

# Web Experience Excellence:

Driving Profitability...From Customer Acquisition to Advocacy

A 3-Part Series by Frost & Sullivan, the Growth Partnership Company

## You Asked, We Answered

In the discussion that followed Frost & Sullivan's recent eBroadcast, "Turning Customer Interactions into Relationships with Dynamic Web Marketing," participants had a chance to pose questions to the panelists. Here is an excerpt of the discussion that followed:

### Q: Is social media marketing more or less impactful (or neutral) in B2C or B2B?



**Mark Yolton, Senior Vice President, SAP Community Network, SAP:**

I don't know which is *currently* more impactful ... I think it *can* be impactful for both B2C and B2B — I know it can — but I don't know which category is currently more effective at capturing that impact and value at the present stage. I believe social media will be critically important for both B2C and B2B in the future, although maybe not for every company or product or brand in the B2C or B2B categories.



**Kirsten Knipp, Web Experience Strategist, Vignette:** This is one of those answers "that depends." The most impactful uses of social media are in cases where there are passionate followers of some ideal, belief or offering; this could be consumer or business oriented.

Open-source offerings often have cult followings in B2B arenas just as consumer goods — like a brand of running shoe or makeup — might have. It is typically easier to find things that people are passionate about in their personal lives, but if your business is mission critical to your customers, regardless of the arena, there is the foundation for social media impact.

As our panelists shared, finding that group where they already congregate is a first step to understanding whether or not social media can make an impact for you.

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### Q: How can you apply social media to a B2B market?



**Stacy Smollin Schwartz, Vice President, Web, Marketing and Advocacy, Virgin Mobile USA:**

I don't think social networking is inherently more or less impactful for a B2C audience versus a B2B audience. Regardless of audience or industry, your customers are simply people with a need to be met. The common factor across all these different sets of people is *relevance*. Don't start with a social networking strategy; start by observing your customers, suppliers, partners, and expand current strategy to include social networking where relevant.

This means:

- Social networking at the right time, right place (relevant audience, product, execution)
- Tools don't need to be too technical or fancy (don't use technology for technology's sake, which can detract from experience)
- Rich media tools can encourage viral involvement (example: counters or "leaderboards" can track participant interactions and keep them engaged)
- Reward for participation, only as relevant to your audience (not necessarily financially-oriented, but with something that matters to your unique audience).



**Mark Yolton:** That's too broad a question to answer completely, other than to say: Learn from others, their mistakes and successes, and *do it*. Also, generally: Change the tone from "old school" marketing, which too often talked "at" customers rather than talking "with" them. Important to social media is dialogue and conversation in a human voice. Don't push your message at people, converse with them.

... Entire university courses will be (are being) delivered on this, there's so much to know at this stage. You can watch and follow other leading companies who provide examples; you can join groups like the Social Media Business Council or the Community Roundtable (Google or Bing them) to share with peers, and follow/read the plethora of blogs on the subject (Jeremiah Owyang of Forrester might be a good place to start). You might also hire a good consultant to guide you in the early stages.

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**Kirsten Knipp:** Mark gave some great examples of how SAP uses social media for B2B ... and there are so many other options.

Some other examples or ideas might include:

- Idea management ... Intel and Dell both use these ... you don't just have to poll consumers to give you ideas about your roadmap — B2B clients want to be involved too
- User groups or groups of interest/practice on topics that are relevant to all
- Twitter handles that let your customers keep in touch more real time than a 'newsletter'
- Classic leadership blogging or blogs from the ranks that get customers closer
- Forums for Peer to Peer help
- Wikis for Documentation and Peer to Peer enhancements
- Widgets that let your power customers / users stay up to date on their own content — maybe it is order status or tech best practices

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## Q: How do you quantify reduction in customer care call expense by using social media?



**Mark Yolton:** There is a simple formula: How many calls do you get to your call center currently, before adding social media? How much does it cost, on average, to answer each one? What is the volume of "calls" handled with social media, or the reduction of calls in the current call center — keep in mind this might not be an actual reduction but might be a slowing of the rate of growth in the number of calls. Multiply the value of calls the old way by the number handled with social media (and factor-in the costs of doing so), and hopefully you get a big number as the savings.



