

Social Marketing Goes Multiplatform

Preliminary Report of Ongoing Research by Paul
Gillin Communications



Social Marketing Goes Multiplatform

Businesses began dipping their toes into the social media pool as early as 2005, but the last two years saw them jump in with both feet. Three developments in the social media landscape drove the rapid expansion of their activities:

- Facebook achieve the critical mass needed to establish it as a major customer contact point. To a lesser extent, LinkedIn also crossed this threshold;
- Twitter burst on the scene and demonstrated enormous value in magnifying the reach of a message for relatively little cost and effort;
- Marketers warmed to the idea that using multiple social media channels together, and coordinating messages between them, collectively achieved a greater impact than if the tools were used in isolation.

Businesses of all sizes report overall satisfaction with the expansion of their social media initiatives. However, few are willing to back their optimism with rich analytics. Rather, their perception that social media is working for them is based more on the belief that the new platforms are reaching a wider audience in the places their customers are already congregating. Says Adam Brown, Director of the Office of Digital Communications & Social Media at the Coca-Cola Co., “Our philosophy is to fish where the fish are.”

These are among the preliminary results of a multi-client research study undertaken by Paul Gillin Communications in early 2010. The purpose of the study, which will be ongoing during the year, is to document the extent to which businesses of all sizes are adopting multiplatform social media strategies, assess satisfaction with this diversified

communications approach and record best practices and metrics that are emerging from their early experiences.

The first stage of the research consisted of two parts: An online survey was posted in January and promoted through a variety of social media channels. The survey received 53 responses, of which 31 came from small businesses and 12 from companies more than 1000 employees. The survey results are not statistically projectable, but they provide an interesting glimpse into the perceptions of early adopters. Responses will continue to be invited during the first half of 2010.

The second stage consisted of in-depth interviews with 10 marketers who have experience with multiplatform strategies. In these interviews, we sought specifics on what value businesses found in each platform, the metrics they used to judge success and the insights businesses had gleaned from their early experiences. Interview subjects included a mix of company sizes with a particular emphasis on large household brands. Among them were Coca-Cola, Ford Motor Company, Cisco Systems, Dell Computer and Sodexo.

Tipping Point of Adoption

The past two years have unquestionably been the tipping point for social media adoption, as demonstrated by this and other research¹. This fact is dramatized by the adoption rates reported by survey respondents (see chart below). Prior to 2006, just 38 of the 53 respondents were using any social media platforms at all. However, in the past two years, respondents rapidly expanded their portfolio of options, adding an average of six new platforms to their arsenal. By the end of 2009, companies surveyed were each using an average of eight platforms.

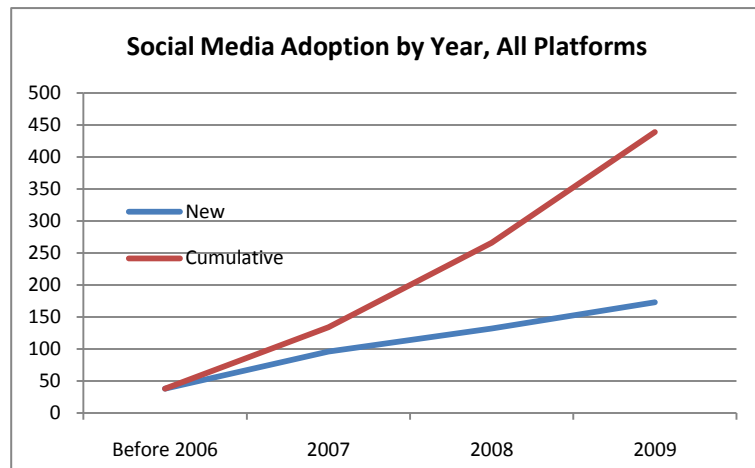
¹ Among the other research documenting adoption of social media tools are ongoing studies at the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth’s Center for Marketing Research, which have tracked

Concerns about negativity, liability and resource demands have largely been put to rest by early reports from the field. In addition, the recession

has boosted interest in social platforms, which are widely perceived as a cost-effective alternative to traditional paid marketing. This benefit was dramatized by the experience of Sodexo, which adopted a wide variety of social media platforms for use in its recruitment operations. The company was able to cut its advertising costs by \$300,000 while improving both the quality and quantity of applicants (see profile).

