



Web Resources for Business

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Introduction

This guide is intended to help businesses of any size, non-profit organizations, and anyone else with an interest in improving the online experience for everyone. It is provided free of charge to participants in our workshops and seminars.

Since this is a rapidly changing field, as new insights and information become available, we will continuously update this document and print new versions. Much of this material is also available on our website www.actgo360.com. We regularly update the website, too. The information on our website should be used as a companion to this document.

Additional help from ACTGO360 is also free. If you are seeking answers to any questions or problems you have, you can call us at 207-418-0874, email us at ed@actgo360.com, post a comment or question on our Facebook page, or use the online form at our website to send us a message.

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The New Environment

Think of the Information Age as an 80-year period and that we are about half-way into it. During the first 40 years businesses lead the way by using technology to automate their ordinary processes. From the PC and the early stages of the internet and e-commerce the focus was primarily on ways to support the industrial economy. Businesses like IBM, Microsoft, and Intel became the powerhouses of innovation.

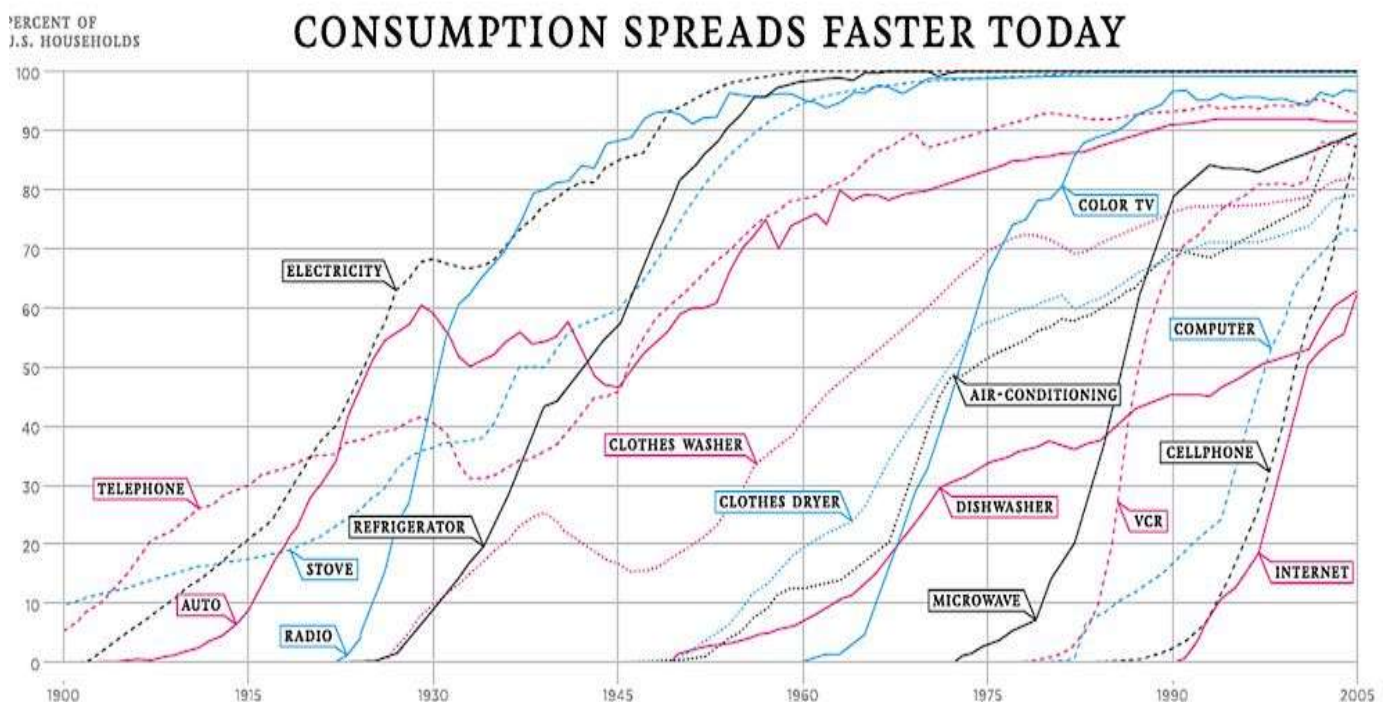
We are now seeing a dramatic shift. Technology has become inexpensive, adaptive, mobile, and ubiquitous. Incredible computing power is in everyone's hands and in everyone's pockets with tablets and smart phones. Wireless and internet-capable devices are being embedded in hundreds of consumer products. Meanwhile social media is rapidly becoming the primary channel for how we consume information. Businesses like Google and Facebook are now leading the way into the second phase of the Information Age.

In this new environment individuals are now able to exert greater control in their social, political, and economic activities. When individuals control the message, institutions lose their ability to push their agendas.

The implications are profound for all of us. Any business that doesn't adapt to the new realities risks being left behind.

The Rapid Adoption of Information Technology

This chart created by Charlie Catlett at Argonne National Laboratory in 2005 shows the increasingly rapid pace at which new technology is being adopted. Information technologies like cell phones, personal computers, and the internet have been among the fastest to reach a majority of American households. If we could extend the chart beyond 2005, smart phones and social media would show even steeper adoption curves.



Mobile Web

Smartphones and tablets are edging out PCs

According to a Gartner Research report published in November, 2011 web capable mobile devices – smartphones and tablets – have already become the preferred methods for accessing the web among new users. The cost and the convenience of smartphones are important factors driving their popularity.

As more people switch to using mobile web and as wireless networks become more capable, home-based wired broadband is becoming less important. According to Pew Research’s report “State of Social Media: 2011” published 12/14/11, after a decade of steady growth home broadband adoption peaked around May, 2010. Since then it has leveled off and actually declined slightly.

Who uses smartphones to access the web?

In 2012 31% of all smartphone owners use their phone as their primary way to access the web. The rate is significantly higher among 18-29 year olds (45%) and those with incomes under \$30,000 (43%). Americans over 50 are much less likely to rely on their phone to connect to the internet (11%). Likewise only 21% of those with incomes over \$50,000 are cell mostly web users.

How are people using their smartphones?

The pattern of how people are using their smartphones is about the same across all age groups. Texting and photo taking are most popular. Among all activities age is a significant factor. Those under 50 are far more likely to take advantage of smart phone features. From the data it looks like most people over 50 could accomplish their most common tasks with a feature phone.

Tablets and Laptops

Prior to the availability of smartphones, a wifi equipped laptop was the only practical way for mobile users to access the web. Smartphones have the advantage of being able to access the internet through wireless networks with wide coverage areas, meaning they can go online almost anywhere. With a cellular card a laptop can access the same network, but most laptops still rely on wifi hot spots. The Wireless Broadband Network estimates that public wifi hotspots will increase by 350% worldwide by 2015, providing additional support for continued laptop popularity.

While desktop PC sales are lagging, laptop sales are expected to experience continued growth. Meanwhile tablet sales have enjoyed explosive growth since the introduction of the iPad in 2010. According to a January 4, 2012 report by DisplaySearch, tablet sales will outpace laptop sales within 5 years. Strategy Analytics reported on January 26, 2012 that tablet sales jumped 260% in 2011 over 2010.

WORLD WIDE MOBILE SALES

2011 smartphone sales

461.5 million units

2012 est. - 40% increase

675.3 million units

In 2011 smartphone sales overtook pc sales for the first time.

