

THE SOCIAL WEB: THE NEW INTERNET

WHAT IS WEB 2.0

The Internet was invented by a man named Sir Tim Beners Lee. He worked at CERN (The European Nuclear Research Institute) and it's purpose was for the sharing of scientific documents.

In his original design Sir Tim had it that the scientists would be able to update each others papers - but the uptake of the whole system was too slow so that part was left out. And that pretty much defines what is Web 2.0 versus Internet 1.

The ability of anyone to author a web page. In Internet 1 there were publishers and readers - in Web 2.0 anyone can publish to the Internet, whether it be on a blog, uploading an image to Flickr or a video to You Tube or maintain your status on Facebook and Twitter. There is no special software needed for anyone to "write" on the Internet.

This has led to a raft of websites and web technologies that have grown up and none less that the community aspects of Web 2.0 or so called social media.

WHAT DOES XEBIDY AND MYSELF DO ON A DAILY BASIS FOR A CLIENT?

Well, we do two things:

- We build websites, and
- We market them

Our ideal client involves strategy, design and development, ongoing marketing

Examples:

1. Oz Experience
2. IDIDIT
3. Iconic Adventures
4. In Queenstown - link baiting

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING: The best way to probably define social media marketing is a role that encompasses keeping your current customers happy while adding new ones. Some of the keywords you might associate with a social media marketer are: brand evangelist, engagement of customers, community building and even viral marketing.

I use Twitter and I love it Twitter. Twitter came to the fore in 2007 and began to be picked up in the mainstream in mid 2008. I describe it as SMS on speed - it is in fact based on the ideas that SMS texts are limited to 140 characters and originally Twitter was expected to be primarily phone based. In this way it is really like sending and receiving lots of texts to and from lots of people. To that end that is pretty much all there is to it. And the one thing on your phone that drives you crazy is getting marketing messages texted to you!

Twitter strategies and examples:

- Generating page views: TravelGeneration and Backpacking Queensland

I use Twitter everyday for myself and for a number of clients. Firstly, I think there are two fundamental principles to social media marketing: relevancy and trust. I like the Seth Godin concept of permission marketing - that is, people sign up to be marketed to through newsletters, becoming fans of community groups and pages, becoming friends on Twitter or receiving an RSS feed. However, they give you permission to market to them on the explicit social contract that you will send them only information that is relevant to them. These "followers" for want of a better word trust that you will share content that is relevant. The quickest way to fail in permission marketing is to lose your users trust through spamming them, through getting the message wrong, through pushing your user base messages that are not relevant to them.

So, I am conscious of what I say on Twitter. I use a desktop application called Seesmic - I hardly ever visit the Twitter website I mostly just use Seesmic. The alternative popular application is Tweet Deck.

I try and tweet regularly throughout the day - not too many at once because I don't want to appear spammy. I am trying to build up a relationship with my followers even though I do not know them. The primary goal is to generate page views for my sites - in particular, Travel Generation. I try and share relevant links with the idea that by sharing good quality content all the time when I share of one of my websites I will get lots of clicks through to them. There is also the etiquette of retweeting, which is when someone shares something you have already shared thereby increasing the network of possible exposure of your link. By retweeting periodically key peoples content and certainly by thanking them anyone that shares your content you build up what we call social currency such that when it is your turn to need a link shared it happens. A Travel Generation link that I share usually generates me around 100 page views.

I also use a URL shortener called su.pr. This shortener integrated into the Stumble Upon website - which can be a huge way to create traffic.

Further on the Travel Generation website we have included easy ways for people to share our content.

- Listening: Telstra, Hotel Bristol, In Queenstown (Novotel conference example)

A different Twitter strategy is that of listening to the stream. Many companies that first ventured into Twitter met with absolute disaster. The old methods of blasting out promotional information down Twitter were met with a backlash from users. Users were not going to follow someone who spammed them with ill-considered marketing messages. I have a great personal experience of such a story with Vodafone NZ. I was in the middle of a week long argument with Vodafone over my eligibility for an iPhone - so when I saw them arrive on Twitter I talked them publicly. The verbal intercourse is amusing.

Telstra Big Pond in Australia suffered similar indignation when they first entered Twitter. People simply do not want to be messaged at. Social media is not an opportunity to ram traditional marketing messages down people's throats. Recall it is an opportunity to make existing customers happy, engaging them in a more loyal relationship - at the same time as generating new customers.

The Telstra Big Pond story is a very interesting example of a Twitter success story. Firstly, after a slaughtering at the hands of the public on Twitter, Big Pond retreated and using

their corporate blog they asked the community what they expected of them within the social media environment. The feedback was surprisingly positive - and despite not being what we call a loved brand they were able to get support from bloggers and Twitterers for their efforts, essentially turning a PR disaster into a success by engaging those say naysayers to help them. I like the saying - "failing forward".

