

# 5 Steps to Starting B2B Social Media Marketing Programs



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"Everywhere you find innovation today, a community is involved," Patricia Seybold, author of *Outside Innovation: How Your Customers Will Co-Design Your Company's Future*

## Executive Summary

Social media marketing defines a class of technologies or platforms that shift the creation of content from a central, enterprise-centric model to a user-generated one.

Useful, relevant content is an important currency for B2B marketers who are trying to get the attention of business buyers. In the context of social media, content is used to enlighten and educate buyers about the best practices for conducting business in your industry and then translate that attention into revenue. More attention equals more revenue.

The struggle continues to be in finding the resources to create and deploy enough thought leadership to invite the most amount of attention and repeat brand exposures.

Social media marketing platforms make significant contributions towards generating relevant content for your buyers, and reduce the load on marketing staff associated with creating thought leadership content every month.

These platforms are not intended to replace your existing website, newsletter, webinar, whitepaper, or analyst marketing programs, but augment them.

There is a great deal of opinion currently circulating about where to get started with social media marketing programs, but a consensus is starting to emerge based on these principles outlined as 5 steps:

Step 1: Start with the goal of improving an existing business process, for example, generating more leads. Put a number on it so later you can measure ROI.

Step 2: Pick an enterprise 2.0 platform to drive the business goal. The three most promising platforms for B2B marketers are:

- Social News (Bookmarking/Voting/Ranking/Tagging)
- Wikis
- Social Networks
- Blogs and RSS should be included in all of the above

Step 3: Decide whether to build internally or look for an outside vendor to host the platform

Step 4: Deploy and drive community adoption – Don't let the platform sit passively – Be the champion.

Step 5: Measure ROI against Step 1, and decide whether to increase or decrease social marketing efforts. Give the effort at least 6 months to drive value.

This document does not cover common 'web 2.0' marketing channels like Myspace, LinkedIn, YouTube, or Second Life. Rather, we are proposing that companies create, and control their own user generated content platforms and communities.

B2B is not like B2C when it comes to participating in social media (especially for the complex sale), which means you'll have to create programs that match your business objectives in a more direct and custom way.

Follow these five steps, and you can have a program up and running in days, and for less than the cost of creating a single webinar or whitepaper.

## Step One – Select a Business Objective

Much of the discussion around social media tends to focus on the technology and its corresponding buzz words. Blogs, RSS, or wikis, like all technology platforms, do not by themselves solve business problems.

It's important to think about what you are trying to achieve, or what you'd like to improve, and then select the technology platform that best fits.

The highest probability for success will occur if you use social media to make an existing process more productive as opposed to changing the way you fundamentally manage marketing programs.

Pick a single marketing outcome that can be enhanced by inviting outside contributors to generate content or thought leadership.

Set up specific, numeric goals. For example, if you are trying to drive more newsletter sign-ups or even new customers, set a modest goal for success. It can be simple such as 250 unique visitors each day and 10 new database opt-ins.

Some examples of marketing programs that can be aided with social media platforms and the outcomes that can be measured:

#### Demand generation

- Metrics: Visitors, conversions, prospects, opt-in signups, corporate website visits

#### Thought leadership and branding

- Metrics: Visitors, popular content (based on votes and page views), blogs and outside sources that link back to site, user comments

Internal collaboration – Create a central repository of internal marketing knowledge.

- Metrics: Number of employees using the platform in absolute or relative terms, total entries, usage trends

#### Search engine optimization

- Metrics: Popular keyword searches, Google Page Rank, visitors referred from search engines

## Step Two – Select Platform Technology

Now technology can come into play. There are three platforms and two universal technologies available for B2B social media marketing:

#### Platforms:

Social news  
Wikis  
Social networks

#### Universal:

Blogs  
RSS

It's important to note that each of these platforms should not be a passive repository of information that exists as an island outside of your website. Platforms need to have embedded tools so visitors can reach out to marketing or sales on-demand, at a time when they are likely to be sales ready.

Examples of communication channels that could be embedded in the system include:

- Click-to-Chat or Click-to-Talk
- Context sensitive ads that click through to your product site – Like Google does for keyword advertising, only all

the ads are for your products or those of your channel partners

- E-mail
- Flash demos
- Phone
- E-mail opt-in
- Free trial

## Platform Overview

### Social News

Set up like an online publication that covers your industry news, trends, tactics and strategies. Over time this becomes the aggregated source for all content that can help a business buyer do their job better.

A visitor submits any form of linked content (text, audio, video), tags it for search keywords, and writes a brief summary. Readers can vote on the most useful pieces. The most popular content by votes rotates to the top of the front page (see <http://www.beetoobee.com> for an example).