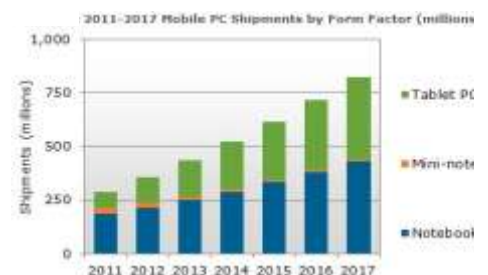
364 million PCs were sold.

In 2012 half US adults became smartphone owners.

TOP USES OF SMART PHONES BY AGE

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+
Texting	95%	85%	58%	24%
Take Photo	91	81	60	37
Send Photo	72	65	40	16
Internet	64	54	26	10
Play Games	53	44	18	7
Play Music	58	39	16	4
Record Video	53	42	19	3
Social Network	50	36	13	2
Download App	49	37	17	7
Watch Video	44	32	10	3
Post Video	37	26	9	5
Online Banking	29	22	10	6
Video Call/Chat	14	5	2	2

Source: Pew Research State of Social Media: 2011



Social Media

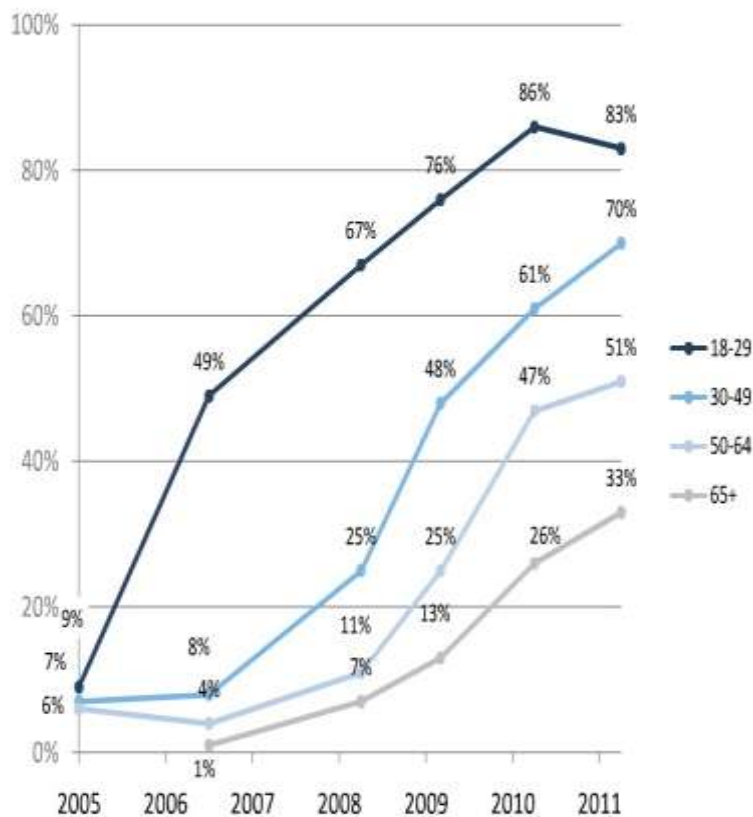
Facebook is dominating the way the web is used.

Today more people will spend more time on Facebook than Google, eBay, MSN, Yahoo, Amazon, and YouTube combined. Social media, especially Facebook, is becoming the primary way that individuals are experiencing the internet.

Why do people use Facebook?

People use Google, Yahoo, and Bing to find objective information. Amazon and eBay are gigantic marketplaces. Facebook on the other hand is a platform that helps people to connect with each other.

In a study appearing in the February 2012 edition of the journal *Personality and Individual Differences* Boston University professors Nardkani and Hofmann revealed that the two fundamental reasons why people use Facebook are to fulfill the need to belong and the need for self-presentation. This finding is consistent with both the reasons people express for using social media and the profile of their Facebook friends.



TOP REASONS PEOPLE USE SOCIAL MEDIA

- 67% Stay in touch with current friends
- 64% Stay in touch with family members
- 50% Reconnect with old friends
- 14% Connect with others over shared interests and hobbies
- 9% Make new friends
- 5% Read comments by celebrities, athletes, or politicians
- 3% Find potential romantic or dating partners

ANALYSIS OF A TYPICAL FACEBOOK FRIENDS LIST

- 22% People from high school
- 11% Extended family
- 10% Coworkers
- 9% College friends
- 8% Immediate family
- 7% People from volunteer groups
- 31% Others (friends-of-friends, etc.)

Source: Pew Research State of Social Media: 2011

Who uses social media?

Social media is being used equally by men and women with no differences based on income, ethnicity, or education.

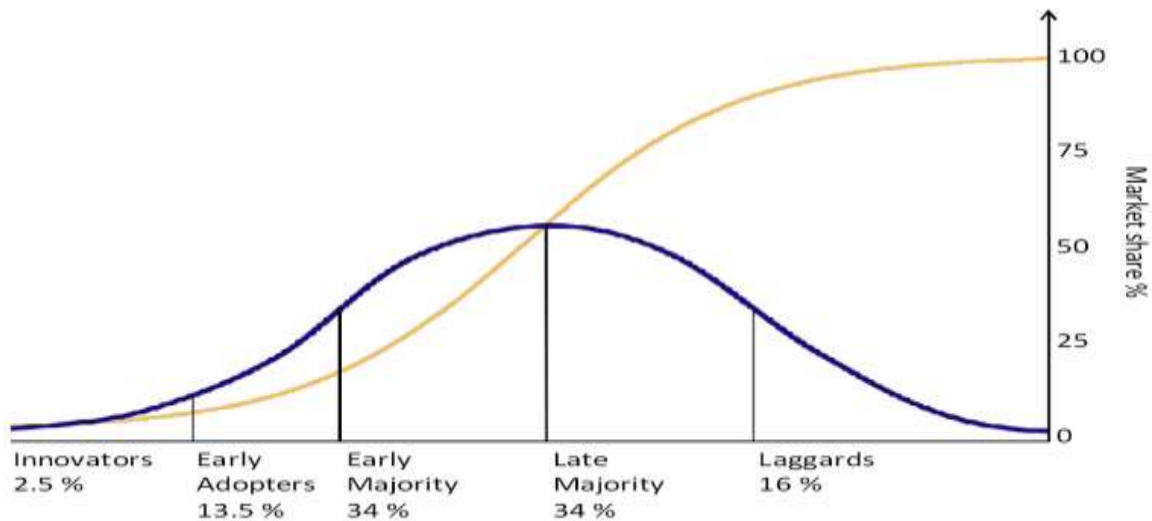
The only statistically significant difference that can be found is age. It is not surprising to find the earliest and fastest growth has been among 19-29 year olds.

However, it appears that over the past year usage among 18-29 year olds has leveled off, while all other age groups continue their rapid adoption. This may be a statistical blip, a natural saturation point reached, or an indication that fatigue with social media is setting in.

Implications of the New Environment

Are we there yet?

Mobile web and social media have already been adopted by a majority of Americans. Both have moved from the Early Adopters stage and into the Late Majority within only three years, based on this *Diffusion of Innovation* model. By comparison the telephone took 50 years, autos took 30 years, and electricity took 15 years. It's true that those older technologies had to follow the build-out of extensive enabling networks, and in the case of autos, required individuals to make a large capital expenditure to participate. Mobile web and social media haven't faced those impediments. Regardless of the reasons we suddenly find ourselves in this new environment. There is no turning back.



