



## **The Business Case For Content Marketing**

### **The Middle Way**

Buddhism is known as the Middle Way because it promotes a path between extremes. Your initial charge at online content optimisation and social media should follow a similar course, smack in that middle ground, far from the extremes of inertia on the one hand, and “bet the house” risk taking on the other (and no, you don’t have to become a Buddhist). The best advice is to avoid both the naysayers and the evangelists, and stick to the middle path of reasonable returns from available resources, always with an eye to the future.

That middle path must also be in good repair. Content optimisation and social media won’t help a firm with dysfunctional habits. What it can do for professionals, and do very well, is build on a solid foundation, much like adding a second storey to a well-constructed house to increase its value.

With that in mind, let’s begin our business case with word of mouth. Why? Because it’s a middle path concept, whose course is familiar and true.





## **The Business Case 1 – Word Of Mouth On Steroids <sup>1</sup>**

Business operators, no matter what they do – professionals, tradespeople, retail, manufacturers, service providers – all have contacts, trusted associates, satisfied customers and clients with whom they have built an affiliation. This is a vast marketing resource of referrals, a real world network that forms organically around businesses and firms. Not surprisingly, given what we have already learnt, these networks have rapidly migrated to social media.

As Andy Sernovitz has noted in his excellent book *Word of Mouth Marketing*, to gain these referrals you ought to:

- give people a reason to talk about you; and
- make it easier for that conversation to take place.

He suggests you should also:

- be interesting;
- provide excellent service;
- earn trust and respect;

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<sup>1</sup> An evocative phrase of Gary Vayerchuk. More about him later.



- make it easy for a customer or client to get a snapshot of your firm or business, a small nugget that can be passed on;
- help the message spread faster and farther; and
- be prepared to join the conversation.

As we will see, these benchmarks correspond with much of what content optimisation and social media has to offer. In fact, an online strategy to gain word of mouth referrals is bound to fail if it does not reflect the existing model of client relationships of the business.

According to the *Nielsen Global Trust in Advertising Survey*, 78% of people trust word of mouth, and for us this is good news, because social media is very much the new word of mouth <sup>2</sup>. In fact, the proliferation of social media, together with the increasing presence of consumers online, has reinvigorated traditional word of mouth.

Professionals know that referrals work. A happy client will generally share that experience with others (they'll share the bad ones, too). As he so often does, marketing expert Seth Godin captured this perfectly: "Before advertising, there

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<sup>2</sup> According to the same survey, only 14% trust advertising.



was word of mouth. Products and services that could solve problems got talked about and eventually got purchased.”<sup>3</sup> It’s really that simple.

In this regard social media is a throwback to a time before mass marketing, when word of mouth carried the message that moved the product. Today, Amazon.com is the prime example of an internet-based business that has leveraged word of mouth to market its product line. There are now tens of millions of consumers (the author is one of them) who check out the reviews on Amazon before they buy a book, or wireless headphones, or an office chair. Millions more would not think of taking a holiday before they consult Tripadvisor, where they can read apparently endless consumer reviews of hotels, airlines, resorts and associated travel services. McKinsey and Co. estimates that two-third of the economy is now influenced by personal recommendations, much of it accelerated by the internet.

If word of mouth is a driver of business, then the real-time interactive nature of social media is a godsend. We tend to listen to word of mouth recommendations from complete strangers because they don’t have a vested interest in what we buy, and just as we like to hear what others have to say, we also like to share our own opinions. But when we say nice things about ourselves it’s just...well, arrogant. When others say nice things about us, and that source is reliable, it’s

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<sup>3</sup> *Purple Cow: Transform your Business by Being Remarkable* by Seth Godin.



the best type of endorsement. Nothing comes close. This is where social media shines.<sup>4</sup>

With its networking affect backed by the massive reach of the internet, social media has kicked word of mouth into overdrive. For business, it's word of mouth on steroids.