Another popular incentive for social media adoption is customer service. Twitter, in particular, has proved to be an effective means of responding to customer comments. Comcast, which has suffered in the past from complaints of customer service shortcomings, now has about 50 Twitter accounts and responds to between 400 and 500 customer comments per day, according to Frank Eliason, Senior Director in National Customer Operations at the cable company.

Even when the business benefit was not overwhelming, the low cost of social media platforms made adoption a simple decision, some respondents reported. “With an investment of less than 1% of our budget, we are starting to see our online channel generate about 10% of



our leads and 15% of enrollments,” commented one marketer at a large health maintenance organization.

Many respondents reported that their adoption strategies were driven by customer preferences. “We talked with some top clients to understand how they use each platform, then built a basic presence on the ones that they mentioned,” noted a respondent from the publishing industry.

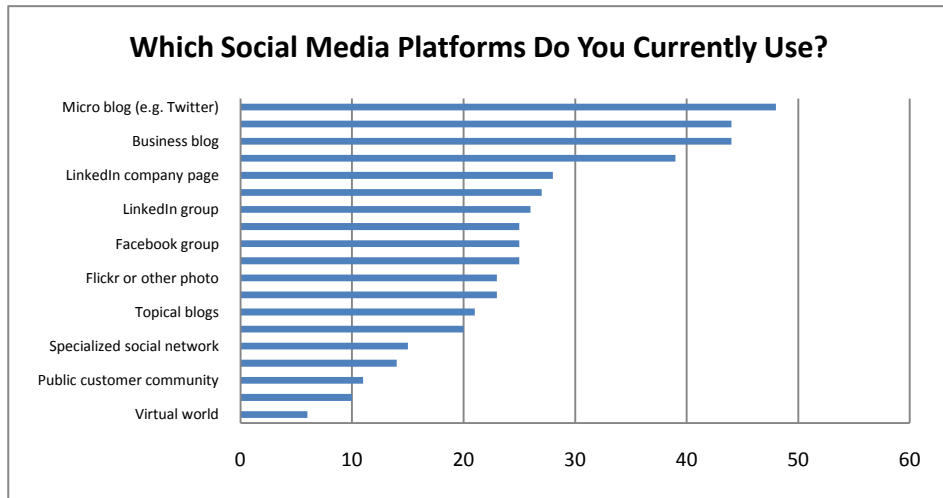
Favored Platforms

It should come as no surprise that the leading social media platforms are also the ones most favored by marketers. Respondents have adopted Twitter, blogs and Facebook fan pages by a substantial margin over other platforms, although LinkedIn was a particular favorite with business-to-business companies. Facebook fan pages have become especially popular since their redesign in the fall of 2008. With nearly 4,000,000 fans, the Skittles fan page is one of the largest on Facebook, with membership that outstrips Mars, Inc.’s signature M&M brand by nearly 7 to 1.

That apparent imbalance doesn’t bother the marketers at Mars, which gives their brands considerable latitude in deciding how to deploy their social media presences, according to Ryan Bowling, Director of Communications at Mars Chocolate North America. In fact, nearly every company interviewed is currently taking a decentralized approach to social media adoption, letting business units and even individuals choose the tools that make sense in their markets. That may change as businesses seek to better leverage customers who land on their blogs or Facebook fan pages, but for now, experimentation is still the rule.

Business blogs are the most mature and one of the most popular social media platforms. Respondents reported that blogs are an effective way to communicate thought leadership and to post general information about the company. In many cases, blog content is syndicated through Facebook and Twitter.

