

# A SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDE FOR FLORAL RETAILERS AND WHOLESALERS

## Introduction

Social media websites have taken the business world by storm since the introduction of SixDegrees (commonly known as “Web 2.0”) in 1997, followed by Friendster, MySpace, and then Facebook (Borders, 2009). Many successful businesses have established or are planning on developing social media sites for their companies to communicate with customers, promote their products, and generate sales growth. For example, 83% of Inc. 500 companies use at least one social media site and 56% reported that social media was “very important” to their marketing program (Barnes and Mattson, 2010). The Inc. 500 list includes the fastest-growing companies within the U.S. Large and small businesses use social media. Many small businesses with limited marketing budgets have turned to social media campaigns to promote their products and services.

Overall, social media is a powerful tool to connect, communicate and build relationships with customers (Eley and Tilley, 2009; Li et al., 2007; Palmer and Koenig-Lewis, 2009; Lea et al., 2006). Social media allows for online word-of-mouth advertising. Having consumer ratings and reviews has shown to improve website activity (with up to 43% more click-throughs) and consumer spending while visiting the site (Barton, 2006). As a result of the two-way communication process, Generation X and Y social media users are more receptive to marketing through these channels (Li et al., 2007).

Social media also generates a lot of cyber buzz with 50% of adult users (18+ years old) telling their friends about products and 66% of youth users (12-21 years old) doing the same (Li et al., 2007). These percentages increase substantially if the social media user is interested in the marketer profile (Li et al., 2007). This behavior gives companies the opportunity to glimpse into the consumers’ mind and view his/her wants and needs as never seen before (Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2008). Social media has been successfully used by other industries, particularly the food and beverage industry (Chester and Montgomery, 2007), and has been shown to positively affect consumers’ attitudes on brands and attachments to those brands (McAlexander et al., 2002). However, social networking has not been greatly explored by the floral industry.

**The purpose of this social media guide is to fill that void by providing a hands-on, ready-to-be adopted overview of best practices that can be adopted by floral businesses to bolster their existing marketing efforts.** Case studies of firms (within and outside of the green industry) that have been successful in implementing social media are presented. It has been said that the

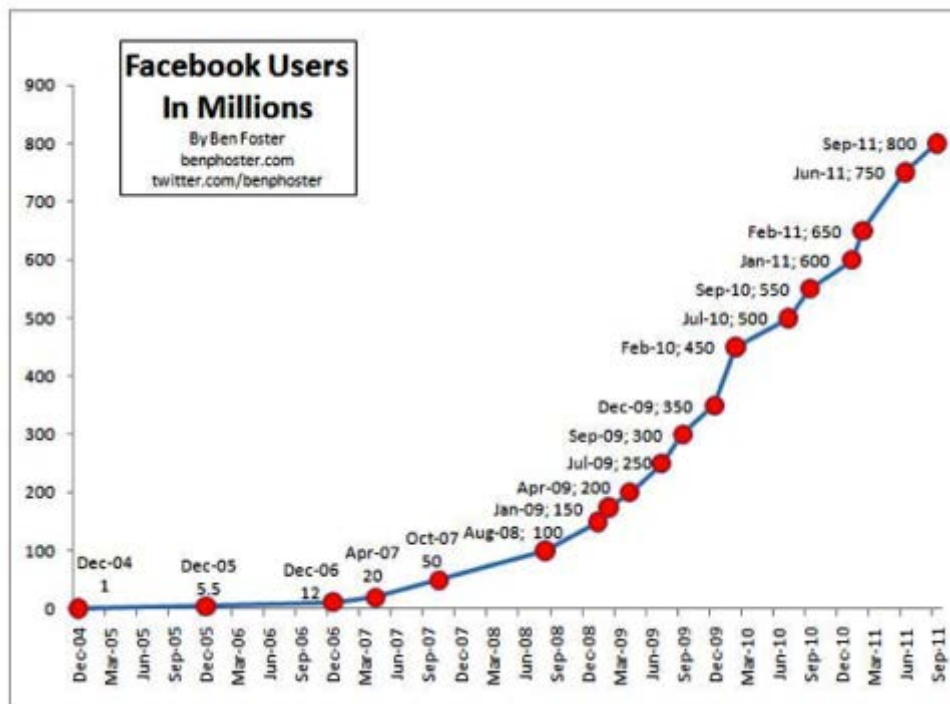
best way to be successful is to emulate success. The content herein provides clear examples of social media success for you to emulate and improve upon in your own business. Now let the adventure begin!

## Social Media Usage by Small Businesses

Phil Mershon provided an excellent overview of the main reasons why businesses should consider the usage of social media in their business activities (Social Media Examiner, November 8, 2011). Social media marketing is a rapidly changing environment, as we all know. But the good news is that your customers are embracing social media as a normal part of their lives. Even the over-50 population is adapting at staggering rates.

The following 26 stats should impress upon you the importance of developing a social media strategy for your business.