Now, let's follow this argument a little further down its logical path. Nowadays search engines like Google are the dominant directory source for businesses and professionals. It's where people go to find everything, including any business or professional. We also know that social media and optimised website content can improve the search engine ranking of a business or professional firm.

So if:

- word of mouth has retained our confidence as the preeminent human referral source, and social media and online content foster those referrals via the internet; and
- search engines are the dominant professional directories; and
- content optimisation and social media can also optimise business and professional search engine rankings;

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<sup>4</sup> In his book *Socialnomics*, Erik Qualman cleverly calls social media "world of mouth".



then a social media and online optimisation campaign that improves both word of mouth and search engine rankings is the best strategy.

## **The Business Case 2 - Changed Thinking**

In our *MatureMedia Guides* you will learn how to leverage the word of mouth opportunities of online content optimisation and social media. But let's start with a few Spring cleaning tips, or if you prefer drills to disinfectants, how about a renovation of sorts? Think of it as clearing out the attic, or adding an extra room, something with a small desk and some decent lighting. Maybe a picture or two on the wall. <sup>5</sup>

Let's look first at the professional mindset. Professionals work for the best outcomes on behalf of their clients, that's the bottom line guarantee every client expects from the transaction, but sometimes professionals avoid the messy necessity to consult their clients every step of the way. Essentially there's nothing wrong with this as long as the client has approved the general strategy. Just as often the client is satisfied to leave the running to an experienced professional who has gained their trust, and the professional equally prefers to get on with the job.

That sort of mindset might be appropriate for a professional as a service provider, but it won't pass muster when you take that client relationship online. When you write a blog, or create online content that explains an aspect of your service (e.g.

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<sup>5</sup> I have one of a young Bob Dylan in concert at the Albert Hall that would work just fine.



a Q&A page on your website) or tweet, or share information on LinkedIn (where prospective clients might check you out), the gap between you and your client is going to shrink. It's in the DNA of social media – online content at best is a communication between *trusted* individuals, and nowadays is seen as non-negotiable. That's why it's a potent tool for enhanced word of mouth. The miracle of social media is that this trust is not only promoted between you and your current clients, but also between you and complete strangers who find you online, and from there exponentially outwards because of the compounding effect of the network. <sup>6</sup>

The mindset of mature professionals will also be challenged. Countless mature professionals strive for a more strategic outlook, or resolve to get advice about the internet. Why do these intentions remain dormant? In part because many mature professionals have an emotional tie to their businesses, and though they despair at inertia, they fear even more the consequences of thinking (and acting) outside the box.

It's all too easy for consultants to urge mature professionals to leave their comfort zones, but there's not a lot of comfort in the extra hours of work done at home, the early mornings and late nights, and most of all the anxiety. Is it any wonder they shrink from the juggernaut shift to online services and social media?

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<sup>6</sup> If you want a quick illustration of this effect, join LinkedIn and see what happens after you have signed up a few people to your network. You'll soon see the network effect of social media. It's astonishing.



So what is a mindset that mature professionals know and trust, that is not “outside of the box” and therefore, if it can be leveraged, unlikely to provoke anxiety or inertia? It’s something they know from their everyday experience, that sense of “community” their clients feel when service is personalised and expectations are exceeded. Once more this is where content optimisation and social media optimisation shines.

Starbucks famously uses the internet to create a community around its brand. It sounds silly because essentially we’re talking about a relationship with a cup of coffee, but it works. In his book *Onward*, Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz nails the real benefit of social media channels and the commercial mindset it requires – “(businesses) are looking at these channels as an opportunity to sell something, as an opportunity to create more revenue. That is a manifestation of these channels but should not be the primary reason for them to exist. The primary reason they exist is to share and engage with customers in a way in which you are making a deposit in the reservoir of trust as opposed to a withdrawal. In a withdrawal, every time you try to sell something or ask someone to do something, it is not building authenticity. So these channels for us have given us the ability to engage with customers in a very, very powerful way.”

