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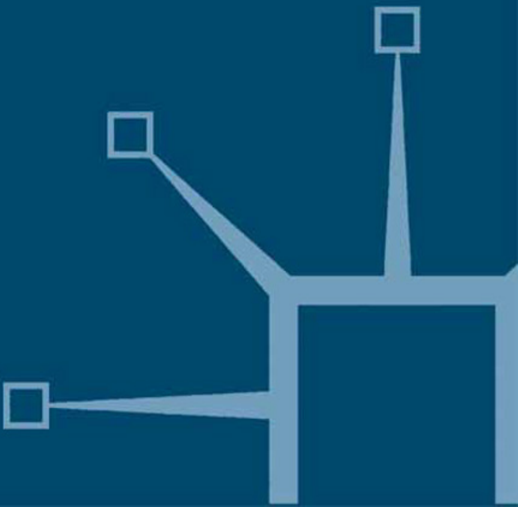
THE SOCIAL MEDIA MANIFESTO

Jed Hallam



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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2013 978-1-137-27141-9
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First published 2013 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

Palgrave Macmillan in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

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ISBN 978-1-349-44457-1 ISBN 978-1-137-27142-6 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9781137271426

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13

Acknowledgments

I would like to sincerely thank the following people for their help, contribution, advice and support over the last 18 months in the research and writing of this book. Without your support, this book would not have been possible.

My friends and mentors Dominic Stinton and Graham Drew, two of the smartest people I have ever met. Everyone at VCCP Share for listening to my seemingly endless out-loud thinking and for being incredibly supportive during the whole process—Annabell, Rob, Tom and Dave, Claire, Lulu, Billy, Sophie and Nincs have all shown tireless enthusiasm for my seemingly illogical train of thought and have helpfully put my brain back on track when it has veered off course.

The whole of the VCCP Partnership, but specifically Stephanie Brimacombe, Rob Wills, Fred Rodwell and Andy Parsons, Cydney, Rob Dougan, Boothy, Tim Kitell, Fergus, Barney, Tracey, Charles Vallance, Adrian Colman, David Boscawen, Jon Phillips and last, but most certainly not least, Dando and Dodd.

Ged Carroll, Mat Morisson, Becky McMichael, Tim Hoang, Tim Malbon, Stephen Waddington, Nathan Williams, Antony Mayfield, James Whatley, Michael Cooper, my old family at Wolfstar Consultancy (but specifically Tim Sinclair and Stuart Bruce), Gabbi Cahane, Philip Sheldrake and all the guys at Meanwhile.

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Foreword

This is a book about change. Indeed, in many ways, it's a manual on change; a "how to" guide to social media and its impact on business and business communication.

If Jed had wanted to, and his publisher had allowed him, he could have expanded the scope to include politics, arts, social activisim and, even, sex and religion. This thing called social media, like the internet on which it rides, has quite an appetite. There are few parts of life it leaves un-nibbled.

It is, however, to Jed's credit that he stuck to a tighter brief. Wherever possible he has avoided generalisations and extrapolations. Instead he offers examples and practical advice to anyone who is wrestling with how they adapt their organisation to a newly socialialised reality. Moreover, in the tradition of the great "how to" books of yesteryear, Jed has clearly given plenty of thought to how his readers will use the book, which bits will be of most interest depending on their requirements and, therefore, how it can be most easily and fruitfully navigated.

On top of all these splendid qualities, this is also a book that, like a fat kid taking up weightlifting, starts with a big natural advantage in that it concerns an inherently interesting subject.

When I started in advertising back in the 80's, one of my first bosses, a pipe-smoking Yorkshireman, would often mutter disapprovingly about the tendency for everyone to approach advertising with an open mouth. Those days are gone. No-one talks about advertising any more, it's merely "a tax you pay for being boring". Now it's social media that gets everyone yacking. More pertinently, it doesn't just get them yacking. It IS them yacking. And that's why it's gold dust. For the first time ever we can measure it. We can monitor it. We can interact with it. We can even shape it. And we can do all these things better once we've read this book. Indeed, I would go so far as to issue a guarantee that you will change at least 5 of the ways your business communicates as a result of reading this book, or the publisher will give you your money back.

