

The Internet Entrepreneur Club's

INTERNET PROFIT REPORT

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Your monthly Internet marketing update: insider tips — industry news — expert knowledge

Marketing effectively through social media!

Dear Club member:

Social networking on platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter is becoming ever more popular as we enter the next decade, so if you're not already out there making use of it, now is the time!

That's why we've packed this issue of the *Internet Profit Report* with all the information you need to get

started, or to continue growing your social networking presence, both as an individual and as a business.

If you're still unsure about how social media sites have become so popular, we have a great article chronicling their evolution, as well as an in-depth look at Twitter so we can make sure you get signed up as soon as possible!

Of course, you will need to know how

to use social media marketing for your business if you want it to help boost your sales, so check out pages 9-11 to see what strategies you need to put into place to make that happen.

Finally, don't forget to listen to our in-house social media expert, Lynette Johnson, on this month's club call.

To your success,
The Internet Marketing Center Team

Understanding the Basics... *Social Media*

SOCIAL MEDIA

Online social media platforms include any platform in which individuals can interact electronically. This goes all the way back to when email was first introduced (allowing people to digitally interact), and includes forums, discussion boards, chat rooms... right up to more recent social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. The nature of these social networks changes all the time, but the social aspect of them remains constant.

MICROBLOGGING

Microblogging is pretty much exactly how it sounds... blogging, but less wordy. Facebook started microblogging with its "status updates," where users wrote very brief

comments on what they were doing or thinking at the time, which showed up on their friends' homepages. These microblogs were so popular that Twitter picked up the idea and created a whole platform dedicated just to comments that had to be 140 characters and under!

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Since the advent of social networking as a business marketing tool, savvy marketers have begun to think beyond pure profits... investing, instead, in the "social capital" that can be made from strong customer service and goodwill. Since goodwill and positive reputation ultimately lead to customer loyalty (and spending!), the value of social capital increases all the time.



The evolution of social media

These days, social media networks are the hottest properties on the Internet.

According to Nielson Research, social networking has become the fourth most popular online activity, surpassing even email. In fact, an incredible **two-thirds of all Internet users** regularly visit social networks.

“Thanks to social networking tools, we can participate in conversations with multiple people anywhere in the world,” says Lynette Johnson, The Internet Marketing Center’s in-house social media maven.

That, of course, makes them an especially attractive marketing tool. By engaging with customers through a blog, or on Facebook or Twitter, businesses can manage their reputation and cultivate a deeper relationship with their target audience. And the amazing thing is, most social media users *welcome* a relationship with the businesses they like. According to Cone Research and Insights, **85% of social media users want their favorite businesses to actively engage with them through social media.**

However, the majority of the 'Net's most popular social networks didn't even exist seven years ago. So how did these magnetic online hangouts rise to prominence so quickly?

We talked with Lynette Johnson about the evolution of online social networking, how it has become such a powerful marketing tool, and how new social media trends will change the way you do business in the future.

Social networks have been around for longer than you think

The first online services to link people with similar interests — conceived in the late 1970s — were called “usenets.” They allowed people to post articles to newsgroups that everyone in that newsgroup could read. Those people couldn't actually have a conversation about those articles, as we can today, but at least they could share information with each other via their computers, which was a pretty huge advancement for the time.

“They were mostly popular with tech geeks,” Lynette says. Because of their tech-heavy interfaces, they weren't very popular with mainstream computer users. Although usenets have now mostly fallen by the wayside, online groups sites such as Google Groups (<http://groups.google.com>) and Yahoo Groups (<http://groups.yahoo.com>) still employ many of the conventions first established by the early usenet systems.

Discussion boards and forums played a major role

Forums allow members to communicate with each other via

a threaded message system — in which one person posts a question or a comment and then other people's responses to that question or comment are posted in chronological order for all members to see.

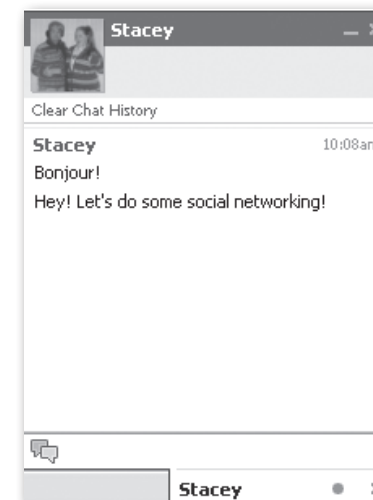
“Online forums were the first community sites that came with a user-friendly interface that made it easy for non-tech types to use,” Lynette points out. “It started on a personal level — people who shared an interest or had something in common, such as teenagers or developers or stamp collectors.”

Over the years, forums have evolved to allow their members to create their own profiles that can be viewed by everyone else in the forum, and to post pictures and links to video and send each other private emails using the forum's messaging system.

Instant messaging enables people to converse online in “real time”

“With the development of ICQ and other instant messaging programs in the mid 1990s, suddenly people could communicate back and forth without the time delay associated with email,” says Lynette. This made the Internet an even more appealing communication tool and changed the way many people engage with each other online.