Who's in charge?

The type of marketing that worked five or ten years ago is becoming less and less effective. Free streaming video is drawing viewers away from network and cable TV. More and more news is being consumed online while print versions suffer. We've known about these trends for years.

What is more revolutionary is the way information is processed. Consumers are motivated less by traditional advertising when making purchasing decisions. For some time consumers have been able to find independent reviews at Amazon or through a Google search. That has made marketing claims less important.

This was just the beginning. Consumers are far more likely to make a purchase based on a friend's recommendation than any other factor. That is the power behind social media and in particular the Facebook Like. In its recent IPO filing Facebook revealed that it has 845 million members with 483 million daily users. On average an average day Facebook users contribute an amazing 2.7 billion new "likes" and comments. Each like and comment instantly reach an average of 227 friends. Whenever a user visits a Facebook page, if a friend has liked it, that information is prominently displayed. Imagine if information could be displayed in your newspaper ad, or if your radio commercial was introduced with the tag "And now here is something five of your friends like." An endorsement from a friend is even more powerful than a celebrity endorsement.

And, there is more. Facebook knows far more about its members than you do about your customers. Without Facebook having to lift a finger users voluntarily share all sorts of personal information. Facebook knows your customer's age, where they live, their marital status, who they know, what books and movies they like, where they

have been, where they went to school, where they work, who they work with, and much more. Facebook even tracks where they go online after they log out of Facebook! Facebook is already using much of that information to help marketers target your customers. According to their IPO filing, they earned over \$1 billion in profits from advertising in 2011. And, they are just getting started.

Not to be left behind Google introduced Google+, its newest attempt at social networking, on June 28, 2011. It is already the fourth most popular social networking site. Given its current growth rate and its potential to integrate its other products, many predicted it will become the number two social network by the end of 2012. That never happened and upstart Pinterest overtook Google+. Google is not giving up and has already integrated Google+ with Google search and with other assets like G-mail, YouTube, and its Android operating system. It has the potential to assemble the most massive database of user profiles on the planet.

According to Nielsen's Social Media Report 2012, Facebook remains the largest social network by far with changes brewing among the next six.

	Unique Monthly Visitors	YOY Change
FACEBOOK	152 million	- 4%
TWITTER	37 million	+ 13%
LINKEDIN	28 million	0%
PINTEREST	27 million	+ 1,047%
GOOGLE+	26 million	+ 80%
TUMBLR	25 million	+ 55%
MYSAPCE	19 million	- 13%

Some examples of what you can expect.

You walk into a store and see a product that interests you. After examining the product and deciding you want it, you can take out your smartphone and browse to Amazon or do a Google search to find the best deal. You can then complete the purchase on your smartphone and deprive the store owner of a sale.

You go to a restaurant and are directed to a kiosk equipped with tablets. You log on to view the menu containing notations identifying your favorite items from previous visits. When you enter your order, it is transmitted to the kitchen wirelessly. You can then pay by swiping your credit card on the side of the tablet or waving your smart phone near it.

You are at the grocery store without a shopping list. You use your smartphone to contact your refrigerator, which sends you a list of items it senses you need in addition to items you entered when you were at home.

You dock your tablet in your car dashboard. It becomes your entertainment center, your navigation device, and monitors your engine functions. It also controls the air conditioning and heating systems.

When you get home your tablet communicates wirelessly with your bathroom scales, a blood pressure monitor, a glucose tester, and other home health devices and then automatically transmits a report to your doctor.

BYO IT in the workplace

As smartphones and tablets have become more widespread, employees are bringing them into the workplace. How do employers cope with potential distractions? Some are banning smartphones. Others are embracing them. Since mobile devices are the logical tool of choice, some employers are developing mobile apps for the workplace. In addition to workflow processes, some employers are developing social media apps to create a platform for mass collaboration that includes employees at all levels, vendors, customers, and partners.

Is it sustainable?

Is mobile technology and social media here to stay? That depends on acceptance and satisfaction. Users were asked to provide one word to describe how they felt about each. The results were compiled into the following word clouds. The larger the word the more frequently it was mentioned. The word clouds speak for themselves.

Smartphones:



Social Networking:



Privacy

Mark Zuckerberg: Facebook users eventually get over privacy anxiety

By Emil Protalinski May 30, 2011, 1:01pm PDT (zdnet.com)

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg believes that users eventually get over their privacy anxiety: they get used to new features that initially worried them. Zuckerberg was at the e-G8 Forum in Paris last week, and as always had some very interesting and controversial things to say.

"We'll roll it out, and pretty often there'll be this backlash, and people will say, ok, we don't like this new thing," Zuckerberg said according to CNET. "It's I think a real anxiety. People were really afraid of more people being able to be involved in the social network. People thought that, you know, it was just too much, right, they wanted to share stuff on the site but they didn't want it to be so much in people's face," said Zuckerberg. "You know now it's just part of the site that I think most people in a way would be like 'What's going on? How can there be Facebook without this?'"

Facebook users are known to almost always initially reject the social network's latest features, but this is not representative of what they will think a little later down the road. Back in 2006, 1 million Facebook users (or 10 percent of the Facebook user base at the time) were against the new News Feed. The feature is now an integral part of Facebook as it gives you a glimpse of what your friends are up to.

Zuckerberg also said that Facebook has so far weathered its various backlashes from subsets of its 600 million users. He also added, "One of the good things about the Internet is you can just kind of build something, and people will choose to use it or not, and that's how we win debates."

Zuckerberg notes that while users are skeptical of new changes at first, they tend to change their minds over time. I would argue that this happens for two reasons. First of all, users realize that the feature or change is actually useful as they begin to use it. Secondly, Facebook tweaks and fixes issues as users complain about certain aspects of the feature.

In short, Zuckerberg is saying that users will follow their friends in complaining about something new. The backlash tends to be short-term, however, so there is nothing to worry about. If the majority of your friends stay on Facebook, then so will you, despite the latest change you may have been complaining about most recently.

A Question Posed to Facebook

Mashable.com 9/25/11

From: Facebook's New Features Might Not Be as Private as You Think [UPDATED]

"Will users be able to completely prevent their browsing data from being sent back to Facebook, or from displaying on their feeds?":

"I am a Facebook engineer that works on these systems and I wanted to say that the logged out cookies are used for safety and protection including: identifying spammers and phishers, detecting when somebody unauthorized is trying to access your account, helping you get back into your account if you get hacked, disabling registration for a under-age users who try to re-register with a different birthdate, powering account security features such as 2nd factor login approvals and notification, and identifying shared computers to discourage the use of 'keep me logged in."

"Also please know that also when you're logged in (or out) we don't use our cookies to track you on social plugins to target ads or sell your information to third parties. I've heard from so many that what we do is to share or sell your data, and that is just not true. We use your logged in cookies to personalize (show you what your friends liked), to help maintain and improve what we do, or for safety and protection."

Q and A: Facebook Privacy Changes

by Barbara Ortutay, AP [usatoday.com 12/1/11](#)

NEW YORK – On Facebook, people talk about births and deaths. They share party shots, ultrasound scans and deliver news about serious illnesses in a way that was unimaginable just a few years ago.

