



## Introduction to Online Content Marketing

### How did we get here?

Technology experts make lousy predictors. The Millennium Bug was supposed to crash computers worldwide as the clock ticked over into the year 2000<sup>1</sup>, while two decades earlier, just as the first Apple desktop hit the market, the founder of computer equipment giant Digital Equipment Corporation insisted "there is no reason anyone would want a computer in their home". In the 1990s many staked their reputations on Apple's imminent demise<sup>2</sup>, while Time magazine assured us that "remote shopping" would never take off.

Even the most successful entrepreneurs can turn the wrong dial on the prediction meter. In 1989 Bill Gates announced that Microsoft would never make a 32 bit operating system. Four years later they did just that. He also claimed that spam

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<sup>1</sup> "Will the millennium arrive in darkness and chaos as billions of lines of computer code containing two-digit year dates shut down hospitals, banks, police and fire departments, airlines, utilities, the Pentagon, and the White House?" *Vanity Fair* 1999. Woops.

<sup>2</sup> "Apple is already dead." Nathan Myhrvold, former Microsoft Chief Technology Officer, 1997.



would be defeated by 2006 <sup>3</sup>. General Motors Chairman Roger Smith said all offices would be paperless by the turn of the century (the year 2000, not 2100!) and legendary IBM President Thomas Watson forecast the worldwide market for computers to be....five.<sup>4</sup>

For more accurate predictions you might look to some surprising sources. Trekkies love to remind us of Captain James T. Kirk's visionary use of a mobile device remarkably like a cell phone - beam me up Scotty! Older cinema goers remember the lasers wielded by Buck Rogers. Novelists can also be closer to the mark. HG Wells wrote of submarine based ballistic missiles, and in 1945 Arthur C. Clarke imagined communications satellites in geostationary orbit above Earth. Just as remarkably, in *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley foresaw test tube babies and genetic engineering two decades before Watson and Crick discovered the DNA double helix, and George Orwell showed us widespread CCTV in 1984 twenty years before it was first installed on a New York street. Perhaps most prolific was the 19<sup>th</sup> Century science fiction originator Jules Verne, who conceived of submarines, light-propelled spacecraft, videoconferencing and an eerily accurate lunar module.

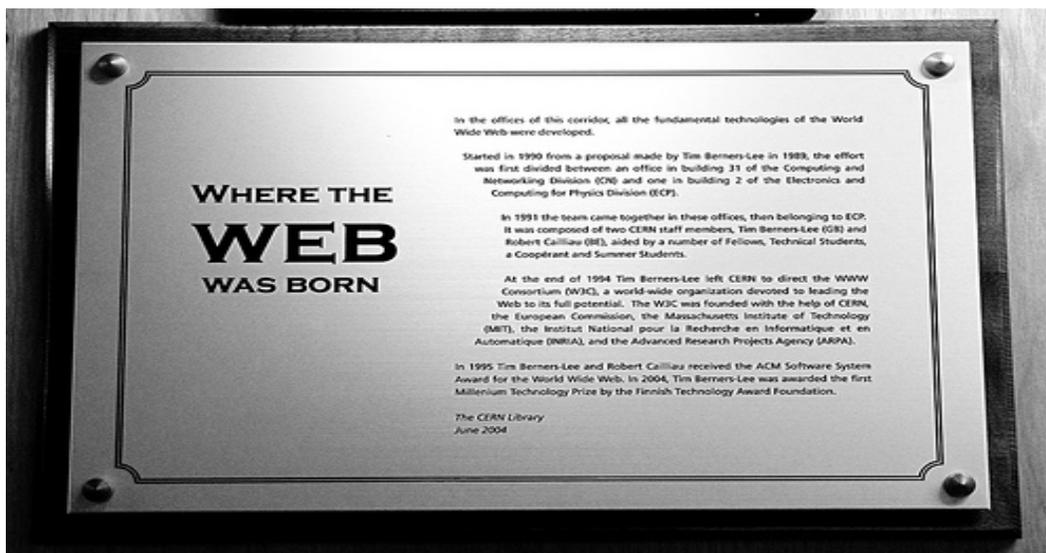
Of course there are true prophets as well. Thomas Edison's prediction that one day books might be read on hyper-thin metal sheets was an inspired premonition of the eBook reader. Others will cite Intel's Gordon Moore, who in 1965 forecast

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<sup>3</sup> I have an email from a bank in Nigeria that requires his immediate attention.