#1: There are now more than 845 million active Facebook users, with over 200 million added in 2011. Notice the impressive growth trend.



Facebook is growing rapidly. Which side of the wave are you on?

Nielsen found the following in their 3Q 2011 Social Media Report:

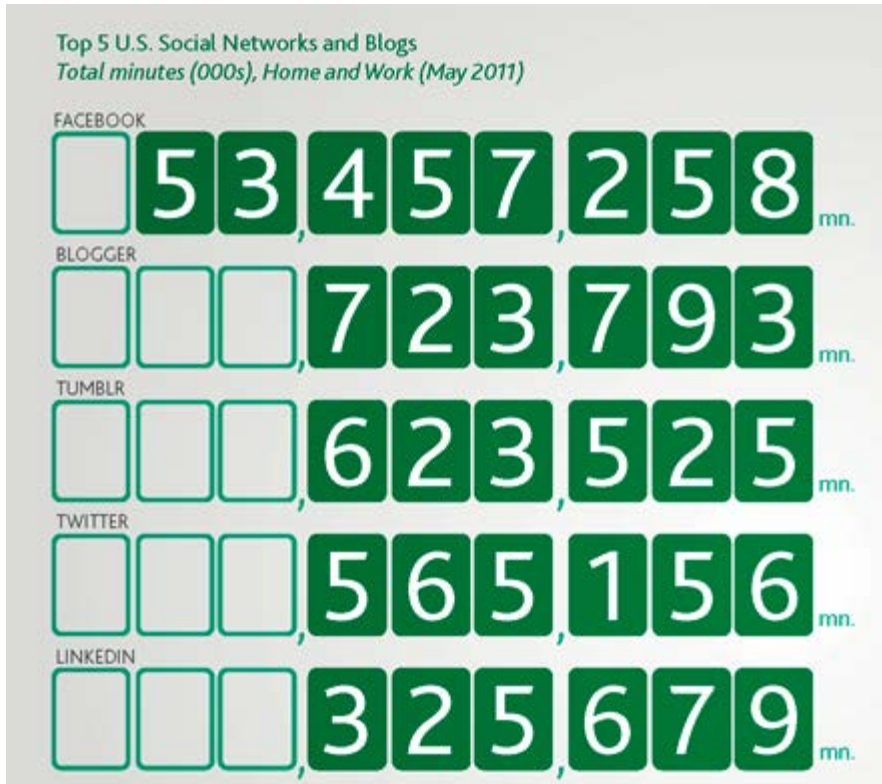
#2: Over 80% of all Americans use a social network.

#3: Americans spend more time on Facebook than any other U.S. website.

#4: Approximately 40% of social media users access their accounts through mobile devices.

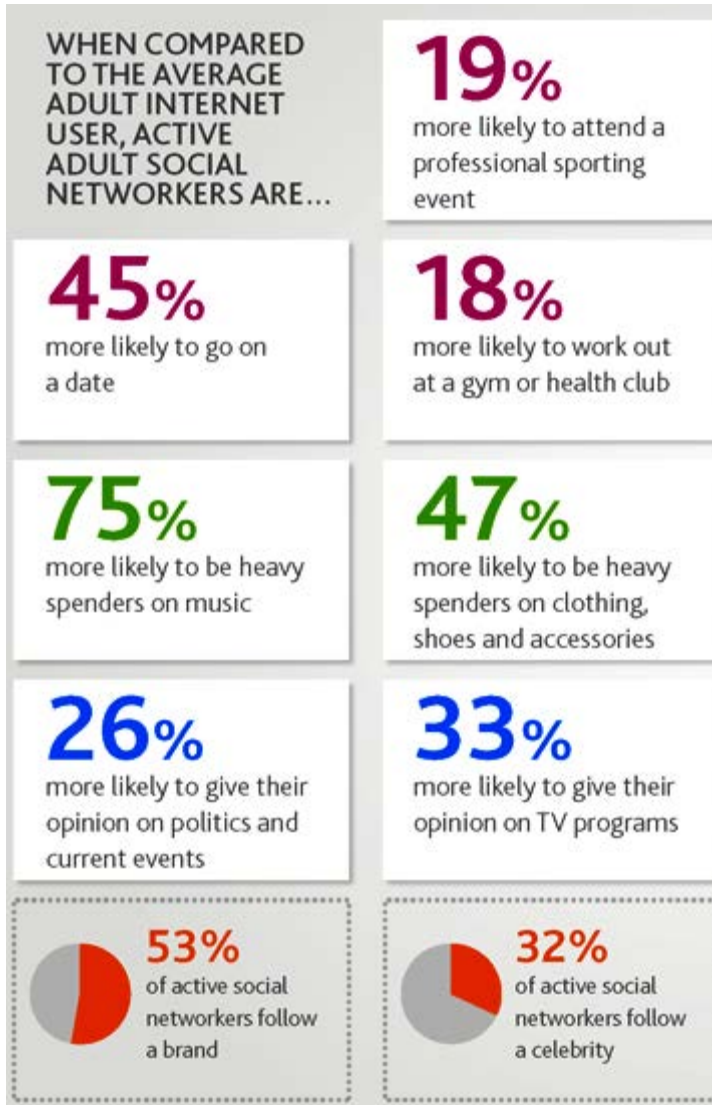
#5: Nearly 23% of online time is spent on social networks.

