



# Persistent, Consistent Social Media Engagement

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## 1.5 billion and counting

With the rise of social media to well over 1.5 billion users, an increasing share of consumer attention, and a widening array of social media venues and usage patterns, marketers must recognize social as more than just another channel to achieve impressions reach via ads. They must seek and accomplish a new form of persistent, consistent social media engagement.

## Social media defined

Social media is a series of online venues in which people connect with each other, dialogue, and form relationships. Many forms of social media and additional features and content exist alongside the core relationship value. But ultimately, if people are not talking with each other and not forming relationships, it's not social. As obvious as this is, it's also the core principle that many marketers today are missing. For the best results in social media marketing, you have to utilize the fundamentals of dialogue and relationships.

Yet today most social media marketing is not truly social. Rather, it's traditional broadcast, PR, and digital advertising, shoved through social channels and at customers who want something different, something more. Brands can achieve consistent, persistent social engagement and new heights of marketing success by better understanding the core consumer benefits of social media, the nature of the social media landscape, and how to build a social cultural architecture.

## The people benefits of social media

The three core people benefits of social media are self-expression/sharing oneself, making friends, and getting attention. These benefits are experienced through dialogue among and with users, which in turn develops relationships among users — and even relationships with brands. Yes, along the way, consumers may get a coupon or a deal. They may get all kinds of information.

Business/professional customers may get how-to information that helps them increase sales or lower costs. But what distinguishes social media — what has drawn over 1.5 billion people, what is creating a time, attention, and usage pattern that has passed all others on the Internet, what is passing print



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and radio and will eventually pass TV — are the human-to-human characteristics that make social unique among all other forms of media.

This really isn't all that new. In fact it is the oldest and most enduring form of sales and marketing. For thousands of years businesses have engaged users through social venues. Roman Forums were gathering places that brought together business and social experiences. Medieval marketplaces were created as social venues to draw the crowd, who in turn would buy from merchants, who would then pay taxes to their feudal lords. In the 19th and early 20th century, the center of commerce was the general store, which had chairs for its customers to sit around and socialize. It's only in the second half of the 20th century that the world of business temporarily departed from this model.

Why has it been this way for most of history? Because people have a fundamental need for other people — to express, to share, to have a circle of other humans to care about and to give each other attention — to have relationships. Businesses have always found that building a relationship with a customer delivers more sales at lower costs than any other approach.

When the history of business is written a thousand years from now, there will be a chapter on that odd 50-year period in the 20th century following World War II when the initial forces of mass marketing, technology, and globalization aberrantly drove businesses away from these basics of sales and marketing. I have worked in technology for about 30 years. As great as it has been, for a while there, it functioned to isolate people and pull them away from that fundamental human-to-human experience. The Internet with social media brings that back and puts it on steroids. With social, humans can connect, express, share, give and get attention, and build relationships far beyond the reach of the Roman Forum, a general store or neighborhood park. You can now reach out to and connect with any number of people, whether on the other side of the world, or the neighbor down the street that you've seen, but never really met. Businesses that help their customers do this will find those same people attracted to having a relationship with the brand as well.



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## The social media landscape

Just as the core people benefits of social media harken back to fundamental relationship marketing principles, so does the structure of the social media landscape. As with other media, we have massively large, broad channels that can reach huge numbers of people; verticals that are more focused but reach a medium size number of people; and specialty venues that have far less reach, but far more depth. In television, these are broadcast TV (NBC), vertical cable networks (Lifetime) and then specific shows with deep resonance (Sopranos, Mad Men). The comparable venues in social are broad networks with massive reach (Facebook, Twitter), verticals like BlogHer, and deeper

specialized community venues such as Facebook Groups or, for maximum depth, a branded community website. The broader venues are good for reach, short attention awareness, and comments. The verticals don't reach as many people, but a brand can generally align its positioning more closely and create more meaningful buzz. The specialized venues are best for creating loyalty and brand evangelists. A fully integrated social media program will evolve to embrace the entire spectrum of the social media landscape. The challenge is to do so in an integrated way that results in persistent, consistent engagement.

## Social media is a party. What type of party is your brand?

Social media is about interaction among people. Ads alone, especially those derived from the general advertising strategy, don't work the way social media does. While they might get you some impulse attention and coupon redemption, they won't get you the relationship and word of mouth value that social media offers. On Facebook, Sponsored Stories work better than display ads. Why? Because they leverage the deeper nature of social media and the consumer pattern of self-expression and sharing, which very often is in story form.