<sup>4</sup> Forrester Research predicts two billion PCs in the near future.

that that the number of transistors on a chip will double approximately every two years, popularly known as Moore's Law. He was right. In 1989 Tim Berners-Lee proposed a global hypertext project, known as the World Wide Web. And of course there are many more.



But no one – not anybody – really foresaw the rise of social media. To even pinpoint who invented social media we might as well go back 100,000 years to the first time humans swapped hunting tips. As recently as 2005, the BlogOn Summit in New York highlighted the breakthrough idea that markets are really conversations.

I offer two lessons here. First, expert opinion is sometimes just conjecture delivered with confidence. Second, leave room for the non-expert who relies on common sense and their own experience. That's you, by the way, especially if



you operate your own firm.

So here's something that is less prediction and more hard fact. As Technorati founder David Sifry explains: "The people formerly known as your audience, or the people formerly known as consumers, are now participants in the process of building your brand."

Yes they are. You can take that to the bank because it's already happened.

### **What is social media anyway?**

Social media is an umbrella term that includes blogs, social networking programs such as Twitter, Facebook and Google+, and professional networks like LinkedIn. Some might argue with this classification, but abstract debates are unhelpful in the real world of professionals. Just look for an online activity that's interactive, allows for collaboration between users and content providers, and promotes the ongoing delivery of information to others. This description happily encompasses hundreds of internet applications, but you only need to learn the basics of a few to begin your online adventure. We're also concerned with targeted website content and SEO (search engine optimisation).

That's the "what" – the "what it does" is summed up by Scott Monty, the head of social marketing at the Ford Motor Company: "Social media humanizes...creating a bond within and between employees and customers and helps to improve our reputation by putting our message in the hands of the people who are most likely



to be trusted”.<sup>5</sup>

For those who have previously faltered on this journey, I have both words of warning and reassurance. As you have no doubt discovered if you began this expedition on your own, for the most part it is uncharted territory. There’s no GPS system to program before you begin, let alone one of those archaic implements with intersecting lines and coloured grids<sup>6</sup>. Sadly, and as someone who has read very widely on the subject, there is precious little information out there for mature professionals that is intelligible, written in plain English, and succinct enough to justify the vast investment in time to track it all down. Like dating someone who is alluring but speaks a different language, the prospect is enticing but the missteps along the way can send you sprinting in the opposite direction.

The second problem is more subtle but no less confronting, and one I hear all the time - “I’m just too old for all of this”. This is surprising given the relatively young age of many who say this with such conviction, but if you dig a little deeper you’ll find it has more to do with a state of mind than the number of candles on their last birthday cake.

Here’s the scenario. You’re 45, or 50, or 55 – and absolutely, 60 and older too, and the so-called new social media marketing is just the latest in a long line of innovation that is, you are warned yet again, essential to your commercial

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<sup>5</sup> [www.scottmonty.com](http://www.scottmonty.com)

<sup>6</sup> Yes, a map.



survival. If you're closer to 40 you at least have a longstanding facility with the online world.

But social media? It's burst onto the scene with the speed of a bullet train, and really that's all you see, a flash of unfocused images as it streaks by, leaving you stranded on a remote platform. And you're only 52, for heaven's sake, you expect to work for at least another ten years! Look around, that platform is crowded with fellow professionals, and surprisingly, some of them work in firms a lot larger than yours.

This is indeed a cruel turn of events. You've followed the rules, worked hard, established a family and burdened yourself with a mortgage that seems to be making the bank (not you) a bundle. Perhaps you've chosen to pay for private schooling, and unlike the image popularised by vested interests, you don't drive a German supercar or follow the changing seasons from snow resort to beach house. In fact the closest you've come to a holiday home is that cubby house you built for the kids beside the sandpit in the backyard. But you're not complaining. You've established a profession, and though you set your alarm early, you accept that this is the way to get ahead. Sure, material gain is one of your goals, and the closer you get to retirement the more important that becomes, but what you crave most is security and the steady progress that hard work is meant to bring.