#6: Facebook is the top destination among social networks and blogs:



Nielsen found U.S. users spend nearly 10x more time on Facebook than Twitter or LinkedIn.

#7: Social media users are more active and influential offline:



#### Key Takeaways:

- Be sure you empower your online fans to be offline advocates;
- Given the growing number of mobile social media users, consider how to best engage your mobile customers when you craft your posts for Facebook and LinkedIn (e.g., requiring shorter responses will get higher engagement).

At Facebook's recent F8 Developer Conference (2011), Facebook shared the following statistics:

#8: More than half of Facebook users log in every day – that's more than 400 million people.

#9: The average user has 130 friends and is connected to 80 pages, events and groups.

#10: There are 900 million objects that people interact with (pages, groups, etc.).

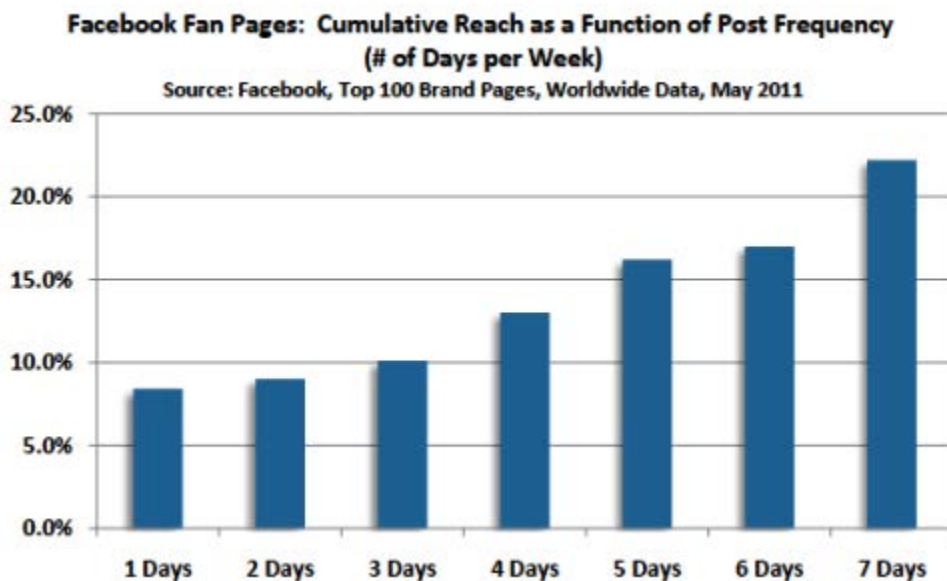
#11: Facebook hosts over 7 million apps, and over 20 million apps are downloaded each day.

#12: Around 75% of Facebook users are outside of North America with accounts available in 70 languages.

**Key Takeaway:**

The previous five statistics show the strong competition for eyeballs. A critical success factor for getting seen is consistency. There is a cumulative effect to your social efforts. The next stat highlights this:

#13: Comscore released a study in 2011) that showed how business brands that post at least once every day will reach 22% of their fans in a given week.



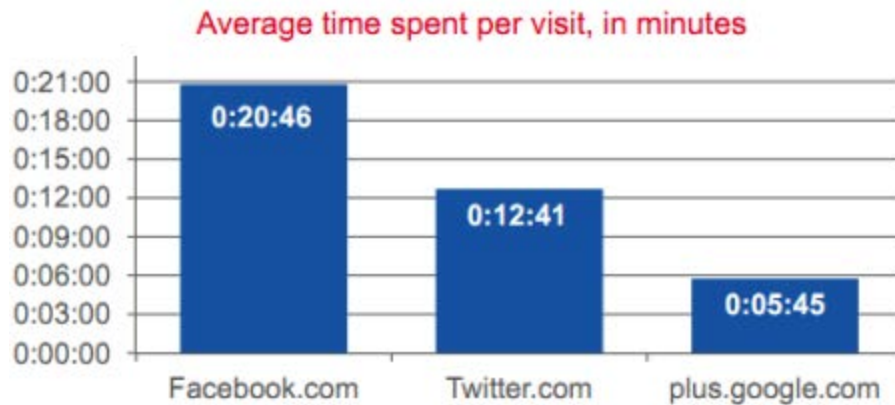
Experian recently released their 2011 Social Media Consumer Report. The following trends help paint a picture of how people are using social media.

#14: Experian estimates that 91% of online American adults (approx. 129 million) access some form of social media each month.

#15: And get this: 98% of 18- to 24-year-olds access social accounts monthly.