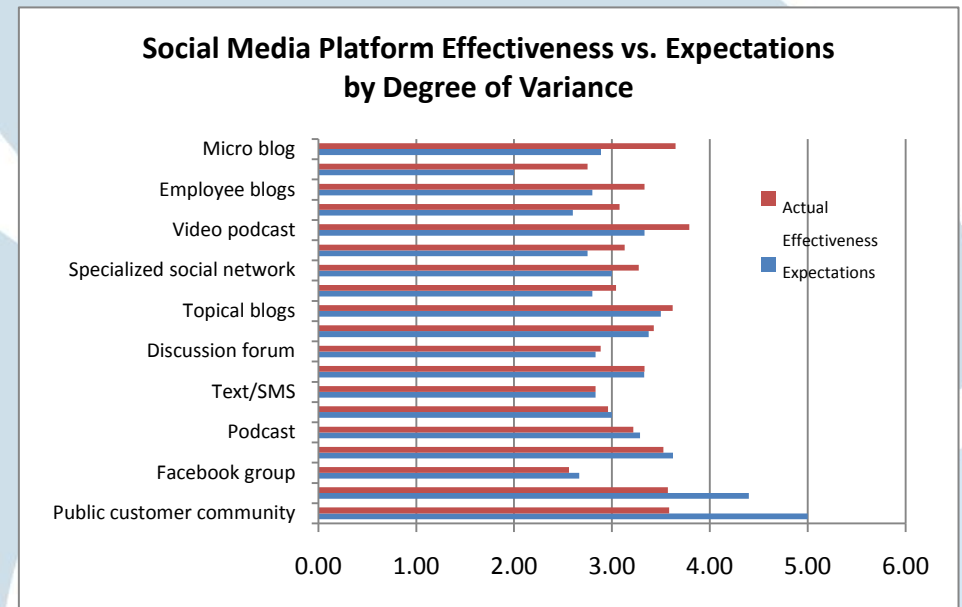
But the all-Star that emerged from this research is Twitter, the micro-blogging service that respondents praised for its simplicity, flexibility and continued strong performance. In fact, all but five of the 53 survey respondents use Twitter, and the platform earned some of their most effusive praise. “I keep expecting to see diminishing returns [from Twitter] and it just doesn’t happen,” says Bill Robb, Social Media Marketing Manager at Cisco Systems. Cisco now has more than 50 official Twitter feeds.



At the opposite end of the scale, respondents reported low adoption rates for virtual worlds like Second Life, vertical social networks and branded customer communities. Facebook groups were also a relative disappointment, perhaps because brands can exercise less control in the freewheeling forums. It should be noted, however, that low adoption doesn't necessarily indicate low value. Mobile applications, in particular, were cited as a promising area by several respondents, but the newness of that market has yet to drive significant activity.

An interesting alternative view of the data emerged when we asked respondents about the actual effectiveness of various social media

platforms compared to their expectations. The chart below shows the results, sorted by the degree of variance between performance and expectations. Again, Twitter rules the roost, but some lightly adopted platforms such as virtual worlds, video podcasts, employee blogs and specialty social networks jump from the bottom of the popularity rankings to near the top in what could be called the “pleasant surprise” ranking. These numbers should be regarded with caution, since adoption rates of some well-ranked platforms is low and the overall survey response was small. However, the contrast between adoption and perceived effectiveness indicates is still an experimentation mode. Further research is still needed.



ROI & Metrics

Return on investment is probably the most debated topic in social media today. The lack of standardized metrics is frequently cited by businesses leaders as a reason to avoid these platforms. Survey results indicate that they have a point; businesses are using a wide variety of metrics to assess performance, but the bottom-line impact on the company is still

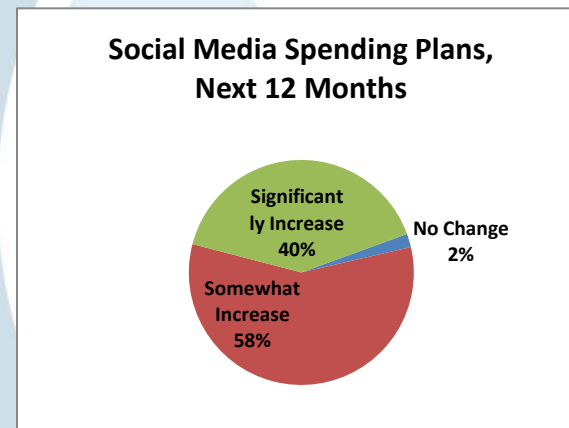
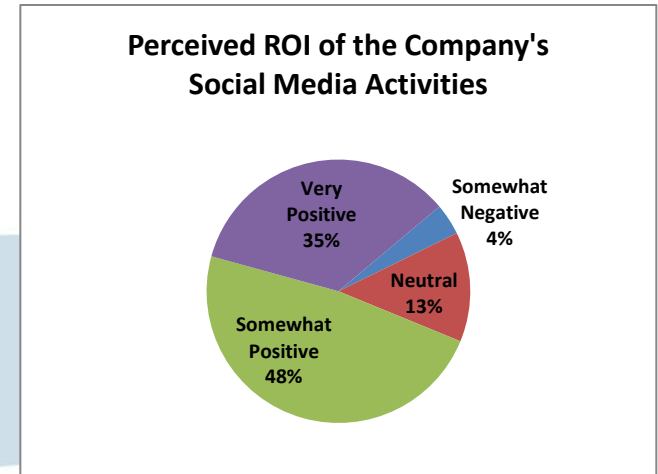
elusive. When asked in verbatim comments (see Appendix B) what metrics they're using to measure success:

One in nine of the survey respondents cited sales, although correlating online activity to sales results remains more art than science;
The same number of respondents also track search engine optimization;
One in five tracks follower and fan counts;
One in three looks at website traffic;
Several respondents also noted that they track leads generated from social media contacts;
Customer satisfaction and reduction in service calls were also cited by several respondents.