The perfect description of the community with clients and customers that is fostered by content optimisation and social media.

### **The Business Case 3 – How We Got Here**

Most successful professionals (especially if they have established their own firm) have a well-worn tale about how they got started, and it usually goes something





like, “I did some work for W and he told X and eventually I landed an important client Y who referred me to some of his friends and colleagues and after that we grew slowly but steadily”.

What do most of these stories have in common? At some point we have all benefited from the networking affect of good word of mouth, though of course some of us are better than others at gaining referrals because, to use a much travelled Yiddish word, they have more chutzpah. They are just better at putting themselves out there. Sure, there are classes you can attend to finesse these skills, but to a large extent it’s a reflection of personality. Not better or worse, just different. There are many lawyers who can act decisively in their offices, on the phone, or in a negotiation, but cannot shine before a court. In the restaurant industry some management is “front of house”, others prefer to stay behind the kitchen doors. One is no better than the other, just different.

In this respect content optimisation and social media is a great business and professional democratiser. It’s basics can be learnt, whether or not you have networking or self-marketing skills. The goal is the same for everyone, to make your firm more “referable”.

John Jantsch, in his terrific book *The Referral Engine*, contends that advertising and marketing campaigns are out of reach of many businesses, including smaller professionals, who therefore rely on word of mouth to find new clients. What is needed nowadays to secure referrals is “content, connection and community”:





**Content** – blogs and online content optimisation in particular, or micro-blogging (e.g. Twitter) that point to your content, is the “new currency of marketing”, as Jantsch calls it.

**Connection** – this is the paradox of online communication, a technological innovation that allows people to interact in such a typically human way.

**Community** – online content, whether on your website or social media, creates community over the tyranny of distance, within the same city or different countries. It’s about taking the opportunities available through newer technologies and distribution channels to communicate directly with clients.

Surprisingly for some, key success indicators are just about the same whether the community is formed online or by human interaction. What works in the real world will likely succeed in the online world, albeit by different means. These similarities create synergies between the two, so where both are engaged, an effort in one will inevitably boost the other.

### **The Business Case 4 – Changing Hats**

Social media is a content strategy, more akin to publishing than the customary strategies we might find in a standard business plan. In every other aspect of your firm you need appropriate commercial skills. In this one area, however, those same skills can be more hindrance than help. What’s needed is a different perspective.

Dr. Edward de Bono developed the idea of “thinking hats” to attack business problems from singular perspectives. Each hat represents a state of mind, for





example emotional, creative or informational. It reminds us to wear different hats for different business needs, each appropriate to that need, otherwise we tend towards unfocussed thinking and cluttered perspectives. When it comes to content optimisation and social media, you need your publishing hat and its perspective. That way you can propose the strategic questions a publisher might ask. What are the information needs that I can address on behalf of my clients? How can I take that opportunity, those unmet needs, and communicate a compelling response?

There is a simple reason many professionals cannot create compelling content – they don't have anything interesting to say, or what they do have to say would be returned from a publisher with a big fat rejections slip. This appears to be a straightforward creative problem, but that's only the case if you believe you must wear a creative hat to produce business content. It's a golden oldie you probably learnt back in your schooldays, with the hackneyed refrain, "I'm just not creative". You're older now, and though it's indeed hard to pick at the scab of wounds suffered at school, you need to remind yourself that content optimisation and social media is business all the way. Publishers create information to make a profit, just as you create online content to profit your firm.

Published content is just another distribution arm for your firm, and with that subtle change in perception a torrent of ideas will follow. All that's needed is a publishing mindset. If you are going to write a report for your clients to share, think like a publisher who knows the needs of their readers. Think in terms of user generated content, not content that is focused on *your* needs as a professional. Ask yourself, what are our client's pain points? Wearing my





publisher's hat, what is the best way I can address this need? How can I make it interesting for them?

