



SOCIAL MEDIA SUCCESS!

JANET FOUTS

FOREWORD BY AARON STROUT



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“Social Media Success!” Book Excerpt

Practical Advice and Real-world
Examples for Social Media
Engagement

By Janet Fouts
Foreword by Aaron Strout

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Foreword by Aaron Strout

As someone who embraced the concept of "social" in the offline world back in the late 90's, it shouldn't be hard to imagine my excitement over the explosion of social media in today's business, political and entertainment world. You can also understand how thrilled I was when my friend, Janet Fouts, sent me a direct message (similar to an email for those not familiar with Twitter) asking me if I'd write the foreword to her upcoming book. I haven't gone back to look at the time stamp on my reply, but I think it took me all of about 5 minutes to give her an emphatic "yes."

If you know anything about me, you'll understand that this was the perfect way to engage me. Given the number of times that Janet and I have chatted with one another online, she knew that this was the right approach.

This brings up an important point and that is the power of relationship building through social media. More importantly, it's the benefit of taking action on these unexpected requests—a phenomena many in the social world call serendipity—because these requests or connections can often lead one to places that could never have been anticipated. And more often than not, these unforeseen opportunities can lead to amazing results. Something that Janet well covers throughout the book.

In spite of the upside of social media, many large companies (and some small) are resisting these "unexpected" outcomes because the nature of business is to be organized. The corporate world abhors the unexpected, and works tirelessly to avoid surprises. This is due in part to the fact that in the past, maintaining a sense of control was the only way to create predictable outcomes. In a world where revenues, earnings and growth are king, this was the only way to do business.

The disruptive force known as social media is starting to change the rules and is creating an environment where one on one relationship building and value creation—two activities that are less formulaic and often can take a while to pay off—but activities that in the long run may pay off bigger and broader than traditional broadcast marketing.

Not only do I believe in this new way of doing business, but I've also experienced it on a personal and a professional level. From getting interviews with people like Craig Newmark, founder of Craigslist and Tim O'Reilly, CEO of O'Reilly Media (content creation) to getting coverage in publications like U.S. News and World Report (awareness), to driving partnerships and leads from Fortune 500 brands (sales). In every case, it's been a mix of hard work, creating the right relationships and then a little serendipity.

To that end, I'd be remiss if I didn't give you a little background on how I like to think about putting social media to work. Here are seven activities that I use myself and often share with companies thinking about getting started with social media:

1. **Listen** – What are your customers saying? Where are they saying it (think: Google Alerts, Radian6, Techrigy, BuzzGain)?
2. **Align** – What do you want to use social media for? Customer research? Sales? Product innovation? Make sure your social efforts align with your personal, professional or corporate goals.
3. **Include** – If you work for a big company, get the right stakeholders in place (corporate affairs, legal, customer service). They can help you guide and craft your social policy.
4. **Join** – Are your customers on Facebook? Twitter? Get Satisfaction? Sign up (but learn the etiquette first).
5. **Engage** – Talk to your customers, prospects, partners and even detractors. Ask their opinion. Tell them yours.

6. **Create** – Be sure to create lots of customer-centric content. And update it regularly.
7. **Measure** – Ignore this step at your peril. You may be doing a great job, but you'll never know if you don't measure.

The beauty of these "seven things," is that they can help drive new business, awareness and real return on investment for anyone. That includes individuals all the way up to some very large companies. Fortunately for Janet, I've decided to save the examples for her since she does a fantastic job of providing dozens of them throughout this book.

With that as a backdrop, what you'll also find out in this book is that social media is a transformational force that can impact all areas of your business including sales, marketing, HR, product innovation and market research to name just a few. I know this first hand because as I mentioned, I've experienced this power of connecting people and allowing them to improve, evolve and ultimately own the concepts that you put in front of them, but only when approached it the right way. Pitch your customers, prospects and partners and they'll run the other way.

One additional item to remember...social media is a slow waltz, not a frenetic boogie and it takes time for it to work. That shouldn't stop you from getting started immediately, but just make sure you read Janet's recommendations carefully and map the success stories to your business, organization or personal experience. Do that and who knows; maybe you'll have a smart person like Janet ask you to do the foreword to their book. And if they do, don't think twice because as they say, "what comes around goes around."

