

Real-Time Publishing and Marketing

1

Welcome to the world of real-time marketing, real-time publishing, search, and social. In this chapter, I will begin discussing some of the primary meanings of real-time and also lay a foundation for the definitions, strategies, and tactics covered throughout the remainder of this book. I will also discuss some of the forerunners to real-time marketing in this chapter. Here are some of the topics you can expect to learn about in this chapter:

Chapter Contents

The state of the current Internet publishing landscape

Terminology, definitions and history

The fundamental tenets of a real-time marketing approach

Integrating search, social, and publishing into a real-time approach

Introduction to Real-Time Content Marketing

In the new world of real-time information-sharing, there are many new concepts that businesses must embrace in order to be successful in their Internet marketing efforts. At the root of this revolution are the following basic elements:

- Seeking and finding behaviors
- Real-time interaction and active participation
- Consideration for both audiences and individuals
- Social-network distribution
- Instantaneous information-sharing, collaboration, and engagement
- Content promotion

Real-time information-sharing demands a more finely tuned approach from marketers, one that includes a redefinition of the word *publishing* and also brings a business alive on a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week basis.



Note: The changing landscape is not so much about social networks as it is about *society being networked, in real-time*.

The emergence of the commercial Internet in the mid-1990s presented a new publishing paradigm that forced marketers to rethink their approaches, in terms of the ability to connect one-to-one and many-to-many with their core audience. Today, eMarketer reports that two out of every three Americans engage in social networks, so a more accurate characterization of *social networks* is that society as a whole is almost fully networked. When including search and email usage in overall network participation statistics, as many as 92 percent of all people are networked in some form, according to the May 2011 Pew Internet and American Life survey.

With the adoption of status-updating and sharing, a message can spread around the globe within hours, minutes, and even seconds. If marketers and brands are not part of the content conversation in either their own brand space or the broader category space, they might as well not exist to a certain degree.

Although more companies are becoming increasingly connected, the concepts of being *present* and *active* most often fall by the wayside. Many companies spend years redesigning their websites. Others look at social media in a start-and-stop manner, and by doing so they are allowing social networks to fully control their marketing conversation by simply ignoring it. Marketers and enterprise brands are also finding that the barriers built to protect themselves in the old media world have now become the very obstacles that prevent them from being effective in this new environment. The good

news is that by knowing the problem, you can start to address the solution. The solution for marketers is all-encompassing and will require the following:

- Organizational shifts from passive to real-time engagement
- A redefining of *audience*
- A redefining of *brand* to include the audience
- In some cases, a redefinition of business practices
- A greater commitment to sincerity
- A reworking of the definition of *social media* to become more inclusive of search principles
- A deep understanding and executional capability in search and findability issues
- A deep understanding of building out earned attention in social networks
- A redefinition of the word *publishing*
- A commitment to being a “marketer as media publisher”

Another major shift is in the way content is found. Now more than ever, publishers and marketers must label content and make it shareable so that it can be found at the most granular level of search or social relevancy. The process of finding might involve a search engine, social or popularity-based results list, discovery streams, or network sharing. Each of these aspects presents new challenges for marketers that must be addressed in order to properly maximize the opportunity of marketing on the Internet and networks.

The greatest difference between marketing efforts of today and pre-Internet is the rising importance of being *present* and *always-on*. This new landscape—one that has really achieved a new level of fluidity and agility only in the mid- to late aughts through the rapid adoption of social- and network-based content-sharing sites—creates a new urgency for marketers to be part of an “in-the-moment” conversation that occurs 24/7 about their brand or company and about the general consumer conversation at large. Ultimately, the sum of many missed moments in this new landscape will be the death of some companies, and this embracing of “right now” will be the ascension of many others.

What Is Real-Time Marketing?

Real-time marketing is a way of thinking and philosophy that requires businesses to meet the demands of an always-on digital world, and includes production, communication, organization and infrastructure. It is not necessarily prescriptive, but rather refers to being present and fluid in your marketing and business efforts, which means being part of the ongoing conversations that exist around your vertical space and brand, as they happen. In the context of content marketing, going “real-time” requires

businesses to redefine themselves in the digital realm through participation and connections through content. Throughout the entire approach, search and social principles are at the core. Real-time marketing is about time, existence in time, and using search and social technologies to interact and strike with lightning speed and laserlike efficiency. Real-time marketing will take on an even greater influence in future society as its digital layer starts to overlap into the physical world.