New potential prospects are drawn to the website by fresh, relevant content that is generated by their peers. The best content from across the internet that is related to your industry in one location and associated with your brand, and not your competitors.

### Applicable Marketing Programs

- Thought leadership
- Website traffic generation
- Demand generation
- Search engine marketing
- Opt-in database marketing

### Wiki

A structured webpage focused on a particular topic, but with the ability to have anyone who is pre-qualified (typically through registration) come in and edit the page. Wikipedia.org is the most well-known example with over 6 million user generated pages on a broad range of topics.

Wikis create central repositories of 'tacit knowledge'. Tacit knowledge refers to the information people carry around in their heads, but rarely write down or institutionalize.

Wikis are ideal for building an encyclopedic authority site for your industry. They can also be used to build an internal repository and collaboration tool for all company marketing information, projects, procedures, and materials.

#### Applicable Marketing programs

- Thought leadership
- Internal collaboration
- Database marketing
- Branding
- Search engine marketing – Google likes Wikis

#### Social Network

An online community for individuals to make themselves known to others with whom they would like to affiliate. Users build searchable profiles, upload images, and write about their interests. Members then invite each other to open up an online channel of communication based on common industry interests.

Social networks help customers and prospects help each other. Social networks will work well if your company relies on a large eco-system of customers, partners, prospects and employees. The value for revenue generation is less compelling with social networks than social news communities or wikis. However, the value for customer retention is very high.

Popular examples of social networks in the consumer world are MySpace and LinkedIn.

#### Applicable Marketing Programs

- Customer retention
- User group creation and growth
- Referral selling
- Case studies
- Recruiting and hiring

Universal technologies (should be embedded in any of the above three)

#### Blogs

Best known of the 'Enterprise 2.0' applications. Blogs are ongoing columns of thought and commentary from a single viewpoint. They are ideal forums for community leaders to share news, views and information with other community members and for thought leaders within your company to express themselves.

## RSS

Packaged headlines for all new content a platform generates. These packages are called 'feeds'. These feeds reside on a central webpage (or directly in the browser with IE7 and Firefox) alongside headlines from all the web properties for which an individual or group have elected to subscribe.

RSS is a critical daily reminder for an interested party to return to your branded platform, without having to remember on their own. It creates a permanent online connection between your brand and your business buyers. Think of it as a Microsoft Outlook reminder for content.

Popular RSS websites, also called 'readers' or 'start pages', include my.yahoo.com, reader.google.com, PageFlakes, and NetVibes.

## Step three – Pick an Implementation Method

The hosted software model is strongly encouraged for implementing an initial platform. Hosted applications or Software as a Service (SaaS) have crossed the 'early adopter' barrier and have reached the mainstream of corporate computing. It is now commonplace for enterprises of all sizes to host critical applications and data on platforms like Salesforce.com.

IT departments are getting up to speed on Enterprise 2.0 applications, but in many cases they are too busy or not well versed enough to deploy today.

Speed is critical, and if you can beat your competitors and be first to deploy a platform, you'll have an advantage from an attention and PR standpoint.

It's important to get IT involved up-front to run 'due diligence' on your hosted vendor. In fact, many IT departments prefer a hosted version of non-mission critical applications, because it decreases demand on their scarce resources. By simply making sure they are included up-front, you'll reduce or eliminate any objections in the final stages of the decision making process.

In deciding whether to implement a platform there three things to think about.

- Interacting with customers and prospects is good.
- Focus on one platform and one application.
- Keep costs low

It's strongly advised to start with a thought leadership/social news site. They are the easiest to implement and the easiest for which to submit content. For example, submitting a story at [www.beetoobee.com](http://www.beetoobee.com) is as easy as using e-mail. They are also the most active content-wise and invite the greatest number of visits.

Wikis are valuable, but can take more time to build up because each entry is written from scratch. Social news uses existing content to form a more immediate and complete picture of the 'state of the art' in your industry.

Social networks tend to favor participants who are already actively involved with your products. They are well suited to customer retention, but less so for generating new customers.

Here are the options in increasing order of time to market and cost:

- Have a vendor with pre-built, hosted infrastructure create a branded social media platform on your behalf.
- Use open source software and have IT install, deploy, and host – Open source software exists for all platforms outlined in this paper.
- Have IT design and build the platform on your web servers from scratch.

Keep costs low. If you are spending more than \$10,000 for a program, consider reducing the cost and complexity. After you evaluate results, you can decide whether to expand or contract your efforts.