Facebook doesn't want that openness to end, which is why the company has been trying to put its privacy problems behind it. But a big settlement with the Federal Trade Commission is once again putting this thorny issue front and center for the world's biggest online social network.

On Tuesday, Facebook agreed to settle federal charges that it violated users' privacy by getting people to share more information than they agreed to when they signed up to the site. As part of a settlement, Facebook will allow independent auditors to review its privacy practices every other year over a 20-year period. It also agreed to get approval from users before changing how the company handles their data.

Here are some common questions and answers about Facebook's privacy practices and what they mean for users.

— Why is Facebook constantly pushing people to share things?

Even before it became a big business making billions in advertising revenue, Facebook's purpose has always been to let people "connect and share" — its motto — with their friends, families and acquaintances. Over the years, as it grew from an online network open only to college students to one with more than 800 million users, the company has pushed the envelope, encouraging people to share more photos, updates, links, and music. Some of the latest apps are let people automatically share news articles they read or music they are listening to.

Facebook's view is that people want to share more and that the company is giving people the platform to do so. Says CEO Mark Zuckerberg in a blog post Tuesday: "We made it easy for people to feel comfortable sharing things about their real lives."

— So this isn't all about making money?

Facebook, which is expected to go public next year in what could be one of the biggest IPOs in history, makes the bulk of its revenue from online advertising targeted to its users. The ads users see are based on things they share on the site. Research firm eMarketer estimates that Facebook will bring in \$3.8 billion in worldwide ad revenue this year and \$5.8 billion in 2012.

As a privately held company focused on building up its technology, Facebook has not made profits its outright goal. Rather, the company has cultivated an "if we build it, they will come" ethos. The more time people spend on its site and the more information they share about themselves, the better companies can target their ads. The more users Facebook attracts, the more people will see the ads so the more it can charge advertisers. However, as a public company with profit-seeking shareholders to answer to, Facebook's goals could change.

— How does Facebook use the information people share to make money?

Facebook, like Google and other companies that rely on advertising, targets ads to people based on their interests. Businesses can pick who they want to show their ads to — by location, age, hobbies and other things they share on Facebook. For example, a bridal magazine can target a promotion to women who've gotten engaged in the past six months. A soft drink company can show its ads to people who say they "like" a rival soft drink. Advertisers can narrow their target audience further by limiting the same pitch to football fans who live on the West Coast. People are more likely to click on ads that are relevant to them, making Facebook a virtual treasure trove of targeted advertising.

— Facebook says it has already addressed a lot of the issues raised in the FTC settlement. Are there things it didn't address?

Privacy advocates praised the settlement but many say more needs to be done to protect people's private information. The nonprofit Consumers Union said it "sends a strong message to companies that they must live up to the privacy promises made to consumers."

Chris Conley, technology and civil liberties fellow at the American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California said Facebook should do more to address outside applications' access to users' information.

"There are settings for sharing information with third-party apps, but they are counter-intuitive," he said. For example, an app your friend installs could have access to your information even if you do not install the app yourself. Though it's possible to opt out of sharing some of your information with your friends' apps, many people don't know to do this because they are not aware that the sharing is happening in the first place.

There's also the issue of online tracking. Facebook (along with Google and companies that advertise online) tracks people's activity around the Web. Facebook, Conley notes, tracks your activity on the Web even if you are not logged on to Facebook at the time. If you visit a page that has a "like" button, Facebook knows you visited the page even if you do not click "Like."

For its part, Facebook says it does not use the information it collects to create profiles about people's browsing habits and it does not sell the data to anyone.

But Conley said the challenge is that while this may be what Facebook is doing with it today, there could be others — law enforcement agencies, divorce attorneys, data miners — who would be very interested in where someone has been on the Web.

EPIC: Facebook Timeline changes users' privacy settings

By Emil Protalinski | January 10, 2012, 11:33am PST [zdnet.com](#)

Summary: EPIC has pointed out a privacy change the new Timeline profile has made for some Facebook users. You can't mass hide all your friending stories any more, nor can you stop them from being posted.

The Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC) is working very hard to point out Facebook privacy issues to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). A big part of its onslaught is centered on privacy through obscurity; EPIC insists the FTC's November 2011 settlement with Facebook doesn't allow this, but Facebook strongly disagrees. There's more though: EPIC claims Timeline makes changes to default privacy settings users set before the new profile rolled out, specifically related to the event of friending someone on the social network.

EPIC first made this argument last month. Facebook countered by saying Timeline has nothing to do with privacy.

I pressed EPIC for more information about specific changes Timeline had made that affected users. The organization was very adamant about the privacy through obscurity angle, but also came up with a separate example that was more troubling, at least in my eyes. Timeline changes the default settings for when Facebook posts a story saying you friended someone.

"Among one of the many ways in which Timeline subtly changes user privacy settings is the display of Friending," an EPIC spokesperson said in a statement. "Before Timeline, you could choose not display on your wall the people you friended. With Timeline, Facebook now shows, sometimes by month, the people you friended, *after* you made the choice not to display this information. A Facebook user who previously selected do not disclose friending events on the wall will now see in the Activity Log for friending events 'Allowed on Timeline' when the obvious default should be 'Hidden from Timeline'."



As you can see in the screenshot above, when I friend someone, the story is posted on my Facebook Timeline. That's how I had Facebook set up before I got Timeline, so this doesn't bother me. EPIC argues, however, that Facebook users who explicitly set this type of story to hidden by default have now had it set back to visible by default, ever since they got Timeline. If true, this would indeed violate the settlement Facebook made with FTC.

Worse yet, there doesn't seem to be an option to disable this automatic posting for all friending stories. Not only does this mean that you can't mass hide all previous friending stories, but you can't do so for future ones either. Furthermore, users who had hidden all their friending stories from their profile, and now have them back on the Timeline, cannot undo this change Facebook made for them. "Looks to me like you have to go in and enter 'Hidden from Timeline' for each friending event," an EPIC spokesperson said in a statement. "Which is ridiculous."

I know Facebook offered this option before, but I'm not sure it was available right before Timeline launched. It's thus possible that only users who had the friending stories disabled before the option was removed could keep them disabled. Once Timeline rolled out and turned the friending stories back on for everyone, it became apparent that they can no longer be all disabled by default.

It's worth noting that this issue is separate from the unfriending one found four months ago, before everyone could get Timeline. In that case, Timeline let you see who had unfriended you. This was more a bug than a feature; Facebook fixed it very quickly.

There is still a friending aspect that Facebook users have complete control over. Even with Timeline, you can still set "who can see your friend list on your profile" to the following options: Public, Friends, Only Me, and Custom. It just seems Facebook is not so strict when it comes to the actual event of friending someone.

With its letters to the FTC, EPIC is hoping the US agency will require Facebook to make the following five changes:

- Restore the privacy settings that users had in 2009, before the unfair and deceptive practices addressed by the Complaint began;

- Allow users to access all of the data that Facebook keeps about them;

Cease creating facial recognition profiles without users' affirmative consent;

Make Facebook's privacy audits publicly available to the greatest extent possible;

Cease secret post-log out tracking of users across web sites.

