

PAUL GILLIN
ERIC SCHWARTZMAN

SOCIAL MARKETING



to the
BUSINESS
CUSTOMER

LISTEN TO YOUR B2B MARKET,
GENERATE MAJOR ACCOUNT LEADS,
AND BUILD CLIENT RELATIONSHIPS

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*To my grandfathers, Morton and Phillip, for teaching me the
value of a buck.*

—Eric

*To Patrick J. McGovern, a brilliant mind and my personal
hero.*

—Paul

FOREWORD

If you're reading this book, you are probably interested in understanding how social marketing can enhance your brand, grow your business, and increase customer loyalty. The authors of this book make the important point that B2B relationships are defined by value, and social marketing has the power to dramatically increase the value that companies can provide to their customers.

Dell is, at our core, a B2B company and has been since Michael founded Dell in 1984 when he started out selling computers to businesses and universities. He had an idea that direct relationships with customers would allow more people access to technology so they could reach their full potential, and that is still very much a guiding principle for us today. Today, sales to commercial and public customers account for approximately 80 percent of revenue—and there's nothing more direct than using the input we get from social media to help our customers solve their most complex challenges.

Why Social?

Many companies talk about the importance of customers, but when it comes to embracing the principles of openness and interaction that social marketing enables, they may hesitate. After all, there may be just as much unfavorable feedback as there is favorable feedback out there. However, it's the combination of both the positive and the negative that can truly empower organizations to make meaningful changes to better serve customers and build loyalty. Social media certainly make listening easier, but it's the actions that organizations take from their conversations that build

enduring relationships with customers that last long after a single transaction.

When I'm meeting with customers or speaking at conferences, I'm often asked why Dell has embraced social media with such enthusiasm. Our commitment to blogs, social networks, and customer forums seems particularly striking in light of the fact that just four years ago we were the target of some vocal criticism in those same places. Here's why we embrace social media. It's because these social communities are where we get honest, candid feedback from our customers that we incorporate into solutions that better meet their needs. Our early conversations with online critics were actually a blessing. They reminded us of the importance of how direct customer interaction drives our business strategy and growth. Dell is mentioned in thousands of online conversations, and on any given day, comments about Dell on Twitter can reach as many as 10 million people. Each of these discussions is an opportunity for us to enhance or build a customer relationship, and to act on what we hear. Social media provide simply another way that we can listen to and engage with our customers—and a powerful way for us to learn what we need to do to help our customers succeed.

At Dell, we believe that team members are our most valuable assets, and they should be the ones to interact with our customers. If a customer has a technical issue, he or she will chat with someone from our product or engineering team. If it's a service issue, that customer will interact with our support team. We provide the foundation that our global team members need to use social media as part of their jobs through our Social Media and Communities University.

This scale of interaction may sound a bit scary at first, but it doesn't have to be when you align people around a common purpose so that when they speak to customers,

they're working toward the same goal. For Dell, that purpose is to provide technology that gives our customers the power to do more—to grow, to thrive.

Why Social Marketing for B2B?

B2B relationships are fundamentally not about companies but about people. At Dell, we encourage team members to use their blogs and Twitter accounts to talk about their families, vacations, and passions, if that's information they want to share. These glimpses into the personal lives of professional colleagues are essential to building strong relationships. Think of it: When you speak to a trusted business partner at a meeting or on the phone, you typically spend several minutes chatting about events that go on outside the office. The better you know people professionally, the better you get to know them personally.

B2B relationships are also about being helpful, and here is where social media have opened some amazing new opportunities for us. A great example is our Social Media for Small Business page on Facebook. Those business owners look to us for advice on how to leverage social channels for their businesses, and we're excited to share what we have learned. We take great care not to make this resource a sales pitch. These days, the best marketing is the kind that helps people to be successful.

The authors give one example of how we support our customers in Chapter 1, where they tell the story of Dell TechCenter, an online support resource for customers who purchase Dell solutions for their businesses. TechCenter exemplifies the value of personal engagement in a business context. Our TechCenter staffers have gotten to know many of our customers personally as a result of their technical support interactions. These relationships are enhanced through dinners and meet-ups at conferences or even at

Dell's offices, where customers often request meetings with the TechCenter experts.

Preparing for What's Next

The information technology ecosystem is constantly transforming itself, but even more impactful is how people are using technology to create innovations that will change our world. A few years ago, customers primarily used Dell.com to buy products. Today, it's the focal point for a variety of social platforms where they learn from each other as well as from us. Tomorrow, the boundaries between online and offline may entirely disappear as "digital" and "virtual" just become ingrained in how we all communicate.