I can already hear the screams out there. Think like a publisher? I advise people about retirement planning. What the hell do I know about publishing?

You know plenty. I don't care whether you only read the newspaper sports section or religiously check out the New York Time Book Review on your iPad every Sunday. How about television commercials? Seen any of them lately? Do you pay attention to a particular news network, or read a specialist magazine? Do you listen to the radio? Have you noticed why some talkback calls engage the host while others are given short shrift? Consciously or not, you already recognise everything there is to know about the content you like and don't like in the media.

Now take that knowledge and put yourself in the shoes of your clients.

Presumably you already know their needs, otherwise you wouldn't have come this far in your professional life. For you, the only issue is which hat you wear when you fulfill that need. If it's a service issue, you wear your service provider's hat; if it's a management issue, that's the hat you wear; if it's a design issue, you'll be reaching for that well designed hat. And if it's an issue that can also be advanced by an online content strategy, then a publisher's hat will do nicely. Clearly your core business is not publishing, but for online content that's your core role. A publisher is a broker of information. That's it. That's your role.





## The Business Case 5 – We Do Whatever Is Easiest

For those mature professionals who see the end of their working life in the near future, or serve a small and exclusive clientele (such as boutique financial services for the very wealthy), social media might not have much to offer. But for those who belittle social media as a tool for angst-ridden teenagers, or choose to cast their lot with what they already know, the bad news is that a growing segment of your market will increasingly prefer to use the internet to find products and services – *your* services.<sup>7</sup>

Nielsen reports that Australians spend nearly 20 hours a week on the internet, and contrary to the youth-oriented hype, those over 50 spend at least as much time on the internet as watching television. Many parents now confirm that their teenage children are leaving the television in favour of their computers. News agencies daily report the anxieties of bricks and mortar retailers faced with the growing competition of online suppliers. Forrester Research suggests that Australian-based online retail sales are expected to nearly double between 2009 and 2015. As a percentage of online Australian internet use:

- 73% of users read reviews, discussions and comments on brands, products and services at some stage;
- 46% have clicked the Facebook Like button for a brand/organisation;

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<sup>7</sup> "Growth in search has outstripped the growth in directories and what I would say is that the majority of that growth comes from the migration of businesses into search" *Interactive Advertising Bureau Expenditure Report* compiled by PricewaterhouseCoopers



- 43% discussed or commented on a product, service or brand;
- 42% have interacted with a company through social network sites;
- 33% posted reviews on products or services.

Interestingly, amongst Australians using the internet, 59% have watched a brand-product related video online and 30% have listened to an online review of a brand, product or service.<sup>8</sup>

These users don't bother to search hard copy directories and newspapers to find goods and services. It's not because they are technology buffs (they're not), or want to imitate their children or younger colleagues (they don't). They do it because it's easier, and likely one of these days they will find your firm online just because it was easier – *if you're there to be found* - and a strong key to that will be the quality of your online content. One thing is for certain, they already expect to find you there. It probably goes without saying that you'd also want to be there the first time they search for your product or service. As Mediacom's Nic Hodges provocatively asks in his presentations, "Are you being outpaced by your customers?"

In the end the business case for online content and referrals has nothing to do with a technological superhighway or an interlinked world. Really, it's just what's

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<sup>8</sup> *The Nielsen Online Consumer Report*



easier for consumers. As a bonus they get to exert greater control over the way they choose the goods and services and interact with other consumers.

Ease coupled with self-empowerment. That's a powerful formula.

Still not convinced? Nielsen estimates that internet users spend more than twice the amount of time on social media than any other online activity. Still not really convinced (boy, you're a hard sell, though that can be a good thing). Here's an interesting story that will give you an idea of what the big players are thinking – and when it comes to big, there is no bigger than Google. CEO Larry Page distributed a company-wide memo that 25% of the staff's annual bonus would in future be directly tied to the success of Google's social strategy. Why does Google care about social networking? Aren't they already super successful doing just what they do? They care for the same reason you should. They want internet traffic, and content optimisation and social media are increasingly the driver of that traffic. In this regard it make no difference if you are Google or a small business or professional, the principle is the same.