The friending privacy change isn't listed, but I think it's one worth clarifying, since it's more significant than the more broad privacy through obscurity issue. I have contacted Facebook about this latest friending issue and will update you if I hear back

From Inherit the Wind

Henry Drummond: Progress has never been a bargain. You have to pay for it. Sometimes I think there's a man who sits behind a counter and says, "Alright, you can have a telephone but you lose your privacy and the charm of distance...Mister, you may conquer the air but the birds will lose their wonder and the clouds will fill with the smell of gasoline."

Building and Developing Your Website

Registering a Domain Name

Picking a Domain Name

Shorter is better – but not necessarily. Most people will go to your site by clicking on a link rather than typing the URL in the address bar of their browser. If they do have to type it, they should only need to do it once, since the browser will remember the location.

It is more important to have a memorable URL. If you already have an established brand name, use that.

Keywords are important. You can significantly boost your position in search engine results if your domain name matches the key words used in the search. If you don't have an established brand name, try using keywords. Don't use more than three keywords. Search engines might consider that spamming. Always make sure that the keywords are prominently used in the site content. Exact match searches will be penalized, if the content is not relevant.

Use .com whenever possible. It implies that you have a reputable site. Exceptions: If you are a non-profit organization, use .org. If you are a school, use .edu. If you are a government entity, use .gov.

If your first .com choice is taken, try inserting a dash between words, if possible.

Don't sacrifice keywords to get a .com. If your first choice for a domain name is taken, see if .net is available. Search engines do not give priority to .com.. Avoid other top-level names, especially .info. Search engines have penalized .info sites since they have frequently been used by disreputable operators.

Registering Your Domain

REGISTER YOUR DOMAIN YOURSELF! Never Never Never let a developer or other party register it for you. Never transfer your domain. Open an account in your name on GoDaddy.com or any other reputable registrar. If you allow someone else to register your domain name for you, you will be stuck “renting” your name. You own the name of your business. Own your domain name, too. If you have already allowed a third party to register your domain name, look into transferring it to your own account at GoDaddy. When you directly own your domain name you can easily have it point to the server of your choice, giving you maximum control.

Register your domain for at least five years. Search engines have been known to penalize short registrations.

Select the private registration option. This will cut down on junk mail and unwanted solicitations.

For most businesses the other options are unnecessary.

Unless you are really worried about someone trying to steal customers by spoofing your website or trying to damage your reputation with a phony site, don't bother with registering your name with various other top-level domains such as .info, .us, etc.

E-Commerce Strategies

Do you plan to sell online? A successful e-commerce web strategy requires a detailed analysis of business processes and market objectives. It is a good idea to begin with a thorough understanding of the various options available to you and the implications associated with each choice.

DIY (Do It Yourself)

There are several low cost packages available online for building a good-looking website. The skill requirements are relatively low and you can get started with your new site quickly. The setup involves picking a template and adding your logo, images, and other content. Most DIY's have optional shopping carts, so you can accept credit cards, PayPal, and other payment methods. They also have specialists who can offer additional design help for a fee. Your site will be hosted on the vendor's shared server.

The biggest disadvantage of this option is the loss of control. Once you sign-up with a DIY vendor you are in effect renting your online presence. You will not be able to download the files and use them on a different server. If your account ever expires, typically you will not be able to recover your website. As your business grows and your website needs to include processes not supported by the vendor, you will be forced to start over with a more custom solution. You may also encounter bandwidth limitations. The server hosting your website will likely contain hundreds of other sites each making demands on system resources, which might cause conflicts. Furthermore, each template typically has elements that are locked, which means there will be sections that you will not be able to edit. Finally, payment processing fees tend to be higher than working with your bank.

The DIY option is ideal for very small businesses. It works well for a part-time, home-based business that needs a website to sell a short list of products or services without a lot of options. Independent contractors who simply need an informational site should also consider this option. Be prepared to spend some time learning the system and how to

customize the look and feel of the site. You should be familiar with working with web content, such as images, and following best practices for web design. Before you begin have clear vision for your website and make sure it can be accomplished with the vendor you choose. GoDaddy.com offers DIY services and might be a good choice since you can also register your domain there, while keeping ownership separate from the web design and hosting.

Outsource Everything

Amazon.com pioneered this approach. This is similar to a DIY approach except that Amazon can also warehouse product and fulfill orders. Amazon takes a chunk of your profits, but the big advantage is that you have access to one of the largest marketplaces in the world and one of the most sophisticated logistics operations. Amazon handles all aspects including delivery, returns, and payment processing. You maintain a DIY storefront using Amazon technology and keep a supply of product flowing to Amazon. If you already have a website, you can also tie that into the Amazon shopping cart. In addition you can always maintain a separate order and fulfillment channel outside Amazon.

If you have relatively high volume products with good margins that are competitively priced and easily shipped, Amazon is worthy of consideration. Samsonite uses Amazon for their B2C e-Commerce. Since their product is manufactured overseas, they can have shipments sent directly to Amazon and eliminate several layers of overhead. Samsonite separately supplies its own chain of outlet stores and independent resellers.

Off-the-shelf e-commerce software with customizations

Compared to a decade ago e-commerce software packages are much more powerful with many features that can match most business models. They are far more robust than DIY packages. The cost has also fallen significantly. Some very basic shopping carts can be downloaded for free. Most full featured packages will cost \$2,000 to as much as \$10,000 depending on what functions are needed. The more popular products have communities of independent developers who offer a variety of add-ons to further customize the package to fit your business model and to automate various processes. If not included with the purchase, you should subscribe to updates to keep your online store secure and compliant with requirements of payment processors and other partners. It is a safe bet to budget two to three times the cost of the software to set it up and customize it to match your vision. These packages are often available as subscriptions. We would only recommend a subscription under special circumstances.

It makes sense to make sure you pick a package to start with that most closely matches your business model. Some are designed for specific industries. Once you have made a selection, unless you have the technical skills in-house, you should consider partnering with a developer who specializes in the software and who can quickly respond to your evolving requirements and to any emergencies that might pop up. These ongoing costs should be factored into your budget. You will be responsible for registering your domain and choosing a host. A host with a supported database and adequate resources is important, since the more sophisticated the program the more demands it will place on the server. Fortunately the cost of hosting has come down significantly in recent years.

Products in this class, such as AspDotNetStorefront, are designed for mid-sized to larger e-commerce ventures with many products and possibly multiple storefronts. They can easily accommodate unlimited products with multiple variations, unlimited customer accounts, and unlimited transactions. Typically the only constraint is the capacity of the server hosting the application.

CMS (Content Management Systems)

CMSs are a subset of the Off-The-Shelf option. They are more geared to blogging and informational websites. Many CMSs are free and have large communities of developers. With most CMS packages you can add a basic shopping cart. If your site provides a lot of online content that needs frequent updates, or if you have a community of users that need to share information, a CMS might be a good choice. They are not well suited for extensive online selling though. With a CMS you will need to consider who will set it up. It requires more technical skill than a DIY solution and the learning curve can be steep. But, once the site is launched and fine-tuned, it will be easy to add content and maintain the site.

Complete In-House Development

For a small number of businesses that don't easily fit in an industry category, an in-house solution built from scratch might make the most sense. It is a good choice when products and services are so unique that the cost of customizing an off-the-shelf product is greater than the cost of building an in-house team to create something new to exactly fit the business' processes. Careful project design, planning, and budgeting are necessary to make this strategy work. In very large organizations in-house web development is a necessity and often a source of competitive advantage.

