

Tools That Make Social Marketing Work for You: *Five types of tools and why you would use them*

By Mary Sullivan

In previous articles we discussed the growing importance of social media in B2B marketing, the leading social networks for B2B companies, and how you can get started. Now that you have identified your objectives and started “listening” to the social conversation, you’re ready to move from rookie to pro. If you have started writing a blog and set up accounts on Facebook, LinkedIn and/or Twitter, you will welcome tools that will augment your contributions.

There are literally hundreds of thousands of applications out there that have been built to enhance the use of social media. Which ones should you be looking at? The answer depends on what you’re trying to do. To help you think about them, we’ll look at five categories of social marketing activities: conversing, learning, enriching, collaborating and measuring.

Conversing

You must be the one to initiate the conversation with your would-be audience. That means writing a blog or posting articles on web pages and then using your “social network” to draw traffic to your content. A blog is ideal. It’s easy to write and publish a post, and your readers will be able to comment back to you. Use [WordPress](#) or [Blogger](#), or one of the other blog platforms. You can choose to approve comments before they are viewable by others.

To supplement your blog, build a network on [Twitter](#) and/or [Facebook](#) where you can leave short messages that link to your latest blog post or other URL where your article is posted. Make your “headlines” enticing so readers will be drawn to click through to your content.

Check out [LinkedIn](#) Groups. Search the Groups Directory and find one or more groups that represent your interests, and be an active contributor and commenter.

Learning

Social media provides endless ways for you to learn what is happening in your market. In some cases you can be a passive listener and in others you can actually solicit information and opinions. We talked about using Google Alerts to monitor what people are saying about you and your competitors in a recent KickStart [blog post](#). But if you just want to become better informed on a topic of current interest (like learning more about social media, for instance!) you can find user-generated content on the topic of your choice. Use [Technorati](#) or [StumbleUpon](#) to search for interesting blogs and sites. And when you find a site you’d like to follow for a while, look for the “RSS” feed symbol or link on the site, and subscribe to have new posts sent to you.

If you want to be a more active listener, you can conduct ad hoc research within your Twitter network using [StrawPoll](#) or [TwtPoll](#), the latter of which also lets you survey your Facebook network.

Enriching

You need not stick to simple text in your social network. The web is full of user-generated content that can enrich your own. There are many rich media options; which you use depends on which network or application you are using.

Images, photographic or just graphic, can liven up a blog post, and the blog platforms all make it easy for you to add images to your posts. Want a photo that enriches what you are writing about? Take the picture yourself, or search for an image on [Flickr](#). Be sure to give attribution to the photographer. In Twitter, you can share photos by storing and linking to them using [TwitPic](#).

The easiest way to make use of video to enrich your content is to post it on [blip.tv](#) or [YouTube](#), which will convert whatever format you used into flash for you, and you can embed your video on your own website. Or you can link to content that you find on these sites. Just don't upload it without permission.

Collaborating

Social networks are great ways to collaborate internally, with a third party or with an entire project team. There are more traditional collaboration tools on the market such as SharePoint, but some of the new Web 2.0 tools are fun and less costly. Think about creating a [wiki](#) — a series of pages that users in your group can edit themselves. Or keep files on [Google Docs](#), where you can assign users read-only or read/update permission. Still technically in Beta, Google Docs has been around for several years.

Not a full collaboration tool but a private communication network similar to Twitter is [Yammer](#), where you exchange 140 character messages with just your own group.

And Google's new [Google Wave](#), just announced but not yet available, promises to offer interesting collaboration possibilities for marketers.

Measuring

We marketers always want to track the metrics to understand the impact of our marketing activities. And, of course, there are tools that allow you to see what is happening when you post content out in the social network. Bloggers can view the stats on their blogs to see where their traffic is coming from (the URL of the referring site), get a count of page views and identify days when traffic was especially high. Offer a link to the blog from Twitter or Facebook, and see how much additional traffic that generates.

Twitter users want to know how they are doing too. [Twitalyzer](#) allows them to see how they compare with other Twitter users in terms of influence, signal, generosity, velocity and clout.

These are just a few of the multitude of tools available to help you have a productive and valuable social media experience. If you choose to follow a few social media experts, you'll soon learn of new tools from them. Be willing to experiment.

Most of these tools are free. But don't be fooled — social media marketing is not as inexpensive as it seems, because there is a cost to the time and attention it takes to do it well. There is no point in attempting to fool the public with a half-hearted social media initiative. To remain relevant in most industries, you will need to make an investment in your company's social presence. Get out there, be proud, and let the world know what your business represents.

Previous social media articles in KickStart Accelerator: ([Get Ready! Social Media for B2B Companies](#) and [Kickstarting Your Own Social Media Initiative](#))

About the Author

Mary Sullivan, co-founder of KickStart Alliance, delivers customer-focused product marketing to clients in a variety of technology sectors, including clean tech. Mary is an experienced social media user and community builder: a long-time [blogger](#), LinkedIn member, Facebook user and active [Twitterer](#). Want help mapping your social media strategy? [Contact Mary](#).