#16: This confirms their stat that college towns log on to Facebook the most.

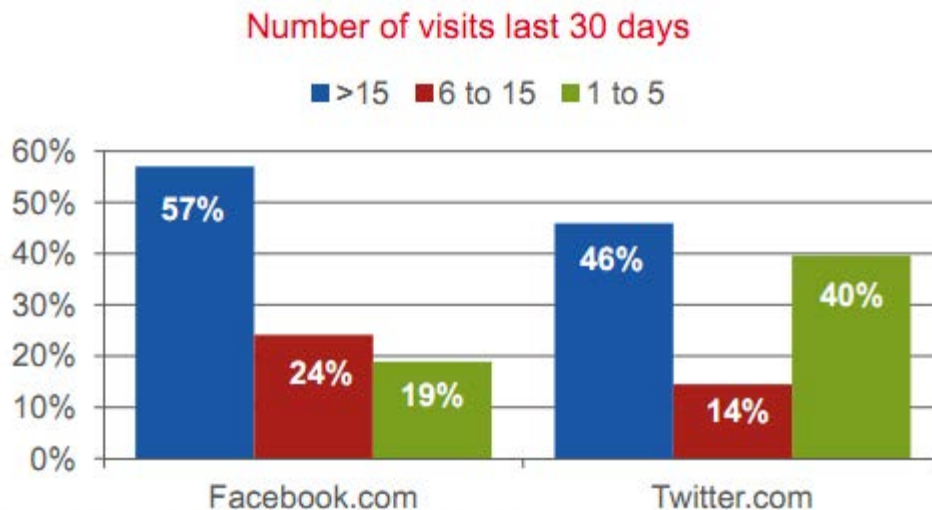
#17: The average Facebook user spends 20 minutes on his or her account during each visit.



Source: Experian Hitwise, August 2011 (Note – Hitwise does not include mobile traffic )

Note that Facebook users spend nearly twice as much time on the platform as Twitter users. The jury is still out on Google+, as data hasn't been accumulated to show the effect of the public release.

#18: A majority of Facebook users log in 3-4 times per week.



Source: Experian Simmons, August 15, 2011



Notice that Twitter users are nearly as likely to login once per week as they are three to four times per week.

#19: One out of 5 social network users is likely to visit another social site after leaving one.

Type of site visited after any Social Networking and Forum-categorized site



Source: Experian Hitwise, August 2011  
(Note – Hitwise does not include mobile traffic)

After visiting a social network, 45% of users will visit another social site, a multimedia site like YouTube or use a search engine.

### Key Takeaways:

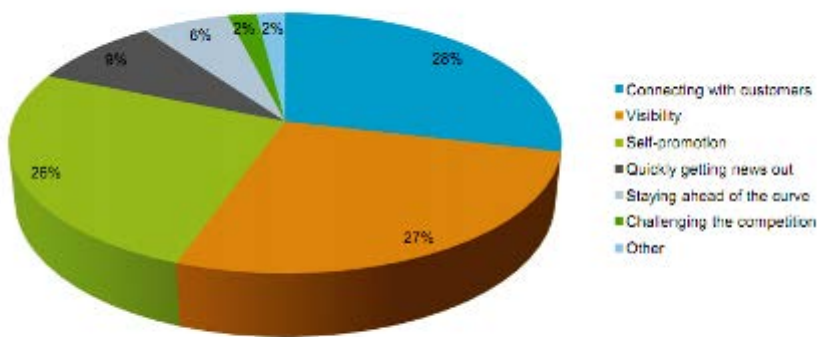
- If college students or young professionals are part of your target market, be sure connect with them on Facebook whenever possible. Because many customers show a tendency to stay on social media sites, find ways to keep them engaged.

So what are business leaders doing in light of the obvious shift toward social media in online behavior? Zoomerang interviewed 1,180 small- to mid-sized business (SMB) decision-makers and 500 consumers in September to release this study in an attempt to answer that question.

#20: The 3 most important reasons small businesses leverage social media are:

1. Connecting with customers
2. Visibility
3. Self-promotion

**What is the most important reason your business leverages social media? Select one.**

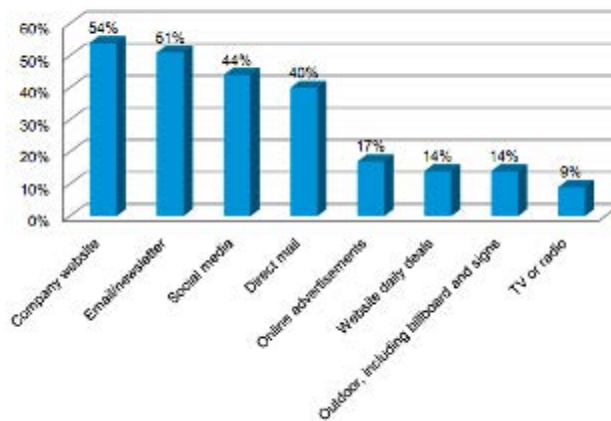


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81% of small business leaders use social media to get in front of customers and find new customers.