The biggest disadvantage of this choice is obvious - cost. The biggest advantage is also obvious - you get exactly what you need when you need it.

How to Manage Your Project

To DIY or Not to DIY?

That is the question.

Specifically are you committed to spending the time to learn how to create your own website? If you are doing something more than selling cookies from your kitchen, it will take some time to get your web presence right. That means you need to weigh the value of your time and where it is best spent – building your website vs. developing your business. If you can devote the time and are confident that you have the ability to bring your vision to life, then DIY is for you. Otherwise sooner or later you will probably find yourself working with a professional web developer.

How to Use a Web Developer

Most web developers can help you with any online strategy. An independent local web developer can also help you choose which strategy will be the most effective and economical. Web development services are also available online through a number of different services. When making a decision about which service to choose consider the following basic differences between local web developers and online development services:

Expertise. You will want to know who you are working with and what their experience and credentials are. With a local web developer you generally will meet face to face. You can ask questions and get to know whom you will be working with. With an online service it is often anonymous and you can be dealing with different people at different times.

Personal Consultation. A local web developer can visit your business and get to know what your challenges and objectives are. A local person usually has a good sense of your market and your business environment. An online web developer will have a difficult time grasping what your business is all about.

Customer Design. A local web developer is like a tailor who can put all the parts together to give you a perfect fit. An online web developer will be working from a template. A selection will be made off the rack.

Web Service Applications. If your business model requires some special online service, you will find that a local web developer will be able to give you almost anything that you need. Working from templates an online web developer has very limited options offer.

Fast Deployment. Both local and online developers can give you quick results. A local web developer can usually be a little more nimble, if your project is urgent.

Marketing Support. Many local web developers can provide additional marketing support to enhance the effectiveness of your online presence. Online services will typically offer coupons with restrictions for Facebook and Google advertising.

Search Engine Optimization. A local web developer can customize the SEO features of your site to your particular needs. An online service will use a formula to optimize your site for search engines.

Scalability. A well-designed custom site can be a great platform that you can use for many years to help grow your business. As you expand and need to make changes and add new features, it can be continuously adapted without reinventing the site. As noted, templates can be restrictive and do not lend themselves to specialized changes.

Ownership. When you work with a local web-developer you own the site. You own the files. You can and should download copies to your local computer for safe-keeping and in case you ever want to move your site to a different location. With online web development services you are buying a subscription. You do not own your site. You rent it. When you stop paying the monthly fee, your site is deleted. You cannot download copies of the files or move your site to a different location.

Technical Support. Both options offer technical support. With a local web developer you are always a phone call away. With online developers support may be limited without paying extra fees and you may be forced to rely on forums and FAQs for help.

Each local web developer is different and there are many differences among online services. Be sure to carefully examine any service you are considering to see how well it can meet your expectations according to these standards.

Specific Questions to Ask a Web Developer

The following is a list of some specific questions you should ask any prospective web developer. The answers to these questions will give you a good guide to compare the value of each option you have.

- Where will my site be hosted?
 - How much bandwidth will my site have?
 - How much disk space will my site have?
 - How many email accounts can I have?
-

- Are MySQL and MS-SQL databases included?
- Do you provide a control panel?
- Who owns the files?
- How many ftp accounts can I have with upload and download rights?
- What support is included?

What does it Cost to Use a Web Developer?

When you use an online service such as GoDaddy's Web Design Services (<http://www.godaddy.com/design/web-design.aspx>) you are offered two packages – Standard and Premium. As of this date (3/8/12), they cost \$49.95/month and \$89.95/month respectively. The Standard package is for a 5 page site. The Premium package is for a 20 page site. These subscriptions include hosting.

A local independent web developer should provide you with an exact quote based on what your specifications are. If there are uncertainties involved you may need to work on an hourly bases rather than a fixed contract. Since there are dozens of independent web developers in Maine, you will need to ask for quotes. Generally speaking, In the Maine market it is reasonable to expect that a web developer will charge you around \$100 per page plus hosting. Using those numbers, an apples-to-apples comparison to the GoDaddy Standard package will mean your cost is \$500 plus hosting. Depending on the hosting options the developer can provide, the total first year cost works out to about the same as GoDaddy. Since you will own your site, in subsequent years the cost difference is dramatic. With the local independent developer you will only be paying for hosting, which will certainly be a fraction of the \$599.40 GoDaddy will demand. When creating a 20 page site a local developer will probably charge you a little less than \$100 per page. In addition to all the other benefits of using an independent local developer, the five year cost savings is significant.

Best Practices

The following list is compiled from our years of experience and our interest in industry standards. It is not exhaustive. We continuously refine these practices and update this list, as needed. We also recognize that each website is unique and must reflect the requirements of the organization and its audience.

Layout and Design

1. Design should begin with an understanding of the target audience.
 2. Titles should be informative of the page content and include the organization or site name.
 4. The navigation area should be consistent from page to page.
 5. The contrast between text and background should meet W3C color standards.
 6. There should be good balance between graphics, text, and white space.
 7. The area above the "fold" on the home page (the area viewed without scrolling) should contain compelling content.
-

8. Horizontal scrolling should not be required when viewed with a resolution setting of 1024x768.
9. No more than 4 colors should be used for text and backgrounds and used consistently from page to page.
10. Animated images should be avoided, unless they serve a specific purpose to compliment content. When used they should not be distracting and should not repeat more than a few times, if at all.
11. Each image should have a specific purpose and should be optimized for fast downloading.
12. Images should contain a descriptive alt tag.
13. Multimedia elements should only be used when they serve a specific purpose.
14. Multimedia elements should have descriptive captions.
15. Non-serif and widely supported fonts, such as Arial, Helvetica, and Verdana, should be used for body text. Serif fonts, such as Times New Roman, should only be used in larger sizes, such as in titles and <h> tags.
16. Font styles should be consistent from page to page.
17. Copyright information should appear in page footer.

Navigation

1. Navigation should be clearly identified with descriptive labels.
2. In most cases the navigation should be structured either horizontally in the header or vertically along the left side.
3. Navigation links should be organized according to their importance to users and not random or alphabetical.
4. The site should be organized so that a minimum number of click are required to access internal pages.
5. In addition to the main navigation plain text links to all primary pages should be included in a footer that is consistently repeated on each page.
6. For complex sites with multiple levels a breadcrumb and site map should also be used to compliment standard navigation.
7. Hyperlinked text should be descriptive, informing as to where the link leads.
8. Styles for hyperlinked text should stand out and be consistent from page to page.
9. All broken hyperlinks should be removed or fixed. The site can be easily checked by the free online link checker provided by the World Wide Web Consortium.

Content and Presentation

1. Content should be organized so that pages focus on a particular topic.
 2. Text should use proper grammar and spelling.
 3. When possible, use short sentences and short paragraphs to improve readability.
-

4. Content should be maintained to keep it fresh, compelling, and relevant. Remove outdated material.
5. Where appropriate, content should contain links to other relevant material, including external sites.
6. Page text should incorporate the keywords used in the meta tag.
7. Include important content in the text, not in images or Flash.