**Stacy Smollin Schwartz:** For now, we literally measure these successes one customer at a time. We observe the types and volume of complaints and issues on the social networking boards, and we follow up with these customers through to resolution of their issues. And then we follow how one "saved" customer communicates with others about her experience with us.

It's certainly challenging to apply this to large-scale cost savings, but many issues and concerns are shared by multiple customers, and even the "lurkers" (as Twitter users who just watch, but don't speak up, are called) benefit from seeing those answers online. Very account-specific issues are sometimes resolved better on a one-to-one basis with Care over the phone. In those cases, we will direct them to contact us that way.



**Kirsten Knipp:** The simplest answer would be to track data that shows trends in usage of both vehicles — for example, if you begin an online forum, simultaneously measure the volume of views, questions and posts over a period of time, as well as customer care call volume over that same period of time. It isn't guaranteed, but if there is an impact, you are very likely to see a correlation in increased online activity with decreases in call volume or duration.

You can even track specific questions that are being answered so that you can find out if your valuable call center resources are spending their time answering more difficult questions while the easy ones get taken care of online, thereby providing your customers an overall higher level of service.

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## Q: (Directed at Mark Yolton) Do you ever have Web casts in other languages? What about the blogs? Is anyone blogging in languages other than English for the global community?



**Mark Yolton:** We do have some content in our community in other languages, including Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, a little bit of German and occasional Spanish, but we're about 90% English. For that reason, members are very forgiving of each others' limitations in English spelling and grammar. We encourage our members to do their own Web casts, podcasts, etc., in other languages, if they'd like, but we don't do official translations or re-record in various languages. It's up to the author, or the author working with some other member who is willing to translate and re-publish. We have too much activity to possibly translate: 6,000 discussion forum posts per day, multiply that by 365 days per year, plus 12-15 blog posts per day, and more. We find that most global business is conducted in English and people can get by just fine, for the most part in English.

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Because the Asian languages are so different (character sets are not Latin letters as we know them), we've found that Chinese and Japanese people are okay to *consume* information in English but are reluctant to ask or answer questions or to blog because they don't feel comfortable *expressing* themselves in English. These are very significant markets, so we're focusing our translation and multi-language efforts and investments there. Visitors and members can select "Language" in the header of our pages, an example of which can be found at: <https://www.sdn.sap.com/irj/sdn>

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**Q: Are you aware of any leading companies that are using social media effectively in the medical device arena?**



**Stacy Smollin Schwartz:** I am personally not aware of any specific examples in the medical device arena. However, healthcare information is among the top categories searched for online. In fact, 80% of U.S. Internet users have searched online for health information. They come to their physician appointments armed with a pile of print-outs — some intended for them (a B2C communication), others intended for physicians and scientists (a B2B communication, if you will) and still others posted for peer-to-peer (C2C) consumption. I don't see any reason why social networking couldn't be an effective tool in this environment.

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**Q: Where do you see the biggest resistance for social media adoption in organizations?**



**Mark Yolton:** Legal and Intellectual Property protection departments. For Legal, this is uncharted territory, so there is little case law to guide them and laws haven't caught-up with reality yet. The IP people are concerned that too much, or the wrong information, will be shared too openly. Sometimes HR gets nervous about employee policies; sometimes corporate communications and marketing departments get nervous about "message control" or "brand" ... but the reality is that conversations are happening and our choice is either to turn a blind eye and pretend not to notice, or to engage in those conversations and try to influence them with our own voices and perspectives, in the service of our companies, customers, partners and other stakeholders.



**Stacy Smollin Schwartz:** The pace and real-time responsiveness demanded of social networking can certainly make a Legal department uncomfortable. Social networking comments cannot be subject to the same thorough circulation and scrutiny we give press releases, for example. And many Legal departments have a difficult time softening their policies to accommodate the new rules of the road.

