

Using Social Media eBook

A Quick Guide
to Getting Started
By Cece Salomon-Lee



Overview

In January & February 2009, I wrote a series of posts on “Using Social Media” on my blog [PR Meets Marketing](#).

I've compiled and updated these posts in this eBook. While each company and program is different, I hope this eBook serves as a quick guide to get you started and how this can enhance your public relations and marketing programs.

Table of Contents

- Before You Start
- Fish Where the Fish Are
- Developing Your Own Community
- Using Social Media
 - Microblogging
 - Search Feeds
 - Social Networking Sites
 - Linking Strategies
 - Blogger Relations
 - Measurement
- Conclusion
- About Cece Salomon-Lee

Before You Start

Anyone can use tools. The question is how to *strategically* apply them for *your* business. Questions to ask yourself:

- What are your objectives?
 - Brand awareness
 - Lead Generation
 - SEO
- Who are your target audiences?
 - Fish where the fish are
 - Creating your own community
- How much time do you have to dedicate to this?
 - Dedicated personnel
 - One-person marketing machine

Fish Where the Fish Are

Promoted by Jeremiah Owyang of the [Web Strategist](#) blog, the concept is to understand whether or not your target audience is online or not. In many cases, it may be better to participate in existing communities versus creating your own. Top level points are:

- Research existing online communities relevant to your target audience
- Monitor these communities to determine etiquette and community culture
- Participate only when relevant and provide valuable information
- Be transparent about your company affiliations

Developing Your Own Community

Assuming that you already have a vibrant community that evangelizes you online and off or if no community exists for your target audience, then consider creating your own. Some high-level points to consider:

- Research the best platform or technology for your community
- Clearly communicate the purpose of your community and why people will want to join and participate
- Be firm about accepted and unacceptable behavior
- Dedicate a resource to monitor and moderate your community

Microblogging

Microblogging is quickly becoming a way to provide updates and share information online. While [Twitter](#) is the main platform that comes to mind, other platforms include [Plurk](#) and [Jaiku](#).

According to Alexa (see Figure 1), Twitter is outstripping traffic for Plurk and Jaiku. As such, I have focused on Twitter as my main microblogging platform. I use [Twhirl](#) to manage multiple accounts for personal, corporate or customer service purposes.

