

Selling Stuff WITH Facebook

BY GLENN RIFKIN



The social media phenomenon is still shy of its 10th anniversary, but its impact on society in general and business in particular has been remarkable. Fueled by the steadily increasing popularity of Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, blogging, texting and wave upon wave of apps for smartphones, social media has quickly morphed from a youth-oriented curiosity to a corporate imperative.

Perhaps nothing demonstrated the power and scope of social media more than Barack Obama's successful 2008 presidential campaign. There is

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no argument that Obama's deft incorporation of social media and the Internet into his campaign efforts made a significant difference in fundraising and in the outcome of the election. His team was prescient enough to integrate online activities from the outset, not just as an add-on but as an essential weapon in the campaign. The online team, many of whom had worked for Howard Dean in 2004, was brought together early. The head of social media, then-24-year-old Chris Hughes, a co-founder of Facebook, reported directly to Obama's campaign manager, and social media

was integrated across the entire organization.

The results were staggering:

- Obama had more than three million friends on Facebook.
- The MyBarackObama.com Web site drew 8.5 million monthly visitors, and there were 400,000 blog posts that resulted in 2 million profiles. The site helped generate 35,000 volunteer groups that held 200,000 offline events. More than 70,000 fundraising hubs raised \$30 million.
- The e-mail list consisted of 13 million people who received 7,000 variations of more than 1 billion e-mails.
- Three million online donors contributed 6.5 million times.
- There were nearly 2,000 official campaign YouTube videos that were viewed more than 80 million times for more than 14.5 million hours, plus more than 440,000 user-generated videos. The 14.5 million hours of free air time was the equivalent of nearly \$50 million in paid television advertising.
- Three million people signed up for the text messaging program, and each received five to 20 texts per month.

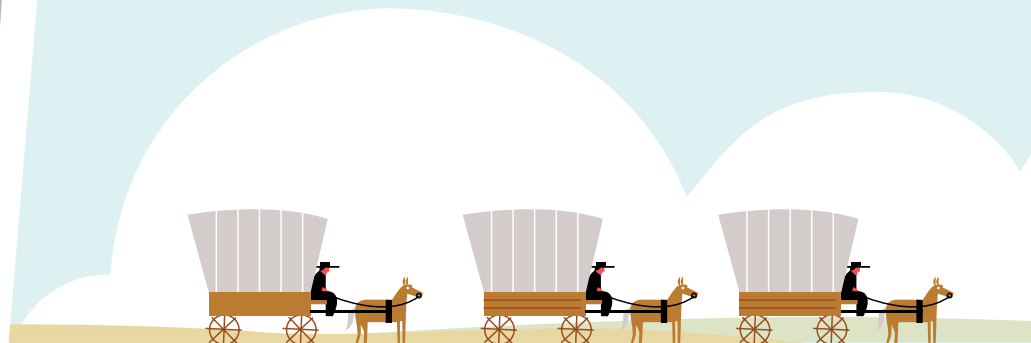
Obama won 70 percent of the under-25 year old vote, and most pundits believe he would not have won without the Internet and social media. The resulting landslide victory for Obama set off a wave of media reporting about his brilliant use of social media. And, it also forced every major corporation to sit up and take notice of the power of these new tools.

"Almost every corporation of any size, say over 1,000 employees, is doing something in social media," said Paul Gillin, a social media consultant and author in Framingham, Mass. "Eighty percent of companies have some kind of social media presence, but probably only 20 percent are doing it well."

Other than the usual early adopters, most organizations have always moved slowly in embracing new trends, especially in the technology era. What is the return on investment for social media? Will it have a positive impact on my brand? How do we get started with something that will have a positive impact? These are questions that are still being asked, according to Gillin.

"We're in the 'hair on fire' stage right now," he said. "There's been the realization 'Oh my god, we have to do something about this because it's not going away.' And so most companies

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consider it an extension of the marketing department and hand it over there as the way to do it. 'Let's hire some kids out of college to handle Twitter accounts for us and set up a blog as a press release channel.' From my perspective, this isn't a good way to do it."

In fact, Gillin said, using social media as just another way to "push out a message" is missing the potent competitive advantage that social media offers. "This is about engaging in a relationship with people who want to have a relationship with you and you want to have a relationship with them," he said.

