

# Social Media and SEO

## *How They Work Together To Fuel Your Business*

### **Introduction**

Social media sites are the virtual playgrounds securing users' undying loyalties and capturing marketers' fervid attentions. Millions of people are tweeting, Facebooking, and blogging daily, regardless of whether they are at home, at work, or on the road. It's no wonder that social media has become the new arena for online advertising. Social media is like the wild child of internet marketing family; though it is a bit difficult to understand and harness, it can also be full of vast potential. Social media is rooted in conversations, interactions, and community – everything a business needs to thrive in today's consumer-centric landscape. Everyone is wondering how social media can benefit their business, but it's important to note that social media has severe limitations. Social media is definitely not for every company, because it is difficult for it to generate much traffic, and does not help with Search Engine Results Page (SERP) rankings in many cases. However, for certain businesses, social media can be an effective component of their marketing arsenal to give their brand more exposure and reap great rewards. The purpose of this white paper is to help you determine if social media is right for you, and how to best utilize it. We will also reveal the few ways that social media can be used to help SEO.

## Why All the Buzz About Social Media?

Gone are the days of businesses depending solely on out-dated marketing mediums such as telemarketing, direct mail, newspapers, and tradeshows. With the internet extending to all corners of the globe and even into the sky, the World Wide Web has become the arena of choice for forward thinking marketing executives to focus their marketing strategies (Figure 1).

This shift in marketing is due to the fact that the internet is entering a new era, where the user is in control, and people can fulfill their deepest desires – from gaining knowledge and companionship, to voicing opinions – all while sitting at their own desk. The swell in popularity of social media sites is a manifesto from internet users everywhere, declaring that they want to make real connections with others, despite being behind a screen. The information on the internet is no longer static, but arising in real-time tweets, blogs, and Facebook updates from a dedicated community. Online networking has never before been such a welcoming staple in people's daily lives, and there is increasing commotion among marketing executives about how to harness this elusive and mysterious medium.

Using Social Media as a marketing tool might not be a hype to all. It might help some businesses, but it can be a waste of time for others. Social Media can benefit a company if it already has the brand recognition. Targeted customers are ones who frequent Social Media sites. For example, a laptop company can assemble a huge fan flow on Facebook because a good portion of its client base is composed of college students. However, a company that provides accounting services for business firms will not have the same luck with Social Media. Social Media, for the most part, does not help with SEO, which will be explained in the following section. On the bright side, Social Media is simple and affordable to begin implementing, so it never hurts to try. If you are in an industry that does not traditionally fare well with Social Media, but you still want it as part of your marketing efforts, it is still possible to succeed in the realm; you just have to be creative and add extra incentives for potential followers.

## Ways Social Media Can and Can't Work for You

There is much hype nowadays about how Social Media can generate links, increase traffic, and expand brand awareness. This can be true, but only in certain cases. It is also true that Social Media has high potential for distribution just from the sheer size of its user base, but you must know how to target it effectively. Most of all, Social Media can help foster conversations with your potential clients, which can be invaluable. We reveal the limitations and advantages of Social Media as an advertising tool so you can decide whether it is the missing piece of your marketing puzzle, or not worth your time.

**When it Does NOT Help With SEO:** One of the most deciding factors of your site ranking is the number of inbound links to your website. An inbound link is a link from an external website that leads to your site, and each link acts as a vote for how important and relevant your site is for that keyword. The more inbound links you have from highly regarded sites, the better your Search Engine Result Page (SERP) ranking. At first glance, social media seems like the ideal place to pursue this sought after "link juice". Unfortunately, many Social Media sites have truncated the search engines' paths through these links, tagging every link posted on those sites with the ominous "rel=nofollow" tag (Figure 2). This tells search engines to not follow the link, so it will not count for SEO. Popular social media sites like Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, and Twitter all include the tags in their code.

Figure 2: The “rel=nofollow” tag that is tagged onto outgoing links on many social media sites.

| URL                 |
|---------------------|
| www.slashdot.org    |
| www.digg.com        |
| www.mister-wong.com |
| www.propeller.com   |
| www.stumbleupon.com |
| www.reddit.com      |
| del.icio.us         |
| www.friendfeed.com  |
| www.furl.net        |
| www.myblog.com      |
| www.mixx.com        |
| Ma.gnolia.com       |

**When it DOES Help With SEO:** Despite many Social Media sites utilizing the “rel=nofollow” tags, there are still ones that don’t. The following is a list of social media sites that do not use the tag (Figure 3), but keep in mind that the sites are constantly being updated, so to be absolutely certain, open up the page source of the site and check for the “rel=nofollow” code.

Furthermore, blogs are one of the social media avenues that can actually be valuable for SEO. Regularly writing interesting content on your website will prompt other websites to link to you, naturally accumulating inbound links. There are other specific ways that blogs can help with SEO, which will be addressed in a subsequent section called “Blogging for SEO”.

**Take up More SERP Real Estate:** With the advent of Google’s Universal Search, having a ubiquitous online presence has become much more valuable. Now, a blog post about your company can show up at the top of search results, which means 3<sup>rd</sup> party endorsements can be greatly beneficial. Since Google now indexes Facebook Pages and Groups, as well as Twitter updates, so a search engine optimized profile or post can show up for targeted keywords.