Most popular social networking sites now incorporate instant messaging tools on their platforms,



making it easy for their members to communicate in real time. Some of these built-in instant messengers — such as the one in Facebook (pictured above) — have become more popular than the ones based on the user's own computer platform, such as Windows Live Messenger.

Dating sites: the first profile-based social networks

The marriage of the Internet's interactive communication tools with the vast population of online users who were searching for Mr. or Mrs. Right led to the first modern social networks. “It was inevitable,” Lynette says. Dating sites were the first online networking platforms that allowed their users to create profiles with photos that other users could browse, something that would later become the model for sites like Facebook.

By offering a way to replace a real life scenario (like going to a bar to meet someone) with a *virtual* social environment, dating sites also made social networking attractive to a lot of people who would otherwise have ignored it. This specific form of social networking option provided a more accessible means of achieving

an important social goal — finding a mate — which made it relevant to a large portion of the population.

Blogs bring social media to the masses



Dating sites may have helped develop the tools and features now offered by most social networks today, but Lynette says that blogs were the tools that democratized the use of social media.

“Thanks to blogs, it was no longer a strange thing to interact with people you didn't know,” Lynette says.

Blogs weren't just for tech geeks, or people who shared a narrow interest, or single people looking for love. They were for everyone.

Email limitations lead to media sharing sites



Just as blogs made it possible for people to convey their thoughts and opinions to a wider audience, different media sharing sites began to appear in the early 2000s that made it easy for people to share different multimedia files — such as pictures or videos — with each other.

“Because as anyone who uses the Internet knows, trying to send photos and especially videos via email can be a painful process,” Lynette laughs.

Suddenly, even technophobic

grandmothers were signing up for Flickr accounts and checking out YouTube regularly so they could view the latest photos and videos of their grandchildren. Once again, a significantly large percentage of Internet users found themselves using the Internet more often to share many different kinds of information with their friends and family.

Social bookmarking sites popularize info sharing



“The sharing didn't stop there,” Lynette points out. Another popular type of social community site was the social news or bookmarking sites that began to spring up in 2003.

Sites like Digg.com, Delicious.com, and Reddit.com allow users to share news articles and other items of interest with each other. On Digg, users can then vote on whether or not they liked the story. The more votes a story gets the higher it gets pushed to the front page of the site so more people can read it. Both Digg and Reddit also allow their users to post comments on the stories other people have posted.

Suddenly the purpose wasn't just *sharing* information, it was *discussing* the information and engaging in interesting conversations about it.

Business networking sites help savvy professionals



Networking events in which savvy

businesspeople exchange their cards and establish relationships with other professionals who can help them advance their career goals have long been a staple of the offline world. It was only a matter of time before online business networking sites began to spring up on the Internet as well.

The most popular online business networking site is LinkedIn.com, which was founded in 2003. As of December 2009, LinkedIn.com has over 53 million members worldwide.

The rise of the social networking “mega platforms”

facebook

“It was inevitable that someone would create a social platform that would combine the most appealing elements of all the other social tools available,” Lynette says.

And so sites like Friendster, MySpace, and Facebook were born. These online platforms encouraged their readers to create profiles that they could constantly update to let fellow members know what was on their minds or what was happening in their lives. Members could share different multimedia features as well, such as their favorite songs, photos, and videos.

Although Facebook was originally created to appeal to high school and university students, the flexible range of communication options it offers has made this site popular among all demographics. In fact, according to iStrategyLabs, the fastest growing demographic on Facebook is women over 55, whose numbers have grown over 513% over the past year

compared to users aged 25-34, whose numbers grew 60% over the last year, or 18 to 25-year-olds whose numbers increased only 4.8% over the past year.

In fact, as Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg pointed out in January 2009, if Facebook were a country it would be the eighth most populated nation in the world, right ahead of Japan.

Currently Facebook has over 350 million active users.

Microblogging: The Latest Phenomenon

A lot of people soon came to realize their favorite part of using a service like Facebook was updating their status to keep their friends informed about their life. Some savvy programmers capitalized on the popularity of this feature and started developing microblogging tools.

“Think blogging, but shorter and faster,” Lynette explains.

The most popular microblog service available right now is Twitter, which allows users to send their “followers” short messages of 140 characters maximum (we discuss Twitter in greater detail later in this report).

Twitter was one of the 10 fastest-growing of all the Internet’s Web properties in 2009!

According to Nielson Research, Twitter’s year-over-year growth was a whopping 1,448%, growing from 1.2 million uniques in May 2008 to 18.2 million in May 2009. All these figures go to show how popular this latest form of social networking has become.

The Future

Lynette predicts that as social networking tools continue to evolve, the emphasis will be on making them even easier and more convenient to use, especially via mobile devices such as iPhones and Blackberries.

Platforms like Twitter and Facebook are already easy to update via cell phones and other mobile devices. There’s also Posterous, a new microblogging tool that allows you to create your own blog and update it entirely through email. You can even link pictures and videos to your blog via email.

