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# The Essential Guide to Social Media

An ebook by Brian Solis of [PR 2.0](#) and Co-Author of [Now is Gone](#)



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*An executive outline of Social Media tools and resources needed to listen and participate, guiding PR, Customer Service, Product Development, and Marketing*

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## Introduction - The State of Social Media and Business Marketing

We live in interesting times. We're currently enthralled in an immersive, confusing, and definitive transition in our "day job." If you don't engage, your competition will. This session will help you become a Social Media sociologist and participant observer, not a cultural voyeur, in order to get to work and build relationships along the way.

Question: If a conversation takes place online and you're not there to hear or see it, did it actually happen?

Indeed. Conversations are taking place with or without you.

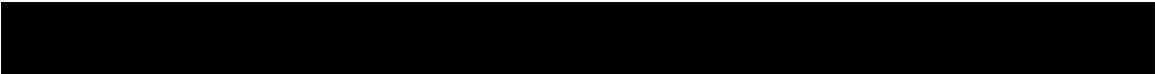
If you're not part of the conversation, then you're leaving it to others to answer questions and provide information, whether it's accurate or incorrect. Or, even worse, you may be leaving it up to your competition to jump in to become the resource for the community. Yes, there will be negative comments. Yes, you'll invite unsolicited feedback. Yes, people will question your intentions. Negativity will not go away simply because you opt out of participating. Negative commentary, at the very least, is truly an opportunity to change the perception that you did or didn't know existed.

Many companies are participating in social networks as a form of proactive outbound customer service with a twist of social marketing such as...

- Zappos
- JetBlue
- Southwest
- H&R Block
- Dell
- Wine Library
- Freshbooks

They're engaging customers on their turf, in their way, in order to help them solve problems, find information or simply engage them in valuable dialog. In turn, they're turning customer relationships into a powerful competitive advantage.

It's breaking new ground and it's setting a new standard.



Engaging with and empowering your customers as an extension of your marketing efforts isn't new. However, in the era of Social Media, there are new tools and philosophies to more effectively listen and engage with customers and in turn...

- Cultivate a more significant community
- Enhance your brand
- Build relationships
- And, create evangelists along the way.

Participation is marketing.

Intention is everything.

And, actions speak louder than words.

However, marketing needs to be clarified as I am not referring to the traditional marketing that typically "speaks" at "target audiences" through "messages."

In Social Media, this is about dialog, two way discussions that bring people together in order to discover and share information. Joining the conversation isn't as simple as jumping in however.

## **Social Media Tools**

- If you've ever walked into the tool section of any hardware superstore, you'll be more than inundated with options.
- There are tools for everything, more than we knew – with more introduced every week.
- Let's not forget that these tools serve a purpose, some general, while others more specific.
  - You wouldn't show up to fix a hole in the wall with everything in the store.
  - You bring what you need and you learn how to use them.
- With Social Media, there are more tools than you can possibly imagine and quite honestly, more than you can ever or should ever use.
- We assess the tools based on our objectives and the conversations that are taking place.
  - We don't just start using everything because they're shiny, new, slick, or popular.
- We embrace only the tools that facilitate conversations between the people we want to reach, where they're taking place.
  - The rest is about Social Science and the art of nurturing discussions and relationships.

## Social Media is About Social Science and Not Technology

- Social Media is much more than user-generated content.
- It's driven by people in the communities where they communicate and congregate.
- They create, share, and discover new content without our help right.
- They're creating vibrant and rich cultures across online networks and using the social tools that we learn about each and every day to stay connected.
  - Any social network is a melting pot of various cultures.

## What are the Social Sciences?

- Social sciences provide us with an understanding of how human interaction and the ensuing ecosystem shape individual attitudes and behavior.
- **Sociology** is the study of human social behavior, especially the study of the origins, organization, institutions, and development of human society.
  - Observation of cultures, people, and the dynamics of interaction.
  - The recognition of people independently from the tools is an important reminder that their interests are at the center of what we do.
- Sociologists study society and social action by examining the groups and social institutions people form.
- **Anthropology** is the scientific study of people, including the development of societies and cultures.
- **Ethnography** is the study of people in their natural or "native" environments—where they live, work, shop, and play.
  - In many cases, it is an **ethnographer** (or someone following in the guiding principles of ethnography) who observes a community to learn the socio-cultural behavior and interaction to hopefully become accepted by the community and in turn, engage as a true member of the desired digital society.
- Margaret Mead is known for championing a style of anthropological research called **participant observation**.
- **Participant-Observation Fieldwork** - When Margaret Mead studied in the field, she set out to both observe people and also participate in the life of the community. It was her belief that it was the only way to more fully understand the culture. Participant-Observation fieldwork is a hallmark of contemporary anthropology.