Another advantage of social media is that it arouses strong opinions. Some love it, some hate it. It has its champions and its detractors, its victims and culprits. And whilst sometimes, despite all the billionaires it has created, old fogies like me can be tempted to think its importance, in time, may slacken—that the pendulum may swing back, not to where it used to be, but where the frantic over-sharing of everything (imho) begins to wane—despite all this, what emerges from Jed's book are three incontrovertible trends;

- The way customers communicate about and with brands/companies/institutions is changing beyond recognition
- Therefore the way companies/brands/institutions communicate with customers must change by a similar order of magnitude
- Therefore the way companies/brands/institutions communicate internally needs to change fundamentally

I could write at length on each of these three subjects but the good news is that Jed already has. So I won't. Not least because I would give a rather amateurish perspective, whereas Jed provides expert analysis and practical guidance on what these changes entail and their implications (not least the importance of Gephi, and open source graph visualisation platforms in general) in terms of what you need to do next.

However, where I think a little reflection is in order is to do with a wider point regarding the nature of change, because sometimes its symptoms can get muddled up with its causes—and nowhere more so than in the world of social media. One of the peculiar qualities of social, converged technology is the massive contradictions inherent within it. Commentatotors, including Jed, are quick to point out how it spells the end of business as we know it, that the rule of tyrannical brands is over. But the problem with this assertion is that it goes hand in hand with a dramatic rise in exactly what is supposed to be disappearing, namely vast, all conquering global brands that exercise something close to a monopolistic hold on their categories. Anything much over 35% market share tended to be viewed as anti competitive before the advent of the internet, nowadays it is not uncommon in online markets to see brands with well over 75% market share. Despite the internet's ability to create unprecedentedly favourable conditions for small, niche, specialist brands (the famous long tail), it also creates perfect conditions for "default settings" where it simply becomes more convenient for everyone, apart from the most initiated, to adopt the dominant protocol, often on the illusory basis that it's free.

It is true, then, that the internet is great for small brands, social enterprise and collaborative consumption. What is less often stressed is that it is also great for the corporate colossi, where power seems to be increasingly concentrated into a smallish number of global super brands which operate both on and offline. Whether this fully represents progress is to be debated.

Similarly, the internet is widely associated with greater fluidity, a breaking down of hierarchical structures and loss of control. Yet many of the greatest exponents of the online world are immensely controlling, trying to coral users into a single operating system, continually requiring the customer to submit to various terms and conditions (which, to be honest, none of us but Jed understand) and, it has to be said, exerting remarkably tight control over the levels of tax they pay to foreign governments and customers. There are some marvellous exceptions to the new control freaks, there are some fantastic open platforms, and some visionary business leaders who are determined to create a truly open system. But, ironically, these often come from more traditional industries, with more traditional and transparent business models.

Another aspect of the new era of control is Big Data. The rise of the CDO, the CIO and the CTO does not entirely sit happily with the idea of a more fluid, unregimented business style. In fact in many ways it feels Orwellian. This is another of the great contradictions of the internet, whilst at one level we are much freer, we are in other ways ever more trapped and more surveilled.

A similar point could be made about the nature of sharing over social networks. This is something that has been brilliantly covered by Sherry Turkle in her thought provoking book Alone Together, so I will simply paraphrase her argument, which is that the type of sharing that we associate with social networks isn't really sharing at all, in that it creates the illusion of companionship when in fact much of the world is becoming a lonelier place. Thus the rise of the micro network, which is likely to offer more depth and meaning than the scattergun social graph. But then micro networks aren't hugely different from coffee mornings, and they've been around for ages.

Which brings me to my final point about technological change. The most successful technologies tend to help us be more like we already are, they tend to go with the grain of human behaviour, because human behaviour is close to constant and not even the mightiest online brands can change that. This means that where we see technology adopted it tends, ironically, to leave things as they were, only more so. We can be a judgemental and resentful species, social media allows us to air more of our resentments and squabbles (ask any Premiership footballer). We can also be altruistic and consensual, which is why we are seeing the rise of collaborative consumption, micro finance and task sharing.