Today’s networking tools are becoming increasingly integrated, as well. For example, Facebook and Twitter have teamed up to make it easy for their users to make status updates on both services simultaneously.

“We’re just going to see more of that,” Lynette predicts. “These companies want to make everything interconnected because by sharing resources, they make themselves stronger.”

And of course, as new social networking tools rise in popularity, savvy Internet marketers will need to come up with new ways to use these tools to connect with their audience in a meaningful way — or lose out to their more forward-thinking competitors.

Be sure to read the other articles in this newsletter to discover how to use social networking tools the right way, so you can build stronger relationships with your audience without continuing to hammer them with unwanted sales messages.



Twitter 101 — everything you need to know to get started

There are dozens of social media

platforms out there, and more come and go all the time, but Twitter is the one that’s captured everyone’s attention over the last year or so.

With a stunning monthly user growth of 1,832%, Twitter ranks within the 50 most popular websites on the Internet today. A truly amazing feat when you consider what it has to compete with!

But what is all the fuss about with this particular platform? Why has it managed to rise to the top of the heap and attract so much Internet marketing attention? And just how can *you* become an effective Twitterer and use it to promote your business?

Well, we’re going to walk you through it right here so you can get a better grasp on this important marketing strategy and start putting it to use right away!

What’s in it for you?

“What’s the *point*?” “I don’t want everyone in the world to know my personal business.” “It doesn’t make a whole lot of sense to me.”

These are just some of the comments we hear all the time about Twitter, but there are a few things you should remember when it comes to social media, and this platform in particular...

- The *point* of Twitter as an Internet marketing strategy is that once you

learn how to use it properly you can put it to work for you and your business. It can act as a customer service platform, help establish your online reputation, put a personal face on your business, attract visitors... and ultimately boost your sales!

- You might feel weird sharing your opinions and comments at first, but this is the whole purpose of social media... connections with other people on the Internet. The more personal or *personable* they seem, the more likely you are to attract people to what you have to say. And ultimately the more likely they will be to listen to your message (which will be to promote your business).
- The only way to really make sense of Twitter is to actually get on there and learn it yourself, which brings us to how you get started...

What’s it all about?

Twitter is a little like going to a party where the only person you know is the person who invited you. There are loads of guests there... some of whom will be interesting to talk to, and who will introduce you to other interesting guests, and some you might not have much in common with.

You will probably wander around the party, flitting in and out of a few conversations before you find one you can engage in. You might even start some conversations of your own. Ultimately, you just never know how

the night is going to end up, but if you leave early, you’ll never find out... so it’s worth sticking around to see what will happen!

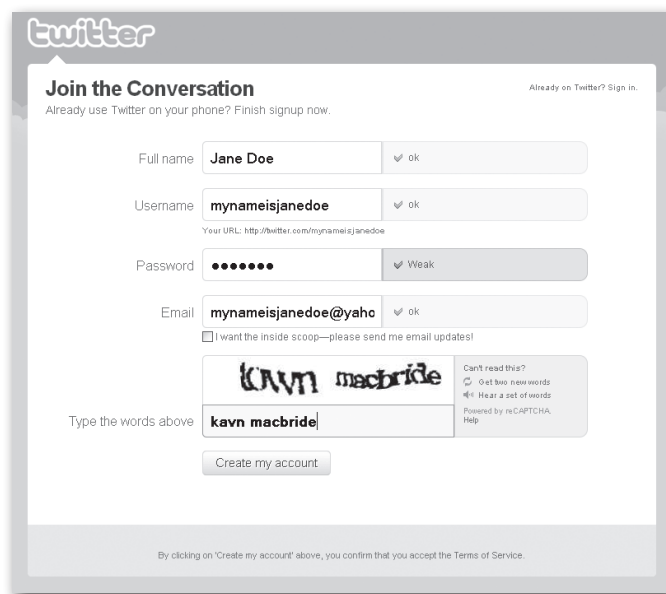
Twitter is the same. When you first join, you might not have a lot to say, or many people to say it to, but keep at it and you’ll gradually find people to follow who have something interesting to say and whose opinions and observations will become part of your daily life. And in turn, as you become more comfortable, you’re likely to contribute more to the people who are following you.

Before you know it, you’re part of the Twitter community — direct messaging, retweeting, follow fridaying, and trend topicing — and you understand what the fuss is about after all.

But we’ve jumped ahead of ourselves a little, so let’s go back to the beginning and get you signed up and logged in to Twitter. We recommend starting a **personal** account before opening one for your business, so you can get a feel for the platform and how it works... and avoid making silly mistakes with your business’s reputation later on.