Aaron Strout
CMO, Powered Inc. (and dedicated husband and father of three)

Introduction

When I first started writing this book, it was a series of blog posts, some training manuals, emails, tutorials and notes I'd put together for my clients over the years. As I sorted through it all, I realized that I'd been answering some of these questions almost exactly the same way for 13 years! I decided it was time to write it all down somewhere it could be more easily shared.

It's not all old news by any means. Though we've been embedded in what is now known as social media for a long, long time, the tools have matured and new strategies been discovered. Some fizzled out and some gave fruit in amazing new ways, making it easier to connect with a large audience efficiently, without having to build the tools as we go.

Some of my co-workers and friends think it's pretty amusing (okay, maybe annoying) that I still get excited as new apps develop and new networks flourish, but it's a very exciting transition to be a part of. I get paid to learn something new every single day and then teach it to other people. How cool is that?

If you're reading this and expecting to get a magic pill that will bring in droves of business for you with a minimum amount of work on your part, or will acquire thousands of followers at the click of a link, put the book down and back away slowly. This book is not for you.

However, if you want to learn to understand how to communicate more effectively with your customers, your staff, and even your competitors through social media, read on.

Social media can do amazing things. It can create an environment where your friends and followers and even your own customers become evangelists and act as a virtual sales, support and marketing teams. It can help you spread word of your business, your products and your successes through extended networks of people you've never even met. It can allow you to create lasting and deep relationships across continents, religious and political beliefs in places you've always wanted to visit or never knew existed. It can open your eyes to the richness of human relationships and even find you a mate.

Social media success is not about numbers. It's about relationships. Build good strong relationships with your clients or clients to-be, establish trust, have real conversations, and your social media efforts will be successful.

1

What Is Social Media?

Simply put, social media is people engaged in conversation around a topic online. When you think about it, there are thousands of ways to engage with other people online and create either long-term or short-term relationships. Ebay, Amazon, Flickr, Twitter, IRC chat rooms, instant messaging clients, Facebook, Myspace, YouTube, blogs and forums are all examples of social media.

What social media **is not** is just as important a question. Social media **is not** a place where you can grandstand and push information out to the masses. The old "spray and pray" techniques of press releases, flyers and direct mail just don't work here.

Social media **is not** your traditional market research tool. People resent being inundated with surveys in traditional media; why would this be any different? Oh. Yeah. Because in social media they can fight back. They'll tell all their friends you've been spamming them with questions and marketing materials and you'll soon find they've turned a deaf ear and you're talking to yourself.

Social media **is not** a good place to pretend you're something you're not. Fakery is outed with glee in these circles, and the louder the better. Be as transparent as possible and you won't be singled.

History of Social Media

"Social media" may be the hottest craze right now, but it's really just a new title for a very old method of communicating. From the very earliest days of society, there has been a word of mouth method of communication that we used to make decisions. Where to find the best food, where it was safe to sleep at night, which vendors to trust and which ones to be careful of—we transmitted all of this by word of mouth, then print, then radio and TV and now through the Internets. Each method gets faster and allows you to reach further around the world, but it all boils down to communication and trusted relationships.

If you think about it, the Internet itself was created to be a social network. The web as we know it today was devised as a way for scientists to communicate over long distances. When RAND Paul Baran, of the RAND Corporation, figured out how to transfer data from one computer to the next (packet switching), ARPANET connected Universities at UCLA, Stanford, Utah and Santa Barbara in 1969. In 1979, Usenet was created and communication on the Internet took on a more social phase. Email and list-servs flourished and people began to form more diverse communities. By 1992, the World Wide Web was released by CERN, and by 1994, Pizza Hut was selling pizza through their website.

Since those early days, these tools have become more user-friendly and society has become comfortable with forming relationships through the Internet. People work from home and may never actually meet their employers face to face. They read blogs before they make a purchase and use crowd-sourcing to find the best products and deals online.