And now, along comes an adolescent to tell you that a tsunami is headed your way, and you'd better be prepared if you expect your firm to continue to grow. Okay, he's not really an adolescent, just a decade or two younger than you, but some days that feels like a chasm. And you resent the hell out of it, because his



attitude is just so superior, as though he knows something you don't (in fact he does). And as he takes a scalpel to your professional practices, you can't help but wonder if he has sweated for decades to master his trade, or like you struggled to put together a firm from the ground up. Does he truly understand the daily grind of the real world, not a fantasy cyber world?

Let's say you're closer to 55 or 60. On the one hand a nervous Government (of any stripe) urges you to work well into the future, at least until your self-managed superannuation savings are sufficient to plug the steady leak that is the social security system. In fact that superannuation carrot they dangle before your eyes with attractive tax concessions recedes a little more every time the budget or the stock market takes a hit. Retirement is a long way off, and though you dream of a less hectic life, you can't afford to even consider slowing down anytime soon. Worse, there's a pall hanging over your head that rarely lifts <sup>7</sup>. Despite the reassurance of your family and friends, who tell you to stop worrying so much, you know it's real. For you it's a persistent insecurity about the future, and a legitimate apprehension that you have less control of your destiny. Business coaches tell you to rationalise, prioritise, micromanage your day to maximise your productivity, and then go home to "enjoy your life". And now there's this social media fad that has suddenly appeared, out of nowhere, with sirens wailing to get onboard or be left behind.

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<sup>7</sup> Your therapist calls it "diffuse anxiety", but what does she know?

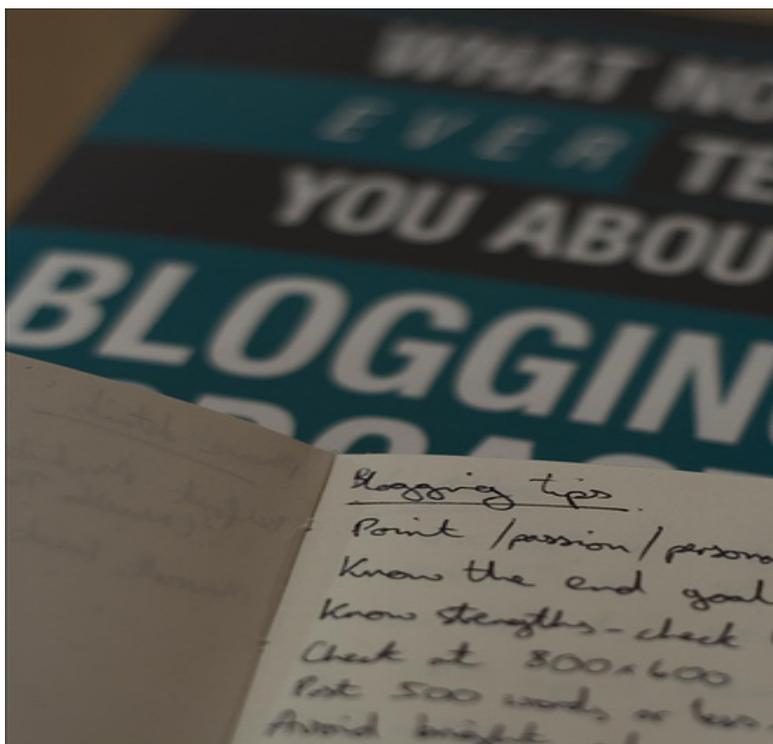


The signs are certainly out there to give credence to those warnings. Your immediate competitor in a building a few doors down, Julie, is a retirement planner with a similar firm profile and chasing the same market. She has markedly expanded her business following a determined social media campaign. You console yourself that she must have spent a fortune in consultancy fees, but you're wrong. She's worked hard to become social media savvy, and to target and optimise her website content to be more search engine and client friendly, but apart from the small outlay for a professionally designed blog, she's largely done it herself. How?