An active and alive real-time content marketer must do a lot of planning and preparation and also be aware of the intricacies of search and social media in order to capture the full opportunity. Because the more up-to-the-moment aspects of the online experience have been largely innovated in the search and social-network realms, an effective marketer must thoroughly understand these channels in terms of the way connections and communications flow and how digital assets best travel between search engines and networks. Real-time content marketing is all-encompassing and includes research, content production, community management and outreach, customer-relationship management, analytics and measurement, and real-time response and interaction through a variety of methods.

Although it could be said that talking on the telephone or speaking in person is the total realization of “real-time” marketing, this definition refers more specifically to *engagement* in the digital realm and connecting with your audience—one-to-one, one-to-many, or many-to-many—in a meaningful way that ultimately serves your own business goals and serves the needs of your audience.

In a broader sense, the definition of *real-time content marketing* is still evolving, but it has been largely adopted by a social-marketing audience rather than a search-marketing audience. *Real-time content marketing is not complete without a deep strategic and tactical understanding of search and social together*, because the two become more intertwined from the marketing and user perspectives. In effect, real-time content marketing is about embracing audiences in a human way, but also recognizing the technical drivers of content through networks. This book will show you the exact nuances and interplay between search and social in various real-time scenarios and how you can master the two together as a single unique discipline.

A full definition of real-time marketing would not be complete without mentioning two pivotal thinkers. One of the key thinkers in real-time and social network theory is sociologist Dr. Manuel Castells, whose key philosophies will be covered briefly in the second chapter. Castells’ writings cemented my intentions of a career in Internet marketing in the mid-90s and have driven my strategic perspective ever since. I will show you how his insight and thinking can elevate your own strategies as well.

One other key contributor to the definition of real-time marketing is legendary Silicon Valley marketer Regis McKenna, who planted the first seeds of its meaning in the mid-1990s. In an article titled “Real-Time Marketing” published in July 1995 in *Harvard Business Review*, McKenna described the future elements and approaches of

marketing in a world that is fully synaptic and connected and functioning in real-time. Though some of the descriptions outlined an approach to more-traditional marketing and business processes, he hit the nail square on the head by predicting many facets of a real-time content approach that will be developed in other parts of this book. Here are a few direct quotes from his article that you would be well-served to know as you begin using this book:

- “To build customer loyalty...companies need to keep their customers engaged in a continuous dialogue.”
- “Companies must keep the dialogue flowing and also maintain conversations with suppliers, distributors, and others in the marketplace.”
- “[Real-time marketing must replace] the broadcast mentality.”
- “[Real-time marketing must focus] on real-time customer satisfaction, providing the support, help, guidance, and information necessary to win customers’ loyalty.”
- “Real-time marketing requires...being willing to learn how information technology is changing both customer behavior in marketing and to think in new ways about marketing within the organization.”
- “[Real-time interaction] allows the customer and the producer to learn from each other and to respond to each other.”
- “The customer still does all the work, hunting and pecking for information. But a real-time marketer would bring the information to the customer.”

Again, all of these statements were written in July 1995 by McKenna, but it is only today that marketers and businesses are able to better justify going real-time, because of the greater adoption of the Internet medium by a majority of Americans (this is, of course, also true for many readers outside the United States). So, what are you waiting for?

Other contributions to the real-time conversation include Monique Reece, who in 2010 wrote *Real-Time Marketing for Business Growth*, which outlined traditional marketing and business practices in real-time scenarios, and David Meerman Scott, who in 2011 wrote *Real Time Marketing & PR*.

Other definitions exist on the technological side, as technologies are moving from a “ping” or “pull” method to a push retrieval method. Overall, it is not the terminology that is important. What is important is that marketers understand the existential real-time shift occurring in digital spaces. Marketing terminology is currently in flux, and whether or not the phrase *real-time marketing* is used in the future is irrelevant. The point is that marketers must become active and participatory to fully realize the opportunity of the digital medium, with search and social technologies residing at the core.

