

# Social Media—Reality vs. Hype

Does our company have a Facebook page? Where's our blog? Are we Twittering?... These common questions not only place tactics before strategy, they reflect some of the “irrational exuberance” surrounding social media marketing today. Social media is a great opportunity in B2B, but too many get lost in the hype and start focusing on the tools themselves. Instead, organizations should focus on their strategy and apply the tools that best fit that strategy.

Say you bought a billboard. You could probably figure out some strategy to employ it. But isn't the better approach to first identify your strategy, and then employ the most appropriate tactic—whether it's a billboard, an Adwords campaign, an event or whatever?

But social media is free, you say. Well, if billboards were free, there would suddenly be 8,000 billboards on the Kennedy with 630 being added daily. Would you feel pressured to get in on the action? The point is that with any social media tool, just because it's there and free doesn't mean you must employ it. And if you do employ it because it fits your strategy, you have to do it well to make it pay off.

**To help separate the reality from the hype, and make social media work best for your organization, here are Pepper Group's five tips for B2B companies:**

## 1. REMEMBER, IT'S ABOUT ENGAGEMENT

Mail, phone calls, events, thank you gifts, face-to-face meetings and many other techniques help you connect and engage with your audience. Social media offers new ways to do this, but it doesn't supersede the others. Consider your audience's needs, pain points and how they might want to interact with your company, and then add social media to deepen the engagement and nurture these relationships. One great thing about connecting on this level is that it's lasting. People move. They change companies and email addresses. They don't change their social media accounts.

## 2. CREATIVITY IS STILL REQUIRED

It's not about the tools, it's how they're used. Think of the world of social media as a set of colored pencils—the masterpiece is based on creating something fresh, interesting and valuable; not the number of pencils used or the frequency of their use.

## 3. IN SOCIAL MEDIA, YOU ARE A “PUBLISHER”

People must have a reason to connect with you, join into a conversation or talk about you. A B2B company may do this by relating to people's work life. This can be done in a way that's funny (a video poking fun at engineers), competitive (a game that appeals to marketing geeks), personal (a monthly sweepstakes for your Facebook fans), or career-related (educational, networking, community forums, and other content of value).



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### 4. YOU'LL STILL NEED TRADITIONAL TACTICS

When you look at social media success stories, note that most times the company also invested a significant amount of money promoting it before it was a success. Often a little push is needed to get the momentum going. Once it's going, of course, it can provide dramatically enhanced ROI, but it rarely happens all by itself.

### 5. DON'T IGNORE THE PROCESS

It's kind of like PR—contrary to what many think, social media is neither free nor easy. Sure the tools themselves are free, but you need the horsepower to come up with creative ideas, the resources to develop good content and the bandwidth to manage it all. That's not free. And sure, it's easy to set up a Twitter account, but you'll need the processes to keep it going, the planning to execute it well, and the foresight to address legal issues, internal fear and theww fundamental problem of lack of time. Not easy either.

While most of the success stories you'll hear are consumer-related, social media definitely has benefits in B2B. When it comes down to it, B2B marketers are still marketing to human beings. Though the motivation may be different when buying a software package for their business vs. a pair of shoes for themselves, business buyers are still feeling, emotional people that you can engage and connect with using social media.

So revisit your strategy, identify your objectives, and then determine how social media integrates into your overall marketing mix. It's not free, nor is it easy, but it can be extremely effective. That's the reality vs. the hype.