



Keywords : Asia social networks, social media marketing, Twitter, YouTube **Date :** 7-10-2009

[Newsletter](#) > [Asia Pacific](#) > [2009](#) > [Jul](#) > [Headline Feature](#)

Jeremy Woolf, Senior Vice President at global PR agency TEXT 100 and a regular commentator on new media developments picks up the gauntlet on behalf of social networks everywhere and looks towards their huge potential for marketers.

The last issue of this newsletter took a critical look at the advertising and marketing industries' failure to come to terms with the challenge of marketing through online social networks. It also suggested very strongly that the media buzz talking up the imminent death of email as a communication and marketing channel due to the rise of social media was grossly exaggerated.

Now it's time to take a look at the subject - perhaps the most important issue today for professional marketers - from a different angle: the upside of the social networks and what is not only an opportunity but now also increasingly a pressing need for marketers to learn the language and culture of social media as an integral part of their sales and marketing plans.

Unfortunately, the initial attempts by marketers to penetrate the world of SNS were not very elegant, so let's get that out of the way first:

Imagine you're at a party together with some friends and a bunch of other people who are friends or friends of friends. Then someone turns up of nowhere who hasn't been invited. This person doesn't knock on the door, doesn't bring a bottle of wine or some flowers for the host, just barges straight into the middle of the room and shouts: 'Buy a new mobile phone!', then runs out again. Are you impressed? No. Has the experience of the party been improved? Hardly. Yet that, unfortunately, is a faint analogy of the way that companies have been trying to exploit social networks to market their products so far.

There is no doubt that the early approaches to marketing through social media were - and often continue to be - clumsy and crude. If all a company can think of to do is pay people to go onto the social networks and deliver badly-disguised spam or out-of-context messages, then they are going to get - and fully deserve - a negative outcome.

The temptation for marketers is to conclude that social media simply aren't suited to their chosen trade and retreat licking their wounds. But if you do that you are blinding yourself to the answer to the marketing professional's most important

question: where can I reach all the customers for the products I'm trying to sell? The simple fact to that is they are increasingly on the social networks, so that's where you need to go to reach them.

A recent study by TNS and Media magazine on digital media trends in Asia analysed consumers' channels of influence. The highest-ranking ones were discussion forums, blogs, online review sites and other social media. Down the bottom of the list were SMS marketing, banner ad placements and so on. And yet if you look at the way companies and agencies are investing the marketing dollars, it's in precisely those channels and media that consumers say they don't believe in.

Enough of what's gone wrong. Let's look at some positive cases:

Dell generated a million dollars in six months through Twitter and it's continuing to build on that success. Viral videos have proved hugely successful in pushing entertainment products. In Singapore and Malaysia, mobile phone companies have shown measurable results in using blogs to improve customer relations. In the UK, IBM used a virtual world to showcase and demonstrate the technology used to build that world and generated 41 successful sales engagements as a result.

One very good example of how to play by the new rules of social media - to speak their language if you will - is Comcast in the US. They had become a byword for bad service, which peaked when a customer filmed a Comcast technician sleeping at their home when he was supposed to be working and posted it on YouTube. The video went viral and the company nearly went critical!

So what did they do? They decided to take a radical route away from the 'click on an email link and we'll sort it out behind closed doors' philosophy, and went for complete transparency instead. They used Twitter. So when someone has an outage in Boston, immediately there's a response to the whole community that says: 'First, have you checked the green button...'and so on. That whole community can participate in and learn from what's going on. It makes it a very positive experience instead of a negative one. Now they have more than 600,000 followers on Twitter.

As for Dell, they've used Tweets to generate direct sales for their wholesale service. If you're a follower, you'll receive a Tweet that says something like: '15% off this week on monitors'. Short, simple and to the point. And now in Singapore they've taken it one step further and adapted this to a group buying model. If you can get 15 people to sign up to the same offer, you get a special discount. Which of course makes sense for both seller and customers.

Twitter user growth was around 30,000% last year. That's not a misprint: it really is thirty thousand percent. Growth of social network users is visible everywhere, further fostered by the availableness of applications that allow you to enter a single profile that all social media can tap into, as opposed to having to enter your profile again and again every time you sign up to one. As all of the social networking applications become more mobile, and as the mobile devices increasingly cross over with the PC in terms of power, their impact and influence will grow, too.

I work for a large global PR agency and we deal with large-scale RFPs from global corporations. In the last six months there hasn't been a single one that hasn't had a social media component. That's a recognition that we have to make a change.

For marketers, this is not a case of either/or. Email marketing is going to continue to have a very important role. It has its own rules and culture and is a highly effective and successful channel for marketing when it is planned and executed intelligently. Yet the email marketing rules cannot simply be transposed onto the culture of social media.

As the success stories of companies like Dell and Comcast show, social networks can generate excellent results for marketers so long as they aim to belong to that community, instead of trying to invade it.

The newer generations of social media users, those who have grown up in the online world, make little distinction between the TV, the PC and gaming devices, and have completely different concepts of privacy. It is a generational shift and it will have a huge impact on marketing. The screen is just their interface to a world where they feel comfortable about interacting with others and much less shy about revealing themselves.

And let's not forget that the fastest-growing demographics for social media users are not the kids (all kids use social media, so there's not really that much room for growth) but the oldies - the over-40's, who have really embraced the blogs, Facebook, Twitter and the rest in a way that very few pundits could have predicted.

The social media may be part of a virtual world, but for advertisers and marketers they're a reality we all have to come to terms with, and fast. ■

Disclaimer:

Text 100 Public Relations provides media and public relations support to Epsilon International in the Asia Pacific region.