Getting started — the ins and outs of Twitter

If you’ve never been to Twitter at all, head over to www.twitter.com and click **Sign Up Now**. You’ll be asked to fill in your name, new username, password, and email address, so go ahead and create a personal account



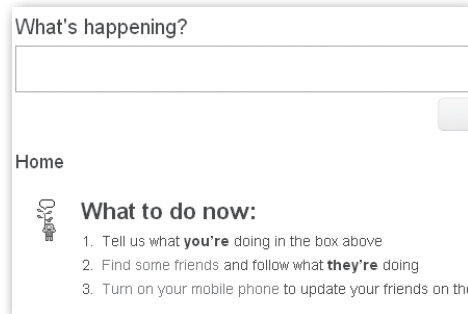
a single person on Twitter, but you *do* know us, so feel free to run a search for The_IMC_Team and start following! There are thousands of people who subscribe to our Twitter “stream” (this is what the flow of posts is called). When you’re looking through our stream, you might spot a post you like the look of, click through to that person

and follow them if you like what they have to say. Return to your homepage, and all of a sudden you have a bunch of posts in your stream and things are starting to get interesting (see below).

Three things show up in your Twitter stream... **your own posts** (you can see Jane Doe’s first post at the bottom

you can start using right away. One thing you need to be aware of before you carry on is that you cannot have more than one Twitter account to the same email address, so **DO NOT** use the address you will be using later on when you create your business account. When you’re done, click **Create my account**.

You will then be taken to your homepage, which is where you will make your posts. Twitter walks you through the first few steps to get you started....



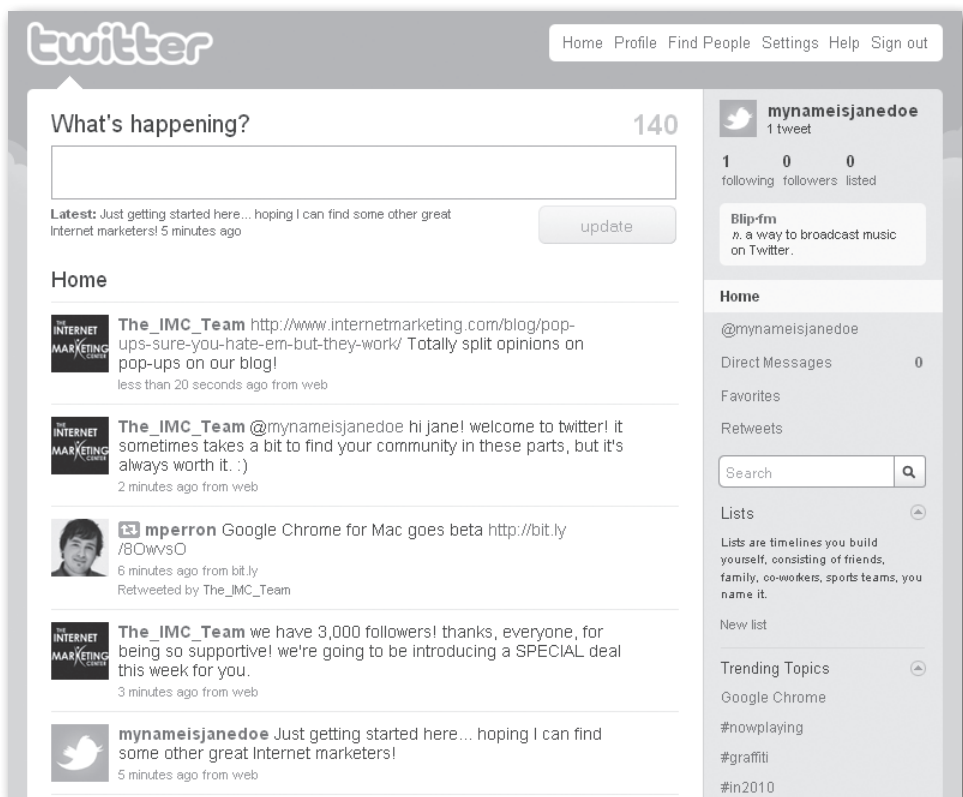
Follow the first step to add a post. This is entirely up to you... post a hello, perhaps, or why you’re there. Anything you like!

Then Twitter prompts you to add some friends to follow. You might not know

of the image below); **the posts of people you follow** (in this case it is The_IMC_Team); and **posts that are “retweeted” by people you follow** (the comment by mperron below is an example of this). The retweeting posts will have a small icon next to them that identifies they are someone else’s comments.

And that is the crux of Twitter. You say what’s on your mind, and you follow other people who are commenting on their own lives. There are no hard and fast rules or right and wrong... you simply make use of Twitter however it best works for *you*.

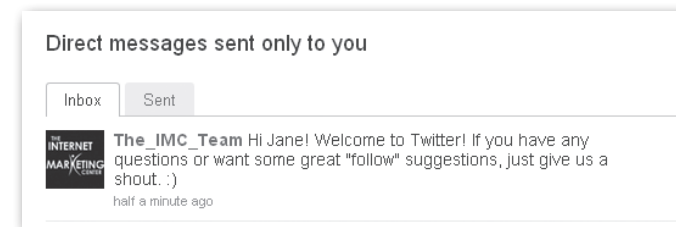
As you become more used to Twitter, follow more people, and have them start following you, you’ll notice some of the other features this platform has to offer. Twitter morphs and changes all the time, but there are a few more obvious functions that will help you along the way...