## Social Sciences and Social Media

- In Social Media, communities take the form of social networks and the communal groups within them.
- People establish associations, friendships, and allegiances around content, objects, products, services, and ideas.
- How they communicate is simply subject to the tools and networks that people adopt based on the influence of their social graph – and the culture within.
  - Cultures are different and unique within each social network and the groups that define them.
- Through social sciences, we're learning to peel back the layers of our target demographics to see the people underneath.
- It reminds us that we need to humanize our story.
  - We would never speak to our friends and family through messages, so why should we speak "at" the very people we want to reach and befriend?
- We're opening our ears and our minds to acknowledge that we can no longer push our impressions upon people in order to earn resonance
- We have to listen, talk, listen again, assess, and contribute value – as if we were citizens of each respective community we wished to join.

## Differences Between Listening and Research

- By listening, reading, and participating, brand marketers have an opportunity to make their brands more approachable and shareable than ever before.
- Most Social Media Marketing initiatives have started with the tools first...
  - Brands opt to engage using the most popular tools and networks to attract relationships instead of going to where their existing or prospective customers are congregated.
  - They didn't observe or listen prior to jumping in.
- Many have incorrectly viewed the process of social media as “build it and they will come.”
- Companies simply create profiles on Facebook and Myspace, accounts on Twitter, uploaded videos to YouTube and images to flickr, and simply hoped for a mass wave of friending and interaction.
  - We can't simply walk into a public square or park, plant a sign behind us with our name, interests and affiliations and expect real people to come up to us for meaningful and long-term dialog.
  - This is the equivalent of setting up camp next to a village because you have the tools to do so and expecting the village to integrate you into their society.
- Conversational marketing requires observation, which will dictate your engagement strategies.
- It starts with a combination of social and traditional tools to discover, listen, learn, and engage directly with customers.
  - It helps us find where the conversations are truly taking place.
  - The goal is to help them make decisions and also do things that they couldn't, or didn't know how to do, before.
  - Build relationships through conversations without objectives.
- It's about gathering intelligence.
- It removes the tendency to “market at” people and instead naturally shapes a more honest, meaningful, and informative approach.
- It helps us humanize our story in order to create loyalty and earn customer business and ultimately their respect.



## Social Media Voyeurs

- Many marketers are merely engaging in cultural voyeurism at best
- They look from afar and roam the perimeters of online societies without ever becoming a true member of any society.
- They don't truly understand what, where, or why they're "participating," only jumping in because they have something to say and have access to the tools that will carry their messages into play.
- This like someone standing on top of a table during a cocktail party shouting marketing statements at the party in the hopes that it may inspire, compel, or resonate with someone to start a series of healthy and spirited conversations that extend the intended messages.
  - Instead, the only conversation it's starting is propelled by disbelief and/or anger for interrupting the dynamic of the interaction and the flow of dialog that was already underway.

## The Breakup – A Comedic View of One-sided Relationships

Video Link: <http://youtube.com/watch?v=DkOHsjZKBB0>

- There's a popular short video circulating the Web that demonstrates the marketing stereotype of taking through messages without listening directly to the needs of the customer.
- The video spotlights a young couple dining at a local restaurant where he represents The Advertiser and she The Consumer.
- The scenario plays out with the woman raising concerns over their relationship, specifically complaining that "he" never listens to her, nor does he really understand her wants and needs.
- As she continues to share examples of his one-sided behavior, he responds with witty, one-liner messages that paint a very vivid, and familiar picture of how brands usually approach relationships.
- In one telling scene, the Advertiser proclaims he cares by referencing a big television ad, a print campaign and even a billboard in Times Square which "was like a 200 foot tall declaration of love."
- When the Consumer tells the Advertiser that she has changed and he hasn't, the advertiser responds with "coupons!"
- After being told that he knows nothing about her, the Advertiser says "I know everything about you. You are 28-34, Your online interests include music, movies and laser hair removal. You have a modest but dependable disposable income."
- The Advertiser merely continues to speak at the customer ignoring her complaints and concerns, behaving as he always has.
- This is a representation of how not to engage in Social Media – but it unfortunately happens every day.
- Relationships require more than one person and definitely offer benefits to all parties involved.
- You can't manage a relationship, you need to be a part of it, fully engaged.
- By embracing the social science in Social Media, we can not only observe social behavior and engage with our peers, but also keep communities intact and unaffected by traditional marketing.
- The customer comes first, and if we fuse sociology, social media, customer service, relationship marketing, experiential marketing, and traditional marketing, we're creating a new formula for outbound influence and fueling a new generation of brand ambassadors and loyalists.