Robert, a fellow accountant in a nearby street, has broadened his client base and is better serving his existing clients with a social media strategy that seems beyond your grasp. He's on Twitter, LinkedIn, and has an impressive blog full of snappy information. You know this because a former client, now *his* client, has given you the URL and now you're sitting in front of your computer in awe of his technological skill and social media nous. You have some vague idea about Twitter (you wonder why anyone would care what their accountant had for lunch), a few friends have endorsed LinkedIn as a fantastic business networking tool, and you only know about Facebook because your teenage son scrutinises it with the same enthusiasm you once had for your footy card collection.

But it's the blog that really worries you. While your clients receive a monthly generic newsletter written by a consultant (it's the same newsletter that hundreds of her roster of accountants receive and then email onto their clients), *his* clients get a new blog post each week, all personalised to his practice and their needs, and written in a style that that is, well...friendly. Worse, it showcases a

personality that challenges the stereotypical view of the boring accountant that makes you look, in comparison, well...boring. Worse still, he sounds like a financial expert, a friendly and interesting expert! And you know he's appealing to a younger clientele, and that's the future of your firm.



You assume he's hired a high-priced consultant to achieve these results, and proclaim loudly it's not worth the expense, but you're wrong. Yes, it takes a few hours of his week, though he does it mainly away from the office, often as not over breakfast and coffee using the wireless network at a local café. He's also started to think of the blog as the most creative and oddly satisfying part of his working life, and he's getting better at it the more he posts. Sure he got some



initial help from a web designer and a staff member, but mostly he's learnt to do it on his own. How?

How indeed. You go online to search for clues, but there are no easy answers. Yes, there are hundreds of sites devoted to the minutiae of social media, blogging and optimised content, but as you quickly learn, more is sometimes less. In fact the plethora of sites and information only serves to make the learning curve appear immense, as though it must be especially complicated if it takes so many "experts" to make sense of it all. It's even more confusing because the internet is the graveyard of tracts of information that have long been superseded, but there they remain online, like a horror movie of the living dead. This is all the more unnerving because it suggests that the pace of innovation is relentless. Where there were once a few social bookmarking sites, there are now many dozens. Where Twitter was once derided as a silly pastime for pop stars, it's now an essential communication tool for business and professionals. Where LinkedIn was once a puffed-up online business card, it now challenges the utility of those professional networking lunches you reluctantly pencil into your planner.

There is a major disconnect here. Our nervous retirement planner and accountant see social media as a ruse, a conjurer's trick that might be explained if its secret was revealed to magically send business their way. This is both convenient and untrue. In all likelihood, the type of business owner who develops a content optimisation and social media strategy is also doing a lot of other things right. It's easy enough to believe a competitor has taken an unfair advantage, or



lowered their margins to pay a consultant, but you know there's more to it than that.

Ask yourself, why is our retirement planner Julie prepared to spend time learning about social media, or how to write a blog? The answer has nothing to do with trickery or narcissism. She does it because she's entrepreneurial. It's not traffic to her blog that has Julie's attention, but rather the traffic she can drive through the front door of the business *as a result* of her exposure via a blog. She's on Twitter because she wants to communicate with her customers, not follow the vain exploits of a minor celebrity. She's joined LinkedIn because she wants to be part of a retirement planners network, in fact she's been proactive enough to form a LinkedIn Group, where she hopes to gather valuable information from retirement planners here and abroad. Julie's online focus is a statement about who she is, what she wants from her business, and the way she goes about getting it. She puts in the hard yards, and she's open to new ideas if they are presented coherently within the context of her real world experience. It's no wonder this has all come together in her growing success. She also knows that these social media tools and her website are part of her branding – she places their icons on everything she can.

By the way, did we mention that Julie is 53?

Robert, the accountant who has used social media to reach out to clients, has followed a similar path. He was also lucky enough to get some useful advice from a more experienced colleague before he mapped out a social media strategy of his own: "Start slowly, get your feet wet, and learn as you go. But whatever you



do, make sure you start, that's the most important thing, otherwise the inertia will kill you.”