However, the one constant that will remain is the value that organizations of all sizes can realize from social marketing. Does social marketing enable a business to get closer to its customers? Does it provide feedback that can be used to improve the customer experience? Does it help grow the business and build the brand? The answer in all cases is yes. Embracing social marketing and finding a way to integrate it into the fabric of doing business can help B2B companies truly provide more value to the people they serve and create loyal customers for life.

—Karen Quintos

Senior Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer, Dell Inc.

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Much of what I've learned about business-to-business (B2B) social marketing has resulted from the generosity of Ellis Booker, former editor-in-chief of *BtoB* magazine. It was Ellis who gave me writing assignments and eventually a monthly column when I was striking out in this territory in 2006. *BtoB* publisher Bob Felsenthal has also been generous in allowing me to further my education in this area as a representative of his fine publication. Many of the case studies in this book began as *BtoB* assignments.

Dell is often held up as an icon of B2B social media excellence. Richard Binhammer has helped me understand how that innovative company has transformed itself. He's also been a great source of contacts.

Jen McClure and her nonprofit Society for New Communications Research deliver unrivaled insight through their publications and conferences. She has made it possible for me to meet so many people who have influenced my life that I can never thank her enough.

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My wife and soul mate, Dana, has stuck with me through four books in four years, which qualifies her for sainthood. She has carefully copyedited and proofread each one. I don't know what I would do without her, and I hope I never find out.

—Paul Gillin

Above all, I thank my wife, Celia, for her love and support, and my son, William, for continuously renewing my spirit and perspective.

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To everyone else who has shared their experience, strength and hope, I am forever grateful.

—Eric Schwartzman

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Social marketing is about tools, people, and organization. To get the greatest impact, you need to introduce the technology to a receptive audience and then apply it for business value. We've organized this book into three parts to step you through the process.

Part 1 (Chapters 1 through 5) sets the table for the introduction of tools. These chapters tell you how social marketing is revolutionizing customer relationships and offer seven business case scenarios for applying tools. We then offer advice on how to sell social marketing to skeptical bosses, build an organization that listens and responds constantly to its constituents, and create guidelines and policies for appropriate behavior. The framework for building a policy is covered in Appendix A.

Part 2 (Chapters 6 through 9) is about technology. We tell you how to build a listening dashboard, which is an essential first step to applying new technology. Chapter 7 guides you through the intricacies of search and keywords; these are essential concepts to know when building online visibility. We then look at the major public social media platforms, such as LinkedIn and Twitter, and offer some context for the value of each. Finally, we tell you how to build your own community platform.

Part 3 (Chapters 10 through 15) is about putting social marketing to work. We start with a series of short case studies that spotlight B2B companies that are achieving results with various tools. The next few chapters step you through the process of identifying good opportunities for social marketing, generating leads, and putting communities to work. We include plenty of examples of how others are achieving success. We wrap up with an explanation of how to calculate return on investment (ROI).

Contrary to popular perception, we believe you *can* figure out the ROI of social marketing if you have the right historical data in place.

PREFACE

The idea for this book was hatched in October 2009 at the Inbound Marketing Summit in Foxboro, Massachusetts. More than 70 speakers packed a terrific two-day agenda, relating stories of how they sold everything from cameras to Cabernet Sauvignon using the new tools of social media.

On the afternoon of the first day, an attendee raised her hand and asked how a speaker's advice could be applied to business-to-business (B2B) marketing. The speaker (we can't remember who it was) asked which members of the audience worked for B2B companies. More than half the hands in a room packed with 450 marketers went up.

Paul watched the scene with interest. He had been a journalist and executive at B2B publishers in the technology field for more than 20 years before making the switch to social media consulting in 2005. It had never occurred to him how different the needs are between a company that sells clothing and one that sells uniforms. A quick check on Amazon revealed that of the 50+ social media marketing books that had been published in the prior year, not one specifically addressed the needs of the B2B marketer.

We began to ask questions of event organizers and social media publishers. Why was it that consumer success stories like Zappos and Blendtec continued to dominate conference agendas and research reports when B2B companies had been such early and enthusiastic adopters of social tools? The answer we got back most often—that similar principles applied to both types of businesses—seemed insufficient. We love it when the two guys from EepyBird.com drop Mentos into bottles of Diet Coke, but we couldn't see how that example would apply to a marketer at ConAgra.

The two of us were already planning to collaborate on a book based on Eric's archive of On the Record . . . Online podcasts. We quickly switched gears and spent the next 6

months delving into the intricacies of the business buying decision. We learned how very different the two business types really are.

Changing Channels

B2B marketing has been conducted pretty much the same way for decades. Direct sales forces followed up on leads generated by trade print advertising, trade show exhibitions, direct-mail campaigns, and telemarketing. These channels were always expensive and have become less effective than they once were. As this Penril modem ad from an early 1980s issue of *Computerworld* demonstrates ([Figure P.1](#)), the limitations of traditional, intrusion-based advertising sometimes forced B2B marketers to use extreme tactics to attract attention.