In-depth interview subjects mostly indicated that metrics have not yet been tied to bottom-line performance. Of the 10 businesses interviewed only one -- Sodexo -- cited measurable cost reductions achieved by shifting dollars from advertising to social media (see Appendix A). While most of the big brands we interviewed said they keep a close eye on traffic, friends, followers and media attention, they didn't seem particularly concerned with relating that activity back to business results.

"Our mission is to get to people who have an interest in Ford. We use whatever channel we can to spread the message," says Scott Monty, head of social media at Ford Motor Company (see profile, Appendix A). Ford spreads its communication activities across nearly every social platform that matters to its customers and keeps a close eye on traffic, followers, responses to Facebook posts and mainstream media mentions, among other things. However, the justification for the company's online ubiquity is similar to that which you might expect for a public relations program: It's trying to get the message out by anyway it can.

ROI measurements remain a victim of social media's relative immaturity. Lacking a long-term track record of repeatable business results, most practitioners are still struggling with the rudimentary metrics that their analytics services provide and supplementing those with customer surveys, media citations and an increase in "over the transom" blind inquiries. One strong thread that emerged from interviews with category leaders like Dell, Cisco, Coca-Cola and Ford is that the management of those companies has made a commitment at the top level to use every means to connect with customers. As long as the volume and quality of customer contacts are trending upwards, that's good enough for them. As David Meerman Scott, author of *The New Rules of Marketing and PR*, has said, "What's the ROI of paying people to landscape your grounds or giving flowers to your wife on Valentine's Day?" Sometimes you do it because it's the right thing to do.



Regardless of whether disciplined metrics are in place, survey respondents overwhelmingly agreed that their social media efforts are paying off. Asked about their own perceptions, 83 percent of survey respondents said

their company's social media ROI was "somewhat positive" or "very positive." Only 4 percent said the return was negative. Among the companies with more than 1,000 employees, 100 percent reported "somewhat positive" or "very positive" returns. And there's evidence that that satisfaction is paying off in spending plans. Every one of the 53 respondents to the online survey expect to increase their investment in social media platforms during the next 12 months, with 40 percent characterizing that increase as "significant."

Multi-Platform Integration

With all this socializing going on, the challenge of coordinating and integrating messages across multiple platforms has become top-of-mind. Nearly every respondent to our online survey and all of the in-depth interview subjects said they are practicing some form of cross-platform integration. However, their tactics vary widely.

The difference lies in the business objective. Our research revealed two basic strategies for integrating social media messaging:

Drive Awareness -- This approach is most commonly used by small businesses that are seeking to maximize impressions and brand awareness. Messages are typically posted on a blog and then radiated out through a variety of platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Flickr and Delicious. Little message customization is applied and back-end metrics generally center on tracking website visitors, leads and fans/followers. Users of this approach seemed less interested in engaging in conversations than in generating contacts that lead to sales.

Create Engagement -- This tactic, which was more popular with big brands, stresses quality of contact rather than quantity. In many cases, marketers said they pay little attention to the role of social media in feeding the sales funnel but are more concerned with stimulating conversation. Success metrics include sustained increases in the numbers of fans/followers as well as conversations with constituents,

improvements in brand awareness and Net Promoter Scores, positive citations in mainstream media and improved sentiment analysis.

Engagement marketers were sensitive to tuning each message for the target customer and venue. For example, the same message may be presented differently on LinkedIn and Facebook because of the different cultures of each community. In fact, blasting the same message out to multiple venues was regarded as spamming.

A few tactics are common. Almost everyone we surveyed routinely tweets blog entries and cross-posts messages between Facebook and Twitter. In many cases, this process is automated through simple consumer services or WordPress plug-ins. Companies that use video and images also often set up branded channels on YouTube and Flickr and embed their content in other media. In most cases this cross posting process is manual because tools have yet to emerge to make the routine seamless.

