

Internet Marketing Strategies and Secrets

The Nowspeed team's perspective on the latest trends, developments, topics and issues in Internet marketing.

Five Important Questions to Ask Yourself Before You Use Social Media

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In preparation for the Social Media Marketing 101 seminar I'm leading for the New England Direct Marketing Association on March 3, I've been giving considerable thought to not just the mechanics of social media, but also to the guiding principles that apply to using this new form of online communications effectively. After all, so many are so intrigued – if not enamored – with simply the notion of joining the conversation. Yet far too few are fully aware of the long-term, strategic rules of engagement on the social web.

Indeed, social media should not be looked at as a fast track or shortcut to a successful exchange of information. When leveraged appropriately, this vast array of online tools, utilities, platforms and channels can lead to deep, mutually-beneficial relationships between people and organizations. But it is not a panacea or quick fix for an inability to find common ground with your constituency in the first place.

Those who are most successful with social media are comfortable in their own skin, willing to reveal their personalities and unhesitant to share. They are thought leaders and inveterate readers, people who value listening and learning as much as teaching others about their own respective areas of expertise. Their social media activity is really just an extension – better yet, an encapsulation – of who they are already. It is their online profile, their individual brand identity, an aggregation of everything they are as human beings and professionals.

Those who are most successful with social media include men and women such as Chris Brogan, Todd Defren, Ann Handley, Joseph Jaffe, Kel Kelly, B.L. Ochman and Steve Rubel, just to name a handful of role models and rock stars among this space.

So before you decide to dip your toes in social media, take a few minutes to answer the following five questions. If you can answer yes to at least a few of them, then you're in a pretty good place, a position from which you can at least begin to immerse yourself in such relatively uncharted waters as the blogosphere, the Twittersverse, Facebook and the like. If not, then you need to move the needle in these areas and possibly talk to a third party specialist who can provide consultation, support and assistance.

1. Can you embrace the two principles of social media, authenticity and transparency? *If you can't be yourself as a communicator, you can't be a good candidate for social media.*

2. Does your company's culture allow for, if not encourage, entrepreneurialism and innovation? *For those who are private, protective and totally buttoned-up, social media represents a radical departure.*
3. Are you comfortable with inclusive, informal dialogue among all levels of employees and between your organization and others, including detractors? *Social media levels the playing field for all concerned.*
4. Do you understand that to be successful with blogging and other forms of social media communications, you need to listen, engage and become an active, generous member of the "community" at large? *Ask not what social media can do for you, rather what you can do for it.*
5. Are you prepared to devote the time, energy and resources to creating quality, relevant content on an ongoing basis, which will be shared – for the most part, unconditionally – with your friends, followers, clients and possibly even competitors? *A commitment to social media is a game-changing move.*

Note: On March 3, 2009, Bob Cargill will be conducting a half-day seminar on "Social Media Marketing 101" for the New England Direct Marketing Association at the Microsoft Seminar Facility in Waltham, MA. For more information and to register for this event, [click here](#).