Social Media’s Impact on Today’s Business Interactions
Abstract
The use of social media in marketing and sales has greatly increased over the last decade. Social media is quickly taking the spotlight as it continues to influence how professionals interact and how companies present themselves and their products.

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PeekAnalytics:
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About the Author
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About the Baylor Business Collaboratory
A “collaboratory” is a mash-up of collaborative laboratory – an arrangement through which businesses and Baylor business faculty work together developing solutions to market challenges through innovative research. The Baylor Business Collaboratory partners include Cabela’s, HEB, BancVue, and affiliates such as data warehousing leader Teradata. Key research questions sponsored and developed in conjunction with industry executives, analysts and others include to date:

• How to grow revenue and transactions without discounting.
• Identifying which marketing actions, channels and programs really drive revenue, customer satisfaction, and loyalty.
• Gathering, analyzing, interpreting, and applying “Big Data” to business problems.

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Introduction

In today’s technologically advanced workforce, social media is the front-runner for how people introduce themselves, how meetings are conducted, how sales are developed, and how marketers create a relationship between their company and their audience.

Today 86 percent of marketers claim to actively use some form of social media as a main tool for marketing endeavors! Marketers and sales teams alike are eager to learn more about what tools are available to track returns on media investment, and to implement new methods to meet consumer needs.

Trends in Social Media Business Usage

As technology has evolved, an evolution in the way we communicate and carry out business has occurred. Ten years ago few marketers would have predicted that a social platform such as Twitter would become a serious marketing tool. Many advertising teams, however, have since taken the stance that much can be learned by using nontraditional platforms to learn about an audience and then tailor new marketing efforts from those findings.

Although the general prospecting search process is not dissimilar between professionals, some tactics and websites are more practical for different types of businesses. For example, while salespeople use media as a way to collect information for a personal client, many marketers use media on a much larger scale for a much different reason.

Social Media Examiner does a report each year to determine what efforts marketers and businesses alike are using to grow their social footprint. For their fifth annual report in 2013, the Examiner collected information from over 3,000 respondents.

From these respondents, it became clear that Business-to-Business (B2B) companies, such as large firms, have a specific social media preference that ties directly to their marketing habits. Platforms for professionals and media that allow these companies to reach large audiences tend to be favored over personal platforms, such as Facebook.

Another trend that became clear was that B2B companies use social media for a very specific purpose, and that social media is proving to be a beneficial way to generate leads, grow partnerships, and to improve sales.

Consequently, B2B companies excel in the use of media platforms such as LinkedIn when compared to other businesses models: a comparison of 86.4% to only 56.9%, respectively. LinkedIn is hardly a surprise for preference when considering the purpose of the website. More surprising is the desire to
make YouTube a more predominant platform, as well as blogging. Currently, 63% of B2B are active in blogs and similar media.

However, the most relevant finding in the report is that regardless of the social platform, 79% of marketers are actively implementing some type of social media into their day-to-day operations, with 62% of those marketers using media for at least 6 hours a week. What this also says is that businesses are becoming significantly more aware of consumer’s needs and wants, while being more productive in their time spent on media.

How to Prospect Via Social Media

PeekAnalytics is a social media analytics company that creates “Social Audience Reports” based on a process of marrying Twitter to 60 other social sites. The social audience report gives customers insight into who their followers are, who these followers are following, and creates data from hashtags, keywords, mentions and links to their company. This collection of data provides the customer with information about consumer demographics, geographic breakdowns, and information on customer’s interests.

Kaitlin Atkinson, a Business Development Manager for PeekAnalytics, works to sell this audience report to potential clients. Atkinson created for us a realistic picture of how salespeople and marketers alike are using social media in their daily operations. She, like many of today’s sales force does, opts for time-efficient ways to meet and introduce herself to potential clients.

Atkinson’s Market
The “beautiful” thing about selling media data, according to Atkinson, is that she “can work with an agency, brand, corporation or company.” Her preference for a client, however, is usually a Senior Vice President (SVP) of Advertising Sales Research.

An SVP of Ads can appreciate that social media data makes life much easier for advertisers to understand where their money is making a difference. Atkinson notes it is easier “to sell to the people that are making advertising decisions and reporting back to a client with audience data; these clients are easy to pitch to because they speak the same language.”
However, not every client is a SVP of advertising. Therefore salespeople such as Atkinson have had to evolve how they find people and how they go about creating that initial contact.

**Atkinson’s Prospecting Process**

Word of mouth is still a large part of Atkinson’s job. She hears about potential clients from existing clients, listens to the news, and keeps an ear open to updates on existing industries and companies.

Atkinson also visits the New York Public Business Library to take advantage of resources such as Factiva, LexisNexis, and Bloomberg Terminal. Although these are not examples of social media, using the information found on traditional search engines provides Atkinson with the knowledge necessary to start finding new prospects. By having information on industry conditions and financial statements at her fingertips, she is more likely to create a lasting business relationship with her new client.