What Is Real-Time Publishing?

Real-time publishing is the process of creating and distributing content across networks, including search engines and social media. This term refers not only to the speed at which content can be created by individuals or groups but also to how quickly new content can be distributed and shared globally between networks of like-minded individuals. It also includes the latent effect of leaving behind a digital conversational footprint and trail that can be retrieved at a later interval based on keyword search and community memory. Real-time publishing involves digital asset optimization, traditional SEO principles for hosting and labeling content, active community management and outreach, and the buildup and maintenance of a publisher's network distribution channels. While effective real-time publishers are active and present, it can take months and years of preparation and expertise to do real-time publishing effectively. In the context of real-time, the term *publishing* can be as simple as updating a Twitter account with less than 140 characters at a time, starting an online library of shareable content, creating a video channel, or, more often, publishing a combination of various asset types.

Apply Immediacy to Your Approach

In a word, becoming an effective real-time marketer adds the element of *immediacy* to marketing strategy or, in other words, being relevant to your audience within a certain frame of time. At the basis of this publishing shift are the core principles of search-engine optimization, social media, active social-media participation, audience engagement, and network content distribution. But traditional publishing elements are also still key to this approach, because the distribution of content through search and social channels is also highly connected to fundamental marketing engagement strategies and principles.

Be As Fast As Your Audience

While many brands and marketers have increased their connectivity points in social spaces, current approaches to enable a live digital marketing existence are severely lacking. Average consumers on a social network have no problem speaking their minds in a fluid and active way. Marketers and businesses as a whole do not have a parallel voice that exhibits this same kind of independence.

This problem generally falls into the categories of organizational dysfunction, protectionism, and improperly allocated marketing and IT budgets. What marketers need to do now is to realize the gap that exists between their active presence and the connectedness with the audience and begin a flow of information to the consumer through conversation, outreach, content publishing, listening, and research.

A Real-Time Approach

The following list serves both as a hint at what you will be learning throughout this book and as a high-level framework for real-time marketing and publishing, with search and social residing at the core:

Act “In the Moment,” and Be Fluid in Your Online Presence Because your audience is always online and active, it is only common sense that marketers should also be present in their online efforts. It is the difference between existence and nonexistence in a world where conversations come and go if one is not there to be part of them.

Act as a Publisher and Media Provider in Order to Connect Through Content Because digital touch points occur through content (as defined by a wide variety of content types), there is an increasing imperative for marketers to embrace new forms of publishing. The definition of *publishing* and *content* is broad and nuanced in the real-time landscape, and various content types may include images, video, conversation, status updates, applications, and articles, among many others. A real-time digital strategy may include all of the content types mentioned earlier, or a combination thereof. The challenge for marketers is to become comfortable with their own real-time publishing framework and platform and begin to publish on a massive scale in order to take advantage of the opportunities that exist in real-time publishing.

Enable the Spirit of the Audience into Your Online Content and Voice To be effective with a real-time publishing and conversational approach, a marketer must put their spirited and sincere voices on the front line of their real-time presence. Connecting with your audience in a way that they naturally speak and interact is the best way to spread your messages through the digital consciousness. Your audience already has a distinct say in how your marketing efforts and company are perceived, so making the audience a co-partner in your real-time efforts will allow them to resonate in a more synaptic way. Enabling voices means projecting this spirit in your own content and providing a way for users to generate their own content, as well providing insight to help inform how you develop your own products and services.

A Company’s Real-Time Search and Social Identity Is Both “What It Says” About Itself and “What Others Say” About the Company The reality of the current state of online marketing is that brands and companies can project only so much about how they want to be perceived before audiences provide their own perception of a company the way they see it. Your real-time marketing identity is a combination of what you write, what you say, and how you conduct your business. Your identity will be ultimately defined by the trail of conversation and content in your real-time marketing efforts and by the consumer trail of conversation and content, for better or worse. To a large extent, your marketing efforts are being judged more by what you are doing *right now* than ever before.