## **The Business Case 6 – The Evolution of ROI & KPI**

The natural objective of any traditional marketing campaign is to increase sales or customer numbers, and the marketing channel (usually advertising, but it can be cold calling, direct mail or whatever) is assessed by its return on investment (ROI).

Traditional advertising seeks to persuade consumers to change brands, to make a purchase, or to prefer one business or professional over another. Social media





focuses instead on engagement and collaboration, so its results cannot be calibrated in the same way as an advertising campaign (“we spent \$100,000 for a 6 month radio campaign, and in that time business increased 6%, to which we attribute 4% as directly a result of the campaign. This translates to \$300,000 increased revenue, therefore a net gain of \$200,000 plus the flow-on effects of increased referral business due to the now larger customer base and repeat business from newly attained customers”).

Does this mean that social media fails to achieve the same exactitude? No, but it’s worth some degree of skepticism. The number of Twitter followers, or connections on LinkedIn, or Facebook fans are not a strategic measure of business or professional success. You need more. Hewlett Packard strategist Liz Philips sums up this dilemma: “Sales figures are transactional and (obviously) measurable, but we know most buyers are in the funnel long before a sale takes place. I would love to be able to tell management exactly which sales were converted as a result of social media. I’d also like to identify which customer complaints were turned into happy experiences, leading to a continued relationship with the brand , thanks to social media.”<sup>9</sup>

Key Performance Indicators (KPI) are the measurement data that help organisations understand how well they perform in relation to stated strategic goals. This is a routine quantitative measurement used by businesses

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<sup>9</sup> *Eloqua Social Media Pro Book*



everywhere to make better informed decisions and scrutinize their objectives. So what about online content? What KPI's should we measure?

First, it's important to know that designated software can measure almost anything that happens online, in fact for most small business and professionals there is too much to measure. Let's say you want to gauge interaction with your customers through social media. In that case you might look at page views, unique page visitors, or active contributors; if the criterion is distribution then you might look at inbound links, blog followers, and numbers who refer to your business or firm; if the criterion is search engine optimisation then you might look at any increase in numbers for keyword searches <sup>10</sup>.

There are plenty of consultants who can access enough statistical data from your content optimisation and social media to make your head spin. Want to do it yourself? As we will see, analytics are available to you for every single page of your web site and blog. The issue is not what measures you choose to examine, but how many.

Of course you're entitled to be skeptical about any measurement that does not objectively "show you the money". However, most analysts agree that a genuine KPI measures both financial and non-financial advancement towards a strategic goal.<sup>11</sup> There is also a question of perception – from whose point of view do we

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<sup>10</sup> We discuss all these terms in later *MatureMedia Guides*.

<sup>11</sup> "The barriers relating to ROI and establishing KPIs have declined significantly. The benefits of a social media strategy are now being acknowledged by more businesses with only 16 percent of



interpret these measurements? The bookkeeper might see this differently than the sales manager, who for their part must look beyond immediate revenue returns to a long term strategy to build the customer base. This is not easy to measure in any business.

So productive Key Performance Indicators for social media and online content must also be defined in terms of:

- growing your firm;
- the reality of changed consumer behaviour, including the increasing influence of social media (and the cost of getting left behind);
- the massive switch by consumers to search engines, and the flow-on from online strategies that boost search engine rankings and therefore make your firm more “findable”; and
- the longer term returns on time invested now.