#21: 44% of SMB decision-makers use social media.

**How does your company currently market to your clients/customers? Select all that apply.**

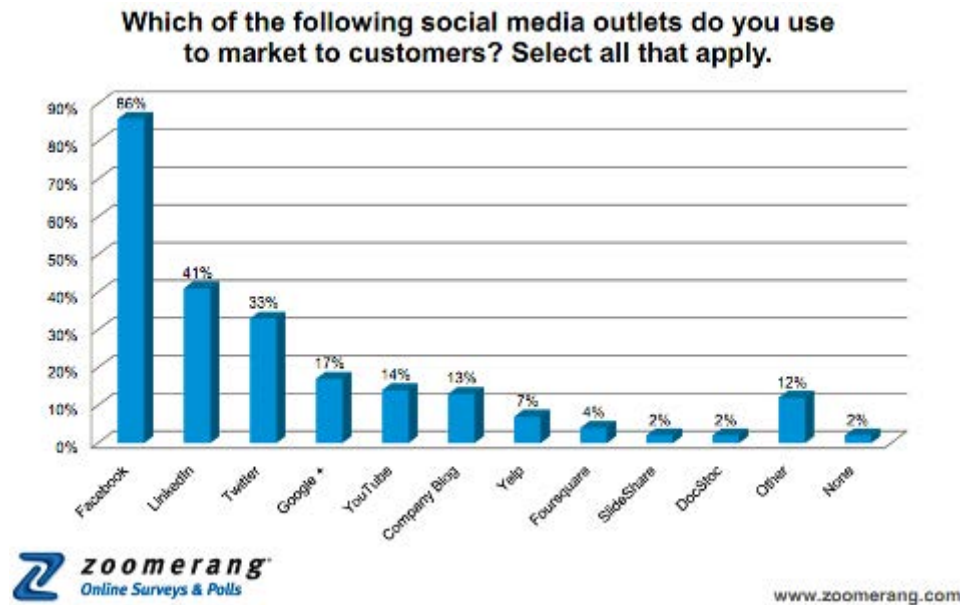


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This graphic highlights how important it is to integrate social media with your website, email and direct mail efforts.



#22: Of those SMB decision-makers who use social media, 86% use Facebook vs. 41% LinkedIn and 33% Twitter:



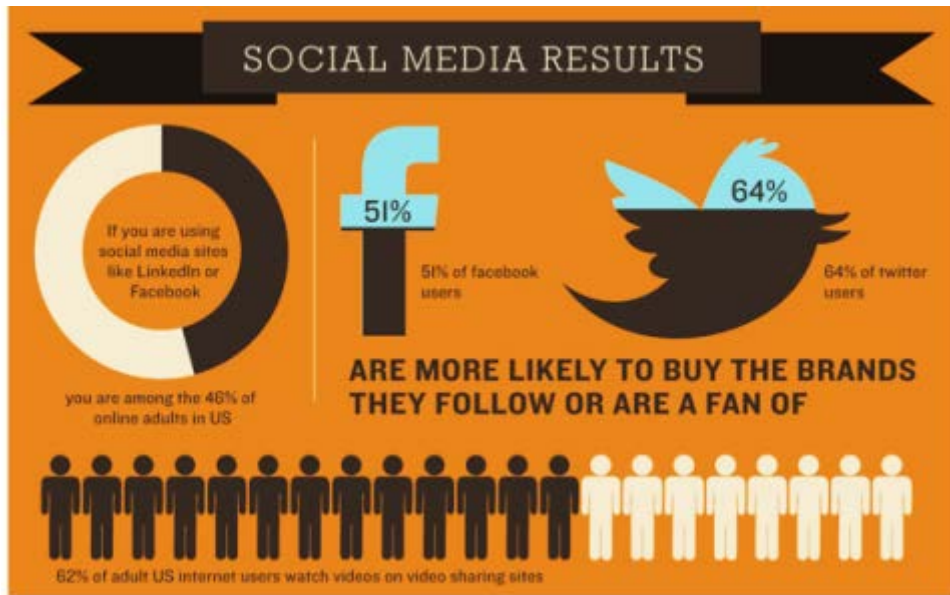
**Takeaway:**

Be sure to integrate your social media efforts with your website and mail efforts (online and offline).

