, then don't do it."

Just the opposite. One of the challenges with social media is that it allows us to segment off into smaller and smaller fields of interest. Finding streams of conversation that fit our **niche world views.** And editing out conversations that don't.



Although traditional media will never cover the breadth of those micro conversations, it does play an invaluable role in **creating a bigger picture.** In **providing context** and a shared experience.

Traditional media may change and stretch, but it will remain the **foundation of our shared conversation,** even as our tangents run deeper, wilder and infinitely more personal.

Traditional Media

Blogs
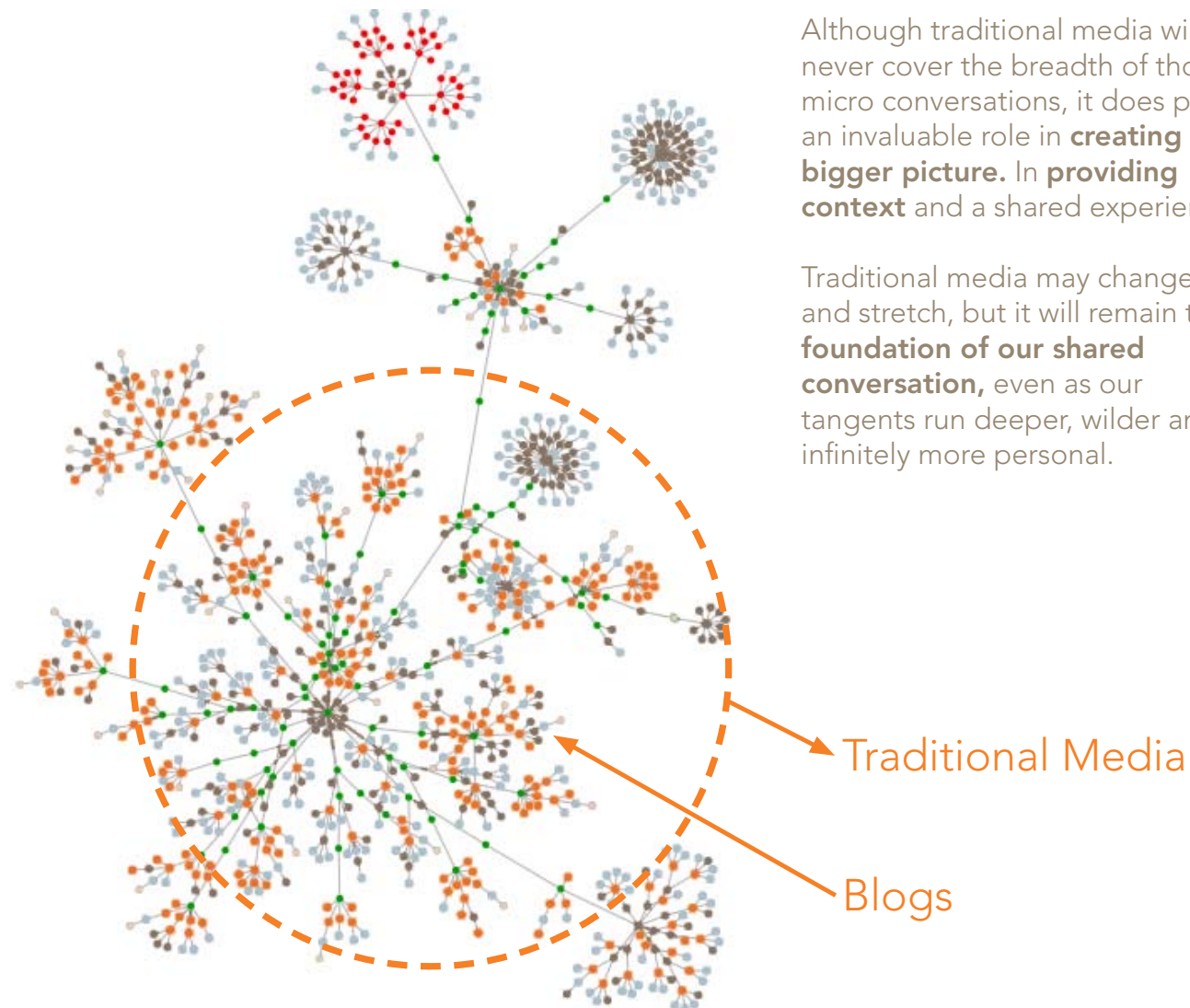
The skinny worldwide web:

We have access to more than 76 million Web sites. But, according to Directgov, most of us visit only **six** on a regular basis.

Ideally, social media **breaks down some of the barriers** in our lives. It lets us connect with co-workers in personal ways and let's our families know us as smart professionals.

That said, **it's a process — one that will take time** and a little wading in. A few strategies to bridge the gap:

**1. Define how you'll use each social tool. And stick to it.**
   – LinkedIn is for all contacts

   – Facebook is just for people you know in real life

   – MySpace is just for people you'd have dinner with (voluntarily)

**2. Create two streams of personas.** Search tools make it easier and easier to find our friends and colleagues online. It's even easier, if you use the same handle across all tools. Try creating **one identity stream for your friends and another aimed more at colleagues.**
   – Work persona: lhouseholder

   – Friend persona: leighhouse

**3. Use full and limited profiles.** Eventually your boss, dad or favorite college professor will ask to friend you in some medium you thought was off limits. Before "ignoring," take a look at the limited profile options. They let you **share just enough** for arms-length relationships.