Direct messaging (DMs)

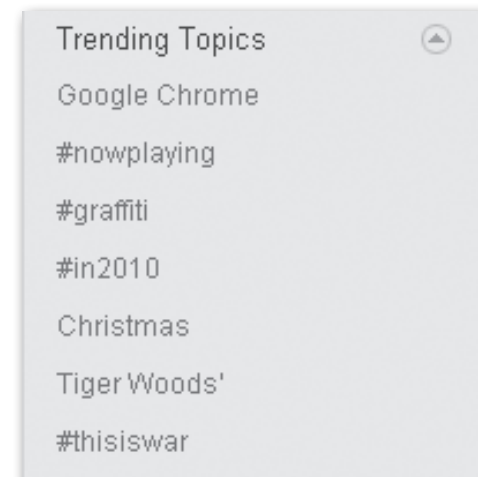
You can see on the right-hand panel of your homepage that there is a link to your Direct Messages (these are often referred to as DMs). Here you can send or receive a note that can’t be read by anyone else, much like an email although it must be constrained to 140 characters.

When you start a **business** Twitter account, you’ll probably find that DMs are great for connecting with customers more privately, perhaps to resolve an issue, or welcome them personally. Here’s what a typical DM might look like...



Trending topics and the hash tag

On the Twitter homepage and down the right-hand column of your account are a bunch of trending topics that are hot right now. They change all the time, depending on what people are talking about, but they’re useful for getting to know what is popular.



You’ll notice that a bunch of the terms have hash tags in front of them like this “#”. These hash tags are how you can flag certain words and terms in Twitter so that people who search for them will be shown a stream of posts all containing those words.

This is useful when you’re promoting your business later on, or when you’re looking for people to follow. You can run a search for terms that are relevant to your niche and see what people are saying about them... maybe find people to follow or see if you have competition on Twitter. You can add hash tags to any words within

your post to make sure it is searchable.

Terminology

There are some phrases and practices

particular to Twitter that you’ll get used to over time. These include things like #MusicMonday (this is how people will refer to it)... when Twitterers post what they’re listening to that day on their iPods, etc.

The one that will probably be more important to you, though, is **#FollowFriday** (sometimes just #FF), where Twitterers recommend other people to follow. If one popular Twitterer recommends you to their followers, you can have a huge increase in the number of people following YOU as a result. This is particularly useful when you are operating a business account!

The other thing you’ll notice in your Twitter stream is “@” symbols. These are for replying to individuals or referencing them in your Tweets, but

they don’t show up everywhere if they appear **at the beginning of the Tweet**. For example, The_IMC_Team sent the below Tweet directly to Jane Doe, which will show up in **her** Twitter stream, **The_IMC_Team’s** Twitter stream, and in the stream of anyone who **follows BOTH** of them, but it won’t appear to anyone else.



If you use the “@name” reference in the middle or end of a Tweet, it shows up as normal, but makes it easier for other people to find the Twitterer you are talking about.

Sound a little confusing? Well it isn’t really, once you get the hang of things!

Followers, following, and bots

To get started on Twitter, you need to begin following people, so don’t be afraid to have a good look around for Twitterers whose posts you enjoy reading! You can always go back later and “Unfollow” someone if it turns out you don’t have as much interest in them as you thought.

And you will want other people to follow *you* if you’re going to get the most out of this social form of communication. Most Twitterers will follow you back if you show an interest in them, and you’ll also have complete strangers following you... perhaps because of something you posted (remember those hash tags and how they make your words and terms searchable?), or because someone recommended you for #FollowFriday. There are any number of reasons! Make sure you check out new followers and return the favor if you

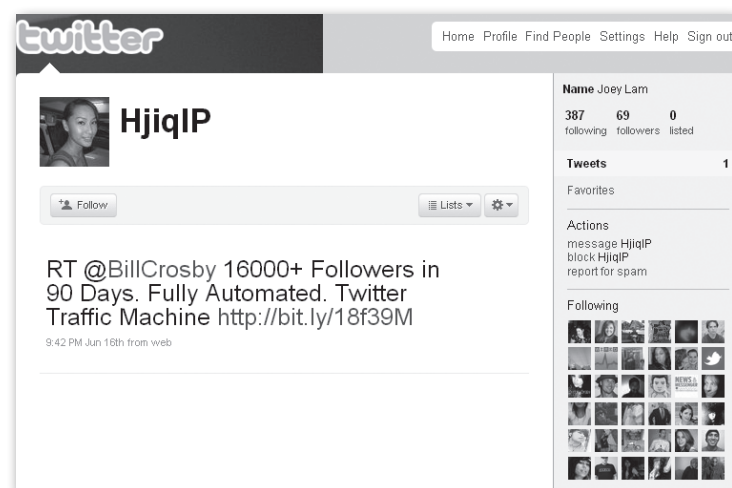
like what they're Tweeting about.