Next, Atkinson has a simple and quick routine that she uses to get in contact with a potential prospect. The first website she goes to is Jigsaw. Jigsaw is a directory that builds upon itself by having an existing member fill out a profile for another person, which, in turn, earns access to other profiles. The purpose of her visit is to get an email address.

LinkedIn is a popular social platform that most professionals use to create contacts and keep up with old ones. From work experience to interests and current activities, LinkedIn provides a more personal look into the client’s life without getting too intimate. Atkinson looks at their picture, sorts through their experience, and takes a moment to get a feel for the person.

LinkedIn also provides a chance to look at the company profile. By opening the company’s profile, you typically get a general summary and the link to the company website, amongst other information. From here Atkinson clicks over to the company’s webpage to obtain the company’s annual report. By informing herself about the company’s financial standing, she presents herself as a knowledgeable salesperson with a credible platform to sell.

She also looks at the potential client’s personal Twitter if accessible. The concern for today’s marketer is the fine line between using media to create contacts and crossing over to creating friends—sometimes referred to as the “creep fact.” By looking at a personal Twitter account, Atkinson is simply looking for a better connection of interests between what she found on their LinkedIn page and what they truly spend their time talking about.
This whole process- Jigsaw, to LinkedIn and their Twitter account, to reading the annual report- takes her under 20 minutes. Atkinson stresses that her research is used to have conversation starters so she can create a relationship with the person in the short phone call she will end with. Furthermore, this method also provides her with a general knowledge of the person and/ or company for future references.

More than 70% of business-to-business companies specifically stated using social media for “intelligence-gathering,” which is exactly what Atkinson has done. Although this routine is tailored specifically to her needs, the same process is common for today’s professional. In a world full of smartphones, all these media sites are at each professional’s fingertip, along with a plethora of other options. Weather apps, email accounts, FaceTime and Skype, to the actual phone itself are all forms of social media tools that have aided in the growth of social media in business.

**Inbound & Outbound Prospecting**

In his book *Predictable Revenue*, Aaron Ross discusses the nature of prospecting. Covering a range of topics, the book focuses mainly on one thing: turning a sales team into a sales machine. Furthermore, Ross emphasizes two strategies throughout the book. First is the need for specialization. Second is using today’s technology to do the bulk of the work.

Ross suggests that sales teams begin with creating a clear definition of what an ideal customer looks like. Which companies are similar to existing clients, and therefore may be likely to use our service? Which companies hit our preference in x, y, and z? Questions like these allow for a concise picture of a prospect and create narrow criteria that a prospect must fit. This in turn produces more qualified leads.

Moreover, the way you get answers to these questions is equally important. The use of emails, blogs, and social media are all on Ross’ list as top ways to generate leads. However, in his section about blogging, Ross brings up a point that applies to all forms of lead gathering: the only way to be successful is to play by the “law of participation.” The law of participation implies that the sales person acts not just as a sales pitch, but also as an audience member who is taking time to build a professional relationship around the sale. Taking time to know your client and to build that relationship will then lead to the best form of lead generation- the referral. The best advertising is the word of mouth referral from an already happy client, according to Ross.

Although there is growth in the use and desire to use social media in business, social media is still an imperfect art. Many professionals agree that the main purpose of social media is to create brand awareness and find clients, but what they can’t seem to decide on is how to gauge the effectiveness of their media investments.
While 92% of marketers are using Facebook, how do they gauge if their efforts are bringing in additional revenue, customers, and interest to the company? The problem is most of these companies can’t gauge the returns, or don’t know how.

Software and analysts are able to monitor how many times an advertisement is clicked, how many page views are generated from a link, and possibly even the number of times a company’s brand is tagged or talked about on sites such as Twitter. Advanced organizations, like PeekAnalytics, are tracking these customer activities all the way to the sale, even when the sales process is taken over by someone like Atkinson. According to Debbie Qaqish, Chief Strategy Officer of the Pedowitz Group and author of Rise of the Revenue Marketer, companies such as GE, Sage, and Iron Mountain are all tracking marketing efforts all the way to the sale. In fact, IBM’s CMO survey showed 63% of chief marketing officers are not being evaluated on their ability to generate revenue.

**Conclusion**

Social media is doing more than shaping the way people interact on a personal level; social media is molding the way business is being handled. Furthermore, the technology that is growing alongside social media is changing the way business is conducted as well. Today, meetings can be held face-to-face with video conferencing in applications such as Skype and Facetime. While these are considered tools of social media, they are still greatly influencing the way buyers and sellers interact through social media. Additionally, it is important to consider the goal and type of business dynamic when choosing a social media. There is no one shoe fits all property to social media. Just as Atkinson has adjusted her routine through trial and error and media trends, other professionals are tailoring their routines to fit personal needs as well.

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