Reach Out to Audiences and Networks in Real-Time, in a Sincere and Present Manner Whether it is connecting with your audience through conversation and outreach, sharing and curating

assets, or creating active and passive content for both networks and search engines, the activity must be defined, sincere, engaging, and committed for the long term.

To Be Effective, a Business’s Primary Networks Should Be Acknowledged and Developed The fundamental network audiences of a business should include both their own organization (the people working for a company) and their targeted network audience that will be directly interacting with the company. This expansion of the definition of social networks speaks to cultivating social participation, presence, and content development within your organization. Whether you are part of a small company with two or more people or the CMO of a large company with thousands of people, careful study, strategy, and a set of rules to play by will be part of your real-time marketing strategy.

Marketers and Companies Are Obligated to Listen and Interpret Their Data into Meaningful Content and Experiences for their Audience Analyzing your company’s data should no longer be an *option but rather an obligation and commitment* to your audience. Your data, and other third-party data, reveals what your audience desires, what they may not be able to find in your network or any other network, and many opportunities for engagement through content and real-time interaction. Your audience tells you what they want in search and social; and as a real-time marketer with a defined strategy, you will be in a position to give back to them in a way that will allow for participating in the conversation on a large scale.

Setting the Stage for a Search- and Social-Enabled Real-Time Publishing Platform

A sizable part of this book is dedicated to enabling you to develop a place to distribute and share content directly with your audience, but you must go into your strategic planning and execution with a key foundation for what is inherently different about today’s Internet world. In addition to understanding the foundation of a sound real-time marketing strategy, understanding the core principles of search marketing and social-media marketing is also crucial. The following sections discuss the basic strategic cornerstones of approaching search and social marketing in a real-time landscape.

Dr. Manuel Castells and the Space of Flows

One major work that documented and predicted the impact of the Internet on modern society and economies is called *The Rise of the Network Society*, the first part of a trilogy written by sociologist Dr. Manuel Castells (Figure 1.1), published in 1996. In the book, Dr. Castells forecasted and documented the impact of networks as they created connections that transcended traditional geospatial boundaries and borders. In addition to outlining the global economic and sociological impact of the Internet, he touched on one of his key theories, called “the space of flows.” Castells described how networks broke down the traditional forms of communication that had previously inhibited everything from relationships to group organizations to economies on both a

massive and a granular scale. He further differentiates the space of flows as a phenomenon of being present in the network in time (and real-time) and apart from the “space of places,” which relies on the proximity of physical location.



PHOTO BY FLICKR USER USPUBLICDIPLOMACY, CREATIVE COMMONS

Figure 1.1 Manuel Castells

The space of flows concept provides a practical basis for defining fundamental social interactions within a global network, which transcends places, and allows for a constant flow of information through people connected as nodes. It is as true and valid today as it was when he first wrote about it. While Castells’ writings further address the philosophical and economic implications of a digitally networked society, a fundamental understanding of this concept serves as an invaluable strategic foundation for real-time marketing strategy.

Dr. Castells was one of the first sociologists to publish a significant analysis of networks on economies, world societies, and politics, and predicted their impact on the world at large.

The concepts outlined in Castells’ work are extremely intricate, and this short section here does it little justice, other than to call out its meaning toward the premise of this book. In addition to *The Rise of the Network Society*, I also recommend the book *Conversations with Manuel Castells*, if you prefer a more casual take of his theory on the space of flows.

The “Resource-Discovery Problem”

In addition to understanding the philosophical basis for network interaction in real-time marketing, one other key observation about the importance of search to the real-time Internet was posited by World Wide Web inventor Sir Tim Berners-Lee (Figure 1.2). In one of his early FAQs posted on the W3C website in 1992, he explained the huge opportunity for a search engine to come into play and help organize all of this new information and connective structure that was developing at a rapid pace.

As you can see, the web is sufficiently flexible to allow a number of ways of finding information. In the end, I think a typical resource discovery session will involve someone starting on their “home” document, following one to two links to an index, then doing a search, and following several links from what they have found. In some cases, there will be more than one index search involved, such as at first for an organization, and having found that, a search within it for a person or document. We need to keep this flexibility, as the available information in different places has such different characteristics.... In the long term, when there is a really large mass of data out there, with deep interconnections, then there is some really exciting work to be done on automatic algorithms to make multi-level searches.