The better-resourced big-brand companies tend to be more cautious than small businesses about over-messaging customers. They are more likely to match the message to the platform and to take pains to avoid repetition which could be interpreted as spamming. "Just because the service is free doesn't mean you should use it for everything," says Coca-Cola's Brown. Big brands are also learning to use multiple media to frame the same message on the assumption that some audience members prefer video while others want text. The strategy is first to engage the customer and then to deliver information in whatever form that customer prefers.

One area with which all businesses struggle is to quantify the ways in which multiple platforms interact to magnify message. This research initially set out to find and quantify a "multiplier factor" that could predict how much lift a message on Facebook, for example could get with an accompanying tweet. We asked all the marketers interviewed if they had

identified such a multiplier and none would hazard a guess. However, all were confident that the integration of multiple platforms collectively boosts the chance that a message will reach its target. In the words of Richard Binhammer, a Strategic Corporate Communications manager at Dell Computer, “We’d be stupid not to use every means at our disposal.”

The Need for Governance

The arrival of a new technology platform invariably kicks off a chaotic period of experimentation as early adopters try to figure out what to do with it. That scenario is very much in evidence with social media.

Early corporate bloggers, some of them working outside the confines of a company-sanctioned platform, established the value of blogging as a way to connect correctly with customers. In the case of social networks, fan pages created by non-affiliated enthusiasts were an early proof of concept that has sometimes created a quandary for corporate marketers. In one extreme case, the Coca-Cola Co. discovered that it had become the focus of one of the largest fan communities on Facebook without the company's knowledge. Coke has since embraced the group and used it to learn about the process of mining value from customer conversations.

Several corporate marketers told us that an important priority during the coming year will be to create structure around their various online outposts. This includes establishing consistent branding and look-and-feel guidelines, as well as tighter policies on acceptable employee behavior. Individual brands will still be encouraged to use the platforms that make sense for their markets, but they'll have guidance and oversight to work with.

“Every time you create a new Twitter profile for a new campaign or project, you’re potentially diluting your brand,” says Adam Brown, Director of the Office of Digital Communications & Social Media at Coke. He added that Coke is also sensitive to the need to nurture communities

after campaigns are over and to instill in brand marketers the importance of continuity.

In our conversations with social media strategists at other large companies that include Ford, Cisco, Sodexo and AT&T, an emerging pattern for social media governance became clear. The approach is epitomized at Ford, where small teams of media specialists share and evangelize best practices with brand marketers. Ford sees nearly all of its external communications as having a social component. Central teams support brand marketers in tasks like adding photo and video galleries to press releases and online collateral. Cisco is taking a similar approach focused on business-to-business audiences.

Dell Computer has a governing council that meets weekly to work on communications strategies and best practices, according to Binhammer. Dell is one of the world’s most prolific social media practitioners with presences on Flickr, YouTube, Slideshare, Twitter, Facebook, Orkut, multiple topical blogs, branded communities and even a crowdsourced innovation portal. But that's just what Dell can control. “There are 200 Dell-related communities on Facebook, none of them connected,” says Binhammer, underlining the magnitude of the monitoring task.

Sodexo shares best practices informally amongst recruiters, an approach made easier by the relatively small size of the group. No one is required to use a particular social media platform, but employees know where they can find the right skills if they need them.

Marketers are being careful not to dilute enthusiasm for emerging channels by imposing too many restrictions. They're trying to walk the fine line between maintaining consistency and killing innovation. For now, the centers-of-excellence approach appears to be in favor.

Appendix A: Profiles in Social Media Integration

We conducted in-depth interviews with 10 leaders at businesses of all sizes to understand how they are coordinating multiple social media platforms. The following are brief profiles of five of the marketers we interviewed.

Cisco Extends the Conversation

Social media is changing the product launch equation for marketers at networking giant Cisco Systems Inc. The company has found that a multiplatform strategy that involves its engineers and developers can maintain online conversations about a new product long after the traditional PR lifecycle.

At Cisco, launch plans used to center on driving pre-event awareness and coverage was measured in the days immediately after an announcement, according to Bill Robb, Social Media Marketing Manager. Recent experience, however, has demonstrated that a launch can be just the beginning of an ongoing conversation. "We're learning that community themes emerge in the four weeks *after* the launch," Robb says.

When planning the launch of the new Borderless Networks architecture and a second generation of the Cisco Integrated Services Router in the fall of 2009, Cisco redirected some spending from e-mail and banner campaigns into influencer engagement. A short video was posted on YouTube and promoted through multiple channels including Twitter to raise anticipation.