Companies are emerging with new, viable social media campaigns every day. In May, 2011, for example, Tupperware Brands Corporation announced a full-blown social media effort intended to carry its vaunted brand into the 21st century. The "Chain of Confidence" campaign, based on a unique Facebook page and Twitter account, is intended to introduce a new generation of women to the Tupperware brand and to make them aware that Tupperware no longer sells just food storage containers but also cookware, cutlery and other lifestyle products.

The campaign features all manner of content on the brand's Facebook page, including video clips, blog posts and motivational tips from celebrities such as singer Kelly Clarkson. Given that Tupperware is legendary for its direct selling prowess, with generations of women having hosted in-home Tupperware "parties," this effort is built on Gillin's concept of relationship building with a trusted brand. In an article in *The New York Times*, Elinor Steele, Tupperware's vice president for global communications and public relations, explained that Tupperware had been dabbling at the edges of social media but "now, we're getting serious about it." She said that the social media campaign is intended to become "an interactive community and destination" for Tupperware sellers and buyers. "It's about moving from brand awareness to helping people become brand advocates," Steele told *The Times*.

And there are many examples of companies that have already established successful track records using social media. Here are several standouts:

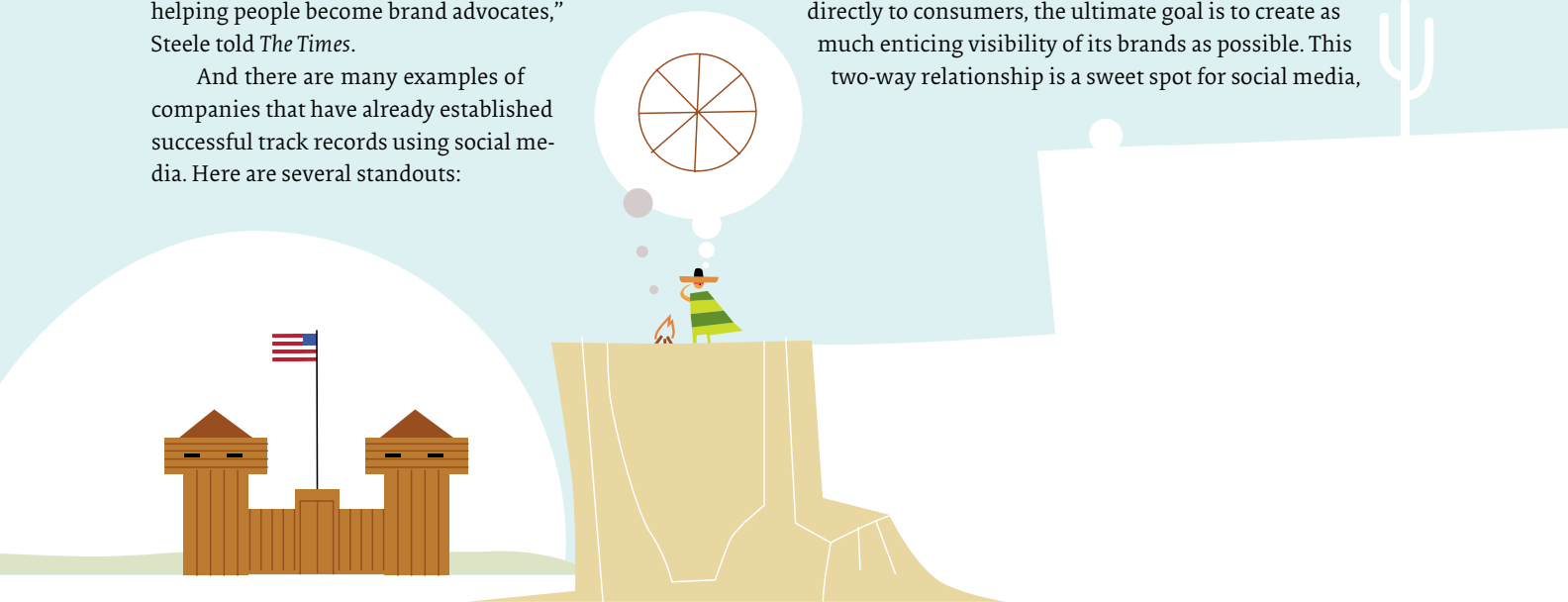
Ford Motor Company

When Scott Monty, Ford's head of social media, joined the giant automaker in July 2008, Ford had dabbled in the various components of social media but had no overall strategy and no one leading the effort across the corporation. Having come from a tiny consulting firm, Monty, who had established himself as a social media expert and widely read blogger, readied himself for serious culture shock at the old rust-belt automaker. Instead, he found an atmosphere far more akin to a high-tech startup where people were jazzed up about the quality of the products and new CEO Alan Mulally's vision for the company.