Sir Tim Berners-Lee; May 14, 1992. www.w3.org/History/19921103-hypertext/hypertext/WWW/FAQ/KeepingTrack.html



Figure 1.2 Sir Tim Berners-Lee

***Social* Emerges as a Description of Network Behavior**

A popular description of networks and the Web becoming inherently “social” began to emerge from the O’Reilly Media Web 2.0 Conference in 2004. Users began to more directly associate their online identities via networks and content sharing, and information flowed through one’s own personal networks of connections, and that information in turn could be shared more quickly with other networks. In effect, content and conversations could be spread quickly, if not instantaneously, around the globe to audiences of like-minded interest.

While the word *social* became a popular way to describe what was previously known as standard network effects, this word adoption did not necessarily negate the fact that the Internet was already “social” prior to 2004. Many forms of online media were redubbed as being social, when nothing had really changed about them prior to this word adoption. Message boards and forums had been well established, and “social content” in the form of user-generated content and collaboration had also been around since the earliest days of the commercial Internet. Even email—one of the earliest forms of networked media and communication—sometimes falls into the category of social media.

Whether the word *social* tells us anything new or not, it has been embraced by a new generation of Internet marketers as a way of talking about standard network effects. There have been calls by many veteran digital marketers and thinkers to kill the term altogether, but for all practical purposes, it looks like it will remain for at least the foreseeable future.

Engage One Bird, and You Might Attract the Whole Flock (and Flocks of Flocks)

One other core tenet of real-time content marketing involves the effects of *networks of networks*. In the one-to-many scenario, a content creator can publish their work to a network, and in effect, a chain reaction can occur from one like-minded individual in a network to cross over into another network. It extends the concept of one-to-many to *many-to-many*.

By establishing your own primary network, you are providing a launch point for your own content to begin this cascading effect of distribution across the Internet. The quality and size of your distribution network can determine how well your content travels through the networks of those people with their own network influence. This is why a well-thought-out strategy is required for your own search and social platform in order to determine the amount of network influence you want to achieve. In other words, if you have a limited content strategy and limited time for engagement, you should not expect domination of your relevant network channel through these efforts alone. But if you see a huge network and search opportunity in your channel, then you may realize that a robust content strategy is needed to meet the search and social

demand, to the point that your efforts are viewed as a hub of leadership in your industry. These hubs of influence tend to spread and disseminate their own messaging, and search engines and social communities reward them for it with a greater mindshare of the conversation and ultimately help you achieve your desired business goals.

Connectedness

The implication of a world society being connected via networks is that marketers and businesses must also be connected in the same one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many sense with their core audiences and customers. *One-to-one* means a direct connection and conversation with individuals, *one-to-many* means connecting to your group or network, and *many-to-many* means being connected and communicating with extended audiences and groups. Not being connected, whether in listening, conversation, transaction, or participation, means that a marketer does not effectively exist in those conversations and economic opportunities afforded in networks. The marketing imperative is to establish these connections in a meaningful way, and this book is designed to show you just how to do that.

Flows

Once you have started to establish your network audience of groups and individuals, you should be managing and stoking the flows of communication. Because information is flowing in real-time, a live presence is required, either as an individual or as an organization. *Network flows* and *search flows* consist of conversation, content publishing, content promotion, content stewardship, curation, and sharing through a variety of methods.

Although a substantial part of this book is dedicated to showing you where to find and establish your social network and search presence, an even greater part of the book will show you *how to maintain the flows of communication* via strategic and tactical content development, community management, search engine optimization, digital asset optimization, and a real-time mentality.

Universally Identifiable, Shareable, and Networked Content

To be successful in the digital publishing landscape, you must ensure that content is readable by both humans and machines. Here, a core understanding and capability in search engine optimization, the principles of community management and engagement, a real-time attitude, and network sharing are in order.

At a high level, your content must be *understood*, by both people and algorithms, in order to get the most out of your online publishing efforts. It must also be inherently capable of being *disseminated* or distributed by people and algorithms to spread your content beyond your hard efforts alone. Being “understood” by people and algorithms means both that it must resonate in way that is readable by algorithms and

technology and also that your points are clearly articulated in what you are trying to communicate to humans with influence across networks.