Microblogging

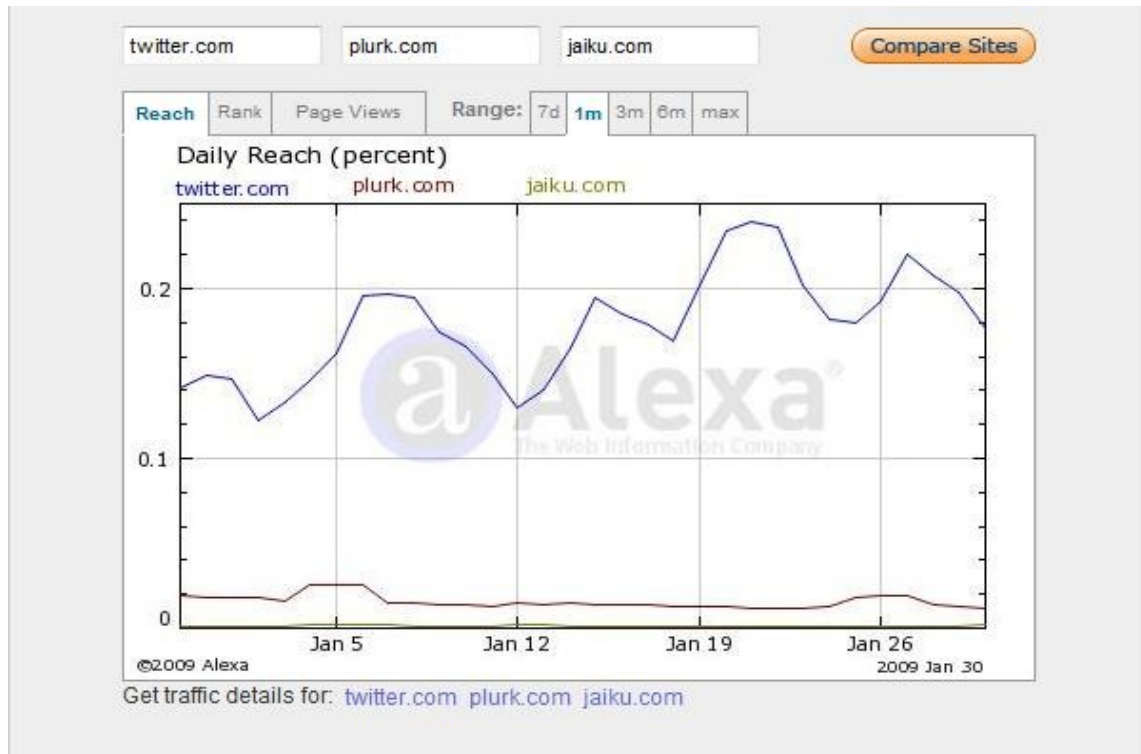


Figure 1: Traffic Comparison of Twitter, Jaiku and Plurk

There are some key benefits of using Twitter for your marketing programs:

- **Brand awareness:** Like a website, corporate brands will have to create a presence on Twitter to reach customers, partners and influencers. Otherwise, they risk having their brand “Tweetsquatted.”

Microblogging

- **Customer engagement:** Twitter is another way for your company to connect and engage with customers who are on Twitter. Follow individual customer contacts, brand or department for updates. This is especially true if your customers tend to be early adopters of technology. I recommend responding to appropriate tweets, especially when your company is mentioned or if people are discussing a related topic. This demonstrates that you're *listening* and not just marketing.
- **Industry conversations:** I recommend following key individuals, such as reporters, analysts and industry luminaries, who are relevant to your company. In this way, you can keep a pulse of topics important to them and provide insight from your company's perspective.
- **Competitive Intelligence:** Consider following individuals from competitive companies. This is one way to monitor what competitors are doing and who they may be speaking with.

Microblogging

- **Corporate Marketing:** And I purposely put this last. The first tendency is to only tweet updates about what your company is doing – new webinars, white papers, etc. While this is important, you need to balance this with tweets about industry topics that would be of interest to your followers or links to interesting articles. *Remember, participate in conversations. This is not a one-way marketing channel.*

Search Feeds

There are several tools that you can use to monitor your company's online reputation. I previously wrote about [Trackur](#), but I prefer to use search feeds via [Google](#) and [Twitter Search](#) – at least for now.

I recommend using a reader to have a single place for reviewing your feeds through the day vs. having multiple emails in your in-box. Setting up RSS feeds with specific search keywords is an easy way to monitor your company's online reputation while keeping tabs on your competition.

The search results can also uncover new reporters and bloggers who may be interested in your company, further expanding your relationships with key influencers.

Search Feeds

- **Online Reputation Management:** With search feeds, this helps you to track mentions of your company throughout the Web, in blogs and Twitter. Depending on the content of the blog posting or tweet, consider commenting or tweeting back respectively. While the response may be a couple of hours or even a few days later, people appreciate that you have *responded*. It demonstrates that you're *listening* to your audiences. (Sensing a trend yet?)
- **Competitive Intelligence:** While you set up feeds for your company, also set up feeds for your competitors'. This way, you can stay on top of any media, blog or tweet mentions regarding your competitor. And when appropriate, participate in the conversation with your company's perspective or introduce your company to the blogger and twitterer.
- **Industry Trends:** Set up searches for key terms within your industry. This will help you to stay on top of industry trends that you can share with your colleagues or uncover additional reporter/bloggers/twitterers within the industry.

Social Networking Sites

Marketers are seeking to break into several social networking sites, such as [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [MySpace](#). As I mentioned earlier, there seems to be two popular models right now - create a group or fan page or participate in existing communities. The former requires dedication to manage the community and ensure that there is fresh content. The latter requires participation in a group without the onus of owning that community.

