

BEING SOCIAL IN THE NEW WORLD OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Talking To Prospects When Prospects Can Talk Back

There are four things to know about what we now call the social media.

First, it's *media* – a means of communication, a medium, not of itself a magic carpet. Which means that its value lies in its ability to convey ideas and facts to a vast world of viewers. Which means, as well, that we're back to the old computer nostrum of "Garbage in-Garbage out." Or to use another (if contrarian) view, it's not the medium, it's the message.

Second, it substantially changes the world of marketing. In the old marketing, we talked to people who couldn't really talk back (other than by buying or not buying what we were selling). Very primitive and cumbersome. With social media, marketing becomes a conversation. We no longer talk at people, but with them, which creates a dynamic that never existed before. And what was once a mass market becomes an individual market, but one with individual feedback. For lawyers and accountants, who, by the definitions of professional services marketing, must participate in any marketing activities, this is a new and invaluable tool. It must be learned by the professionals who would compete with one another for practice development.

Third, it puts marketing directly in the hands of the professional – the lawyer and the accountant. I remember, back in the early days of the personal computer, when no lawyer or accountant would consider touching a typewriter keyboard (that's what secretaries were for). I remember, back then (1982), seeing a partner or two with the old Kaypro computer (an early version of a laptop computer), hidden under the desk. Today, no desk in any firm is without a desktop computer. Many of these desktops are now used by lawyers and accountants for Facebook, LinkedIn, or managing blogs, as marketing tools. It is very much Marketing 3.0.

And fourth, today's social media defines the meaning of change, which is the result of an evolutionary process. The went from non-existence to dominant communications devices in a relatively few years. The beauty of this is that the evolution Darwin spoke of was a process of incremental change over thousands of years. Moreover, unlike traditional evolution, which is driven in large measure by environmental response, social media are an evolution of an *idea* – an evolution of the mind. With the social media, it's a process that resulted in substantial change, in our lifetime. Darwin would love it.

Social media, in its various iterations, means computer applications such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, blogs, and the like. (*The Marcus Letter*, I should note, was one of the first professional services marketing sites that bestrides newsletters and blogs. In the evolutionary context, it began with my book, *Competing For Clients in the 80s*, which became *The Marcus Report* – a print version of a newsletter, which became the online *Marcus Letter*, which is still going strong.

Facebook and similar applications started in places like college dorms for on-campus socializing. They were quickly adapted as business tools for both marketing and client relations, many of which are now remarkably sophisticated. Business people, and especially marketers, quickly recognized their value for their feedback ability and sustaining relationships. What was once one way communication now became two way discussions – a new dimension in marketing and, for professionals, practice development.

As with any new technology, many books are being written on how to do it. Like so many books in this context, many are shallow and superficial. But two, while different from one another, are not.

Social Media Strategies for Professionals and their Firms, by Michelle Golden (John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken, NJ, 2010), is a comprehensive view and primer on the full range of social media, and of marketing specifically for professional services. Michelle Golden is a leading and nationally recognized expert in professional services marketing, as well as an experienced hand in the social media.

She writes for her market – lawyers and accountants – which she knows intimately. Professionals, she knows, tend to accept and adopt any tangible technology which, to them,

means new equipment, like the late model smart phones that do everything. But they are frequently wary of new and unfamiliar applications of the equipment, like Facebook and Twitter. They involve social interaction in a marketing context that is not always within the ken or experience of professionals. Thus, the mechanics may be within their grasp, but not their uses in dealing with strangers, particularly on a large scale, such as marketing. And so the real problem she addresses in her book goes well beyond simply how to access Facebook, LinkedIn, etc., but how to use them as working tools. How to use the tools to relate to a broader audience. The etiquette and ethics. And how to tame the dynamic of the new media. Thus, her book takes the reader step by step through the process. In her detailed discussion of LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, and blogs, her step-by-step discussion of each does a terrific job of taking the reader from neophyte to expert, from getting started to using each effectively in any context.

All this, and more, she does remarkably well.

Social media, she points out in the first chapter, "...is not strategy. Social media are plural, and individually or collectively, they are not strategies." Nor, she says, are they initiatives or tactics. She then defines the distinctions among the different values and purposes of the new media, all as a context for addressing the media themselves. It's a remarkable foundation – easily comprehensible, and a basis for discussing the different aspects of the services.

Golden carefully delineates the achievements of effective use of the social media, citing both the personal and firm advantages, including reputation, prospect identification, networking, recruiting, self-publishing, and customer relations. She explains how the media can be used to build credibility, and to enhance networking.

Nor does she ignore the evolution from the basic use of the computer to gather data to developing its uses today as a highly personalized communications and marketing tool. This is significant, because it offers a clue to the future of networking by computer, which, I think, is crucial to understand in developing its uses to the individual and to the firm. Neither does she ignore comparisons' between using social media as compared to the more traditional marketing approaches, describing the differences in such areas as tone, conversation, validation, reach and

control. This is consequential to understand how best to use each medium – social or otherwise – in planning the marketing program.

And finally, she discusses the best online writing techniques, the etiquette, and the best practices. All, of course, with case histories.

This is a rare kind of book – one that assumes, at the outset, that the reader knows little or nothing about the subject, and without talking down to the reader, goes through it carefully and thoroughly. Michelle Golden's book can and will make a difference in the proficiency of those who will benefit the most from it – the lawyers, accountants, and the marketers who serve them.

Facebook Marketing, by Justin R. Levy (Que Publishing, Indianapolis) doesn't specifically address the marketing context of professional services, but is useful nevertheless as an overview of what to do and how to do it in Facebook. Its marketing principles are generally sound, if not always applicable to the arcane structures of professional services. It explores some of the large variety of applications for which Facebook is useful, and gives examples of how it's used in a number of contexts. It delineates the mechanics clearly and understandably, which can be particularly helpful for the non-technically experienced neophyte. The author is Director of Business Development, Marketing, and Client Relations at New Market Labs, and writes with authority on the subject, but the book bespeaks no knowledge of the unique qualities of professional services marketing.

As for the future of social media, no one can say – simply because it's still a work in progress, too often in unskilled hands. It's got a toe in the future, but it would be foolish to say it's there yet.

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