Influential bloggers were brought into the process and given help to develop articles.

The results "blew away the numbers" for virtual press conference attendance and post-event coverage at a cost that was 30% lower than that of a traditional rollout, Robb says. Cisco bloggers are also encouraged to connect with customers post-launch to keep the conversation going. A small team at corporate headquarters works with business units to "build social media DNA" that's needed to connect developers with their customers.

Cisco has had some pleasant surprises in testing new platforms. The popularity of the company's Facebook fan page has been one. Twitter also continues to delight. "I keep expecting to see diminishing returns [from Twitter] and it just doesn't happen," Robb says. Cisco now has more than 50 official Twitter feeds and will be expanding its investment in social media across the board over the next year.

iContact Connects to Drive New Business

The e-mail marketing business is a crowded place, so upstart iContact has had to use every means at its disposal to compete against entrenched players. That has meant trying every possible social media channel and doubling down on the outlets that worked.



Communications Director Chuck Hester says the company has had its greatest success with LinkedIn and Twitter, but for different reasons. “For media relations, LinkedIn kicks butt,” says Hester, who has given seminars and written a book about applications of the business social network. He cites coverage in *Fast Company*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* as a direct result of LinkedIn relationships.

Twitter has also found a home as a customer service tool which, when combined with simultaneous publishing through Facebook and LinkedIn, alerts customers to new services and outages. iContact has several Twitter accounts, including two company accounts run by the marketing communications department as well as personal accounts for the chairman, CEO and Chief Marketing Officer.

“We use as many channels as we can,” Hester says. “If something on Twitter causes a blip, we’ll add Facebook and LinkedIn to drive activity.” The company also posts video newsletters regularly to YouTube and uses video in recruitment efforts to depict iContact as a fun and collegial place to work.

Among the most effective Twitter campaigns have been daily marketing tips and coupon promotions that “have probably added 20-25 accounts alone,” Hester says. Marketers scope out iContact followers on Twitter and follow them in hopes of initiating a conversation. The combined social media platforms have also been effective at communicating with customers during times of trouble, such as when a distributed denial of service attack brought down the servers last fall.

Hester advises businesses to learn the culture of each social media platform before diving in. “How you talk on one isn’t how you’re going to talk on another,” he says. “Spend a week monitoring the conversation before you say a single word.”

Sodexo Takes Platforms to a Hire Level

Sodexo is a hiring machine. The 350,000-person global food service and facilities management company brings on thousands of new employees every year, including more than 5,000 managers in the US alone. Even the economic downturn barely made a dent in the company's need for talent.



The company used to rely primarily upon online recruitment sites like Monster.com and CareerBuilder.com to reach prospective employees. Over last couple of years, though, it has shifted most of his activities to multiple social media platforms, cutting about \$300,000 in annual advertising costs and improving candidate quality.

Working from the philosophy of fishing where the fish are, Sodexo intentionally didn't create its own community but leveraged giant social networks like LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter to find prospects, according to Marketing Communications Manager Kerry Noone. The result: traffic to Sodexo's careers site has increased 182% over the last two years, job applications have jumped by a quarter and contacts from minority and female candidates are up by half.

"We want to be seen as a company that adopts new ways of doing things," Noone says. Sodexo has made a companywide commitment to using social media tools. More than 50 of the 60 members in its talent acquisition team have Twitter accounts which they used to nurture relationships in the specialty areas they cover.

Each recruiting area maintains its own online presence, which may include micro-sites and blogs for specialized professionals like dietitians, of whom Sodexo is the world's largest employer. Recruiters choose the tools that make sense for their objectives. "It's highly encouraged that recruiters use social networking tools but it's not mandatory," Noone says.

Most recruiters are on board, though. Social tools lend a personal touch that creates a connection that job boards simply don't have. By friending potential employees, recruiters get a glimpse of their personalities that leads to more robust relationships. Candidates are more likely to ask probing questions about job opportunities and to bring more enthusiasm to the employment courtship if they connect at a person level with the recruiter

Sodexo is careful not to blast recruitment messages out across every platform it uses. Instead, recruiters work from a common set of keywords to build search visibility and they approach each platform in a manner that's appropriate to the community. The goal isn't just to fill the pipeline with candidates, Noone says. "It's about making the right connection."