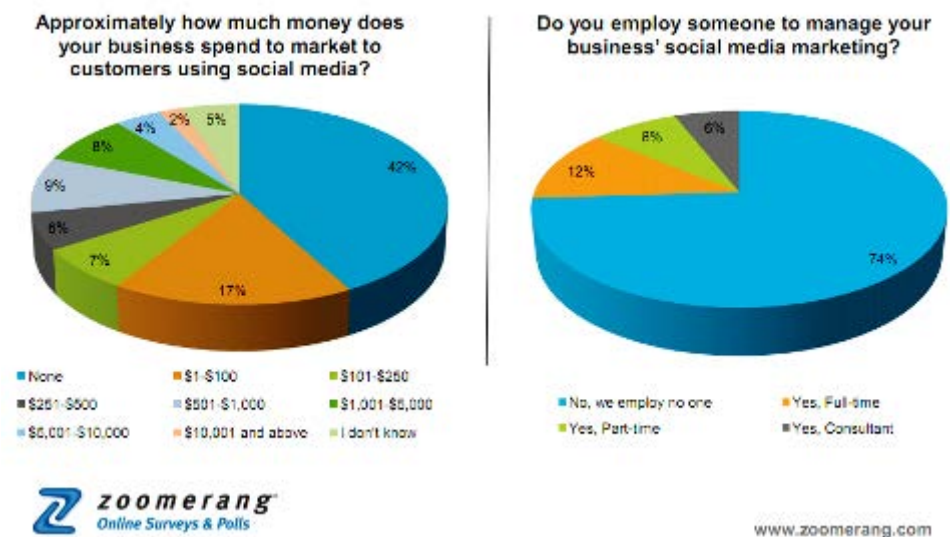
Social media is good for business, not just relationships. Mediabistro published an infographic produced by Crowdspring that reveals the following findings:

#23: 50% of small business owners reported gaining new customers through social media – most notably through Facebook and LinkedIn.

#24: 51% of Facebook users and 64% of Twitter users are more likely to buy from the brands they follow.



#25: Small businesses don't have to spend much to get results: Zoomerang found that nearly 60% of all small business decision-makers spend less than \$100 on social media and 74% of businesses don't employ anyone to manage their social media marketing.



#26: Ning has found it only takes 20 people to create meaningful many-to-many interactions and bring an online community to a significant level of activity. That's something almost any business can achieve.

**Key Takeaway:**

Don't use the excuses of having a limited budget or a small fan base to prevent you from broadening and deepening your social efforts.

There are numerous conclusions to draw from these statistics. Clearly, small businesses are increasingly leaning on social media to grow their businesses. Many of your customers are using social media almost every day. The opportunities to connect directly with your customers are unprecedented, but so is the competition.

## Social Media Channels

Just as the definition of social media has been difficult to clarify, there is not one systematic way in which different social media channels can be categorized. Most attempts simply list the various types of social media, without fully presenting the ecology of the social media channels that exist. However, several helpful attempts have been made to outline the “forest” rather than simply providing a census of “tree” types.

For example, Kietzman et al. (2011) discuss seven functional building blocks of social media. Each block examines a specific facet of the social media user experience and its implications for firms (Figure1):

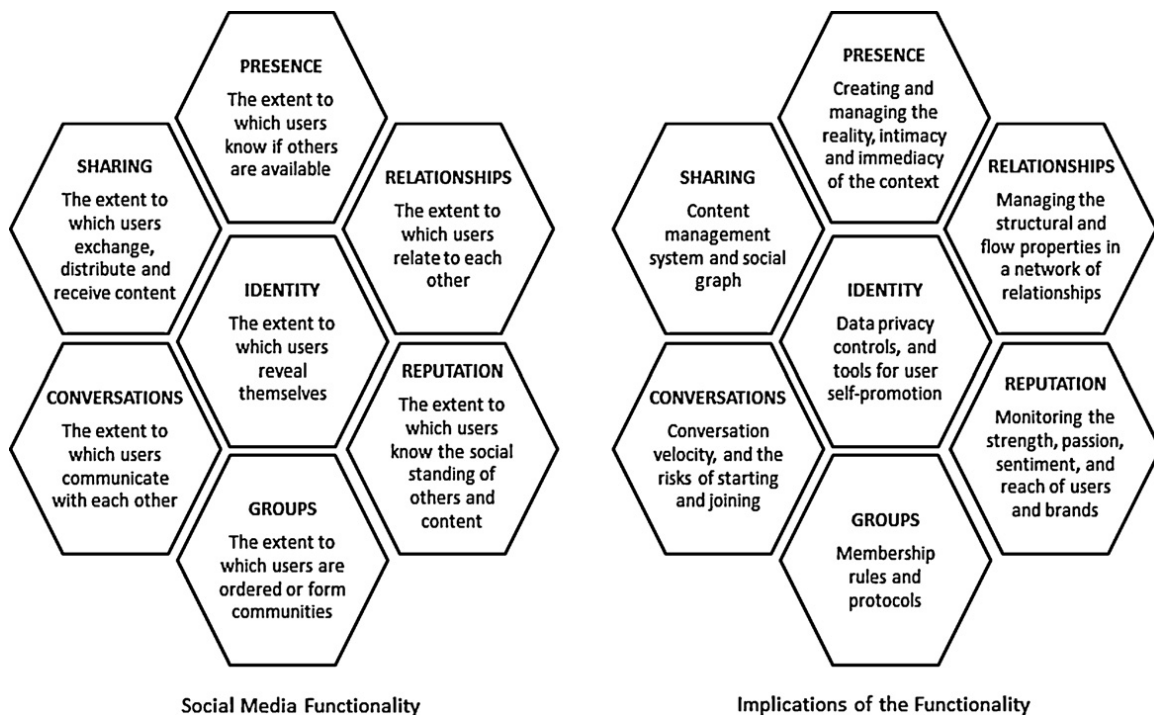


Figure 1. The functional building blocks of social media (Source: Keitzmann et al., 2011)