In a vast corporation, with \$120 billion in sales and more than 165,000 employees, Ford had been a disjointed organization made up of countless business silos. When Mulally left Boeing and took over Ford in 2006, he made it clear that his mission was to create a united Ford focused intently on profitable growth. The One Ford plan became the corporate mantra and the foundation for Ford's future, and Mulally wanted the world to be privy to the company's reinvention via all media channels.

Monty understood from the outset that social media is not intended to replace Ford's traditional marketing efforts. In 2010, Ford spent more than 25 percent of its vast marketing budget on social media. Social media has become a significant and potent new marketing channel for Ford, and the company has aggressively embraced all social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr. According to Gillin, Ford's multiplatform integration is among the most sophisticated social media efforts he has encountered. The company's flagship Web site, The Ford Story (www.thefordstory.com), is a gateway to the company's multiple social media offerings.

Because automakers sell through dealers rather than directly to consumers, the ultimate goal is to create as much enticing visibility of its brands as possible. This two-way relationship is a sweet spot for social media,



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and Monty has orchestrated several major campaigns built on social media platforms.

For example, when Ford was ready to introduce an entirely revamped version of its flagship SUV, the Explorer, in July 2010, the company abandoned its traditional unveiling at a major auto show and opted instead to introduce the entire campaign on Facebook. The 2011 Ford Explorer was introduced simultaneously in eight major cities and with its own Facebook page. “We had a bigger impact than a Super Bowl ad,” Monty said. “And it wasn’t just about the big event; it continued indefinitely to interact with fans on the Facebook page.”

The Explorer Facebook page incorporated video, live chats with Ford executives, photos, blog comments and Twitter posts. According to Monty, the event spawned 99 million social media impressions on the day of introduction and more than 400 million impressions across the Internet. A half million unique visitors went to the Ford.com Web site, and Ford was the No. 1 trending topic on Twitter and the No. 2 trending topic on Google for the day. “And that was a day when Lindsay Lohan was being admitted to or released from a rehab program,” Monty said.

Ford also used social media to introduce the European version of its Ford Fiesta in the United States. Ford gave cars to 100 enthusiastic digital influencers for six months. The mandate was to flaunt the fact that they were the only people in the United States with the car, and they used social media to get out the message. Each driver had to create a video each month about the experience. They blogged and tweeted about the experience, and the results were impressive. According to Monty, there were tens of millions of Twitter impressions and YouTube hits, and 132,000 people visited the Web site and checked a box that requested that they be notified by a local dealer when the Fiesta became available.

In the long run, Ford is hoping that by humanizing the company with social media, it will achieve the cachet of cool brands like Apple and Google, and attract a new generation of younger buyers who likely had never owned a Ford. “We know that we are making great cars, but the way that we talk about them and market them is just as important as having great vehicles,” Monty said. “To younger customers who watch what we do and how we do it, this will be the tipping point to get them to go see for themselves.”

Dell Computer

In a December 2010, press event, Michael Dell, founder and chairman of the \$53 billion computer giant, introduced Dell’s glistening new Social Media Listening Command Center in the company’s Round Rock, Texas, headquarters. A team of social media specialists now track roughly 25,000

Dell-related “conversations” in 11 languages every day from the entire spectrum of social media, including Twitter, Facebook, the blogosphere and other online sources. In so doing, Dell knows both the good and the bad being said in real time about its products and services and, most important, can respond proactively.

“The Command Center becomes a systemic early warning system for Dell,” said Manish Mehta, Dell’s head of social media and a 16-year Dell veteran. “It provides a companywide view, and we can listen to all the conversations that are happening across all of our products, categories and brands.”

Dell can now engage its customers immediately, quickly address complaints and dissatisfaction, encourage admirers and be an active part of every conversation about its brands. And in a world where bad news travels around the globe in a mouse-click, the ability to track and respond instantly is a huge competitive advantage. “It’s become a wonderful tool for us,” Mehta said. “We can step back and make sure we have the right conversations, the right engagement and practices around listening. We’re now looking to deploy these command centers in different locations around the world.”