Making It Easy for People to Distribute Your Content via Networks

People in networks can quickly make a judgment about whether your content is of importance to them. This means being clear in your points, utility, usability, design, format, and messaging. Making it “shareable” is also of critical importance in networks and makes a great difference in whether your content is linkable, has the proper sharing buttons, is capable of publishing directly to a share network, or is easily downloadable.

Social and Search Algorithms

Being understood on an algorithmic level requires a literal approach in describing and marking up content in a way that it can be understood and retrieved by machines. Content tagging and labeling via keywords, page elements, and making assets indexable extends the shelf life of your content and conversations and increases the opportunities for that content to be found in both networks and search engines. Making an asset “crawlable” means that it may essentially be copied by automated software to become a freely indexable and shareable object between databases where search or other processes may occur.

It is also important to note that the definition of *search engine* does not just mean a traditionally understood engine such as Google or Bing but includes any site that may crawl the Web or any network with its own search or algorithmic functionality, including Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, eBay, or Amazon. In addition to sharing across networks, a large majority of the Web’s content is surfaced to consumers via algorithms, whether it is in the form of a search engine, discovery, push notifications, popularity lists, personalization, or other types of technology that show content based on similar interests.

Universal Search and Digital Asset Optimization

In 2007, search engines Google, Yahoo!, Microsoft Live, and Ask each introduced a new search-results concept that has since changed the search marketing landscape as we know it. The “universal” search approach involved not only retrieving the 10 best website result links but also promoting results from vertical engines into the “prime-time” web results area of the page. So, now searchers would see photos, videos, news, blog posts, and other vertical content interspersed into the results page based on its importance and relevance to their query. The days of optimizing for the “10 blue links” alone were officially gone. If you cared about the health of your natural search programs, then the time had come to start venturing off into other areas of content beyond text, and into these verticals, if you had not already done so.

While search professionals had long understood these innovations both conceptually and in practice, it was search and social marketer Lee Odden who coined the phrase *digital asset optimization*. Digital asset optimization implies that it is no longer enough just to optimize your web pages and that a full optimization approach to content creation and strategy is in order. If your audience is searching for images, then you would be wise to consider a content play involving the use of images and optimize them appropriately. If your audience predominantly consumes video, then you need to fire up your digital video cameras and optimize. The same can be said for consumer usage of forum dialogue, news, social status updates, PowerPoint slides, PDFs, and white papers, among many other asset types. Digital asset optimization is not just a search tactic. If executed properly, it will also lend itself to shareability and readability across social networks, in real-time, and this is one of the core tenets of marketing with a search and social frame of mind.

Understanding Delivery Frameworks Across Multiple Platforms

It is also imperative for marketers to understand the platforms and devices that deliver their content and how their audiences consume this content. Search and social tactics are quickly spreading from the desktop and into the physical world in the form of mobile devices, kiosks, RFID, voice activation, voice search, touch screens, and myriad other applications. If you look closely, most of these new digital applications have some function of search and/or social at the most basic level. Studying this landscape as it evolves will help you become a more effective marketer, help you spot new emerging opportunities, and help you plan and execute on strategies for the future. For these new areas of innovation, you may even have to invent optimization techniques of your own.

The Power of Reciprocation

Reciprocation is another fundamental element of search and social marketing in real-time and is apparent in many different forms. In real-time content marketing, there are two basic rules you need to know in order to have an effective strategy and platform.

The First Rule of Reciprocation: You Give, and You Get

The first rule of reciprocation, one that should be central to any agile and real-time frame of mind, is that *you give away a lot in order to earn what you receive*. This takes on many forms:

- Gaining knowledge, expressed in the form of content
- Answering questions in real-time
- Building useful applications in anticipation that they will be used widely
- Providing a voice or point or view to further a conversation
- Volunteering and helping to “crowd-source” online projects

- Sharing the content of others in your community, in hopes they will reciprocate
- Speaking at and documenting industry events and conferences
- Volunteering and participating with industry or consumer associations

As a marketer who has done all of these tasks for many years, these activities have paid immense dividends for the companies I work for in gaining new business, raising awareness, making useful connections (who in turn also reciprocate), and elevating the online conversations that occur in my business, both at the brand and general conversation levels.