## Getting to Work...

### Observation

- The true form of observation starts with just that, observation.
- It's the listening and monitoring that tells us everything.

We'll learn:

- Where the relevant conversations are taking place
- Who's participating
- What they're saying and the tone of the discussions
- The specific information they're looking for
- Impressions and conceptions
- The patterns of behavior within specific communities

### Important Next Steps

- Identify who your customers are and where they go for information.
- Search for key words: Product and Company names as well as competitors and their products and services.
- Please don't forget the relationships that exist in the real world.
  - They're also indispensable for providing the feedback and insight you now and later.

## **Social Tools for Listening**

- There are many tools available to us for listening, both free and those that require subscriptions, which will reveal the conversational hubs that require our attention.
- At the moment, the tools are mostly specific to each category of social media as well as specific networks.

## **Social Bookmarks**

Ma.gnolia  
Delicious  
Diigo  
StumbleUpon

## **Crowdsourced Content**

Digg  
Yahoo Buzz  
Mixx  
Hubdub  
Reddit  
Newsvine

## **Blogs/Conversations**

Google Alerts  
Blogpulse  
Radian6 (paid)  
BuzzLogic (paid)  
Ask.com  
Google Blog Search  
Technorati

## **Blog Communities**

Blogged.com  
MyBlogLog  
BlogCatalog  
Bloglines  
CoComment  
Tangler



## **Micromedia**

FriendFeed  
Pownce  
Tumblr  
Seismic  
Jaiku  
Plurk  
Utterz  
Pinger  
Jott  
Kwiry  
Twitxr