And while I believe social media should be an integral part of marketing, the reality is that this takes a concerted effort and time. As such, I recommend aligning your efforts with the latter strategy until more staff or focus can be given to the former. While there are different communities to join, LinkedIn has some benefits that you should consider.

Social Networking Sites

Why? I hate to say this, but frankly, of all the social networking sites, organizations can be overtly salesy on LinkedIn. I know, I know – that isn't the point. So let me be clear, **I DON'T RECOMMEND THAT YOU SELL FROM THE PLATFORM**. Rather, apply the same rules you would apply elsewhere – be transparent of who you are and offer valuable information. So even when others are being blatantly self-promotional, you and your company are seen as contributory. You'll see what I mean below.

Here are aspects of LinkedIn to consider:

- **LinkedIn Answers:** Monitor questions for topics that are relevant to your company. When appropriate, respond to questions to position you and your company as thought leaders. There will be instances when you can recommend your company as a prospective vendor. Again, you

Social Networking Sites

have to be careful that you're not too "salesy" as your answer can be flagged as inappropriate. Overall, LinkedIn Answers is a good way to provide brand awareness for your company. And since LinkedIn Answers are searchable, your responses may appear in Google search results.

- **Groups:** There are numerous groups within LinkedIn. It's important to research specific groups as some may be more self-promotional than others. I recommend seeking groups with audiences that are relevant to your company and have good participation by its members. Once you join a group, monitor the discussions before fully participating.
- Group Questions: Like LinkedIn Answers, each group incorporates this feature. By responding or asking questions in a group, you position your company as an industry expert to a targeted audience relevant to your business.

Social Networking Sites

- **News:** You can submit article links, like Facebook Share, that are relevant to the groups. In addition to blog posts, you can submit general news articles that mention your company or are relevant to your industry. You can also consider submitting your press releases. While this is *slightly* self-promotional, make sure the article or press release discusses a larger trend of interest to the group.
- **Events:** LinkedIn recently introduced a way for members to post events. If you have a webinar, in-person seminar or other gathering that you want to promote, LinkedIn events is a place to promote it. What I liked is that they have an option for “virtual events” as well. You can then share this event with your contacts as well as be searchable by other LinkedIn members. One drawback, in case you have to cancel the event, there doesn’t seem to be a way to delete the event.

Linking Strategies

In a July 2008 post, Owyang argued that your [corporate home page is really Google.com](#). As such, SEO (search engine optimization) has become a strategic tool in every interactive marketer's tool box for increasing a company's presence on search engines.

In addition to SEO, bookmarking sites/services like [Digg](#), [Delicious](#), [StumbleUpon](#), and [Facebook's](#) share application can further extend your news to key audiences. And if you have a blog, claim it on [Technorati](#) to have your posts automatically cataloged by the site.

For more information, I recommend checking out Tom Pick's series of posts on [social tagging at WebMarketCentral](#).

Linking Strategies

- **Bookmark Your Content:** While Digg may be an obvious choice, my perception is that Digg is for more trendy or consumer related stories. Rather, I recommend establishing an account on delicious or StumbleUpon. While the former is more text based, the latter, to me, is more visually driven.

I recommend using delicious to bookmark press releases, website pages, white papers and other information related to your company. If you have videos or interesting images, consider submitting them to StumbleUpon.

- **Submit Your Link to Appropriate Sites:** As I mentioned in my previous post, content posted on certain social networks will appear in search engines. When appropriate, consider submitting press releases, white papers, media coverage and rich media content to these social networks. There are also websites that will accept news releases for their daily news coverage.

Linking Strategies

- **Tag Your Content:** This is a way to describe the content through keywords. According to [Wikipedia](#), “This kind of [metadata](#) helps describe an item and allows it to be found again by browsing or searching. Tags are chosen informally and personally by the item’s creator or by its viewer, depending on the system.”
- **Add Users to Your Network:** Regardless of where you submit your links, each website has a community of users and allows you to add other members your network. Consider connecting with users who 1) have already bookmarked your content as this demonstrates an interest in the subject matter and 2) have a network of active users who are bookmarking content in your industry.