[Figure P.1](#) Old Computer Ad.



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Consider the corporate technology executive, who was the target for this ad. Until about 10 years ago, the typical information technology (IT) manager's mailbox bulged with print trade magazines. It was not unusual for IT executives to have a stack of unread magazines in the corner of their offices and to take piles of them on plane trips for rapid processing. Paul remembers with a chuckle the IT manager who referred to his weekly trade magazine deliveries in a metric he called "stack feet."

This was a highly wasteful system. Technology companies could pay as much as \$30,000 for a full-page advertisement that might be seen by only a tiny percentage of the magazine's readers in any given week. Of those who noticed the ad, an even smaller percentage were in a position to make a purchase at that time. It was impossible to communicate the value of a product in this format; advertisers mainly relied on quick slogans borrowed from the consumer sector that they hoped would spur a phone call. Lead quality was poor, and sales cycles were long and arduous.

It's not surprising that the technology sector was one of the first to discard print advertising. Today, only a handful of technology magazines still exist in the United States, and their average size has shrunk from hundreds of pages a week to a few dozen. In 2009, the trade publishing sector was the single largest declining print market, with ad pages contracting 28 percent on top of years of previous declines. The collapse of that industry was dramatized in November 2008, when *PC Magazine*, which once generated more than \$100 million in annual revenues, announced it was exiting the print business and going fully online.

What explains this dramatic turnaround? Quite simply: choice. Business buyers are looking to make decisions as quickly and as intelligently as possible. Searching for solutions online is more efficient than relying on the serendipity of encountering an ad in a magazine or seeing a flyer in a mailbox. Americans older than age 15 conducted 131 billion searches in December 2009,¹ according to comScore. Marketo reported that 93 percent of B2B buyers use search to begin the buying process,² and Forbes Insight reported that 74 percent of C-level executives call the Internet "very valuable," and 53 percent said they prefer to locate information themselves.³ Nor is it shocking that direct-mail spending is expected to decline nearly 40

percent by 2014. Buyers' information discovery habits have changed forever thanks to search engines.

But it isn't just search. Business buyers have been saying for many years that their most important source of information is each other. Research in early 2010 by Genius.com and DemandGen Report found that 59 percent of B2B buyers engaged with peers before making a buying decision, 48 percent followed industry conversations, and 44 percent conducted anonymous research among a select group of vendors. Forrester Research reported that more than 8 in 10 IT decision makers said word-of-mouth recommendations are their most important source when making buying decisions.⁴ Countless other surveys, stretching back more than 30 years, have reached the same conclusions. Business buyers actively seek out others like them because they believe they will get the most direct, untarnished advice.

Marketers have many more options for reaching business buyers than they did just five years ago. All of the traditional channels are still available, and many new ones have also emerged. Marketing today is a lot more complex than it used to be, but the opportunities are also greater for marketers who can figure out the right combination of dials to turn.

Social media empowers individuals to share their experiences directly with one another and without the filters of corporate public relations (PR) departments and lawyers. People are more honest and direct when speaking with their peers, which is one reason why feedback from social networks is more compelling than packaged case studies. As the number of channels multiplies and more participants come online, the quality of information improves, a phenomenon known as the "network effect."

Today, prospective buyers have other options beyond search. They can ask questions directly of one another via

Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Response is nearly instantaneous and, because each message is tied back to an individual profile, participants have a high degree of confidence in the quality of the information.

“If a customer in the chemicals industry is having a challenge and wants to know best practices for distribution of chemicals through a supply chain, he or she can turn to another chemicals customer in our ecosystem through our [online] communities and learn,” says Mark Yolton, senior vice president of the 2-million-member SAP Community Network.

Andrew McAfee, principal research scientist at the MIT Sloan School and author of *Enterprise 2.0*, has gone so far as to suggest that a new kind of search is emerging based on the ask-and-answer metaphor. So now, not only can we search the web for others’ experiences, but we can ask questions directly of an anonymous or semi-anonymous group and get back experiential advice. Those “stack feet” of printed magazines have been replaced by a vast network of people who freely share their firsthand experiences for no reason other than to help others make better decisions.

For many B2B companies, these new information-gathering metaphors will ripple across every function in the organization. Customers, suppliers, and investors will demand that businesses become more open and responsive. They will grant attention to companies that deliver useful information and shun those that simply deliver sales pitches. “People want to buy, but they don’t want to be sold to,” says Benjamin Ellis, a serial entrepreneur based in the United Kingdom who now specializes in social marketing.