Performance, Functionality, and Accessibility

1. All page elements should be optimized to assure rapid download. This includes the elimination of unnecessary code.
2. All pages should display as expected in all popular browsers.
3. All pages should contain valid code, according to standards established by the World Wide Web Consortium. Pages can be checked using their free online validator. Validated pages should display the valid icon, linked to the online validator.
4. The site should use a CSS (Cascading Style Sheet) to eliminate the need to repeat style specifications on each page.
5. The CSS should meet the standards established by the World Wide Web Consortium. Site CSS can be checked using their free online CSS validator. Validated pages should display the CSS valid icon, linked to the online CSS validator.
6. When images and multimedia are used to convey meaning, an alternate text version should be available to assure consistent accessibility.
7. Avoid using frames.
8. Only "White Hat" techniques should be used to optimize search engine ranking.
9. Meta tags, such as description and keywords, should be representative.

Important Design Considerations

How is the 3-second decision made?

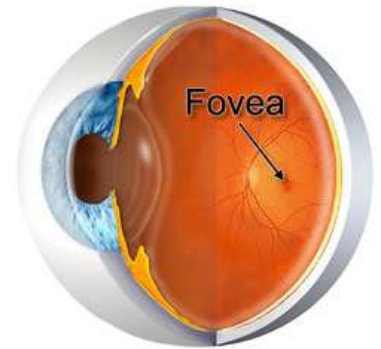
Typically your website will have two basic purposes: to serve existing customers and to attract new customers. Studies show that when someone sees your website for the first time you have 3-4 seconds to convince the visitor to explore your site further. If your site can't do that, an opportunity is wasted.

Your busy prospects will stay on your site if they think your site has the content they are looking for and they can find it easily and quickly. Too often cool graphics and lots of eye-candy are distractions.

Understanding the Fovea.

The fovea is the tiny region in the retina of the eye, which supplies 50% of the information reaching the brain and accounts for maximum acuity of vision. In your field of vision it is an area equivalent to twice the width of your thumbnail at arm's length. Your brain automatically fills in the rest of your field of vision based on what it expects to find.

When someone goes to your website for the first time the regions of the landing page that they scan with the fovea are the ones they think are the most important. Therefore your site should be designed to attract fovea vision to those elements that best convey your message.



How do eyes track across your web page?

In 2006 usability guru Jakob Nielsen conducted a landmark study using eye-tracking technology to observe how people view websites. He compiled the data and created heat maps of each web page studied. The sample heat map images below are coded in red to show regions that attracted more attention and in blue to show less frequently scanned regions. Nielsen noted that there is a general "F" pattern to viewing. The subjects usually scanned horizontally across the top of the page, then vertically along the left side, and then horizontally again further down.



By placing important elements, such as navigation, and key word headlines, in the "F" locations, your design will better conform to the way viewers are accustomed to scanning. It will also more efficiently convey your message.

Responsive Design

What is Responsive Web Design

The World Wide Web Consortium has begun to roll out the new standards for HTML5 and CSS3. All the major browsers have been quick to adopt them and most mobile browsers and operating systems are now using the new features. Among the new tools available to web designers are media queries. These are simple statements in the code that detect the dimensions of the screen on the user's device and deliver content that conforms to the available layout environment. A website using responsive web design is typically created using a grid system with each element occupying a specific location that can then be moved around in a logical sequence depending on the space on the user's screen. Images can also be dynamically sized to fit any specified space. The result is a fluid design that satisfies all users, regardless of the desktop or mobile device being used. bostonglobe.com became the first large scale application of responsive web design.

Testing your site across different platforms

As more mobile devices with different screen sizes become available to your customers, it is important to know how your site is rendered on different platforms. Enter your domain in these sites to test your site:

<http://responsivepx.com/>

<http://www.responsinator.com/>

<http://screenqueri.es/>

<http://mattkersley.com/responsive/>

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

The SEO Mystery

One of the most closely guarded secrets in all of tech-land is how search algorithms work at Google, Yahoo, and Bing. No one really knows for sure. In fact Google has been known to frequently change its sophisticated formula for ranking web pages. It does so mainly to generate more useful results but also to keep ahead of developers who try to use tricks to outsmart the search engine and gain an upper hand. Sometimes Google will swap out algorithms several times a day.

SEO Tips

Pick a domain name with key words.

This won't work if you already have an established domain or brand. If you are starting out without the benefit of a brand name, pick one that contains the key words for your business. For example, if you sell oatmeal cookies, select oatmealcookies.com. Of course oatmealcookies.com is taken, but oatmeal-cookies.com is available. Google gives high ranking to domain names that match the search words.

Include key words in page titles. Google and the other search engines look at page titles for clues about content. Too often page titles are left blank or repeat the same information. Whenever possible each page on your site should have a unique page title.

Include key words in text headers. Make sure that important text isn't buried below page content and use descriptive headers. The various <h1>, <h2>, and <h3> tags should contain key search words.

Carefully choose the key words to include in the meta tags. Search engines do look at the words you use within the meta keyword and meta description tags. They aren't given as much consideration as they used to receive. There is a little more analysis involved. You will probably get penalized for repeating keywords too frequently (more than three times) in the meta tags. You will get penalized if you use too many keywords. Keep it under 40. And, you will also get penalized if you don't use your keywords in the text on the page.

Key search words should appear prominently in the text on your page. Search engines look for text. They figure the first text they encounter on a page is the most important, which is where the most important key words should fall when composing your text.

Keep content fresh. Your site will be crawled frequently. If content doesn't change, it can hurt the ranking. It makes sense that they want to return the most current content ahead of stale content.

Avoid flash. Search engines can't read Flash content.

Avoid using images containing important text. Search engines can't read text contained in images. If you must, be sure to use the <alt> tag to explain what is in the image.

Links! Having lots of links is important. Get partners to add links to your website from their website. The more external links pointing to your URL the more important the search engines figure your website is. If you contribute content to another website be sure to include a link back to your site. Outgoing links from your website and internal links are also important factors.

Create an XML site map. Site maps help search engines index your site. Once you upload your XML site map, notify Google, Bing, and Yahoo.

Keep your domain name registration current. When you renew extend your registration at least five years. Going a year at a time implies that you are not a serious website.

Don't let SEO take priority over usability. Having an attractive and user friendly website is more important in the long run than SEO. The two objectives should be compatible though.

Marketing Online in the New Environment

Push vs. Pull Marketing

Selling in social media requires a different mindset.

Study the list on a previous page that contains the reasons people say they use social media. You won't find anything about shopping, researching products, or finding a service. People go to Amazon or use Google to do those things. So why are businesses spending billions of dollars to advertise on Facebook?

Facebook has been called the world's largest cocktail party (without the alcohol). If you try to spew the messages you might put in your newspaper ads or radio ads at people you meet at a cocktail party no one will want to talk with you and you will probably get tossed out. You need to offer something else.

Selling on Facebook has also been compared to selling from your front porch. People walking by on their way to pursue their interests might notice your offer for a glass of lemonade and stop by to relax and have a pleasant conversation. If you have something interesting to show, you might engage them in a dialogue. If you make the right impression, when your product or service is needed by the visitor, you have a better chance of doing business.

You cannot successfully "push" a message in social media. You have to create an environment that encourages your ideal customers to "pull" you in.

How does Pull Marketing work?

The big advantage of advertising in social media, such as Facebook, is that your advertising dollars are highly targeted. Targeted advertising only works with a specialized message that appeals to the specific audience being targeted.

Targeting means going where your ideal customers are. When you are there it is necessary to listen. You need to engage them. At least half of the conversation has to be listening.