If that seems like spin to exempt online content from the strict scrutiny of KPI metrics, it's worth noting that simplistic cost/benefit formulas break down every day when they are not defined within an appropriate context. Time is money, rates of return, metrics to calculate return on investment – these are essential in

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businesses finding it difficult to measure the ROI of social media activities..” *The Nielsen-Community Engine Social Media Business Benchmarking Study*





any business decision making. But let's look more closely at just one of these calculations.

What do we mean when we say, "time is money"? That we should never make a phone call when a text message will do, even though there may be non-financial benefits in terms of personal contact? Does the term reflect the present-value of time expended (e.g. your dollar earnings today divided by the amount of working hours it took to earn it) or should it also take account of projected future returns from current efforts? What if that investment in time creates an intangible capital asset that will appreciate in value, for example the goodwill of your firm? Should that also be reckoned in a "time is money" calculation?

Let's look at that same concept, "time is money", in the online world. Critics often point out that DIY content optimisation and social media has a cost, both a real cost and an opportunity cost, in terms of working hours and return on investment. Time expended to produce online content is certainly a cost to business, and of course must be counted as such, but it's also an opportunity for multiple returns on investment. This is commonly referred to as "repurposing". Don't confuse this with "republishing", which is a mere duplication of the content.

For instance, you:

- make a speech or seminar and use the text to create a blog post or series of posts;
- film the speech or seminar for your blog and/or YouTube using a cheap and easy to use Flipcam;





- use the PowerPoint slides from that speech or seminar to post a SlideShare presentation on your blog or LinkedIn;
- turn a series of blogs into a downloadable PDF document;
- send the blog post to an article directory website like ezinearticles.com;
- share the content on Twitter and Facebook;
- pose a question on the blog post and use that to encourage commentary by clients;
- create a podcast from a seminar or speech with any of the readily available and free podcast software;
- create an eBook from a series of posts.

Admired Ford Motor Company head of social media, Scott Monty, neatly addressed this issue:

“A direct impact to sales may not be immediately felt, but there are other things that can be measured that lead back to ROI. For example, if social media is used to create brand awareness or to improve reputation, what is that worth? Or if customer insights gleaned from social networks lead to a better business process or practice, how can that drive cost efficiencies? Or in the customer service arena, how much was saved by eliminating unnecessary calls to the call center? These are different ways to measure the impact of social media, whether or not it’s directly tied to revenue”.





One last word about KPI's. As an entrepreneur, you have an intuitive knowledge of whether a marketing strategy works or not *because you know your own business*. That intuition is worth enormous respect because it's likely been hard earned.

### **The Business Case 7 – Up Against Bigger Competition**

We cheer for the underdog, which is why this is probably the best known of the business cases. An optimised online presence allows you to take on the big players, though this is sometimes oversold because the Goliaths in this battle often have bottomless budgets to support these efforts. But gone are the days when larger competition was allowed to simply dominate the game to the extent that you abandoned the ring before the opening bell. Of course there have always been upstarts, in fact Facebook was the ultimate upstart because it took on MySpace, the then dominant player in the social networking universe, and beat them into submission.

Do you have a unique selling proposition, one that perhaps takes advantage of your smaller size relative to a bigger player in the same market? Can you more precisely narrow your target market and then speak directly to them? Can you emphasise the service aspect of your business or firm and concentrate on that? Can you afford to turn over some dedicated time to spread the word that your business or firm places a premium on customer service? Can you spend the time to monitor the market and be ready to inform your customers and clients of any new development as soon as it occurs? Do you have communication skills that personalise your message?



If so, the new media will help level the playing field.