Few corporations have embraced social media as effectively as Dell. One of the first companies to take its business model online, Dell has long embraced a digital relationship with its customers. But its social media efforts ramp things way up. The goal is to imbue social media across the fabric of the entire company, with its 103,000 employees around the world. Mehta said that Dell’s commitment to listening intently to its customers dates back to Michael Dell’s days of selling personal computers directly to customers from his dorm room at the University of Texas.

In fact, Mehta launched the company’s first online community forum in 1997. He was amazed to find truck drivers, lawyers and casino pit bosses solving problems and sharing computing insights with each other at all hours of the morning and night. “It taught us a lot about the wisdom of crowds,” Mehta said. Noting that people were eager to connect and help each other out, Dell began to formally embrace social media in 2006. Due to its viral nature, social media was already alive and well deep within Dell’s inner circles. Grassroots efforts were everywhere, tracking how viral videos work, how Facebook pages played, and what the responses would be on Twitter.

Eventually, Dell realized that this “anything goes,” “Wild West” approach needed some active governance, and Mehta set out to put some order into the chaos. Now, every corporate function, from sales to customer support to HR, is able to leverage social media. For example, in the product development organization, problems with new products would



normally take weeks before enough feedback reached the company to set off a reaction and mobilize a response.

Today, the product organization has its own team dedicated to doing nothing but listening via social media, which changes the landscape dramatically. They track early adopters and read tweets, blogs and social network postings and know immediately whether problems are surfacing. Responses can happen in real time rather than weeks or months later. This is especially useful in Dell's B2B space. "Social media is not just a consumer play," Mehta said. "There's a huge business play as well. We have to train parts of our organization to acknowledge that."

Mehta convenes a Social Media Leadership Council every Friday, and representatives from 18 different corporate functions across the company attend. There is a healthy sharing of best practices, and Dell has even established a Social Media University for its employees. Already, 14 classes are taught and more are on the way. To become an official Dell blogger or tweeter, an employee must pass a minimum of four of the courses to be certified. The company has also reached out to the vast customer community, to both advocates and detractors, and brought them to its headquarters to discuss Dell's efforts. Nothing defuses an angry blogger better than a personal visit, open conversation and a willingness to listen on the part of the company. One blogger, already a Dell advocate, was so overwhelmed by her visit that she lobbied for a job with the company. She is now one of Dell's chief bloggers.

Though most companies have yet to quantify social media's return on investment, Dell believes ROI is critically important. In fact, Mehta said he has an entire team dedicated to tracking social media's payback. Using sophisticated software and algorithms, Dell tracks how its customers click around on its Web site and whether social media efforts catalyze sales. "We now have science that starts to trigger on customer behavior in the B2B space," Mehta said. For example, Dell tracked a long-time customer who had never purchased any of its EqualLogic storage products and noticed that he or she had been clicking repeatedly on the support content offerings on the Web site. This activity suggested that the customer might be considering a large purchase and was deciding between Dell and a competitor. Dell's sales group mobilized to reach out to the customer but before they could get there, the customer had purchased an EqualLogic product.

In the hypercompetitive global economy, the ability to anticipate customers' needs and desires via social media is fast becoming table stakes to the game. "That period of time when you ignore or don't respond to a customer can have a huge ripple effect," Mehta said. "I worry about brands that are ignoring that medium because the negative ripple can be sizable."

Indium Corporation

Few people outside its niche industry have heard of Indium Corporation, a small, privately held developer, manufacturer and supplier of specialty alloys and solders based in Utica, N.Y. But under the direction of its brassy marketing communications director Rick Short, Indium has embraced social media so effectively that it has changed the



culture and driven the growth of this obscure but dynamic company. With 600 employees in 10 facilities, Indium is a science- and engineering-driven operation, and its materials, such as dipping paste and wave solder, are critical in the manufacture of circuit boards for everything from cell phones to jet aircraft.

Connecting with its customers, who have countless technical questions and comments, is a key facet of Indium's marketing efforts. For Short, who has been with Indium for 27 years, social media, specifically blogging and videos, seemed like the perfect medium to find and attract new customers. In 2005, believing he could not take his company "into the murky depths" of social media without a personal understanding of the environment, Short began his own blog. He blogged about his own life, learned the subtleties of the medium, how to post, how to add photos and video and became facile with the tools.