Useful advice indeed. But where do you go from there?

### **What content optimisation and social media means for you**

“Social media is hot. And for businesses it represents a marketing opportunity that transcends the traditional middleman and connects companies directly with customers. This is why nearly every business on the planet – from giants like Starbucks and IBM to the local ice cream shop — are exploring social media marketing initiatives.”<sup>8</sup>

Content optimisation and social media are not foremost marketing tools, though you'd hardly know it given the way it's hyped to small business and professionals. Anyone who has watched an episode of the ABC program *The Gruen Transfer* knows that marketers will appropriate any form of media for their own purposes, thus we now hear industry terms like “a marketing communication tool” to describe social media. Don't believe this nonsense. Social media is not a substitute for more traditional forms of marketing, in fact it is not analogous to marketing at all, though traditional advertising has now found a cozy home on blogs and other social media. Of any social media tool, LinkedIn is probably the closest to traditional marketing, in that it markets *you*. As for the rest of the new media, they are primarily communication tools.

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Stelzner, founder SocialMediaExaminer.com



The heart of social media and content optimisation lies in its authenticity, and for many users this is precisely why they reject the marketing tag. They don't want to be in the same category as passive radio or television advertisers, and instead prefer to identify with the "social" aspect of the media, which is unmistakably interactive compared to earlier technologies. For small business and professionals, social media is the opportunity to communicate with customers or clients, and always in the context of a relationship.

Of course some businesses try to bend social media to a role that suits their marketing goals.

Let's look at the efforts of two self-managed superannuation advisors, Patrick and Stephanie, who each operate client blogs <sup>9</sup>. Patrick see the blog as a marketing tool. It's a monotonous stream of colourless posts about the firm's strategies, available client packages, and office dynamics that are a ham-fisted attempt to create familiarity ("Our Office Manager Kel is off to Bali for ten days. Bring us back more than a tee-shirt!"). Through the blog, he aims to market his firm as an elite enterprise whose clients are privileged to access his expert advice. Interest to clients? Close to zero. Social media does not like braggarts. It favours modesty, transparency and selflessness. That's why it's a community, and a fairly egalitarian one at that. The very architecture of social media platforms makes this inevitable. Just as the rules of a sport regulate what

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<sup>9</sup> We deal in full with blogs in our MatureMedia Guide *Get Started With A Blog* but for now it's enough to know that a blog is a web site where you write on an ongoing basis. Those writings are called "posts".



happens on the field, so social media imposes standards of behaviour that favour inclusiveness and sharing, whether it's comments on your blog, referrals to articles on Twitter, or a professional discussion group on LinkedIn. It doesn't take more than five minutes on most social media platforms to work this out.

Stephanie sees content optimisation and social media as a way to communicate with her clients, to nurture their business, and ideally add value to the client relationship. She hopes to educate them about self managed superannuation, so she's not threatened by their feedback or collaboration. She uses her blog and optimises her website content to cut through the detachment that has traditionally characterised the relationship of financial advisors to their clients. Her blog is a reflection of her personality, her professional ideals, and her strategic goals. Interest to her clients? High and getting higher. Lately she's flattered that growing numbers mention aspects of her writing, or broach an issue raised in a blog post, or have posted comments on the blog (prompting an immediate return phone call). She's also quick to respond to events. A sudden drop in the stock market, from her experience a jolt to her self-funded retiree clients, will mean a late night at the computer but a thankfully reassured clientele the following morning.

Why is she successful in her new media efforts? Because she understands content optimisation and social media *for what it is*, a communication tool that has a marketing benefit. She doesn't try to corrupt the medium to clumsily market herself, but instead works within the boundaries imposed by the technology and its organic growth in the hands of users.