- The *identity* functional block represents the extent to which users reveal their identities in a social media setting. This can include disclosing information such as name, age, gender, profession, location, and also

information that portrays users in certain ways.

- The *conversations* block of the framework represents the extent to which users communicate with other users in a social media setting. Many social media sites are designed primarily to facilitate conversations among individuals and groups that happen for all sorts of reasons. Sharing represents the extent to which users exchange, distribute, and receive content.
- The *framework* building block presence represents the extent to which users can know if other users are accessible. It includes knowing where others are, in the virtual world and/or in the real world, and whether they are available.
- The *relationships* block represents the extent to which users can be related to other users. Relate means that two or more users have some form of association that leads them to converse, share objects of sociality, meet, or simply just list each other as a friend or fan. Reputation is the extent to which users can identify the standing of others, including themselves, in a social media setting.
- The *groups* functional block represents the extent to which users can form communities and sub- communities. The more 'social' a network becomes, the bigger the group of friends, followers, and contacts.

Hansen et al. also provide a listing of the major social media categories, along with examples of each (Table 1). These categories include asynchronous threaded conversations, synchronous conversations, collaborative authoring, blogs and podcasts, social sharing, social networking, online markets, idea generation, virtual worlds, and mobile-based services. Frick (2010) provides a similar breakdown that includes video and photo sharing, social bookmarking, blogging and microblogging, wikis, directories, review sites, and social network apps.

The *conversation prism* (Figure 2) by Brian Solis and Jesse Thomas debuted in August 2008 to provide a visual representation of the true expansiveness of the social web and the conversations that define it. The inspiration for its inception derived from a consistent observation of top-down methodologies and practices of brands, professional and personal, employed to create a presence on the social Web. Simply stated, brands focused on building presences in the most popular communities without regard to how they would attract inhabitants and ultimately interact, let alone whether or not their core ambassadors were present. The conversation prism suggests a reversal in this approach, instead inspiring a bottom-up strategy that promoted social research, mapping, and ethnography.

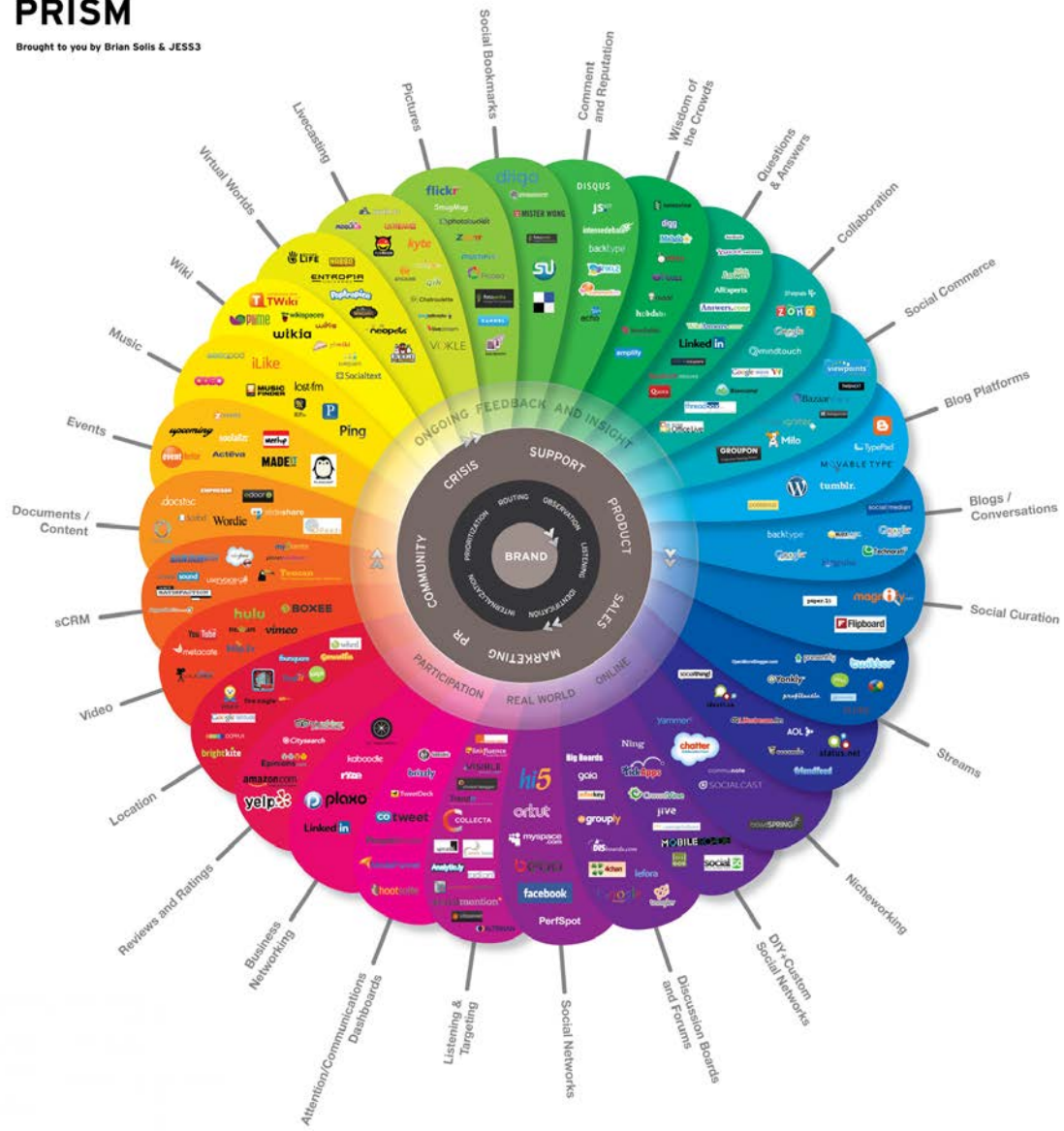
Table 1. Types of social media channels with example services of each.