"As leader of our company's foray into social media, if I couldn't walk the walk, nobody would follow," Short said. "We started out with the intent of being the leader in this space. There was no value in being No. 3."

In 2006, Short began to identify internal candidates to become the company's official bloggers. He recruited a group of 15 engineers and focused, not on blogging, but on how they might strengthen sales. "Social media is simply a tool," he said. "We're not bloggers; we're business people."

The engineers he chose had the credibility with custom-

ers that made them perfect bloggers. "In our field, we are technologists selling to technologists," he said. "Many of our customers have advanced degrees in science. You are not going to fool them with spin and slick photos."

Short's blogging corps were the "go to" people in their respective fields, but most were quietly obscure geeks who toiled in the shadows. "These were the guys who are developing new chemical products and processes, and they are building and servicing these processes," Short said. "What could be cooler than these people, especially in the eyes of our target customers?"

Not everybody bought into the concept. Some of the company's top engineers refused to participate. Dr. Andy Mackie, a global product manager in the semiconductor and advanced assembly materials area and a company star, actually tried to discourage others from participating because he didn't believe it was a good use of his time. Short was undaunted.

In time, Short and his team of bloggers had a page on the company Web site called "From One Engineer to Another," and they were posting 73 blogs in six languages. The blogs, with such esoteric titles as "The Limits of Aqueous Flip-Chip Cleaning" and "Heat Spring Thermal Interface Video Release," incorporated keyword search engine optimization, which ensured that Google searches would feature the blogs. Staff volunteers wrote entries about these topics using a defined set of keywords aimed at getting prospective customers' attention.

"If a customer is Googling something and they find you and come to respect you via online media, they will trust you

Loving Your Scissors

It might be hard to believe that a company founded in 1649 could become a social media success story, but that is exactly what happened to Fiskars, the Finnish maker of high-quality scissors and crafting equipment.

According to the social media consultant Paul Gillin, who wrote a case study of Fiskars's social media efforts, the Finnish company had grown frustrated in 2008 that sales of its famed orange-handled scissors (which are in the Museum of Modern Art) had slowed in the United States. Shelf space in big box retailers was becoming more limited, and Fiskars realized it needed a way to spice up its emotional connection to customers in the United States.

Fiskars's marketing people decided that scrapbooking was a popular hobby upon which it could build a new campaign. But it needed to find out more about who its customers actually were. Fiskars hired outside consultants to track social media conversations on the Internet and create a strategy.

Instead of the expected baby-boomer audience, the research showed that it was actually Generation Y — younger — women, who were the more passionate scrapbookers. The company used its Web site to engage this group and hired four young women on a part-time basis to use blogs and social media to encourage others to share their passions with one another. The four part-

timers, dubbed Fiskateers, encouraged other women to join an exclusive Fiskateer club and become members who could exchange ideas and designs.

By mid-2008, the response overwhelmed Fiskars. Instead of the expected 200 members, more than 4,200 women had signed up. A blog by the four original members flourished and within a year, "sales of Fiskars supplies in stores that had been visited by a Fiskateer more than tripled," Gillin wrote. "Online mentions of Fiskars products increased sixfold." If a nearly 400-year-old company can embrace social media and win, anyone can, Gillin said.

The Best Advice

So what should those organizations that are still paralyzed by indecision do about social media? Despite the noise, social media remains in its earliest stages of acceptance. Doing nothing, however, is no longer an option. Gillin offered some practical advice:

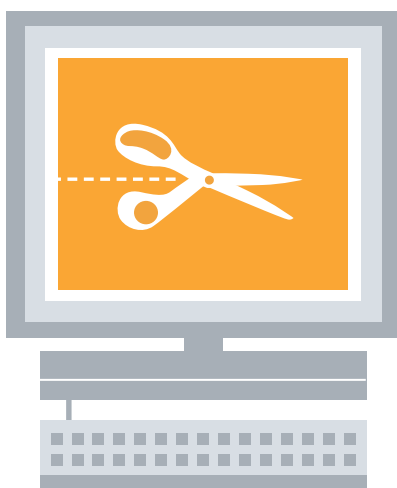
Start by listening ... to your customers, employees and business partners.