However, there is something else you should be aware of when it comes to followers and following... and those are the bots. Twitter bots are fake personas set up to send people to websites, or to gather personal information about them. A bot sends out a program following a bunch of Twitterers in the hope that they will be automatically followed back (some people set up their accounts to do that). This gives the bot access to that Twitterer's information, which can be used for whatever devious schemes the programmer had in mind.

Bots are a bit of a problem on Twitter, but they're easy enough to spot. Some are clearly sexual in nature... and you should report and block those bots immediately. Others are a little trickier, but once you click through to the profile there are some telltale signs, including:

- clearly fake names
- very few Tweets, or Tweets that don't make any real sense
- following a lot of people, but not being followed by many
- links to other websites that are selling something

Here's a good example...



If you notice a bot is following you, block it. If it is really offensive, then also consider reporting it (you can do this in the "Followers" function in your account).

The other reason it is important to know about bots, is that you don't want other people to think *you're* one! This is a common mistake when you're first starting out, since you probably won't have made a lot of posts, and you'll be following a lot more people than will be following you back. So just make sure you fill in the bio section of your profile, add a picture, post frequently (and legibly) at first, and respond to direct messages from Twitterers who are just checking to make sure you're real.

Twitpics

Twitpics is another great function you have access to as a Twitterer. This is a platform for uploading images, which you can have posted automatically to your Twitter account — they show up with your caption and a clickable URL that your followers can simply follow to view the image. Just head over to www.twitpics.com and use your Twitter username and password to log in.

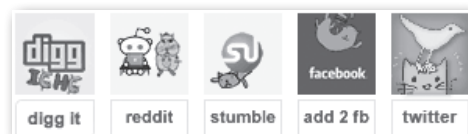
Twitpics is perfect for putting a face on who you are and what you like and do. But even more important, when you use Twitter for business purposes, you can use Twitpics to post images

of what you're selling. Of course you will want to be creative with them... people aren't going to click through more than once if they're just product shots. But if you show someone enjoying your product, or people having fun with your service, for example, it makes your business more visually accessible.

Posting images to your Twitter stream through Twitpics also boosts the number of posts you make, which gives you credibility when people decide whether or not they're going to follow you.

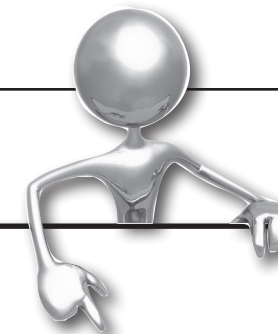
Posting to Twitter from other sites and platforms

Finally, you will probably have noticed that some websites include buttons allowing you to post something of interest directly to Twitter (or Facebook, etc).



These are a great way for you to pass information on to your followers. When you're using Twitter for your business, you can forward links to all sorts of relevant articles and videos, etc, which adds value to your stream and attracts (and keeps) followers. You can also add these link options to your own blog or website so other people can post Tweets about you!

Although there are a lot of other functions you will learn over time, the topics we have covered here should give you enough of an idea about how Twitter works so you can start building an online presence, ultimately making it work successfully for your business! ✂



Find and engage your market with social media tools

Many people get started using social media tools to connect with their friends and family, or to seek out communities of folks with similar interests to their own. Using social media platforms as marketing tools might seem like a bit of a stretch if you've only used them to be, well... *social*, so far.

But when you hear these interesting statistics...

- 34% of bloggers post opinions about products and brands.
- 25% of search results for the World's Top 20 largest brands are links to user-generated content — which basically means that reviews and recommendations are showing up alongside advertising content, whether the companies like it or not!
- 78% of consumers state that they seek out and trust online recommendations when it comes to making a buying decision, where only 14% of those surveyed state that they trust traditional advertising.

... you can see that marketers who use social tools are just tapping into conversations people are *already* having about products online!

So is your target market using social tools, too? And are they having conversations about the products and services they love? The answers are obvious: yes, and YES!

If you want your product or service to become a part of those conversations — and if you want to be on top of what people might be saying about your company already — you need to take a three-step approach to connecting with your market on the social Web:

- Find your target market with social media search tools
- Listen to the conversations that are already happening
- Engage your target market with great content

Let's get started!

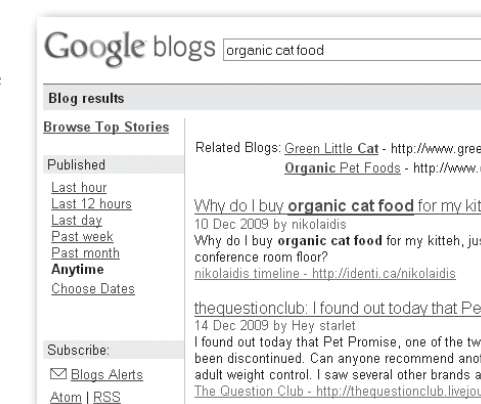
Use social search tools to find your market

One of the first places to seek out your market is the blogosphere. Aside from the wealth of conversations bloggers are having about your interests and your industry, you'll also find recommendations for products and services they enjoy... along with no-holds-barred reviews of products they *don't* love.

