



# **Leveraging the Power of Social Media Networks for B2B Technology Marketing**

White Paper

**September 2009**

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## 1 Introduction

The buzzword “Web 2.0” is everywhere, but what does it really mean? Traditional web content, or “Web 1.0”, was a one-way information conduit. Individuals or companies created web sites that provided information to the reader, and there was very little, if any, interaction with the reader.

“Web 2.0” content and applications allow the reader to be part of the experience through interactive elements such as forums, commenting, and other tools. Businesses are realizing that their customers are demanding more from their web experience, and have a voice online like never before. If a customer has a good experience with a company, he’ll tell some of his friends. If he has a bad experience, he’ll tell many of his friends, and the Internet allows him to reach more people than he ever could before.

Today, it is essential to have an online presence in order to do business, and this is especially true for companies who are involved in B2B technology. However, just creating a simple informational website is not enough. Technology businesses need to understand the mechanisms of social media and leverage the benefits of these networks to augment their marketing strategy.

## **2 What are Social Media Networks?**

Social media functions in Web 2.0 websites allow visitors to interact with site elements and with other visitors in a variety of different ways. Some of the primary categories of social media networks include:

- Social networks, such as LinkedIn, Facebook, or MySpace – These networks are user driven groups supported by an independent platform. Individuals connect with each other and with organizations.
- Media sharing networks, such as Digg, Reddit, or StumbleUpon – Media sharing allows users to recommend or rate articles, websites, applications, or other content to other users.
- Self-generated social media, such as blogs, forums, or customized social network platforms like Ning – These content sites are driven by an individual or company, generally around a certain theme

Each individual social media platform generally caters to a specific demographic, although some try to capture as wide a subscriber base as possible. For example, MySpace is generally used by high school and college students, as well as entities that market to this demographic, such as the music industry. Digg focuses primarily on sharing articles and news on technology topics, but other topics can be found in other, more limited categories.

Self-generated social media allows companies like yours to ensure that the content meets the needs of your target audience. Self-generated social media generally has a smaller audience, but the audience is more targeted and relevant.

## **3 Social Media Networks for B2B Marketing**

Companies that want to leverage social media networks as part of their B2B technology marketing plan need to develop a game plan for their approach. It isn't an effective use of personnel time to start creating profiles on different sites without a cohesive strategy and message.

### **3.1 Step 1 – Assign Knowledgeable Personnel**

Just as you have specific personnel who are responsible for the maintenance of your company website, you should assign a specific person or group of people to act as your social media liaisons. These people need to have a good understanding of social media and your company message. By having a dedicated person or team as your online presence, you'll portray a consistent message across all social media outlets.

### **3.2 Step 2 – Develop External Network Presences**

Based on the specific products and services that your company provides, select specific media outlets with audiences that match your target customer profile. For B2B technology marketing, it's best to choose outlets that have a professional user base. For general social networks, LinkedIn is your best bet.

Look for forums, blogs, and custom networks that mesh with your product and service offerings, and begin monitoring them. For example, if your company develops a software product, look for industry groups that may use your product, or independent user groups that have been created to share experiences with your product or related products.

### **3.3 Step 3 – Develop Internal Networks**

An internal blog is one of the easiest options for businesses looking to expand their online presence. However, a blog has to be regularly maintained and promoted to maintain relevancy with your target audience.

If you have a large base of customers, and you'd like to engage them further, a forum or custom social network could help you to interact more closely. However, remember that the more that you allow your users to interact, the more oversight is needed.

### **3.4 Step 4 – Validate Leads**

While the focus of many social media networks is to develop relationships, as a B2B company you are looking to turn relationships into customers. You'll likely share information on various social media outlets that guide people to your website, such as links to articles, white papers, support information, or other content. Response information can be tracked in exactly the same way as referrals from other methods, such as email marketing. You can employ registration functions on your website to capture visitor information before they access some content, like white papers.

## **4 Strategies for Specific Networks**

### **4.1 LinkedIn**

LinkedIn is the largest professional social network on the Internet, and is the primary place to connect with people who are interested in connecting for business. Of all of the "general" social networks, LinkedIn is your best bet for finding your target customers for B2B technology marketing.