### ***Specific to Twitter:***

Tweetscan  
Hashtags.org  
Summize  
Twemes  
TwitterLocal

## **Social Networks**

MySpace  
Bebo  
Facebook

## **Niche Networks**

Ning  
Plaxo  
LinkedIn  
CrowdVine

## **Location**

TripIT  
Dopplr  
BrightKite  
TwitterLocal

## **Live Video and Audio**

Ustream  
Justin.tv  
Veodia  
BlogTV  
Kyte  
Qik  
BlogTalkRadio



## **Customers Service Networks**

YahooGroups  
GoogleGroups  
GetSatisfaction  
Yelp

## **Video**

YouTube  
Metacafe  
Blip  
Viddler

## **Video Aggregation**

Magnify.net

## **Pictures**

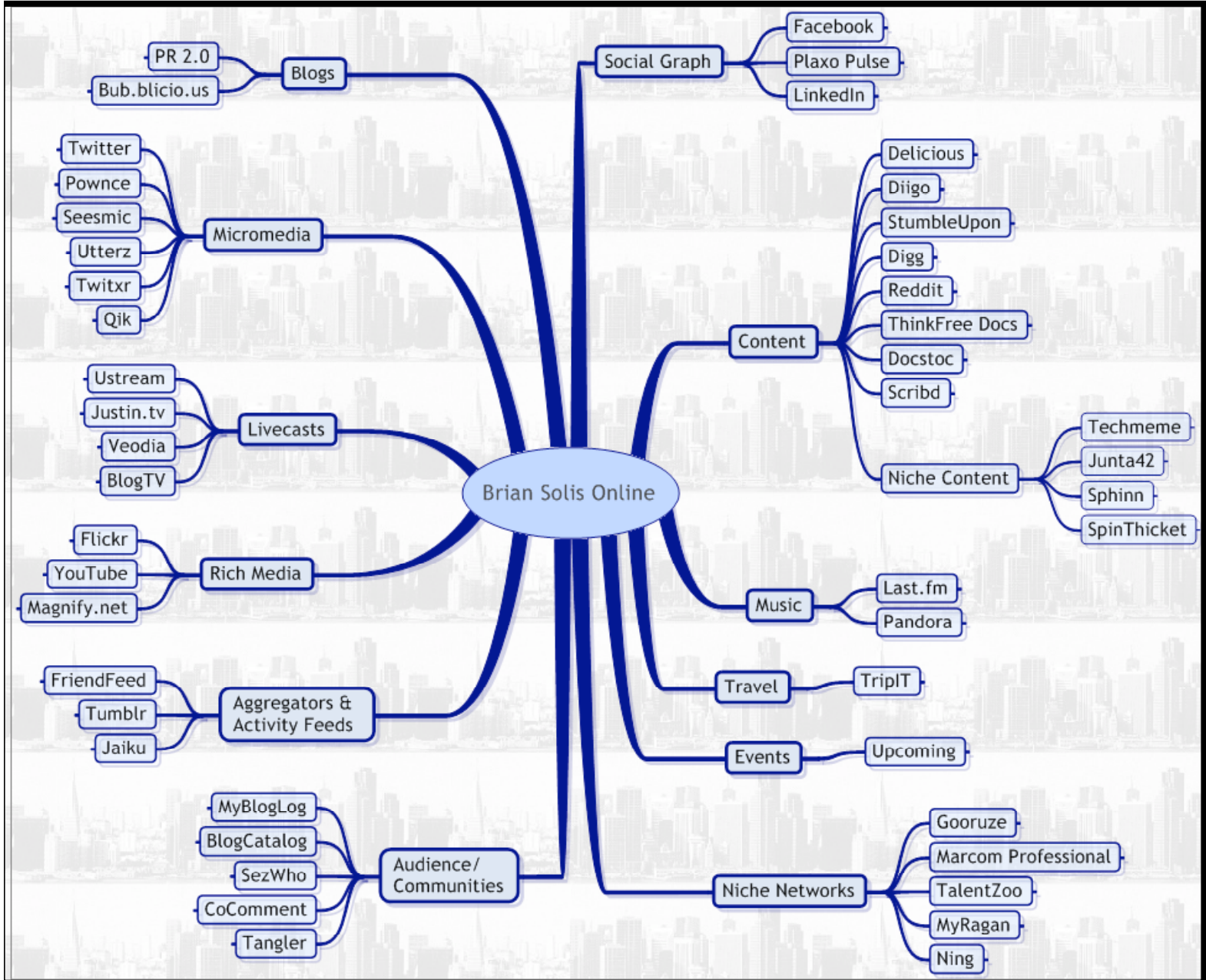
Flickr  
Zoomr  
Smugmug

## **Documents**

ThinkFree Docs  
Scribd  
Docstoc

## Creating a Social Map

By searching for keywords in each of these communities, we can create a detailed blueprint for engagement. Here's an example of the communities I identified that were important to my personal brand as determined by my research and listening.



## Immersion

- Sociology isn't simply relegated to observation, it encourages and requires full immersion.
- Once you've outlined the targeted conversations and who should engage, the process of participation craves a very human approach.
  - It starts with respect.
  - Participate as a person, not as a marketer, sales person or message factory.
  - Be helpful and bring value to the conversation.
  - During this entire process, you're contributing to the personality and the perception of the brand you represent.
    - It's the only way to earn their respect in return and hopefully their business and loyalty.
  - Remember, the lessons learned in the field should in turn be fed into the marketing, customer service, product development, sales, and executive departments.
    - This inspires more intelligent, experienced, and real world initiatives across all forms of marketing, PR, sales, service, and advertising.
- Any sociologist will tell you that the best way to truly "go native" in a new culture or society is through immersion.
  - However, they'll caution you on several things.
    - Don't be naïve, don't be ignorant, and don't get too immersed where you lose your perspective and value.

## Becoming the Customer

- In life, you are also customers.
  - You buy things.
  - You complain about products and services you don't like.
  - You recommend those that you love.
- You have to be a customer to think like a customer.
- You have to have experienced the product or service you represent in order to be empathetic, knowledgeable, and genuine.
- We've all heard that in Social Media, we can't control the message.
  - To some extent, we can't control perception, but we can help steer it.
- Be helpful and ensure that your solutions and benefits are clear in a way that can be understood by the different demographics of users that populate your markets.
- They need to hear things differently across each segment, from the head, to the long tail across every chasm in between.
- It's not just about the masses, but the niche markets as well.
- The importance of engagement is to ensure that you engage on their terms according to the rules, and culture, across each community.
- Be the people you want to help.

## Resources – Personnel and Budgets

Based on the research results, you can measure:

- The average frequency of relevant conversations
- Identify the more active hubs and communities
- The context of the conversations in order to determine time and variety of resources required (a community manager is required at the very least.)

The formula is calculated this way:

- The number of average relevant conversations per day per community.
- Multiplied by the quantity of relevant communities
- Multiplied by 20 (minutes required to research and respond and also monitor for additional responses), variable +/- dependent on the case, usually +
- Divided by 60 (minutes)
- Equals the amount of time required and in turn, the resources and associated costs required depending on internal labor or external consulting fees

Throughout the research process, you'll undoubtedly see that relevant conversations occur across disparate networks.