Organisationally, the impact of a converged, internetegrated (™) world cannot be underestimated, and Jed's book is a brilliant manual on how to respond. But have things truly changed? To say that we are more beholden to our customers, our staff, our stakeholders is irrefutable. But are we any more so than when George Cadbury built Bournville as a model town for his employees? It is conceivable that what we are witnessing is surface change, and that the fundamentals of business, society and branding remain permanent. If you want to succeed in the long run, be good to your customer, be good to your staff, and be good to your community. There are plenty of corporate goliaths who forgot this recently and, like Oxymandias, king of kings, are now face down in the dirt.

If there is one thing I take from Jed's book, it is a re-affirmation of classic marketing principles; listen to your customer, learn and adapt accordingly, communicate this to your staff and then begin the process all over the again. Only this time with bells on. As Tancredi Falconeri says to his uncle Don Fabrizio Corbera, Prince of Salina in Prince Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's posthumous and melancholy masterpiece Il Gattopardo (The Leopard); "Everything must change so that everything can stay the same". Try tweeting that.

Charles Vallance
Founder of the VCCP Partnership

Introduction

The premise of this book is simple: it should provide a brief introduction into the changes that have taken place in business over the previous 15 years, it should outline why "social media" is not about technology but human insight, and finally, it should clearly illustrate how you can use this insight to develop an innovative and competitive business. The way in which I have pieced this book together makes it part short essays and part pragmatic guide to using this changing landscape as an opportunity to turn your business into a social business.

You will be presented with a detailed breakdown of how human insight can be used across your business and an insight (I believe) into the next ten years backed up by some of the finest economic, technological and strategic thinkers of the last one hundred years (obviously not me). Also, where possible, I have referenced best-practice case studies to help illustrate the potential that becoming a social business represents.

While some of the points I make may seem academic, please bear with me, I will get to the actionable stuff in good time, but first it is important to give a macro view of what has happened to create (as my friend and mentor Stephen Waddington coined as the title of his excellent book) *Brand Anarchy*.

This book is about how and why business has changed, and how you can use this change to build a stronger, more profitable business.

* * *

My research for this book began a few years ago. I was in Paris for a week ahead of moving to London, I left with no plans and a stack of books—one of those books was Nassim Taleb's *The Black Swan*. I bought it on the recommendation of a friend, but thought it bore little relation to my day to day work, as it was about fragility and economic instability in the financial markets. In the space of two days I read the book cover to cover, and what struck me most

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pertinently was how the unpredictable behavior Taleb was describing in action in the financial markets was also being replicated in a more micro-level in different markets—namely, how many businesses were struggling to understand how the influx of consumer data from social media and the increase in availability of communications would affect their business. The level of complexity of business had increased, as had access to technology. Taleb talks a lot about the mistakes that many traders make in being too close to the markets, news and information and how micro-analysis of data caused massive issues on a macro-scale. In short, the financial markets had always been complex, but traders had become more simplistic in their approach, due to technology—the parallels with branding and business building were uncanny. The industrial revolution gave way to mass production of products, the division of labor coined by Adam Smith (and later developed by Karl Marx) ensured that businesses could produce huge quantities of the same product—which had a knock on effect in the late 1950s and 1960s when the rise of advertising and "branding" lead many of these businesses to use advertising and branding as a way to create salience in stagnant, identikit markets—hundreds of identical products lined the supermarket shelves, distinguished from each other not by the products themselves, but from the branding wrapped around them by advertising agencies. Technology had made mass production easy, and businesses lazy. Consumers obviously discussed products and services, giving advice to their friends and family, but this was kept within small networks of people—location ensured word of mouth had a limited impact, and it was easy for brands to mass-broadcast messaging into millions of homes through television and radio advertising. As the Internet began to gain critical mass, 40 years later, and access became cheaper, we saw a proliferation of online journals and IRC (early versions of chat rooms and forums), platforms for people to discuss any subject without boundaries. This gave the everyday consumer a voice that could be potentially heard by anyone with a modem, breaking those geographical word of mouth boundaries that had existed for thousands of years. Then, as Gordon E. Moore predicted, technology became cheaper, more prolific, and today more people have mobile telephone access than have access to clean water. This has flattened any notion of geographical boundaries, aided by platforms such as blogs, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. Everyone with access