LinkedIn offers several areas within the network for your business to be noticed. The first step is to create an overall company profile. However, a company profile should only be used as a repository for company information, and should only be used for other LinkedIn functions sparingly. LinkedIn users are far more responsive to interactions from actual people.

### **LinkedIn Groups**

LinkedIn Groups are one of the most powerful tools that a company can access within LinkedIn. LinkedIn Groups are self-created associations of people with common interests. There are geographic groups, alumni groups, product user groups, industry groups, and so on. These groups

are where you can find people who are interested in what you have to offer.

When reviewing potential groups, look at the number of participants as well as the activity within those groups. There are thousands of groups in LinkedIn, and some may not be active at all. You want to participate in groups with relevant topics and active participants.

However, you need to have some caution when interacting with these groups. They won't want you to market to them directly. Begin by joining relevant groups, and review past discussions with the group. Contribute to the group discussions, and provide information from your company where appropriate, but don't overdo it. Use an individual profile to join each group rather than a company profile. If you join a group with your company profile, users will simply assume you are there to market to them.

### **LinkedIn Questions and Answers**

Another area where companies can interact with LinkedIn users is the Questions and Answers tool. Users can ask or answer posted questions within a hierarchy of categories, and answers can include links to outside information or to LinkedIn users that could assist as experts. As with the LinkedIn groups, don't simply provide company links for all answers. Participate in a way that allows you to appear helpful and knowledgeable.

### **4.2 Twitter**

Twitter is considered a "micro-blogging" platform, where entries are limited to 140 characters. Twitter is a great resource for providing quick links to outside content, whether it's on your website or on a third party site. When you set up a Twitter account, you can choose to follow other Twitter users, and other Twitter users can follow you.

Begin by creating a Twitter account and customizing your profile to include information about your company. Then, do searches within Twitter for keywords that are relevant to your business. The search results will return Twitter posts, or "tweets" that mention the keywords that you searched for. Each of these search results could be potential followers, simply review their user page to see if they are relevant to your interests, and add them as followers if they are. For example, if your company develops customer relationship management (CRM) products, you can search for keywords such as CRM and relationship management. You can also follow competitors in your industry to see what they're tweeting about. Twitter users will find you in searches and begin following you.

Once you have selected some followers, you can begin tweeting. Like in a company blog, you can announce new products and share links.

### **4.3 Company Blog**

A blog can be used to alert your readers about new product and service offerings, but that is only the beginning:

- Interview your customers and provide case studies on how your products and services benefit them
- Announce when your company will be represented at conferences and trade shows
- Allow your customers or partners to write guest blog entries
- Share third party resources that your readers could use
- Post answers to frequently asked questions about your product or service

The goal is to make the content on your blog useful and relevant to your readers. In addition, your blog needs to be regularly updated with this useful content. Updating daily is best, but a weekly update should be a bare minimum.

## **5 Resources**

### **5.1 Real-World Examples**

*Sun Microsystems* – Sun Microsystems is a world leader in computer network infrastructure products and solutions. Sun promotes blogging among its employees and management by providing a free blogging platform. Sun bloggers include the CEO and over 3000 employees. By encouraging its employees to blog about projects they are working on, Sun is reinforcing its position as a technology leader in its industry.

*Solar Winds* – Solar Winds is a provider of network management software solutions. The company has been raising brand awareness through a series of popular YouTube videos. These videos span a range of information, from tutorials to interviews. YouTube videos are easy to share, so viewers are likely to pass on videos that they enjoy.

*Breaking Point Systems* – Breaking Point Systems produces testing systems for application, performance and security testing. The company has embraced micro blogging through Twitter as a way to quickly get word out about product launches and events. Links in the tweets bring readers back to the Breaking Point website. The company also has fun with their tweets, including games and trivia.

### **5.2 Online Resources**

Marketing Sherpa – [Using LinkedIn for Lead Generation – 6 Lessons](#)  
HubSpot - [Inbound Internet Marketing Blog](#)

## **6 About Ridge Marketing.**

Ridge Marketing is an integrated marketing agency specialising in direct marketing, online marketing and telemarketing campaigns that deliver real ROI. Learn more about our marketing services by

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