The most successful real-time publishers are providing content, coverage, online help, and useful information on a steady basis and allowing this content to travel so that a greater community can receive the benefits as well. In turn, marketers are reciprocated by receiving broader consideration, direct business sales and leads, brand awareness, better collaboration with partners, offline word-of-mouth, assistance in sharing your own content, and general goodwill from their industry and community at large. If your real-time marketing strategy is really amazing, your audience has an ongoing expectation of quality that you must continue to live up to in your content, products, and services. Consistently meeting these expectations can cement your place as a hub in the conversation and content of your industry.

The Second Rule of Reciprocation: Search and Social Are Interdependent

A second type of reciprocation occurs in networks, and it is between search and social. While search and social have many independent elements, they have become interdependent in many ways. Search engines look to social signals to rank content and provide an edge of freshness to their results, and social networks are becoming more algorithmic and also reliant on search engine traffic to build communities. This interdependency creates wider visibility and extends reach to new and recurring audiences.

“Search and social” is quickly evolving into its own discipline. Search and social are often viewed by marketers as opposing entities, but the real-time reality is that they are constantly giving to and taking back from each other. It’s not a question of whether search or social will cannibalize each other, but more a question of how they work together to extend the opportunities of real-time marketing and content publishing. This book is also designed to show the key correlations between search and social and how, together, search and social is a guiding marketing discipline unto itself.

Social “signals” are most often just traditional SEO signals. As content passes through networks, new pages and links are created all along the way. Considering that links are one of the main elements of how search engines rank content, social distribution of content is fundamentally connected to basic SEO principles. New links may come in the form of connections, status updates, and shared links in many different formats. At the end of the day, likes, tweets, and +1s are still links.

authority, and velocity can be determined by analyzing all as one signal. In 2008, I coauthored a white paper with Gabe Dennison called “Integrating Search and Social Media” and first discussed the concept of *social relevance*. Social relevance takes both search and social signals into account, as well as other key aspects of real-time marketing, to provide a more relevant result. Social relevancy incorporates some of the traditional methods of search algorithms and applies them to the faster-moving world of real-time marketing and social media. It looks at the velocity and speed of shared digital assets, status updates, and keyword search velocity in order to determine what is going on with the real Internet at the speed of “now.”

The release of Google+ in June 2011 introduced a new kind of social relevancy, and this time it was not about social signals on search but rather on search signals to improve the social experience. By placing more emphasis on relevancy within social networks through segmentation, Google+ proved that the social experience could be enhanced, not by shouting out to the entire world but by speaking to only the most relevant audience within your network. With the concept of “circles,” Google+ users are able to more easily share messages within the relevant context of their network, and this concept is quickly being adopted by other major social networks such as Twitter and Facebook.

In the greater discussion of *social-media optimization* (SMO), a phrase coined by marketer Rohit Bhargava in 2006, social relevance could be considered the “thing” you are optimizing for. My intention for the phrase is to make it easier to describe SMO and SEO together conceptually, in the sense that search and social are one discipline.

Gaining Trust and Authority with Your Audience in Real-Time

Again, the imperative for marketers is to apply what they have already been doing with traditional common-sense SEO principles and extend this method of thinking to the management of networks and content development and propagation. It involves creating relevant networks and attracting followers and friends of like-minded groups, creating content that gets shared by these groups, attracting and promoting citations of your content, and optimizing assets in a way that will extend their shelf life beyond using either social or search tactics alone.

Beyond just search and social, the practice of *being present in your marketing efforts or otherwise having an alive presence that is as active as your audience* will send the strongest signals that your content is backed by a real person or group of people and is not spam. Of course, there is another level of trust and authority that good content providers should be seeking at a very strategic level, and that is with the audience. Building trust and authority with your audience means the following:

- Creating engaging content
- Creating knowledgeable and expert content

- Creating content so good that your audience would be inclined to share it with other like-minded people or groups in their own networks
- Helping your readers and people in your network with their problems and concerns
- Conversing with your audience through passive content or direct interaction
- Writing clearly and communicating effectively
- Keeping a clean and consistent web appearance with your website and digital assets
- Enabling your assets to be easily shared

These approaches require a constant real-time presence and in turn will earn the trust of the audiences you serve, which will ultimately translate into achieving your designated business goals.