## Step Four – Launch & Adoption – The Greatest Challenge

Picking a business objective, a platform, and an implementation method should be clear and logical. But, without an audience, social media marketing programs will not succeed. Adoption is

the most crucial step where your skills as a marketer will have the most impact.

You just need to get started.

There are two ways to launch new initiatives:

Soft – Internal – Start with key employees in the department, phase in the rest of company, and then customers, partners, and others. Once considered 'stable', then launch aggressive PR and marketing. Better strategy if you are starting with an internal application such as a wiki or with a social networking platform.

Hard – Instant BETA, instant feedback. This is more like the Web 2.0 ethos. Use your metrics from step one and determine what level of traffic you'll need to generate to achieve your goals. Put the site out there and invite everyone to participate. This is the best method for thought leadership and lead generation applications.

Assign an internal advocate, or use an intern who can monitor the site, scan industry articles and blogs, and add posts to jumpstart content generation. It only takes about 10-20 minutes every couple of days to add fresh content, and screen and delete content that is inappropriate or irrelevant.

Seed the content through the participation of committed customers, user groups, and employees. Have them invite other interested parties and leverage network effects. If you are first in your industry to deploy a platform, let everyone know through PR and by wooing key industry bloggers.

Feed all your demand generation campaigns through a social media marketing platform. That includes whitepaper downloads, webinar registrations, newsletters, and analyst reports. Publicize it on the front page of your corporate website.

Rather than capturing the hard fought attention of a business buyer once, they can add your branded platform to their RSS feeds and become repeat visitors. A new interesting article appears? Their RSS feed reader will alert them to click through. Now they are back at your brand, with a new round of attention that you've earned.

Be patient. Six months is the minimum point at which you should begin to measure against goals.

#### Internal selling

Social media is a fundamentally new way to create and collaborate internally and externally. If done right, it can significantly reduce the time and effort required to create content that drives revenue.

As with all marketing programs there is no guarantee of success. Success, however, will typically drive significant ROI. Push back against the naysayers, focus on your goals, get help in deploying the technology from vendors who can act quickly and customize to your needs.

Position it as an experiment using discretionary marketing funds. Think back when e-mail campaigns were new, or webinars, which started out as cutting edge experimental programs by early adopters, and are now mainstream marketing programs.

It's important to make sure a platform is not complex, and does not require significant resources and special skills to acquire, deploy, and maintain.

## Step Five – Measure and Evaluate Against Step One

In step one, you defined a business objective and put a number on it. Once you've deployed a social media marketing platform, people will start asking, 'so, how did we do?'

In this phase, it's time to take some measurements and see what the output looks like.

What can you measure with social media? Visits and pageviews are important, but also think about engagement metrics such as session lengths, votes, comments, clickstreams, and sales activity triggers.

What content is generating the most views? Is there a particular story that is driving newsletter sign-ups? What stories are getting the most attention? The most votes? You can use this as the foundation to create a whitepaper or webinar where you know there is interest.

If you are falling short, what can be done to help get the numbers going and drive justifiable ROI? Can you leverage more existing marketing programs to drive traffic? Or is it best to end the experiment?

If you are meeting or achieving your numbers, what can you do next? What platforms can you add to solidify your position as the industry experts?

Everything on the platform is measurable. Use the numbers as your guide.

## Summary

To get started in social media marketing, BeeTooBee strongly recommends the following:

### Step 1

You'll likely have the most success with your internal selling efforts by choosing a customer facing goal that contributes to revenue like lead generation, customer retention, or partner recruitment. Put specific numbers in place for succeed/fail. Make it a range, not a hard number.

### Step 2

Start with a social news/bookmarking/voting platform to drive daily fresh content and repeat visits by business buyers. Consider wikis and social networks as follow-on platforms. Embed communication tools into the platform to invite sales opportunities.

### Step 3

Have it hosted as a software service using a vendor with pre-built modules. Don't pay too much to get started.

### Step 4

Drive adoption like you would the launch of any other marketing program with PR and audience generation programs. Ask your brand community to participate from employees and the press and key bloggers, to loyal customers.

### Step 5

Take 6 months to decide whether to expand or contract your social media marketing program.

### Bonus Step

Contact BeeTooBee at [consult@beetoobee.com](mailto:consult@beetoobee.com) today to arrange a free consultation on how to get started with a social media marketing program that best meets your marketing objectives.

You can visit our product website at <http://www.beetoobee.com/productsite>

If you can't wait, call 415-420-5610. We can even help you create your internal presentation to sell these concepts to your co-workers. If done right, you'll be seen (or re-enforced) as an innovator in your company.