From this effort Telstra launched @bigpondteam made up of a few individuals that personally identified themselves in Twitter. That was point number 1, they were not a company face but in fact real people. Secondly, they adopted a strategy of listening to the chatter - not marketing, but listening. The Big Pond team watch the Twitter stream listening for conversations where they might be able to jump in and add value. If someone is complaining about Telstra they offer support - they try and take on the persons problems personally, getting their mobile number and sort out the issues. In this way it is not about numbers of followers at all - there is no marketing message. I like to think of it as going out and looking for your customers and helping them in their own environment without obviously force marketing.

Another example happened just the other night when I tweeted that I had book my flights from Manchester to Geneva for the weekend to meet a mate. Almost immediately I received a tweet from Hotel Bristol in Geneva asking if I had booked accommodation and would I like help. They would have been running a search against people who mentioned Geneva.

This leads to an interesting point of view on social media marketing - unlike search engines effort above it is not about what is the competition doing. Rather it is about meeting the expectations of your customers. Rather ask yourself "what do my customers expect for my businesses websites in terms of Web 2.0?" Different customers are demanding different information and methods of receiving it, the younger market is in tune with blogs and forums, other markets are well versed in RSS feeds (now in standard practice on newspaper websites), females prefer social networks such as Facebook and males age 35+ prefer Twitter. So it is not what your competitor is doing, but rather what your customers are demanding. Nonetheless, it is possible to raise the bar for all your competitors by giving the service demanded by your customers better than they can.

- Making money out of Twitter: Tours NZ

I use Google Alerts and subscribe to a number of blogs to keep me up-to-date.

I also use Twitter for contacts:

- Looking for guest posts (Last Minute example of the importance of guest posting, Rainforest Retreat example Xebidy, The Park example TG)
- Being an expert - telling people what I know

Blogging is the best way to tell people you are an expert. In my opinion blogs are an absolutely essential part of the online marketing mix:

1. Content is King! And fresh content is the king of kings - search engines lover regular fresh content and there is no easier way to do this than with a blog.
2. In fact search engines will crawl websites with regular fresh content more regularly - sometimes daily, even hourly in the case of our Xebidy.com website

3. In the case of most businesses the content on their website rarely change - a blog gives a medium to introduce regular fresh content
4. A fresh informative blog helps a site be seen as a greater authority on a topic
5. The nature of comments and inter-linking of blog posts dramatically helps search engine rankings
6. Blogs are the best way to communicate with your customers on an informal basis. They can be a more customer friendly face giving opinion, news and a human side to the business
7. Blogs can be fun and involve the whole company

What about Facebook, where does that fit in? The biggest difference between Facebook and other social media is that in Facebook there is reciprocity in who you follow or are friends with. In order to view another's profile you need to communicate and be friends with each other. In Twitter however the following only needs to be one way. In Twitter anyone can follow anyone else - and that means that your Tweets are being listened to by complete strangers. You don't have to accept a follower and although many do, you don't have to follow them back. In Facebook the equivalent is a company page where people become your fan and receive your updates on their wall like they would with any friends. The alternative is a group. A Groups gives you more functionality, you can create message boards and forums - but I prefer a page for exactly the reason that the information you share shows up on your fans walls. A group necessitates that a person will return to the group to receive the information and I challenge that this is not a frequent occurrence. The same rules apply in maintaining a Facebook page - share only relevant information to your fans, and don't share too often - the last thing someone wants is their wall crammed with your messages.

Personally, I think that Facebook provides it's own challenges in that in many ways users view Facebook as their own personal space in the same way as they view their emails. Marketing to someone on Facebook can therefore risk being viewed as interruptive marketing or spam.

I think the IDIDIT example I gave you is a stroke of genius. By giving customers the tools to become advocates of the brand AJ Hackett Bungy is using the viral nature of Facebook to their own advantage. Bungy is actually an example of social currency. Social currency in this case is the value a user perceives for themselves by using your website. The more value a user feels they are earning by using your site the more they will return and the more value they feel they have the more likely there will be to share your website. Emotive images of yourself jumping off a bridge earns pretty good social currency with your friends. Social currency is an important element in reviews and ratings websites - if a user feels they are going to earn esteem points, a true thank you from others for sharing their information the more likely they are to contribute. This is why showing the number of reviews and reviews or reviewers works.

Clearly this form of marketing is quite different to traditional marketing. It is much more focussed on marketing to what we call the long-tail, that is to your niche. I conceptualise it as actually going out, identifying the people you want to view your message and targeting that message to suit them. Cliche: fish where the fish are.

I believe that data portability is the way of the future: TG, Tripit, affiliates e.g. Trip Advisor and Hostel World

What is going to happen on the web with travel.

- Travel is hot in Silicon Valley - Oyster raised \$10 million
- Peer to peer information flow is here to stay
- Internet everywhere or the Internet of Things
- Loss of brand value as the big boys rip your data:
 - Google day trips
 - Google hotel searches
 - Bing
 - Google Real Estate