- They're representative of a sweeping variety of related topics
- They require varying responses
- And, they usually map to specific departments within your organization (those most qualified to respond)
  - Marcom
  - Product management
  - Customer service
  - PR
  - Executive management, etc.
- Keep a pulse on relevant conversations.
- Feed them, intelligently, to the right people internally.
- Guide them on the required response.
- Follow-up to ensure that the interaction is more meaningful and helpful
  - Distribute the responsibility across existing resources.

## Establishing Policies and Guidelines

- Understand that whether they know it or not, everyone within the organization contributes to the public perception of the company brand.
- Create communication policies and guidelines for all personnel, not just those tasked with participating in social media.
  - There are examples and tips online, review them for inspiration and also adapt what works specifically for your organization.
- Get IT involved as in many cases, popular social networks are blocked at the firewall.
- Craft outlines and determine response strategies based on a series of predictable scenarios.
- Assign leads for listening and responding.
- Training and education bring things into perspective for everyone.
  - Share examples of how to do it right and also circumstances where a variety of scenarios didn't pan out ideally.
  - Note how they were or weren't corrected.
  - One of the best lines I've heard when thinking about establishing guidelines is Microsoft's umbrella policy, "don't be stupid."

## Your Personal Brand

- Even though you're representing other brands, your personal brand is also a factor in Social Media.
  - It is sculpted and shaped by your online activity.
- Determine upfront, whether you are participating as "you" or as "you@company name."
  - Either way, be transparent in your engagement.
- Beware the things you share on social networks.
  - Realize that everything you share online can be used against you, usually when you least expect it.
  - Everything you upload, say, tweet, comment, post, etc., is usually indexable and discoverable through traditional search engines.
  - It can positively or negatively affect the company you represent.
- Use this as an opportunity to demonstrate and build thought leadership, value, and expertise.
  - Google is the new resume.
  - Knowledge and relationships are portable.

## Summary

- At the end of the day, we're all people and thus we should approach conversations as such.
- It may seem like common sense, but as classically trained marketers, we tend to approach these things with our marketing hat on.
  - It's the difference between authentic conversations and one-sided talking "at" people similar to the examples above.
- Conversations are feeding communities and communities are markets for relationships.
  - Relationships need cultivation and value from both sides in order to grow into something of value and longevity.
- Relationships are the new currency in Social Media.
- In a social world, engagement is a privilege.
  - Friendship, trust and loyalty are the rewards.
- In Social Media, we earn the relationships, and the reputation, we deserve.

## Additional Resources

PR 2.0 – [www.briansolis.com](http://www.briansolis.com)

Society for New Communications Research – [www.sncr.org](http://www.sncr.org)

SocialMediaClub – [www.socialmediacub.com](http://www.socialmediacub.com)

Gooruze – [www.gooruze.com](http://www.gooruze.com)

Marcom Professional – [www.marcomprofessional.com](http://www.marcomprofessional.com)

Now is Gone – [www.nowisgone.com](http://www.nowisgone.com)

Sphinn – [www.sphinn.com](http://www.sphinn.com)

Junta42 – [www.junta42.com](http://www.junta42.com)

Free ebook: Customer Service - [The Art of Listening and Engagement Through Social Media](#)

## About the Author



Brian Solis is Principal of [FutureWorks](#), an award-winning PR agency in Silicon Valley. Solis is globally recognized for his views and insights on the convergence of PR, Traditional Media and Social Media. Solis blogs at [PR2.0](#), [bub.blicio.us](#), Gooruze, Marcom Professional, and [WebProNews](#). Solis is co-founder of the Social Media [Club](#), is an original member of the [Media 2.0](#) Workgroup, and also is a contributor to the Social Media [Collective](#), TechCrunch, and BrandWeek.

In concert with Geoff [Livingston](#), Solis co-authored “[Now is Gone](#)” a new book that helps businesses learn how to participate in Social Media.

Solis has been actively writing about new PR since the mid 90s to discuss how the Web was redefining the communications industry – he coined PR 2.0 along the way. He was among the original thought leaders working to defend and define “Social Media” as a definitive media category.

PR 2.0 is a top 5,000 Technorati blog and is ranked in the Ad Age Power 150 index of leading marketing bloggers.

Connect with me on [Twitter](#), [Jaiku](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Tumblr](#), [Pownce](#), [Plaxo](#), [FriendFeed](#), or [Facebook](#).