Professionals, more than small business operators, have a hard time with this. They are trained by universities, and then later by their peers, to see themselves as an elite with proprietary skills. This does not translate well to the world of social media, where the consumer has the real power. Get labeled a spammer or abuser or self-promoter and you will face the wrath of the mob (or worse, the Google search engine). This is why it's crucial to understand each platform, be it blogging or web content on WordPress, Twitter, LinkedIn or Facebook. You must be prepared to accommodate the cultural norms of each of these tools, and accept that though you "own" your blog and other social media, you don't have sole ownership of it as you might of the intellectual property developed by your firm. Think of it the same way as a regulatory agency that sets standards for the operation of your profession, except that social media is regulated both by the terms of usage of each platform and its organic growth over time, like the court-made common law that has accrued to sit side by side with laws made by Parliament.

## **Networking on the social network**



You're at a get-together of your local professional organisation, or perhaps a business association that organises a monthly buffet. Or it might be a lunch break



in a day of seminars you are required to attend to maintain your professional accreditation. However you got there, you are in a room full of fellow businesspersons or professionals. What happens now (or for some of us a better question might be, “what am I meant to do now”)? Discuss a professional or business concern, complain about the latest Government interference in your working life, or swap tales of recalcitrant clients or customers? For others it will be your football team, or a spicy morsel of gossip that is making the rounds.

What you are “meant” to do is leverage this opportunity “to network”, not shake a few hands and then seek the refuge of a familiar face. The aim? To generate new business, though it’s rarely clear how this happens other than the customary exchange of business cards. What is achieved at these events? For most of us, apart from yet more business cards destined for the bin, this is a colossal waste of time.

It’s a pity, because there are plenty of business operators and professionals who want to deepen their contact with colleagues. But ask a small business owner to prioritise their time, and no doubt networking will fall well below an extra hour’s sleep. And then there’s the awkwardness of it all. Some people are born networkers, they love to spruik themselves to a room full of strangers, but they are the minority.

Step back for a moment to see what is really happening in that room. Clearly many participants are not eager to be there, and the ones at ease have probably found someone they already know (defeating, of course, the whole purpose of the event). Sure, some are smiling, and others are mingling as well, but it’s



guaranteed a lot more have an eye on the clock and their mind on a strategic calculation – when the hell can I get out of here without being the first to leave, and what’s my excuse (“got to get back to the office”)?

Now let’s adjust that scene.

There are many more participants, they are all in a similar line of work or business, and they remain in a shared space. But halleluia, you don’t have to leave the office, or your warm bed at 6 a.m. if it’s yet another “business breakfast” (which demented Type-A personality came up with that idea?), and you can manage your networking needs incrementally as time allows, not when an invitation dictates. Let’s make a few more changes. Those business cards are now your URL, the “w.w.w.” of your website, which also has an integrated blog. Maybe you have a Twitter account, or best of all, an account with LinkedIn, a social media tool that was conceived to showcase your talents across an online network.

What will you learn from a handshake and a perfunctory greeting at a business breakfast? Not much. Now ask instead what you can learn from that person’s LinkedIn profile? Plenty, and in time plenty more. Not only will you know their background and professional/business experience, but remarkably, you will also discover whom you both know in common. If that’s not enough, they can also introduce you to people that they alone know. Think about that. Not only can you be in the same (virtual) room, but you can also have access to others who are not there but might also benefit your career or business because they know the person you just met. And here’s the kicker – you can learn plenty about *those*



people as well. And then about the people those people know, almost ad infinitum. In other words, it's a true network.

What else can you learn from that handshake at 7 a.m. while you balance a plate of scrambled eggs on your knee? How can you gauge a participant's expertise, or gain insight onto their thinking, or their knowledge of accounting or law or whatever else you want to know? You can't. Now let's suppose you have access to their blog, and 20 or 30 or 100 articles they have posted for their clients or customers. If you have a Twitter account, you can also check out what they're learning from other businesspersons or professionals. In fact you're going to form a well rounded view of them, including what they know and the ways they work. And that might mean you want to look more closely at some of their ideas, or the ideas of those they admire. You might even want to communicate with them, or comment on a blog post, or pass on an article or two via your own Twitter account, or check them out on LinkedIn and then add them to your own LinkedIn network. Whatever you do, it will be accomplished quickly and efficiently, because that's another dividend of social media, it rewards economy.

That's our introduction to content as a marketing choice for mature professionals. Let's now move on to content optimisation for mature professionals.