Understand that this is a two-way medium. Marketing has historically been a one-way experience because it was the only game in town. But the game has changed.

Don't try to do everything. Do what makes sense for your customers. "The most common request I get is, 'We have to have a social media strategy.'" Gillin said. "My response is, 'Why? Do you have a hammer strategy?' These are tools; use them as they make sense. Don't go into this with the idea that you have to use social media. Go in with the idea that there are business results you want to achieve. Social media may be one of the tools to help you do that."

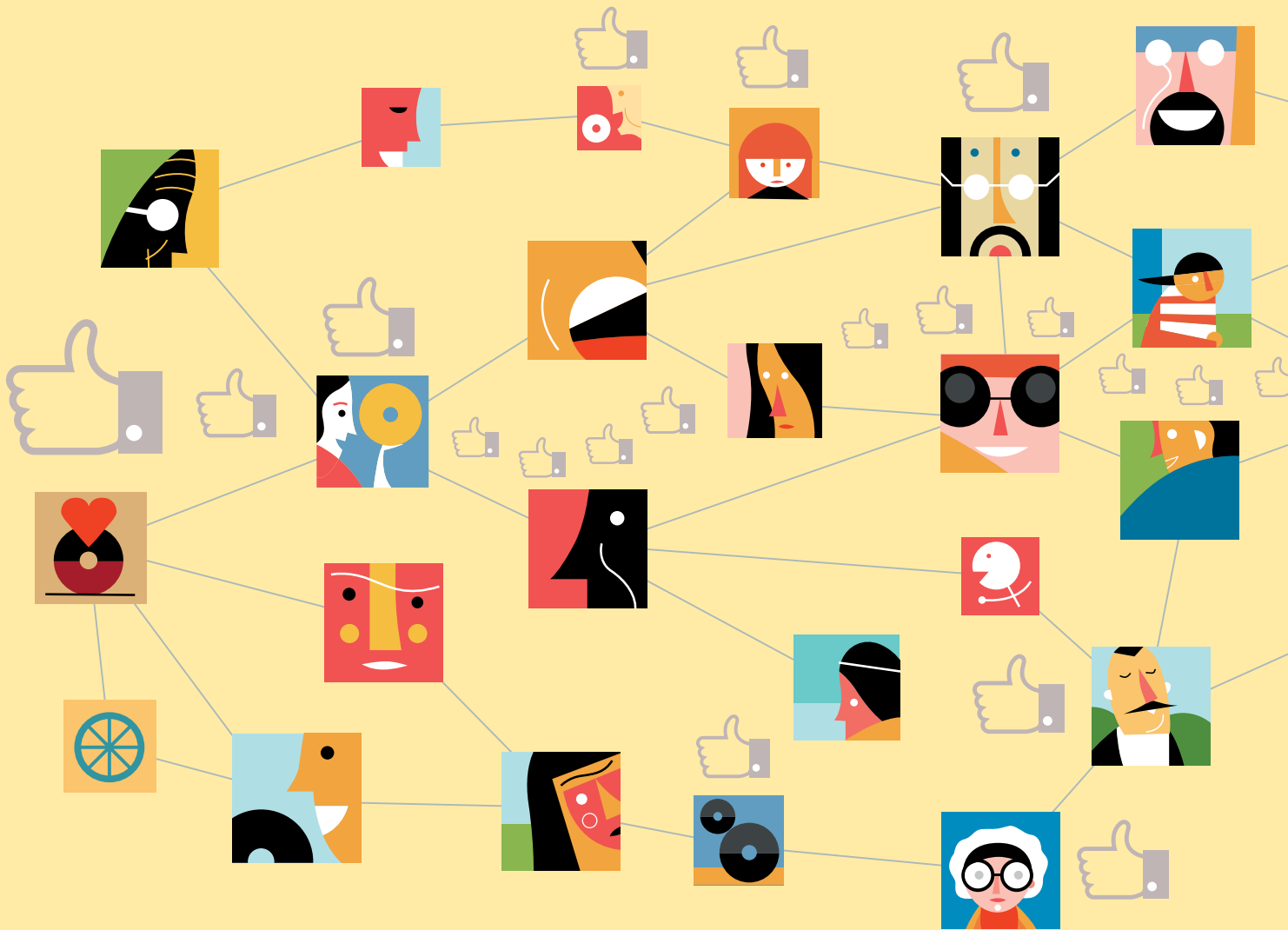
Respond. People expect a response. If you are in for a penny, you are in for a pound. You cannot avoid paying attention to what people are saying, good or bad.