## **Marketing in tandem offline and online**

“Australian retailers must urgently exploit their home-ground advantage by adopting an integrated “bricks and clicks” model.” *The Australian Newspaper Business Section.*

The theme of our first three *MatureMedia Guides* is now clear: the optimum marketing model for professionals incorporates the best that the online and offline worlds have to offer, operating in tandem <sup>12</sup>. This can be achieved when we:

- look for intersecting points where traditional word of mouth can be extended and networked by online content;
- recognise that prospective clients nowadays expect to find online information about a bricks and mortar firm, in fact they search for it as a matter of course;
- distinguish social media by what makes it human, rather than the more newsworthy techno-babble that alienates mature professionals;

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<sup>12</sup> “Based on our review of top advertisers...traditional and new media were becoming more closely aligned and playing a vital cross-platform role for many leading marketers.” Peter Cornelius *The Nielsen Company, That Was The Year That Was*



- take social media, especially blogging and website content optimisation, as an opportunity to speak plainly with clients to encourage word of mouth and referrals in the same way (but by a different means) as face to face contact;
- see social media as a spur to a better and holistic marketing culture for firms, rather than a threat to traditional and trusted referral and word of mouth;
- incorporate online and offline events – most obviously using your blog or Twitter (or whatever social media vehicle you choose) to advertise a real world event such as a seminar, information session for prospective clients or a meet-and-greet;
- see online and offline marketing as interlinked strategies so that resources are shared between the two and synergies are created;
- use online content to make a good first impression, just as we do in every human interaction with clients;
- appreciate that both online and offline marketing are a way to differentiate our product or service, and the greater the effort the greater the differentiation;
- welcome the opportunity to use social media and online content optimisation in the same way as a “trial offer”, allowing prospective clients to sample the information, expertise and culture of our firm before they



- commit to a full engagement. Professionals often mimic this tactic with a free first interview, or an advice hotline;
- look for opportunities to supplement the familiar “meet and greet”. For instance video technology, which is increasingly simple and inexpensive, can create an online “meet and greet” that is not as effective as a personal face to face encounter, but takes far less effort <sup>13</sup>;
  - present our parallel online and offline strategies to send a clear message to existing and prospective clients – we are a firm that goes the extra mile to service your needs;
  - monitor feedback to social media in the same way and to the same ends as personal feedback from clients;
  - take advantage of the available online Key Performance Indicators that can be measured through widely available (and free) analytics, just as we already monitor traditional KPIs;
  - do not assume every client is an appropriate target for online efforts. For them we still have our traditional marketing – newsletters, seminars, events, meet and greets or whatever.

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<sup>13</sup> Try a low-cost Flipcam with a purpose-built tripod to record video for the web.



Many professionals abandon traditional marketing after a short time. It's generally the first casualty of an economic downturn, which of course makes online content optimisation and social media, with its lower entry barriers, a relatively attractive proposition. But like a car that will roll to a stop if you take your foot off the accelerator, marketing sometimes just runs out of gas, often because it failed to meet expectations. Once begun, online strategies can reignite your traditional marketing. Why? Because a quality presence counts in both worlds, and a new way of looking at the same problem can kickstart a marketing campaign from its lethargy.

Gary Vayerchuk is an energetic enthusiast for social media, and a successful business operator as well, and he makes this point: "There is room for everyone in the world of social media, which is the same thing as saying there is room for everyone in today's business world". It's worth reading his book, *Crush It*, just for the story of his family's journey from the former Soviet Union to America, where they established a bricks and mortar business that has now multiplied its sales largely through the innovative use of internet channels. He knows that in the real world a brand is built by word of mouth, and he believes that social media and online content is the best agent to achieve this.

### **You don't have to be extraordinary**

Please, please keep this message in mind – you don't have to be extraordinary, you just need to make ordinary use of the extraordinary opportunity afforded by the internet. But most of all you need to make a start. Yes, your blog may have a lower search engine ranking than others in your industry, or your Twitter numbers





may not challenge Lady Gaga's, or you may wonder when your herculean effort to revise the content on your website will kick-in, but by your participation alone – *apart* from the quality of that participation - you are already way ahead. That's the business case.

Making a start is the most immediate task, for the moment no greater ambition is needed, and after that the learning curve will quickly flatten to a manageable incline. At that point you can decide whether to invest more resources. For now the best way to learn is to digest the basics, as we present in our *MatureMedia Guides*, and then get on with it.