Blogger Relations

While blogger relations should be an integral part of any “traditional” public relations strategy, bloggers are somewhat unique compared to reporters at traditional publications. Bloggers are writing to communicate their distinct perspective on a topic. And most are writing in addition to their day jobs.

- **Bloggers are not journalists:** Bloggers write because they are passionate about a particular topic. Journalists write as a job and part of that job is receiving tons of emails and calls from folks like me. Most bloggers don't come from the traditional reporter background so treating them as such can backfire.

Blogger Relations

- **Familiarize yourself with the blogger:** This is more reading past posts. It's about familiarizing yourself with the blogger. What has the blogger written in the past, what is the tone and what is the person's background. I would even recommend googling the person to learn about the person's online reputation. Go to [LinkedIn](#) and see if there is a profile on the blogger (Note: do this with reporters and freelance writers as well). There is a wealth of information on the person's background. Take advantage of it.
- **Beyond Email Pitches:** While a common way to "pitch" a reporter is via a contact page or email, bloggers also pay attention to other ways of connecting. For example, some bloggers only accept pitches via a [Twitpitch](#) or will take interest in your comment and want to learn more.

Blogger Relations

- **Nurture a relationship:** Don't pitch, get "coverage" and then leave. It's like getting ready for a hot first date and being taken to a McDonald's for dinner. Once you've gotten a person's attention, be sure to nurture that relationship like you do for any reporter relevant to your space. When appropriate, connect with the blogger when you have news, drop an email about industry news and occasionally comment to demonstrate that you're reading their blog. For emails, an added touch is to incorporate something the person has recently written.
- **Be Transparent:** Whether you're commenting on a blog or contacting a blogger, be transparent about who you are and what your intentions are. Do I *really* need to say more on this?
- **Grammar and spelling do count:** If you've read the person's blog, you should be able to identify the blogger's gender and correct spelling of his/her name. And having good grammar just demonstrates you can write English well. Check out [B.L. Ochman's recent post](#) on this topic.

Blogger Relations

- **Don't disregard "smaller" bloggers:** Never disregard a smaller blogger. You never know who will read and link to a story that can gain a life of its own.
- **Face to face is important:** While I have met a lot of people virtually, I think it's important to cement any relationship in person. If the blogger is local, have an open door policy to visit your offices, give in-person demos or just have coffee. If you're traveling, reach out to bloggers in that town, especially those you've been in touch with in the past.
- **Monitor and respond quickly:** You never know when a post can quickly spiral out of control for a company or person. You have to monitor what is being said and respond immediately to correct inaccurate information or diffuse potentially disastrous situations. Scott Monty of Ford recently handled a similar situation ([check out the article at Fast Company](#)). The key was Scott's transparency, as well as his personable demeanor in all his online communications.

Measurement

According to Marcel LeBrun of [Radian6](#) and media philosopher blog:

“It [social media] is rich with metrics especially when it is compared to traditional media which produced only a few metrics to work with, like reach & frequency.”

I agree with Marcel that social media is easy to measure if you know what you're measuring upfront. If you're just starting a program, I recommend identifying a handful of key stats to measure the efficacy of your programs over time.

As your program matures, you'll be able to identify which criteria has direct impact on your business and further expand upon your basis.

Measurement

According to Marcel LeBrun of [Radian6](#) and media philosopher blog:

“It [social media] is rich with metrics especially when it is compared to traditional media which produced only a few metrics to work with, like reach & frequency.”

I agree with Marcel that social media is easy to measure if you know what you're measuring upfront. If you're just starting a program, I recommend identifying a handful of key stats to measure the efficacy of your programs over time.

As your program matures, you'll be able to identify which criteria has direct impact on your business and further expand upon this foundation.