Head to Google BlogSearch (<http://>

blogsearch.google.com) and plug your keywords — the same keywords you use to optimize your site and run your PPC campaigns, along with any other terms that relate to your business — into the main search box. Click "Search Blogs"... and get ready to read!

At the top of your results, you'll see a short listing of "Related Blogs," which are the most popular or relevant blogs that fit your search term. Next, you'll see a chronological list of links to blog posts that include your search term.



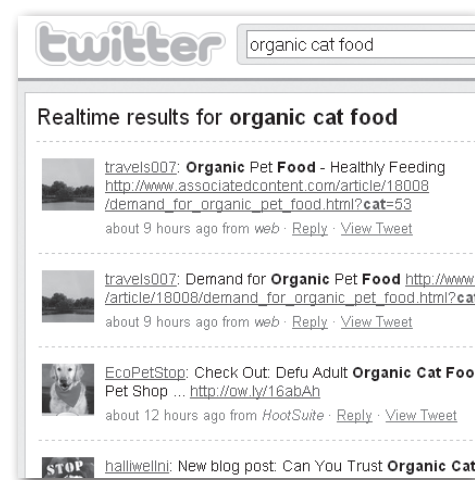
If you get a large number of results, you can narrow down this list by limiting it to a particular time frame (in the last hour, in the last day, in the last month.) Some of these results may be extremely relevant to your search, while others may be using the keywords out of context.

Click through the "Related Blogs" and the recent posts to see if the blogs are

posting consistently about topics that connect to your product or service. If they do, plug their RSS feeds into a Google Reader (<http://google.com/reader>) account — that way, you can keep track of everything they're writing about in a single place!

Most social media websites have some sort of search feature — and that's where you're going to use your keywords next!

For example, **Twitter** offers a “Find People” search that allows you to search usernames and user bio information for your keywords, along with Twitter Search (<http://search.twitter.com>), which allows you to search chronologically through Twitter posts that include your keywords.



From there, take some time to click through the Twitter users you find in both sets of search results, and figure out whether or not they're consistently having conversations about topics related to your business.

Facebook offers a single search box to browse through user profiles, groups, and “fan” pages. Start by connecting with groups that match your search results, rather than connecting directly with individual users. Unlike

a “follow” on Twitter, or joining a group, folks often consider becoming a Facebook friend as a step up from basic online conversation.

Take time to listen first

Once you've found some blogs, active Twitter users, and groups to check out, it's important to spend some time *listening*. Don't worry about joining the conversations or commenting quite yet — just take a little while to see what people are saying. And while you listen, ask yourself the following questions:

- What are people most excited about?
- What topics come up again and again — and why?
- What are the most common problems people are facing?
- What products are they talking about — for better or for worse?

By listening first, you make it clear that you value the information and opinions people are sharing with one another... and that you're not there to do a “drive by” sales pitch. You'll also get a feel for the tone of the conversations already in progress, which will help you strike the right note when it comes time to join in.

If you find people speaking directly about YOUR product or service in your search results, it might be tempting to jump in right away and respond to them — especially if they're having challenges, or making complaints.

If the messages are positive, you can feel free to offer a quick “thank you!” or note of appreciation. If the comments are negative, though, write an email or send a **private note** offering assistance or support. Until

you've established a social media presence for your company, you won't want to be known publicly for only showing up to dispute complaints.

Engage with your market... by providing value

After you've spent a while listening, it's time to get your own business presence up and running.

Start by setting up proper, branded social media accounts on the most trafficked websites with your logo, company link, and information about your company — and don't forget check out the featured article on Twitter in this issue to get an A to Z guide to using one of the most buzzed-about social media tools on the Web!

Here are some quick tips for setting up your social media accounts:

- Use the same logo or picture for all your accounts, along with a consistent bio — that way, people will start to recognize you wherever you pop up.
- Double-check your spelling and accuracy (put your most professional foot forward).
- Don't mix business and pleasure — set up completely separate accounts. Adding a business angle to your personal accounts results in friends getting too much business info — and your market getting a little too much information, period!
- Don't worry about joining every social site out there — you can't possibly be everywhere at once. Start by joining the sites with

the most traffic, and branch out from there by joining other sites that receive attention or buzz from your market (once you start connecting with them!).

Once you've set up your accounts, you can start posting information of your own, and engaging with other users. It might be tempting to haul out your sales pitch at this point and start trying to convert your new friends into buyers, but the social landscape requires a different touch.

What kind of information works well? Here are some ways to get started...

- **Company information and mission:** Share who you are, how you got started in your industry, your passion for what you do and why you do it.
- **Public relations-style information:** Put the word out about new product releases, new product features, press mentions or awards you've received.
- **Customer service details:** Post common problem solutions, product bulletins, problem solving, best practices, training and tips for using your products. Don't be scared to solve a customer's problem publicly if they post it publicly. It's not a bad thing for customers to see that you stand behind your products, and that you're eager to solve problems!
- **Customer stories (with permission!):** Share stories of people who have had positive experiences with your products, or have overcome difficulties as a result of using your products

- **Fun stuff:** Post games, contests, fun pictures or videos related to your products or industry.
- **Special deals:** Create offers just for your social media “friends” — but not with a heavy pitch, please! Just a link with a discount code will do — let your site speak for itself!
- **Feedback and research:** Questions, polls and surveys targeted towards your community or customers can be a great way of getting great market research data, product feedback, and information about the right direction for your business to head next!