Understand the social media etiquette. Don't do anything via social media that you wouldn't do at a semiformal cocktail party. Remember this is a conversation with your customers; being deferential, courteous and respectful is essential.



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and contact you, and that is where the sales process begins,” Short said. And the numbers told the story. In 2009, with blogging in full swing, sales leads increased by 600 percent from the same quarter in the previous year. In 2010, the blogs generated more than 11,000 sales leads, which might be an insignificant number for a large consumer products company but is transformational for a company the size of Indium. “We’re getting a great payback on this, and we wouldn’t do it if it wasn’t rewarding for us,” Short said. “These leads are self-qualified, highly qualified and urgent. It’s a dream come true.”

Among Indium’s most influential bloggers: Dr. Andy Mackie. After his initial skepticism, which was based, he said, on his early impression that the word “blog” brought up impressions of “spotty teens talking about their favorite bands in bad grammar,” Mackie decided to test the concept with some ideas he wanted to share with others. He wanted feedback and challenges to his assumptions.

Having built a small but devoted following, Mackie felt the power of blogging on a customer visit to Malaysia two years ago. One of the customer’s senior engineers came up to him and said, “Hello, Andy.” Having never been to Malaysia before, Mackie asked if they had ever met. The engineer re-

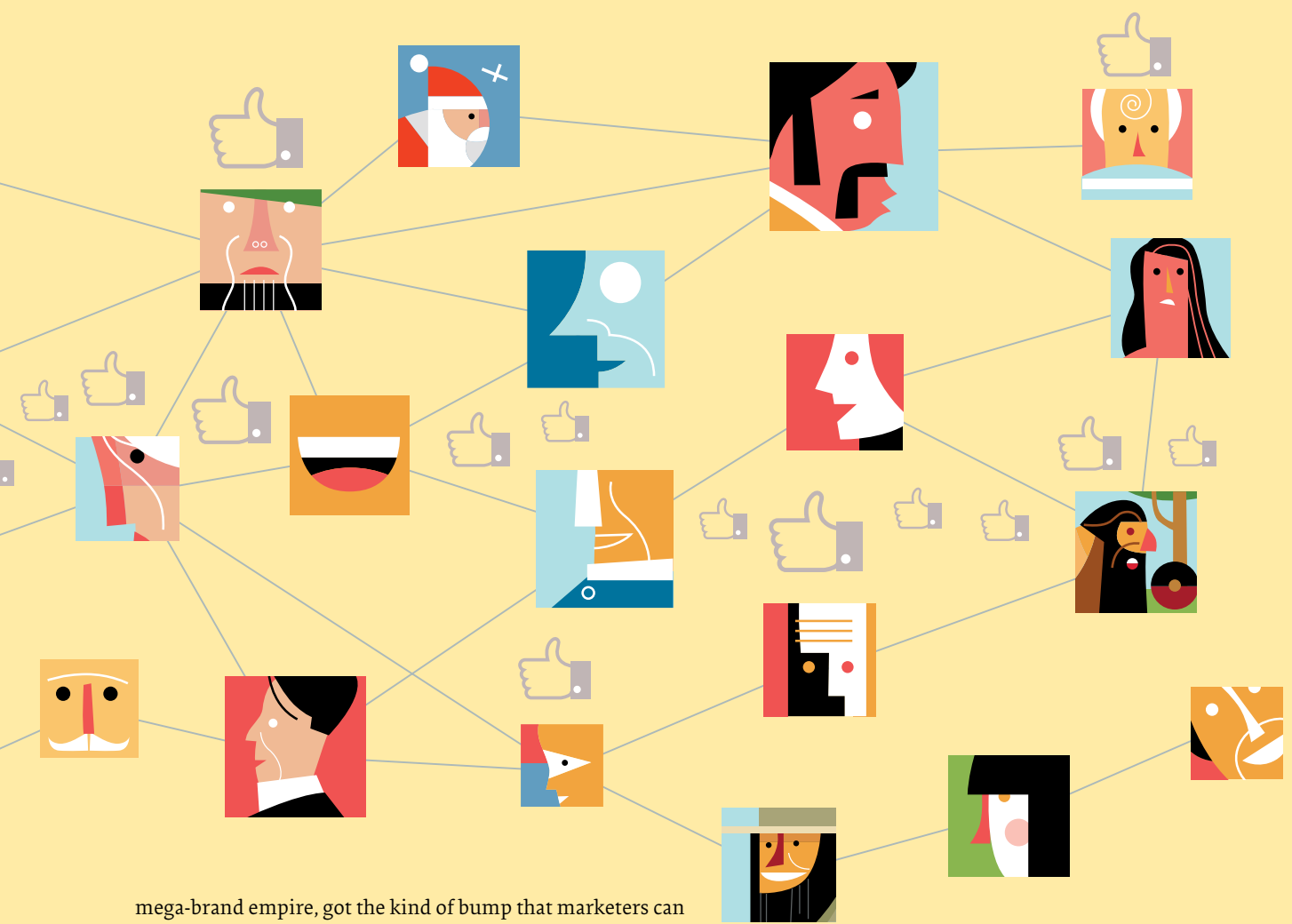
plied, “No, but I read your blog.” “That kind of floored me but also confirmed that we had something useful here,” Mackie said. “Blogging has become a crucial part of my marketing toolkit, a 24/7 store of technical credibility for me and my company.”