**4. Remember that it's fallible.** It's technology. Used by people. Always **filter what you post** with the reality that someone you don't intend to read it, eventually might do just that.

THE WORK ME

THE PLAY ME

THE REAL ME
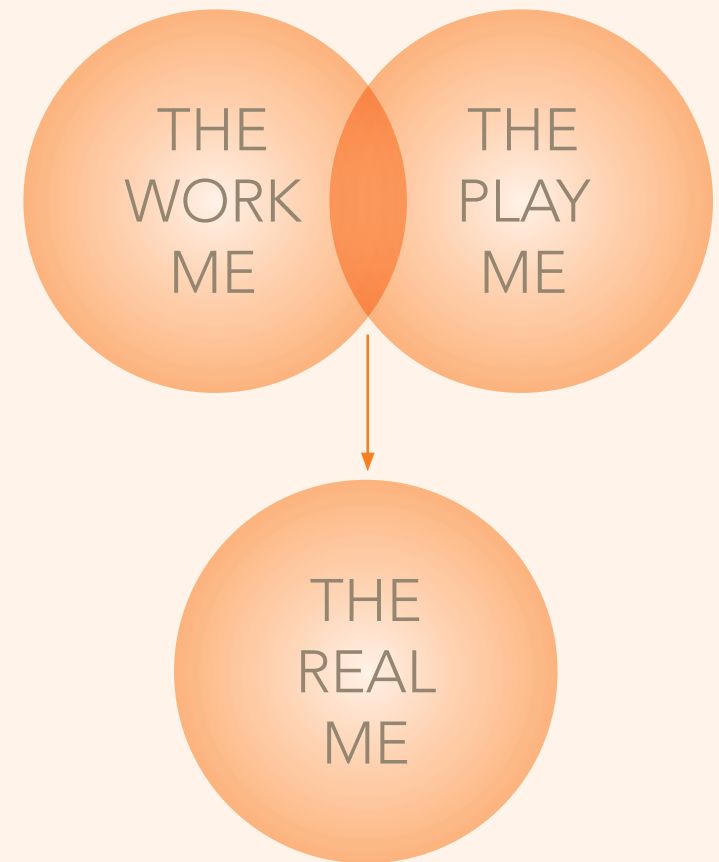
Technology changes our expectations for behavior, our standards for etiquette. Social media is no exception. The things that are important are vastly different that than the broadcast Web. A few live-by rules:

– **Be real:** Be honest about your identity. Speak with your true voice. Share your personality.

– **Be responsive.** Engage in conversation. Reply quickly. Answer questions.

– **Be a good host.** Thank your community. Make people feel comfortable. Translate new terms, insider references, etc.

– **Set expectations and deliver on them.** Try to be consistent. Focus on a topic. Let people know when things change.

– **Be personal, don't broadcast.** Don't be one sided. Don't be overly promotional. Don't repeat, repeat, repeat.

– **Listen, then talk.** Know your community. Be relevant. Hear other opinions.

– **Edit.** Don't overwhelm with frequency. Be brief. Be compelling.

Avoid one social gaffe most Facebook newbies make:

Don't post on your own wall. That's for friends only.

**The single biggest change is the end of the 1% rule.**

The 1% rule is a widely shared behavioral theory that states that the number of people who really create content on the Web represent only 1% of the people actually viewing the content. It suggests that 99% of Internet users are just reading and watching. But the latest from Forrester Research paints a very different picture of participation:

**19% Collect and Share**

**21% Create New Content**

**37% Review or Criticize**
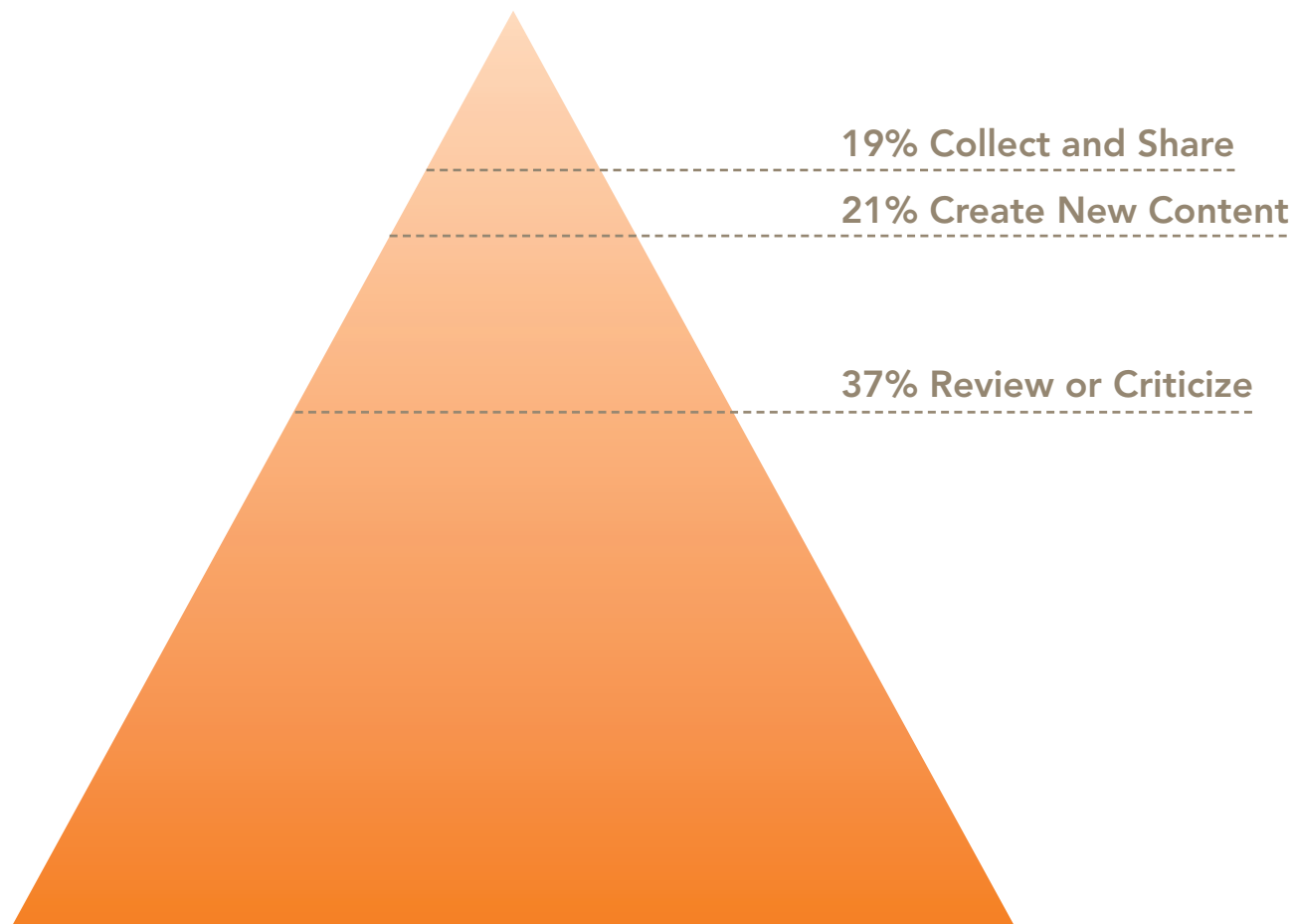
What else is changing?

– **Bloggers are beating out friends**
New research from BuzzLogic shows that people who read blogs are more likely to take buying advice from their favorite bloggers than from their friends.

– **Mass adoption of mass communities**
Facebook has 120 million active users, adding now at a rate of about 10 million per month. And no longer is it just more of the same — the fastest-growing population is 35 and over.

## The Death of MySpace

The use of "macro" communities — like Facebook and MySpace — will decrease as **adoption of semi-private "gated" communities grows.**

These smaller communities will allow:
- Deeper sharing
- More relevant conversations
- More personal experiences

## Bridging Social and the Store

**Mobile technologies will bring social media to physical experiences.**
- Scanning any bar code with your cell phone will pull up consumer reviews
- Friends will broadly co-shop using tools as widely varied as wired dressing rooms and interactive mirrors attached to online stores

## Polarized, Passionate People

Social media will make it easier and easier for us to **self-select into groups filled with "people like us."** Savvy leaders will energize these "microsegments" and create powerful emotional connections.
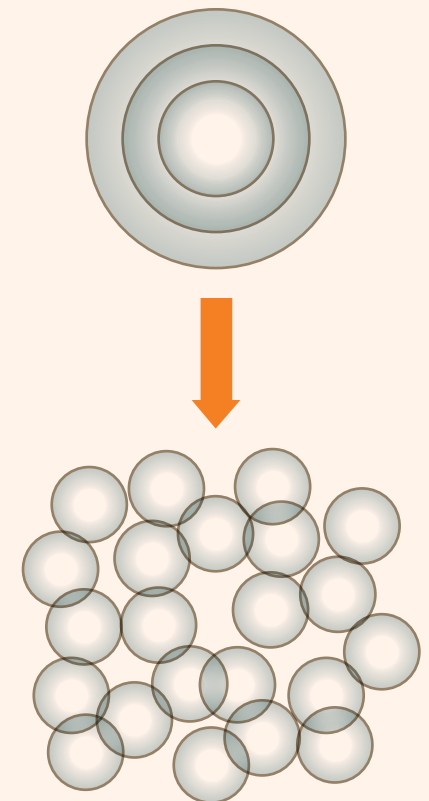
## "Main Street" Customer Service

Consumers will increasingly expect **personal, relevant experiences** with the brands they choose to do business with. The hallmarks of these experiences will be proactive problem solving and dedicated points of connect — across multiple media.

### Meet Ning

Ning is one of the first platforms that enable people and organizations to create their own communities.

**From: Rings of Relationships**

**To: Targeted Communities**