Measurement

- **Subscribers, Followers, Fans:** One way to track the success of your programs is by the steady growth of subscribers to your blog, followers on [Twitter](#) or fans on [Facebook](#). [Feedburner](#) is a nice way to track subscribers to your blog or any RSS feed that you create for corporate updates, such as press releases, newsletters, etc.
- **Audience Reach:** The key aspect of social media is tracking “word of mouth” or the reach of your content to your key audiences.
 - [Twitter](#) ··[Tweetburner](#) allows you to create a short URL for Twitter and then tracks who has retweeted the link or clicked on it. You can keep your stats private or public. While this is a great tool, I’ve found that people will create their own short URLs for the content, so you may want to actively search on your Twitter ID for possible retweets. I then add up the number of subscribers for these individuals to get a “number” regarding reach. One drawback is this is a bit time consuming.

Measurement

- **Online Reputation:** Another way to determine reach is to track who is talking about you online. I wrote a bit about this in my second post - [Using Social Media: Part 2 - Search Feeds](#). The added component is determining the reach of these online outlets. While ad equivalence can be used too, I'm not a fan of this method as it doesn't measure direct impact on your business.
- **Incoming Leads, Inquiries:** There are a couple of free tools such as [Quantcast](#) and [Google Analytics](#) that provide good detail about your incoming traffic. The key is to closely track the referring sources for the incoming leads and determine which have an impact on your sales pipeline. For example, Twitter is quickly becoming a driver of traffic to my blog or answering a question on [LinkedIn](#) can lead to a sales inquiry about your services.
- **Increased Links:** Before you start your programs, take a quick snapshot of sites that link to your website. While a basic stat, this can have huge SEO implications for your site, which in turn, increases your visibility on search engines. Check to see if your efforts increase this basic stat.

Measurement

- **Conversation Index:** Steve Boyd discusses the [Conversation Index](#) as a way to determine which blogs are successful. Basically, successful blogs are those that have more comments than posts. I would think that the same value can be applied to Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook. The more that people interact with your company and messages, one can assume the more engaged they are with you.
- **Share of Conversation:** In fact, LeBrun does take this to the next level. He defines share of conversation as “the degree to which a brand is associated with the problem or need that it is setting out to help with.” I recommend reading LeBrun's in-depth [post](#) about how this measurement point can be integrated into your program.

Conclusion

The misconception is that social media is free. While this may be for the tools, the true cost is the time and people power to develop, implement, monitor, respond and measure a social media program.

This eBook is by no means a comprehensive look at everything you can do with social media. One area that I haven't covered is using video, photos and other visual elements.

Regardless of how you decide to proceed, there are common elements to keep in mind as you embark with your social media marketing:

- **Listen:** Instead of jumping in to defend what others are saying about your company, take a step back and truly listen to what is being said. Do they have a valid point about your product quality or customer service?

Conclusion

- **Engage in conversation:** If so, engage in a conversation. You can do this by leaving a comment requesting to discuss the matter more or acknowledge the issues and highlight what the next steps are. Each situation is different and requires a different response. In the end, it's not about parroting your marketing materials. It's about having meaningful conversations with your customers, partners and prospects who are already interested in your company.
- **Be transparent:** No matter what, *always* be transparent about who you are. Hiding your identity or company affiliation can create harm your credibility, especially when you need it most for the next crisis.
- **Provide value:** In all your online interactions, provide valuable feedback or link to others who provide unique insight. This helps to position you and your company as a thought leader.

About Cece Salomon-Lee

I have over 15 years of public relations, marketing and communications experience. I have the ability to craft and communicate messages that successfully positioned start-up and established companies as thought leaders.

Through my blog, PR Meets Marketing, I explore the intersection of public relations and marketing. I believe that all aspects of PR – from media relations, analyst relations to competitive intelligence – is an integral part of marketing's overall objectives.

For PR and marketing professionals, social media is another component that they can adopt to accomplish these goals.

If you are interested in learning more about how PR, marketing and social media can benefit your company, contact Cece at:

415-287-3209 or cece.lee@gmail.com