A successful party has a distinct story line — an ambience, great mix of people, and conversation. People tell other people about it and want to come back to with their friends. If you went to a party in an empty warehouse with people just milling around, nobody would know what to do. Who would want to remember or return to that? But if it were well themed, with red and white checker tables, country music playing, and waiters in cowboy outfits serving beer, these would be the cues for a memorable western event. A party with violins playing and waiters in tuxedos serving champagne



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stimulates a different but equally memorable experience. This same principle applies to social media: A brand must establish its distinctive ambience and tone, its culture, to foster a memorable party experience — one that guests (fans, followers) remember, tell others about, and come back to, bringing their friends. Consistent, persistent engagement requires the brand's social media party be deployed across the social media landscape with one core cultural model.

While the idea and the fundamental consumer experience should be the same, the cultural implementation specifics should vary by channel for appropriate context. Persistent, consistent social engagement does not mean the same thing everywhere. In particular, it does not mean posting the same content across social channels. In the last year or so, due to increasingly cross-channel social

publishing tools, we have seen a trend of brands using these tools to post exactly the same content across channels (often Facebook and Twitter). In addition to risking a spam effect, this approach focuses too much on the brand's view of its own content, and renders the dialogue/relationship equation to a least common denominator. Deploying a core cultural model across channels does not mean posting the same content everywhere, any more than a brand would use a print ad exactly the same way on radio, or a radio spot exactly the same way on TV.

Each social media channel has different dynamics — even for the same users. A post on Facebook is best if it is more story-oriented, can easily be added to, and can be shared with a personal view. While Facebook posts can be longer than those on Twitter, they must be crafted to properly leverage the Facebook EdgeRank algorithm or nobody will see them on their personal Facebook Walls. This is a critical factor, since 95% of people never return to a brand's page after Liking it. Immediate brand response to users is not necessarily as important as selective response that carries the story along. In contrast, a post on Twitter must be short and planned with the idea of generating a rapid cascading influence effect. The brand should be prepared to rapidly re-engage if, when, and where dialogue energy builds.

The most effective social media marketing fosters an environment where your customers can have a good time getting three key benefits: self-expression/sharing, friends, and attention. Rather than just display ads or present interactive apps, this means setting an ambience (culture), attracting interesting people, and enabling your guests to engage first with each other. If they have a good and rewarding time with that, they will invite you to participate, and they will tell their friends and



associates that your brand gives the best parties. And by association, they will tell their friends to frequent the brand's stores, watch its shows, or buy its products.

## A recipe for persistent, consistent social media engagement

As with any good marketing, understand your market, define goals, and strategies. In particular define what is different about your brand and how you will bring that forward to your customers.

- 1) **Start by understanding your customers** as people who have fundamental expression, relationship, and attention needs and wants.
- 2) **Mix in the definition of what type of party your brand will give** in social media — its cultural model, how you will play in it, and how you will integrate it with everything.
- 3) **Integrate the rest of the ingredients by recognizing that, as with any media landscape, different venues (or sub-sections thereof) serve different purposes** for your customers and for your brand. In social, these nuances are all the more important because your customers will come to experience your brand through the different dialogue and relationship character of each channel. Keep the cultural idea the same across the social media landscape, but tailor the delivery to fit each different context.
- 4) **Above all else, deliver social media persistently and consistently with an eye on dialogue and relationships that serve up self-expression and sharing, friends, and attention for your customers.**





Peter Friedman is a social media visionary and veteran with 28 years experience in the space (with 16 years at LiveWorld and 12 at Apple). He has provided multiple global brands with strategic social media guidance and delivered hundreds of social media programs for them in multiple countries and languages.

These include Apple's industry wide social network, AppleLink; MINI Cooper's Member's Lounge; Unilever's Dove Campaign For Real Beauty; HBO's original show character-driven web site community; the American Express Member's Project, and Walmart's Facebook and

Twitter programs. Peter founded LiveWorld, raised over \$100 Million in private rounds and an IPO, and grew the company to hundreds of employees.

Prior to LiveWorld, Peter was Vice President & General Manager of Apple's Internet Services Division, overseeing the creation and management of social media services such as AppleLink, eWorld, AOL, and Salon.

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