Procter & Gamble’s Old Spice

It isn’t easy to take a 73-year old deodorant brand and turn it into an overnight social media sensation, but in February 2010, Old Spice set off a viral marketing wave that quickly became the envy of every consumer products manufacturer in the world.

What began as a conventional television ad for Old Spice Body Wash on the 2010 Super Bowl broadcast transformed into a viral YouTube hit that became the No. 1 all-time most-viewed sponsored channel on YouTube. The humorous and irreverent commercial, featuring actor and former NFL wide receiver Isaiah Mustafa, was called “The Man Your Man Could Smell Like,” and it emerged as one of the 2010 Super Bowl’s most admired ads in a crowded field.

The Old Spice brand, a part of the Procter & Gamble



mega-brand empire, got the kind of bump that marketers can only dream of, and sales of Old Spice body wash and deodorant soared. The commercial became a YouTube, Twitter and Facebook phenomenon, especially with the 15- to 34-year-old male demographic that it was targeting, and Old Spice realized it had an opportunity to marry conventional marketing efforts with social media to take the brand to new heights.

“We had 15 million views on YouTube,” said Michael Norton, communications director for Old Spice. “People were using the ads as social currency with friends, and we had the opportunity to see how a popular culture phenomenon got started.”


Taking advantage of the reaction on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, Old Spice and its advertising agency, Weiden + Kennedy, launched a second phase of the campaign in July by creating an interactive session with Mustafa answering questions that came via social media outlets. In responding to selected questions from bloggers, the media and celebrities such as Ashton Kutcher over a two-day period, Old Spice created 186 personalized videos in real time featuring Mustafa as the Old Spice Man.

On July 16, 2010, Old Spice had eight of the top 10 most popular videos on YouTube, which was unprecedented. But that was just the beginning. On July 18, nearly 95 million views of the Old Spice campaign set off a streak of unparalleled popularity, and Old Spice became the No. 1 all-time most-viewed sponsored channel on YouTube. Old Spice also

had more than 80,000 Twitter followers and a Facebook fan base numbering 630,000, increases of 3,000 percent and 2,000 percent, respectively. Traffic to OldSpice.com soared by 300 percent. “He took over the Internet,” Norton declared about Mustafa.

This frenzy translated into the doubling of sales of Old Spice body wash and antiperspirant, according to Norton, and allowed Old Spice to overtake Unilever’s AXE product as No. 1 in the marketplace.

For Old Spice, the experience illuminated the power of integrating conventional marketing with social media. “The ability to have a two-way conversation with a customer and create an affinity for the brand is what this is about,” Norton said. The days of brands “talking at you” are over, he added. With social media, “You self-select as a consumer. You go to the sites you like and not to the others. People are now interacting with the brand.”

Sustaining this conversation requires one other critical factor: great products or services. Social media is a learning experience on so many levels, Norton pointed out. “So many great brands get you to try something, but if you can’t deliver on the promise, people won’t come back.” 

Glenn Rifkin has written for *The New York Times*, *Fast Company*, *Strategy + Business*, and many other publications.