Social Media Type	Examples
<b>ASYNCHRONOUS THREADED CONVERSATION</b>	
Email	Gmail, Hotmail, AIM Mail, Yahoo! Mail, MS Outlook
BBS, discussion forums, Usenet newsgroups, email lists	Slashdot, Google groups, Yahoo! Groups, Yahoo! Answers, Listserv
<b>SYNCHRONOUS CONVERSATIONS</b>	
Chat, instant messaging, texting	UNIX Talk, IRC, Yahoo! Messenger, MSN Messenger, AIM, Google Talk, ChaCha
Audio and videoconferencing	Skype, Gizmo, iChat, Window's Live
<b>WORLD WIDE WEB</b>	
<b>TRADITIONAL WEB SITES, HOMEPAGES, AND DOCUMENTS</b>	
Corporate, organizational, and government websites and documents	Ford.com, UMD.edu, Prevent.org, Serve.gov; Data.gov
Homepages	Faculty member websites, artists' portfolio websites, family history websites
<b>COLLABORATIVE AUTHORING</b>	
Wiki	Wikipedia, Wikia (Lostpedia), pbwiki, wetpaint
Shared documents	Google Docs, Zoho, Etherpad
<b>BLOGS AND PODCASTS</b>	
Blogs	LiveJournal, Blogger, WordPress
Microblogs and activity streams	Twitter, Yammer, Buzz, Activity Streams
Multimedia blogs and podcasts	Vlogs (video blogs such as Qik), photo blogs (Fotolog, FAILblog.org), moblog (mobile blogging such as moblog.net), podcasts (iTunes, NPR)
<b>SOCIAL SHARING</b>	
Video and TV	YouTube, Hulu, Netflix, Vimeo, Chatroulette
Photo and art	Flickr, Picasso, deviantART
Music	Last.Fm; imeem; Sonic Garden
Bookmarks, news, and books	Delicious, Digg, Reddit, StumbleUpon, Goodreads, LibraryThing, citeulike
<b>SOCIAL NETWORKING SERVICES</b>	
Social and dating	Facebook, MySpace, BlackPlanet, Tagged, eHarmony, Match
Professional	LinkedIn, Plaxo, XING
Niche networks	Ning (e.g., classroom 2.0), Ravelry, Groups
<b>ONLINE MARKETS AND PRODUCTION</b>	
Financial transaction	eBay, Amazon, craigslist, Kiva
User-generated products	Instructables, Threadless, TopCoder, Sourceforge, Codepiex
Review sites	ePinions, Amazon, Angie's List, Yelp
<b>IDEA GENERATION</b>	
Idea generation, selection, and challenge sites	IdeaConnection, Chaordix, IdeaScale, Imaginatik
<b>VIRTUAL WORLDS</b>	
Virtual reality worlds	Second Life, Club Penguin, Webkinz, Habbo
Massively multiplayer games	World of Warcraft, Lord of the Rings Online, Aion
<b>MOBILE-BASED SERVICES</b>	
Location sharing, annotation, and games	Foursquare, Gowalla, Loopt, MapMyRun, Geocaching, Letterboxing, SCVNGR



# THE CONVERSATION PRISM

Brought to you by Brian Solis & JESS3



For more information  
check out [theconversationprism.com](http://theconversationprism.com)

Figure 2. The conversation prism.



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