Listening to Your Audience, Data, and Your Competition

One of the other biggest, but perhaps most overlooked, opportunities in real-time content marketing is the ability to use data to help inform and build upon your own strategies. When starting off with a real-time content marketing strategy and tactical plan, you may feel overwhelmed by the constantly changing landscape. But knowing that the answers to your big questions lie in both your own data and third-party data should provide you with some relief. A typical problem is determining where to start or determining which conversations are of most importance to your audience. Here, keyword and conversational data can help. Reviewing keyword popularity helps you determine which themes are of most interest to groups of searchers and can provide key direction to start your content-development process. Reviewing common questions in Q&A sites like Yahoo! Answers and Answers.com can also show social popularity of different topics across a wide range of categories. Studying the overall web space can help you find the areas of focus for your own strategy, and later chapters in this book will specifically show you how to do this.

Real-time content marketers should get their data from a number of sources on a timely basis. New content opportunities constantly arise, and if you or your organization are not paying attention, then a major opportunity to become part of the conversation may come and go without you even knowing it.

Google is a great example of a company that makes the best use of its data to create new products and also help expand future strategies. In June 2007 I attended a panel discussion on personalization at the SMX Advanced conference in Seattle. Google engineer Matt Cutts provided an interesting revelation that gave the audience key insight into the way Google's chief strategists think. In a response to a question by one attendee, Cutts effectively stated, "You give us your data for free, and we feel we have an *obligation* to use it."

By “obligation,” he meant that users had given Google their data through its search queries and other measured behaviors and that the company had a responsibility to use this data to make their products even greater. So in this case, the end result was personalization of search results, which meant that about 20 percent of a person’s search results may be changed based on their own biases taken from prior search, recently viewed or clicked web pages, and geographic locations, among many other factors. Google continues to invest in areas informed by keyword demand and user data. It is also active in promoting Google+ data into many other products and services Google offers.

But the story here is not about Google; it is about you and your business. Consider the following questions with regard to how well you are currently using your data to inform your strategies and tactics in a world of search and social:

- How is your company using its internal site search data to find out what people are looking for but can’t find?
- Why are people abandoning your website pages?
- What are the most common questions asked offline about your business?
- Do you have a frequently asked questions (FAQ) page to answer those questions?
- Do you effectively address those questions in your site content and community-management strategy?
- Does the content you publish on your site reflect these questions as a whole?
- What does your competitors’ data tell you about what they have and what you lack, and is this something you should address?
- How do people react to your products and services online?
- What suggestions do they make or what changes do they wish for, and how can you implement them or make sure your organization is aware of these suggestions?

Keep in mind that more likely than not, your audience wants you to weigh in online about your relevant areas of expertise. So, in addition to the basic questions about your business, are you chiming in to give that extra level of insight, once the questions go a little bit deeper about your company or respective general conversation area? If a question were to come up publicly right now on a social network, would you be ready to answer it right now or in a timely manner that shows you are active while the conversation is still in the social spotlight?

Real-time search and social data is not just for identifying strategies directly for your own company or brand, but also for comparing how others in your competitive space are doing. What do people like or dislike about your competition? What are they doing right or wrong, and how can you best capitalize on this data with your own strategy? Is there a huge opportunity, or does your company just have a lot of catching up to do in order to remain relevant in search and social spaces?

Brands and Marketers As Real-Time Content Publishers

These are just a few of the questions that will be addressed in the subsequent chapters, and there are so many more you need to answer in order to prepare for acting in the moment, with a real-time frame of mind. Real-time marketing is about interaction and online publishing at its core and about businesses and marketing practitioners embracing real-time content publishing as the *new marketing*. Get ready, because in order to fully understand and develop a real-time marketing and publishing platform, you need to better understand how search and social work together. Chapter 2 will explain exactly how these two are working together to form the foundation for real-time marketing.