Customer Care teams might also be resistant to opening up an entirely new channel for dealing with customer complaints, as their reps are actively deployed on the phone each day. However, they need to understand that customers are talking about you whether you are part of the dialogue or not. Looking the other way while they complain about the issues they're having is a temporary solution at best.

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**Q: How often do you monitor, and what tools do you use?**



**Mark Yolton:** We use our own community members to monitor for offensive or inappropriate content (we put a "flag for moderation" link on most every page) in real-time, thereby using them to help police the community sites. Sentiment analysis tools are also interesting. You probably also want a core Web traffic tool to track traffic and hot topics.



**Stacy Smollin Schwartz:** Through our public relations agency, we use Radian 6 to scan the river of daily comments all around the Web related to our keywords. We measure the volume of conversations, and attempt to correlate that with jumps in Web traffic and sales metrics. As we have grown more sophisticated in our approach, we make attempts not just to measure volume of mentions, but also to distinguish between those positive and negative comments.

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**Kirsten Knipp:** Vignette uses Radian 6 to monitor what is going on out in the Web — this results in a sentiment analysis for us which we review on a monthly basis. This analysis, in combination with active monitoring by our marketing team, gives us insight into trends in the way the market and our customers perceive us. This data also provides information about how well our social media initiatives are providing coverage.

We also review inbound traffic generated from and ongoing activity within our social initiatives to gauge efficacy and impact, and we are lucky to have a Social Media Strategist whose role includes the active participation and monitoring of these social media elements.

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**Q: How do you manage offensive comments towards the organization if they are posted on Facebook, Twitter, etc.? Should you remove the bad comments or leave them on the site? If you leave them on, how do you address them?**



**Stacy Smollin Schwartz:** This is very much handled on a case-by-case basis. Generally, we leave all genuine customer comments, even the negative ones, posted to our social networking pages. It's difficult to do, but it's important that you resign control to your customers in most of these situations — they will most often come to your defense if complainers get too out of control or someone provides misinformation to the group. If not already corrected by a customer (which is more often the case), we will jump in to correct inaccurate information when we see it.



**Kirsten Knipp:** To date, we have not had comments that are inappropriate, but we have certainly seen statements that we don't agree with or which are disparaging to our product or brand. Our position is that in about 90% of the cases, the best approach is to acknowledge the concern and respond with any tactics or changes that could positively impact the individual, letting them know their concerns are heard and defining next steps or better explaining a corporate decision.

In about 9.99% of cases, we believe that a comment is emotionally driven, rather than being fact-based, and we know that by engaging in that type of conversation, we are likely to see escalation without any change or learning. In those cases, we feel that commenting just gives credibility to the topic and instead choose to remain silent. This is primarily when the comment is made on a non-Vignette Web property or forum.

In very few cases, let's call it .01%, a comment is so inappropriate or factually incorrect and damaging that we would consider removing or asking the author to remove their comment. We have asked several pundits to correct factual errors outside the auspices of our own social media initiatives, but have been lucky enough not to have incendiary remarks thus far.



**Mark Yolton:** We don't ask other sites to remove such comments unless they are clearly over the line — offensive, racist, threatening, and so forth. Sometimes the best policy is to ignore them and most other people will, also ... or readers might see them as the rantings of someone with an axe to grind. Negative comments about our company or its products are fair game on those other sites, and are okay on our own community sites (in discussion forums, blogs, etc.) too.

We actually appreciate some degree of critical and even negative comments about our company and its products and our partner solutions as long as those are expressed as a fair and reasonable (even if emotional) opinion or experience, especially if they are constructive — not just complaining but also offering suggestions how we can improve. Usually we see other customers and partners defending us very strongly, or offering a different perspective, and we find that third-party defense a lot more credible and authentic than either us defending ourselves or us censoring content and comments.

Also, the negative feedback is instructive to us on how to improve, or where to work on an issue. We believe that we can learn from the open (even negative) discussion, and that it's essential — *essential!* — to an authentic, transparent, vibrant community.