Few people head to social media websites looking directly for items to purchase — but they *do* appreciate coming across companies that provide great information and great service. And if they are looking directly for product recommendations, your presence and solid reputation could put you at the top of everyone's list.

Use a positive voice

Once you've created a business presence, you can start taking part in the conversations you've just been listening to until now. But remember — leave your aggressive sales pitch on your own website!

Now is the time to...

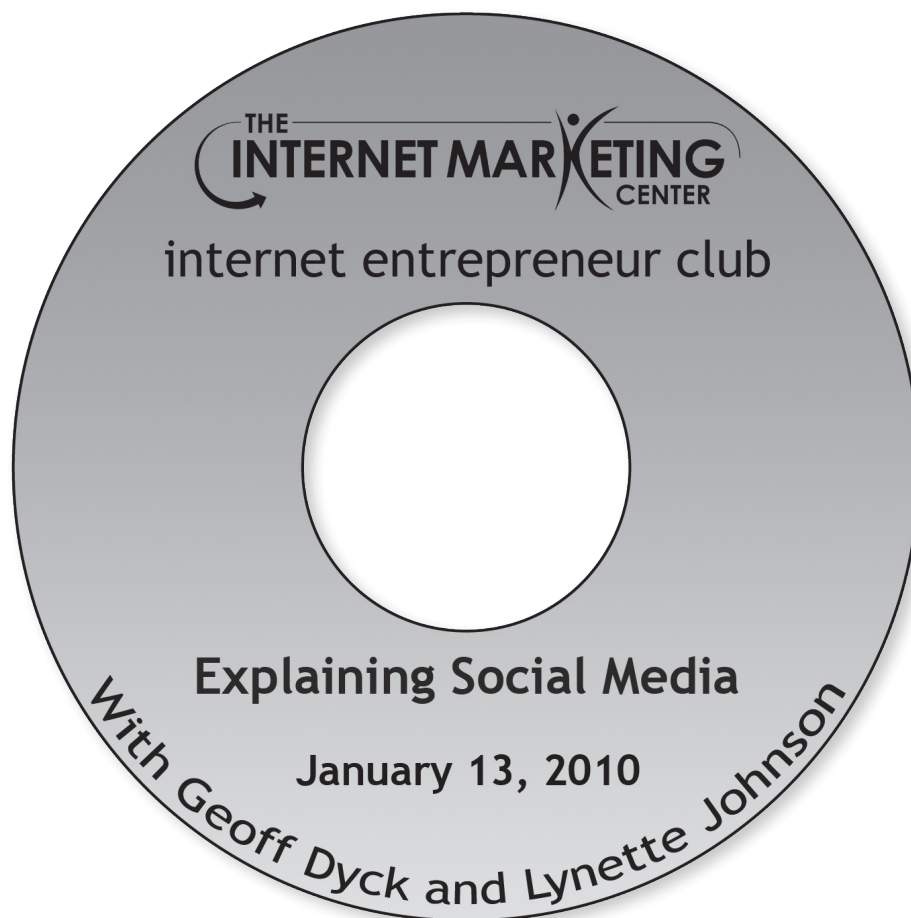
- Interact with your customers in a positive way on your own profile page, or from your own account. Answer questions, solve problems, give great customer service, offer fresh ideas for using your products, thank them for sharing good experiences... and anything

else that makes them feel heard and respected. If you have an unhappy customer, do your best to solve their problem in a public way, and if that can't be done, contact them quickly offline to figure out a solution.

- Establish your expertise by answering common questions and offering valuable information in industry discussions and groups. That *doesn't* mean you answer every question by pointing to your product (even if it seems like the most obvious solution)! You want to earn trust first... and let that lead naturally to sales.
- Share your own ideas and thoughts about your industry through blog posts, microblogs and group posts. Start discussions that matter to you, and invite other people to share their ideas alongside yours.
- Create your own group or central meeting place online for people with interests that relate to your products — again, not to offer a pitch, but to offer great information, and give people a forum to share their ideas.

If you follow through with all these steps — and it doesn't need to take you more than a few minutes a day to get rolling — you'll develop a social media presence for your business that does as much to build your reputation and community goodwill as it does to boost your sales.

And above all, remember that the key to successful social media marketing is not to leave out the “social” — listen first, respond positively, and keep the conversation going!



NEXT ISSUE

in the Internet Profit Report...

We take a look at how sticky your site is and how you can make sure visitors are staying around to buy. You'll learn...

- How to measure your site's stickiness and how popular each Web page is
 - What you can do to improve your stickiness so that visitors hang around longer
 - Why stickiness isn't just good for sales... but for your search engine rankings as well!
- ...and much more!



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