Coca-Cola Spreads Social Happiness

You wouldn't think that the brand that claims to be the second most popular word in the world (the first is "okay") would need to promote itself by word-of-mouth. But the Coca-Cola Co.'s mission to create products that brings happiness to people's lives has taken it into the social media world with a vigor that few companies can match.



Coke's most ambitious new effort in that respect is [Expedition 206](#), a year-long program that has charged three volunteer "ambassadors" with the mission of visiting all of the world's 206 countries in one year. The ambassadors are using every kind of online medium at their disposal to document their travels as millions of fans welcome them and suggest future destinations.

Coke made a conscious decision to promote Expedition 206 without print or broadcast advertising, instead relying entirely on traditional public relations and social channels. When we spoke to Adam Brown, Coke's Director of the Office of Digital Communications & Social Media, in late January, the campaign had logged 400 million media impressions in just 22 days. "We're seeing incredible interest in China," via Tencent QQ, the 300-million-member text messaging service that's the Chinese version of Facebook, he says.

Coca-Cola may be the most globally focused marketing entity on the planet and its social media strategy reflects that fact. The company has identified five key platforms for its initial efforts: Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Bebo and Orkut. The last two outlets are particularly popular in Europe, Brazil and India. They are also the international platforms "where we we're getting the most enthusiasm for the brand," Brown says.

Coca-Cola had its social media epiphany a couple of years ago when it discovered that the brand was the focus of the second-largest fan page on Facebook despite the fact that management was barely aware that the page existed. Instead of trying to shut down the five-million-member community, Coke embraced the effort. It contracted with the founders and began listening and contributing to the conversations.

Having since expanded its reach into other social niches, Coke is learning quickly about the nuances of multiplatform integration. "Social media isn't a broadcast platform," Brown says. "The audiences are very distinct. What works on Facebook may not work on Twitter.

"The cost of sending a message on two platforms is about the same as sending it on 20," he adds. "But just because the service is free doesn't mean you should use it for everything."

Coke is learning to appreciate the unique attributes of different communities. For example, Twitter users tend to be more serious and worldly than Facebook fans, who basically like to have fun. They all have one thing in common, though: "Consumers who participate with our brand online have a higher purchase intent," Brown observes. "When someone retweets us or posts on our wall, they're more likely to buy our product."

AskPatty Uses All the Tools

Social media is almost an unfair competitive advantage for small businesses. Small-business owners bring knowledge, passion and drive to their work, and their relative freedom to publish without the overhead of committees and approvals enables them to move much faster than large competitors.

Few small businesses exploit this advantage better than AskPatty.com, an automotive information site for women. The 25-person company provides a suite of training programs to enable auto dealers to be certified as "female friendly," meaning that they understand and address the unique needs of women buyers. Its main promotional vehicle is content in the form of articles and videos from employees and a network of contributors. Bootstrapped from day one, AskPatty has achieved the kind of media visibility that much larger companies would envy, including coverage in *The New York Times*, *Forbes*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Oprah* magazine and scores of television and radio interviews.

Founder and CEO Jody DeVere is a tireless promoter of the value of social media marketing. "You could spend millions of dollars building a brand using traditional media or you could spend almost nothing but your time syndicating your content through social media channels," says the serial entrepreneur.

In the early days, that meant blogging, but now AskPatty uses syndication and other branded channels to spread the message far and wide. Syndication partners include [TwitterMoms](http://TwitterMoms.com), [BlogHer](http://BlogHer.com), Parenthood.com and the lifestyle site [SheKnows](http://SheKnows.com). A deal with [BlogBurst](http://BlogBurst.com)



delivers regular visibility in outlets like [Autotrader](http://Autotrader.com) and the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*.

And then there are the social networks where AskPatty has built its own presence. When a new article appears on AskPatty.com, it's also automatically posted to numerous bookmarking sites, multiple Facebook fan pages, Twitter and several Ning.com communities. Selected items may also be cross-posted to LinkedIn, MySpace, Flickr and YouTube. Most of the process is automated with free Web services and a tool AskPatty developed for the task.

Results: "I can't measure all the views of our content, but I'm estimating about 10 million a quarter," DeVere says. More important is that the visibility generates business. "My inbox is overflowing every day with people who want speakers, partnerships, training and certifications," she says.

Last year, DeVere was hired to be a spokesperson for both the Rain-X Division of Shell Oil and for the Mobil1 Motor Oil division of Exxon/Mobil. AutoNet TV hired AskPatty to do a 12-part video series. Mercedes-Benz brought DeVere in to address its Strategies for Support conference.