We are more likely to buy a product or service from someone we trust. If someone in our network reveals a reason to distrust a person or a company, we are going to be more careful dealing with him or her in the future. We may not buy products from someone we've heard negative comments about in our circle.

If you hear from a friend that the shoe manufacturer you were thinking of buying from uses child labor camps to produce them, are you going to think twice before giving your money to that company?

If you read a blog about another shoe company who donates a pair of shoes to a needy child for every pair you buy, will you not buy those instead?

"Harnessing the Power of Blogs," a research study of over 2,000 online consumers in the US, conducted by Jupiter Research (a Forrester research company) showed some interesting trends in online purchasing.

Blogs influence purchases: One-half (50%) of blog readers say they use blogs for purchase information.

The research path these users took was: read product reviews online (17%); seek more info on a product or service online (16%); visit the manufacturer or retailer website (16%).

If they used blogs to gather information for product decisions, 56% say they looked for a niche focus and topical expertise.

The Power of Social Media

There are legions of stories to show the power of social media as a force for good. Social good and marketing good. The two don't always go hand in hand, but it's nice when they do.

Grassroots fundraising on a personal level

David Armano had a fairly good-sized network to start with, and many of us have had brief conversations with him on Twitter, his blog or Facebook to name a few, and many in his network know him in person for business or casual friends. He has demonstrated himself as a person of character and honor and he rarely asks for favors from his network.

At some point he and his wife took in a friend who had escaped from domestic abuse with her three children, one of whom had special needs. Daniela had lost her home because she couldn't support the family, the house and the medical needs on her own on a housekeeper's wages. The whole family moved into David's tiny house while she sorted out what she was going to do.

One night David got an idea to see if his network could help Daniela raise just enough to get her on her feet and find an apartment. Nothing huge—just a place to re-start her life. Late that evening, David wrote a blog post with a picture of Daniela and the kids and reached out to his network with a simple and eloquent plea in a video to help Daniela. He posted a widget on his blog and asked people to donate whatever they could, no matter how small, to get her on her feet.

Within minutes (minutes!!) the news spread and bloggers around the world wrote posts asking their own networks to help with the widget to donate. Twitter caught fire with people tweeting the plea and linking to the blogs. Newspapers and magazines picked up the story and wrote about this one man's effort to help. The response was so moving that it still brings tears to my eyes. It did to Daniela's as well, and David chronicled her amazement at the outpouring of support, both financial and personal, that was the result of that one lonely blog post late at night. In just a few hours the donations through the widget topped \$7,000. In the end people donated over \$16,000 in financial aid as well as help with moving, furniture and a host of other things.

What's the lesson?

To quote Seth Godin, "If you've got a small, fixable problem, people will rush to help, because people like to be on the winning side, take credit and do something that worked.

If you've got a generational problem, something that is going to take herculean effort and even then probably won't pan out, we're going to move on in search of something smaller."

Daniela's problem was fixable. It was compelling, and it was personal.

Social Media Backlash

Social media is not all warm and fuzzy. It combines news and word of mouth in a way that can be exhilarating if it's working for you, and stunning if it's working against you.

Take the example of the "Motrin Moms' incident." Motrin put out a relatively innocent ad for parents using a style of baby carrier called a sling. The video intimated these slings can cause back and neck pain, and just what you need to relieve that pain is Motrin.

Personally I didn't find the ad offensive (yes, I'm a mom but I don't use a carrier), but some moms sure did. In the blink of an eye, mothers around the world roused their networks with their outrage. Within 3–4 hours the backlash was huge. The original video was posted on YouTube and backlash videos cropped up all over.

All this happened over a weekend, and all things considered, Proctor & Gamble responded pretty quickly, but the damage was done. The impact of this case was pretty interesting to watch, and it clearly demonstrated the power of the so-called "Mommy Bloggers."

Most of the storm took place on Twitter.