**Gain Referral Traffic:** Referral and SEO traffic are two different things. Referral traffic is **not** associated with SEO, but can be useful as well. Referral traffic is the visitors that arrive on your site by clicking the links on the Social Media sites, while SEO traffic is the visitors that land on your site by conducting a search and clicking on your link on SERPs. While many Social Media links will not help with SEO, they can still help you increase the number of visitors to your website (referral traffic), gain brand recognition, and generate more positive commotion about your business.

## Getting Started With Social Media

So you have decided that Social Media is right for you? Now it’s time to know how to use it to the fullest potential. There are various types of Social Media sites available for your business, including blogs, micro blogs, and social networking sites. Though they are very different, there are many core properties that are pervasive among them all that you must consider when beginning a Social Media campaign:

**Know Your Target Customers:** In order to make the most out of your social media efforts,

you should have an intimate understanding of who your customers are. How do they engage with social media? Which sites do they frequent? What are they saying about your brand? All of this may dictate which Social Media channel to use, and even whether you should use it at all. For example, if you are selling baby formula, Mom Café might be the social networking site to target rather than MySpace. If you are selling software for construction companies, maybe social media is not the best tool for you after all.

**Update Consistently with Interesting Content:** As with most other aspects of SEO, content is king. Just having a blog or Facebook Page is not enough; you need to constantly update your site with fresh content that your followers want to read. This is what makes social media so time consuming and therefore not the best choice for everyone. However, if people are taking the time to follow you, then you must reward them often with interesting posts, incentives, and tools so they will keep coming back. It's also best to not advertise your brand excessively, but focus on related "hot" topics that would catch your readers' attentions. As an added bonus, search engines love new and original content as well, and keeping your main website and peripheral social media pages updated will help your SERP rankings. Moderation is key, so while consistently pushing out new content, be sure to not overflow your followers' inboxes with mundane information.

**Follow Traditional SEO Techniques:** Many Social Media content can be spidered, so remember to optimize your content for search engines. This means finding the right target keywords, and incorporating them strategically into your posts and updates.

**Build a Community:** Social Media is based on the foundation of community. The web is no longer isolating and anonymous, but rather a bustling hub of conversations and interactions between people. People want to be heard, want to listen to others, and want to know that businesses care. You have to be active by reaching out to your customer base and building a center for this community. People love seeing the humanity in a business, so try to use a casual and friendly tone.

**Make Sharing Easy:** One of the attractions of using Social Media as a marketing tool is the potential for it to go viral. If people like what they see, they will tell their friends about it. Including a great blog post can result in readers linking to your site, which will naturally accumulate inbound links. If you have articles and blogs on your website, offer a "share this"

link to make it simple for readers to submit the pages to social bookmarking and news websites such as Delicious, Digg, and StumbleUpon. Facebook and Twitter provide their own sharing mechanisms, which will be discussed in detail later in the paper. Word of mouth recommendations have held incredible weight in guiding opinions and decisions since the dawn of mankind; except now that they are done online and have become searchable assets.

Now that you know the common threads running through all Social Media sites, we will reveal how to best utilize some of the most beneficial Social Media practices and sites for businesses. The areas of focus are blogging, micro blogging (dominated by Twitter), and social networking (dominated by Facebook).

## Blogging for SEO

Creating a company blog can be a huge asset for a company. What started as a sanctuary for personal ruminations has become an open platform to speak to the world. Online marketers have embraced the sensation and are creating corporate blogs to connect with potential customers. Blogs are also one of the few ways that social media can actually benefit SEO in the following way:

**Increase Fresh Content:** Both search engines and site visitors love to see a consistently updated site with new and relevant information, and a company blog is just the forum to provide this. If you create a blog under the URL `mysite.com/blog`, the blog is regarded as part of your website, and every keyword-rich entry you make is extremely valuable for your SEO.

**Increase Inbound Links:** To increase inbound links, you can create an offsite company blog with the URL `blog.mysite.com`. This domain name is counted as an external website, and links from this blog to your main site will boost your “link juice”. Additionally, you can gain inbound links from highly regarded external blogs. However, there’s no easy trick to gaining links from outside blogs; the best way to accomplish this is just writing excellent, valuable content that others want to read, prompting more people to link to your site.

## Making Tweets Count

In recent years, Twitter has become a surprise sensation; who knew how eager people would be to answer the question “What are you doing?” Twitter is a micro blog, where people make updates about their lives in 140 characters or less (Figure 4). Twitter’s rise as a universal phenomenon is attributed to its simplicity. According to comScore, April 2009, the site boasts 17 million unique U.S. users, and 62% of them are ages 25-54. Twitter can be useful for engaging in real-time conversations with users, and creating a voice for the brand. Although tweeting sounds simple in principle, here are some best practices for optimizing your corporate Twitter campaign:

**Make It Interesting:** This is the case with any social media updates, but it needs to be

emphasized because Twitter updates are so often abused. Despite the way the site is promoted, don't actually answer the question "What are you doing?" because people are rarely interested in what you had for lunch. Instead, answer the question "What has your attention?" Notify followers of new offers, provide comments about an article link, ask questions, and get opinions. Also, people who enjoyed your post can retweet it, publicizing it to all of their followers.