Having been early to the business blogging game, DeVere has seen the value of expanding a brand's presence as new online channels have come along. She estimates that syndication activities collectively amplify AskPatty's voice about 100-fold. They've also had an unintended side benefit: DeVere is increasingly being asked to meet with automotive executives to train them on the value of social media.

Platforms Tell Ford's Reinvention Story

"Internally, we think of ourselves less as a car company and more as a media company," says Scott Monty, Ford Motor Company's head of social media. Monty isn't referring to the carmaker itself, of course, but to an internal organization called The Content Factory that constantly delivers news about the company's reinvention using every available media social channel.



Ford is a darling among social media enthusiasts. Its flagship site [The Ford Story](#) is a gateway to the company's multiple presences on Facebook, Flickr, YouTube and Twitter as well as its RSS feeds and social media press room. Monty, who came to Ford from an interactive media agency, has nearly 40,000 Twitter followers himself, which is 50% more than Ford's main Twitter account. But that's okay because media innovation is part of the overall story of Ford's reinvention.

The strategy is simply "to get to people who have an interest in Ford. We use whatever channel we can to spread the message," Monty says.

Ford has one of the more sophisticated approaches to multiplatform integration we encountered in our in-depth interviews. For example, press releases are posted with associated video and images whenever possible. That's because video is often more effective than words at telling a story. For example, when Ford introduced an automatic parallel parking option for its passenger cars, "people didn't really say "Wow!" until they saw the video,"

Monty says. Content typically goes live simultaneously on Ford's site and the target social media venues such as YouTube or Flickr. "Then we typically follow on with stories that have a human element and post that on The Ford Story," Monty explains.

Facebook entries are automatically tweeted and everything on the The Ford Story has shareable links. The company has even experimented with the document sharing site Scribd to post documents related to its Congressional testimony. Key metrics include retweets, Facebook comments and mainstream media mentions. Old-fashioned awareness research also indicates whether the message is hitting home with consumers.

Monty won't say what kind of boost the company has gotten from spreading its message far and wide with social media, but he notes the old stalwarts still have a lot of value. "Most consumers still rely on e-mail," he says, citing internal research. "They share links by cutting and pasting URLs from the address bar and e-mailing them." Not surprisingly, email newsletters will be a big part of the Ford outreach strategy this year.

CDW Taps Into Wisdom of Crowds

“I don’t have a social media strategy. I have a business strategy and social media plays into it,” says Lauren McCadney, Small Business Marketing Manager at CDW. That practical approach to evaluating new channels is characteristic of the b-to-b technology and service provider that is known for its innovative use of direct and online marketing techniques. And the early results are positive, “Social media has changed how we go to market,” McCadney says. The company has taken a disciplined approach to sticking to its core competencies and outsourcing community support to an expert provider.



After briefly experimenting with a customer community of its own in 2006/7, CDW turned over the majority of its social media marketing activities to Spiceworks, a media company that McCadney calls “The Facebook of IT.” Spiceworks has built a community of more than 900,000 IT professionals around a powerful systems and network management platform that it distributes at no charge. Its business model is built on the idea that IT professionals spend much of their day monitoring performance on a network console. This creates a previously untapped opportunity to reach them with engaging promotions.

Small business IT professionals can be a difficult group to reach. Many work in isolation and have neither the time nor resources to attend the conferences frequented by their corporate peers. Online communities have been a godsend to them. “Social media has bridged gap so that

people can now interact,” says McCadney. “Shouting makes no sense. Engagement is what matters.”

For CDW, that has meant using the Spiceworks community to identify prospects at each point in the sales funnel. A one-year \$114,000 investment has returned more than 100 percent in lead conversion alone and has had numerous less tangible benefits. CDW taps into the wisdom of the community for everything from research to referral sales. Case studies and white papers raise awareness and prompt consideration. As prospects move into the buying cycle, they may be invited to engage in focused discussions led by CDW technology experts in areas like virtualization and storage. Active customers get access to a personalized price schedule and may download a toolbar that enables them to place a product order from within the Spiceworks environment.

Leaving the task of community management to an expert partner has paid off for CDW, which now focuses its energies on topical alignment and conversations, rather than administering platforms. And because the overall community is so large, CDW can also monitor the larger population of Spiceworks members for insight on issues and problems they face. That may lead to new sales opportunities. The biggest CDW fans get special attention. “We’re trying to engage with the influencers and let them tell our story,” McCadney says.