Add value to the conversation. Make a free offer or something special that will give them a reason to stay engaged.

Entertain them. Be likeable and interesting.

Show them something unique about you or your products or services.

Tell stories about you and your organization and what you do that is special.

Be responsive and be authentic.

Don't try to "sell". Remember the customer is in control. Let them pull you in. Let them opt to do business with you.

Choose Your Social Media and Engage

Social media cannot be an afterthought. More people spend more time on social media than traditional popular websites – Google, Yahoo, MSN, Amazon, etc. – combined. Every business should be on Facebook as a minimum. People will expect to find you there. Then, depending on your target audience consider others.

Twitter

LinkedIn

Pinterest

Google+

Yelp

StumbleUpon

MySpace

Digg

Reddit

Consider a blog. Blogs are great for SEO. Consider creating videos and posting them on YouTube.

The main purpose of Social Media for E-commerce is to drive traffic to your website. It is not realistic to be on every social media platform.

Creating a Plan

Every business is unique, so it is difficult to create a formula that can produce a perfect solution. However there are some important steps that every business should take before marketing in the new environment. It is likely the opportunities will overwhelm your ability to do everything you might want to do. Picking the best options and making sure you can follow through is usually better than taking a shotgun approach.

What is your current revenue model?

How do you attract customers now? What is working? Do you use email blasts? Do you run sales? Do you rely on word of mouth?

What steps do customers take to do business with you?

What parts of your model need to be working better?

What social media or mobile tools can complement your existing revenue model?

If collecting email addresses is important, can you use Facebook to get more people to sign up for your email blasts? If you conduct sales, can you use text messaging to announce specials or send coupons? If word of mouth is important, can you create a fan page on Facebook?

What opportunities are there to add to your revenue model or create new ones?

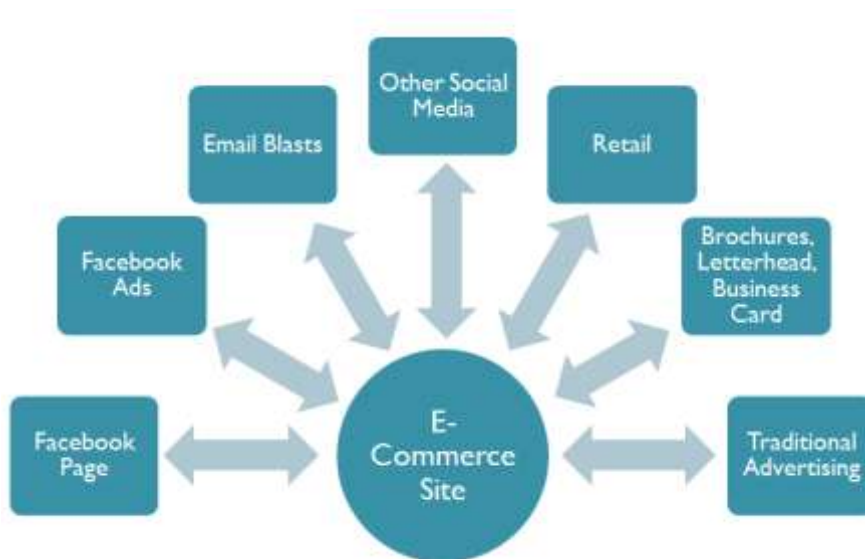
Are there new markets possible with social media? Are there new products or services that you can offer that make sense in the new environment?

Prioritize the opportunities.

List each opportunity and each new tool you are considering. Analyze what commitments will be required by each in terms of time and money. Also, be sure to consider both the costs to implement and the costs to maintain. Weigh each cost profile against its likely benefits. Is timing important? Is there seasonality to your business? If so, create a calendar-based list that prioritizes each opportunity based on the realistic costs and expected benefits.

Determine the “Hub” of your business activity.

Do you want your customers to reach you through your e-commerce website? your offline retail store? your Facebook page? a mobile app? Whatever you decide, make it your “Hub” and connect it to all other parts of your marketing plan. Your “Hub” is where you want to drive customers in order to best support your revenue model.

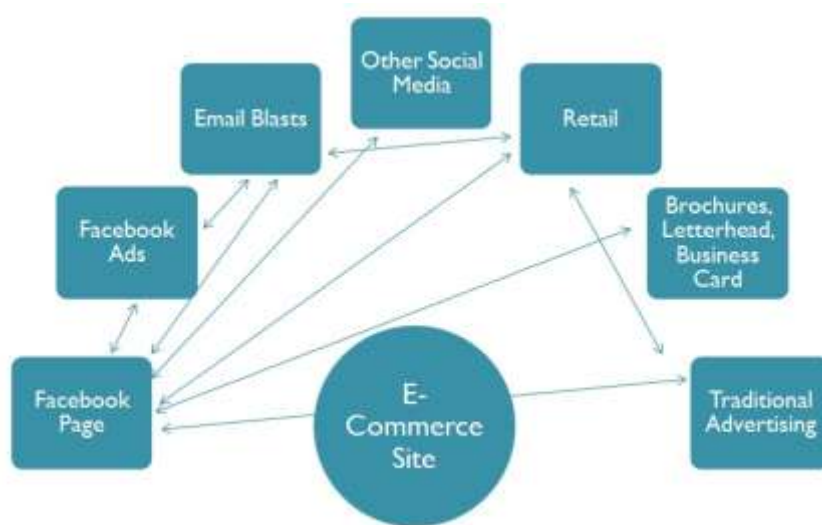


Build the primary links to and from your “Hub”.

This example is for an imaginary business that has its e-commerce site as its “Hub”. Each other element in the marketing plan links to the e-commerce website, directing customers to interact with the business at the online store.

Add the secondary links.

Other logical paths to your hub exist indirectly through the other elements of your marketing plan. There are also logical ways the elements can reinforce each other. This diagram shows some possible secondary links for the imaginary business.

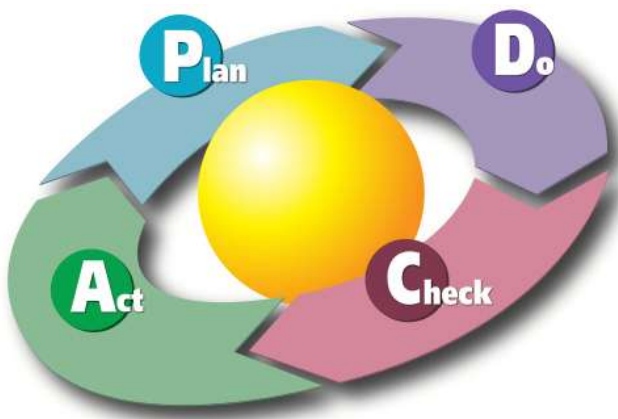


Implement your plan.

For each opportunity you plan to pursue detail the sequence of steps necessary to implement it, including all the necessary links. Reevaluate your budget of time and money. Establish a realistic timeline to act on each of the best opportunities. Involve everyone in the organization and make sure everyone is committed.

Continuously improve your plan.

Be alert to changes in the environment. Always check what is working and not working and act to make necessary changes to your plan. Follow this diagram from the start and strive to add quality in every process you pursue.



Important Points to Remember when Marketing in the New Environment

Change is rapid.

Be alert to new opportunities.

Listen.

Do what it takes to be likable.

Don't push.

Provide value first.

Your customers have more control than ever before.