Find Your Own Path

There's an inherent risk in generalizing about the needs of companies that run the gamut from high-volume office supply retailers like Staples to highly focused firms like American Biltrite, whose Autowrap division is so specialized that executives already know everyone who could possibly do business with them. In some ways, these two kinds of B2B companies couldn't be more different, but there are also a surprising number of common threads to their experiences: their markets are value-driven and relationship-based. There are no impulse purchases and no fashion statements. Word of mouth is a powerful source of influence. Reputations and even careers ride on buying decisions.

Any company that sees virtue in better connecting the people who build and sell its products with the people who buy them can find opportunities to apply the new tools of social marketing. In the following pages, we'll introduce you to dozens that already have. We'll also continue to tell stories on our blogs: paulgillin.com, spinfluencer.com, and ontherecordpodcast.com. We hope you'll contribute yours to the conversation.

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Part One

Setting the Table

CHAPTER ONE

The Changing Rules of B2B Marketing

Friends know Scott Hanson as an affable native Texan with a penchant for computers, cars, and poker. But to thousands of technology professionals around the world, Hanson is a celebrity. By day, he and three other technologists at Dell manage the Dell TechCenter, an online community that helps enterprise information technology (IT) professionals unravel the thorniest problems that occur when trying to integrate technology from multiple vendors.

Dell conceived of the community in 2007 as a way to enhance loyalty among its largest customers. Members share advice and ask questions of Hanson and the other engineers, who dispense it for free. The community is open and fully searchable, although only registered members can submit articles and comments. In 2008, about 100 people visited the site every day. By early 2010, that number was over 5,000.

Hanson and colleagues Jeff Sullivan, Kong Yang, and Dennis Smith are celebrities of sorts in the community of enterprise customers, who frequently seek them out for meetings at trade shows and during visits to the company's executive briefing center. Their celebrity has paid off handsomely for Dell: Hanson won't provide specifics, but Dell has estimated that the TechCenter is indirectly responsible for many millions of dollars in sales each year.

That's despite the fact that Dell TechCenter isn't charged with selling anything. The site is free of advertising, and the

member list may never be used for promotions. “The last thing IT people want when they come to a technical resource is an ad asking them to buy a laptop,” Hanson says.

Those sales are generated by the affinity that the staff has developed with these key corporate customers. It’s a camaraderie that is nurtured by personal contact. In the early days of Twitter, the Dell TechCenter staff had set up a common Twitter account as a secondary channel of communication. But it turned out that customers wanted to speak to people, not brands. The Twitter initiative really gained traction when Hanson became @DellServerGeek and Sullivan became @SANPenguin. Suddenly the discussion became more personal and the people behind Dell TechCenter more real to their constituents.

Welcome to the new world of business-to-business (B2B) communications. Dell TechCenter and other initiatives like it are microcosms of the changes that are sweeping across the corporate world as a consequence of the rapid growth of social media tools like blogs, communities, and user-generated multimedia.

Companies like Dell, which does 80 percent of its sales volume with corporate customers, are ideally positioned to take advantage of these new channels. In fact, B2B companies were among the earliest adopters of social media. Technology leaders such as Microsoft, IBM, and Cisco had hundreds of thousands of employees blogging as early as 2005, and those same companies are now expanding their footprint into social networks like Facebook, YouTube, and, overwhelmingly, Twitter. Microsoft has featured interviews with thousands of its own employees in video programs on its Channel 9 web site. The company wanted to expose its human side to a market that saw it as closed and secretive.

B2B technology companies have also been among the most creative users of social channels to reach the highly skilled people they need to hire in competitive labor markets. Recruiters have found that social channels are far more effective in identifying prospective employees than recruitment advertising sources, and that prospects came into the hiring cycle with a better understanding and more enthusiasm about the company they were hoping to work for.

Yet B2B applications of social media get remarkably little attention. Perhaps that's because their focused communities of buyers pale in size to the millions who flock to Facebook Official Pages for Coca-Cola and Nike. Perhaps it's because glitzy video contests and games don't resonate with the time-challenged professional audience. It doesn't really matter. Few B2B companies seek the consumer spotlight, and their audiences, which may spend millions of dollars with them, are more interested in substance than in style. Fortunately, B2B social media is all about substance.

The B2B Difference

Why are B2B companies different, and why do they justify a social media book just for them? For one thing, B2B marketers quietly spend about \$80 billion per year, some \$3 billion of that online. Spending on B2B Internet marketing is expected to grow at a compound rate of 12 percent through 2013, with social media spending showing a 21 percent compound annual growth rate.¹

B2B marketers are far more entrenched in social channels than they are given credit for. [Business.com](http://www.business.com) reported in late 2009 that 81 percent of B2B companies maintain company-related accounts or profiles on social media sites, versus 67 percent of business-to-consumer (B2C) companies.² The same study also found that three out of four B2B companies