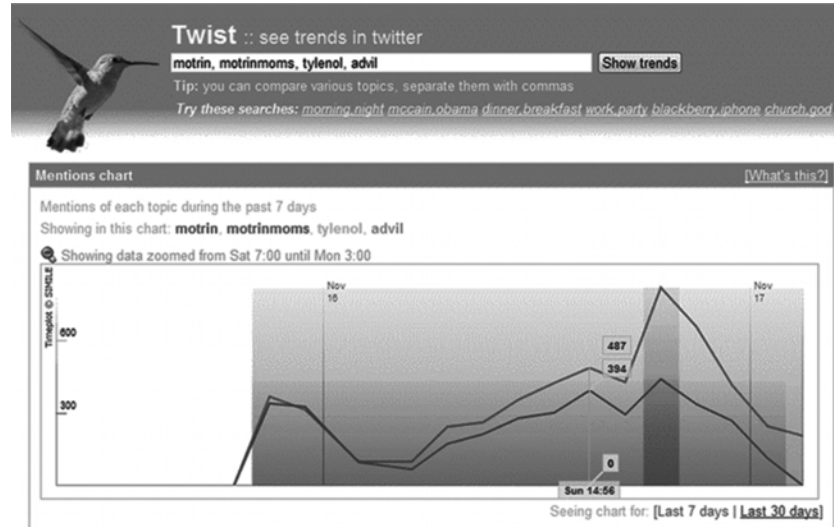


Image credit Jeremiah Owyang – Forrester Research

This graph shows the huge bump in traffic related to the Motrin and Motrinmoms keywords on Twitter. It merited its own hashtag on Twitter, forever to be known as #MotrinMoms.

Proctor & Gamble took down the video; in fact the entire website came down for a short while. Kathy Widmer, Vice President of Marketing for McNeil Consumer Healthcare, wrote an apology email and posted it on the Motrin website. Eventually, after a couple of weeks, things died down and Proctor & Gamble learned a valuable lesson: Even if you're not actively reaching out to your users in social media, you'd better be listening so you can put out the fire while it's small. Had they kept their head in the sand and ignored it, the storm would have eventually passed, but remember that these negative posts on blogs and in the news have a much longer shelf life. As of this writing (6/09) the Motrin Moms debate shows up as the 6th through 15th search results in a Google search for Motrin. How does that affect their sales long term? Time will tell.

What's the lesson?

The first line of action should be to get your ears on and listen to social media so you can see something before it gets too big to handle. If a storm blows up, be ready to act quickly and empower your staff to respond in a friendly and informal manner directly to the source of the issue in minutes, not days.

A Resources

I've mentioned a lot of great resources in this book. Rather than list them all here and risk them being out-dated or broken, I've posted them on my blog:

<http://www.janetfouts.com/social-media-success>.

Please take time to visit these pages. There are some wonderful resources there and I'll add more as I find them.

About the Author



Janet Fouts is a social media coach, educator and speaker. She helps individuals and corporations of all sizes understand how to use social media tools and work efficiently in this emerging field, and conducts in-house workshops and virtual training sessions on social media tools and strategy in industries ranging from wine and landscaping to non-profits and high-tech companies.

Janet has been working with small businesses to develop their online presence and also with online community for 13 years as senior partner in the award winning web design and development firm, Tatu Digital Media (TatuDigital.com).

Her own personal experience in restaurants, hotels, web development and tech start-ups gives her unique insight into a range of industries.

She freely shares her knowledge on several social media platforms, including her blog at JanetFouts.com and on Twitter as @jfouts.

Janet gets offline by riding the roller coaster in Santa Cruz with her family, hiking, horseback riding, taking the dogs to the beach, wine tasting all over northern California and frequent trips to San Francisco to enjoy walking the city and the cuisine from street carts to fine dining.

RELATED LINKS:

Janet's Blog: <http://www.janetfouts.com>

Tatu Digital Media: <http://www.tatudigital.com>

Twitter: <http://www.twitter.com/jfouts>

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- 42 Rules™ to Jumpstart Your Professional Success:
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- 42 Rules of Social Media for Small Business:
<http://happyabout.info/42rules/social-media-business.php>
- I'm on LinkedIn -- Now What???:
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- I'm on Facebook -- Now What???:
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- Twitter Means Business:
<http://happyabout.info/twitter/tweet2success.php>
- Rule #1: Stop Talking!:
<http://happyabout.info/listenerspress/stoptalking.php>
- The Successful Introvert:
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