Some professionals believe that marketing in general, and online media in particular, is anathema to a “proper” professionalism. If that image serves your goals, then of course that's fine. But for most aspirational smaller professional firms, content optimisation and social media is an opportunity to leverage their human capital and differentiate themselves from their competition, especially larger firms. This is even moreso for mature professionals who bring with them decades of experience and learning. It's worth repeating, online content is not about tools and technology, it's about people and the social relationships they develop, including commercial relationships. Some professionals recognise that human capital is the whole capital of their firm, and therefore see social media as a natural fit.

Paul Adams, when he worked for Google and conducted research into social media, put together a now celebrated presentation, *The Real Life Social Network*, that tackled the gap between the online and offline social networks. He begins



with the premise that the social web is now a fixture in our lives, that it's all about fostering communities, and so requires an authentic voice. It's this authentic voice that is being marketed.

Perhaps you know the saying, "we are what we do". In the online world, "we communicate what we are". And it's here that small to middle-tier professional firms have a big advantage, particularly for mature professionals who have a larger (and earned) "personality" than their larger but more anonymous competitors. Take a moment and look around you. The branding opportunity is right there, every day, in your office.

### **It's the content, stupid**

You may have heard the story of the sign that adorned the wall of the so-called War Room in the campaign headquarters of Bill Clinton's successful 1992 presidential run against then incumbent George H. W. Bush. At one time following the Gulf War, with stratospheric approval ratings, Bush was considered unbeatable. Clinton's chief strategist James Carville hung a sign to keep the campaign team on message – "It's the economy, stupid". His motive was not to berate the team that it lacked intelligence, in fact they were the best and the brightest, he placed it there to emphasise the obvious. Sometimes, in business as well as politics, we need to remind ourselves of what is right before our eyes. For a professional firm that wants to be found online, it's the content.

We spend so much of our working lives anxious about how we look, what we say, every aspect of the ways we project ourselves to employers and clients.

Successful online content relies instead on authenticity. It's a relief. You can even





inject a little creativity into the mix. So don't obsess over every detail of your online campaign, for now its enough to know that you can just loosen the belt, be yourself, and communicate what you already know. That's what's special about content optimisation and social media, not the platforms that carry your content (very smart people in labs and garages have done all that work for you – that's why they get the big bucks).

Any information can be written in a way that personalises your firm. Do you have an insurance brokerage and advice service? Want to warn readers to effectively cover their properties for flood damage, but in a creative way that grabs their attention? That's fine, just share a few anecdotal stories, and I know you have them. What are the horror stories clients share about their dealings with insurance companies who define "flooding" and "water damage" in ways that make no sense except to deny their claim (hence the warning – get advice before you sign a policy). You get the idea.

Are you a tax lawyer or an accountant? A long detailed recitation of the latest changes in tax law will not cut it on your website or blog, although the same text might be just fine for an in-house presentation to fellow professionals. But a vibrant explanation of how those same tax law changes affect your clients' ability to deduct certain employee expenses, together with your best advice plus a dollop of your own opinion, that is the makings of a riveting blog for your business clients. You can spice it up with tales from your practice, or a bright suggestion gained from a seminar you attended, or a David and Goliath story of one client's battle with the Tax Office.





Remember, there is no subject, no matter how apparently mundane, that cannot be turned into great content. That's a promise. And often that content is right under your nose, because the best type of social media content takes your readers on a journey. That's why the blog of young New Yorker Julie Powell (the "Julie" in the movie *Julie and Julia*), who ambitiously aspired to cook all 524 recipes in Julia Child's French cookbook in 365 days, was such a smash hit. The blog was less about the cooking than how her life changed along the way. That's what made the reader's journey worthwhile. The experience a mature professional brings to their content will do the same.

So let's start out on our own journey together and briefly set the scene for our online adventure.