**Write Keyword-rich Tweets:** Believe it or not, tweets are indexed by Google. Incorporating target keywords into your tweets might result in the tweet showing up on search engines. This practice is rather difficult to achieve because of the small amount of space available in a tweet and the level of competition for many keywords. However, for less competitive ones, it is possible. Another tip: use the bit.ly URL shortening service on Twitter to make links shorter and not waste precious tweet space.

*Figure 4: A twitter page, where the company updates followers with new and useful information.*

## **Be Popular on Facebook**

Facebook is a social networking site that allows people to reconnect with friends, meet new friends, and form communities. What started as a fledgling website restricted to Ivy League students has inflated into an indispensable communication tool for over 60 million active users of various ages (Facebook Press Room Statistics, June 2008). What's more, over half of those active users return everyday, amassing over 65 billion page views per month. Gaining popularity on Facebook can be a great marketing tool for your brand, and here are some best practices for creating a corporate profile:

**Choosing Facebook Groups or Pages:** There are two avenues available for businesses when setting up a Facebook account: a Group or a Page. Both can be useful for your business, and we will illuminate the differences and similarities between the two.

**Facebook Pages:** Pages (increasingly referred to as "Fan Pages") are profiles that can only be started by "official" representatives of a business, musical group, or organization, and they are more for long-term relationships with fans, readers, and customers (Figure 5). People can choose to "become a fan" the Page, declaring their allegiance to that organization, and opting in for messages and updates; however, the messages only show up in the "fans' update box", which people might not check that often. Pages also boast a wall, where fans can post comments and questions, which the Page administrator can respond to. Additionally, the administrators can view visitor statistics to get a gauge of who is checking out their profiles.

*Figure 5: A Facebook Page, where loyal fans can post on the wall.*

**Facebook Groups:** Facebook Groups have a more communal feel because not only do they have walls for posting, they also allow all participants to start discussions (Figure 6). They are better for hosting active communication and attracting quick attention, which can be important for keeping members interested. Groups also allow you to send out bulk invites, and members can send invites to their friends as well, giving groups more potential for viral marketing. Additionally, group updates show up in Facebook inboxes which are checked more often.

*Figure 6: A Facebook Group, where members can host and join discussions.*

**Bottom Line:** Facebook Groups and Pages have very different atmospheres, and both have advantages and disadvantages. Pages act more like a satellite homepage for your company, where you can provide fans updates about your business, and groups are more for members to engage actively with you and other members. Both allow sending out messages to all members, though groups can only be sent to 5000 people at a time. An added bonus is that both are spidered by Google, so these pages can show up as search results for your company, giving you more search engine real estate. Just as a tip, we find that companies have better luck with Facebook Groups because it fosters more communication and interactions between members, which are the reasons why people use social networking sites in the first place.

**Using Your Facebook Page or Group:** Both Facebook Pages and Groups can be used in similar ways to gain leads. First, publicize your account to employees and other people in the industry while encourage them to join. Keep participants interested by giving incentives such as useful applications, tools, online deals, and updates on new products and services. Send messages or post on walls about the update, and include a link to a landing page or homepage. This link acts like a link in regular search listings, where users are led to a page to fill out a form or get more information. While these links do not count for SEO, they do provide another route for users to visit your site.

## Conclusion

Social Media has taken the age-old traditions of kitchen table chats and evening club meetings and transformed them into public online forums that everyone can join. Never before has the online world been such a hub for talking, listening, and sharing. Businesses are starting to take full advantage of this new marketing media, seizing the prime opportunity to engage in casual conversations with their target customers. Social media can offer many advantages to

businesses, including increased online exposure and infusing a public presence with a welcomed touch of humanity. However, social media might not fit every company, and it is important to examine whether it can truly benefit your business. If you choose to undertake marketing through social media, be sure to follow the best practices for SEO and communicating with customers. Social Media can provide a goldmine of new leads if harnessed well, offer an enjoyable experience for your target customers.

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*Social Media is one of the hottest topics among marketing executives today, but is it right for you?*

*The internet is quickly changing into a center where more people are talking, listening, and sharing, and marketers are beginning to take advantage of this trend.*

*Figure 1: A plethora of social media sites are available on the internet.*

*Social Media has its limitations, and can only help SEO and traffic generation to a certain degree.*

*Figure 3: Social media site without “rel=nofollow” tags*

*Once you decide to utilize Social Media, be sure to follow the best practices to make the most of your campaign.*

*Blogs are one of the most popular ways for businesses to get started with Social Media, and it is the most relevant for SEO purposes.*

*Twitter is a simple concept that is surging in popularity, and here are ways to make the most of your tweets.*

*Facebook is one of the most popular social networking sites, so be sure to make a presence in this large community.*

*Social Media is already a staple in people's daily lives, and it might be a staple for your company's marketing efforts.*

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