

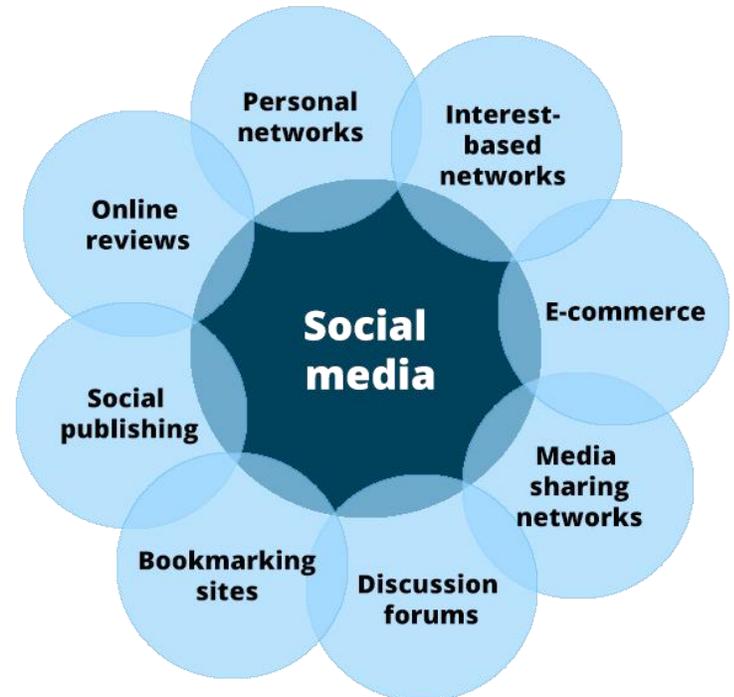
8 Types of Social Media

and How Each Can Benefit Your Business

by Dave Kogan, Manager of Marketing & Business Development

One of my favorite quotes, by Albert Einstein, is “If you can’t explain it simply, you don’t understand it well enough.” But how many of us have tried explaining social media to non-users (when we know how to use it) and failed to do justice to all its benefits? The challenge is underestimated, since the definition of social media is in a constant state of flux.

Today, no type of social media is completely isolated from others, as major networks adjust their functionalities to offer more services to their users – recent examples of this include Facebook’s announcement of [Place Tips](#), as well as Pinterest’s acquisition of [new advertising technologies](#). To help you distinguish different types of social media, I have highlighted the primary types and capabilities of different online services, and illustrated each with examples of major players.



Relationship Networks



One cannot talk about the types of social media without first mentioning major networks such as Facebook. While personal relationship networks aren’t the oldest type of social media, they can be called the most defining of them all. These channels were one of the first ones to offer public mini-sites, which later became known as profiles, with extensive information about the user, and most often require them to register with their real name. Relationship networks allowed us to keep all our communications in one place, on our “walls”, “timelines”, or private messages (aka “PMs”), and

share updates with our entire networks in one click. They vary from professional relationship networks (e.g. LinkedIn) that help you find work, connect with other professionals in the field, and share recommendations, to romantic relationship networks (e.g. eHarmony) that help you find single users in your area. Relationship networks also offer a unique chance for brands to connect to their users on a personal level. These days, it is necessary for most brands to have a Facebook page of a Twitter account, in order to reach out to their audience online and answer any customer service questions that may arise.

Media Sharing Networks

This type of social network is defined by the primary type of media shared among users. Facebook and Twitter have amazing video and image-sharing capabilities; however, the majority of posts shared on these channels contain text. For channels such as [Flickr](#) or [Instagram](#), however, images are the main focus – users have to choose, upload and edit image files before proceeding with anything else, such as captions or mentions of other users. Similarly, with sites such as [YouTube](#) and [Vimeo](#), or apps like [Vine](#) and [Snapchat](#), video is the primary mode of communication.



When determining whether or not your business needs to establish a presence on a media sharing network, it's important to consider your available resources. If there's one thing the most successful brands on platforms like YouTube or Instagram have in common, it's a thoroughly planned mission and carefully designed media assets, usually following a certain theme. To increase your business's chances of success on media sharing networks, do research first:

- [8 ways to get more likes and followers on Instagram](#)
- [Which social video platform is right for your business?](#)
- [A guide on social video and how it fits your marketing plan](#)
- [Instagram or Tumblr? Choosing the right phot-sharing network for your brand](#)
- [How to build the perfect YouTube channel](#)

Online Reviews

Location-based review services such as [Yelp](#) and [Zomato](#) are getting more traction as personal social networks adopt geolocation, and more users choose to consult the Internet along with their friends for recommendations of best dining spots and professional services. There are sites to review anything from hotels, restaurants or your latest employer – an user reviews have more weight than ever before. Sites like [Airbnb](#) and [Uber](#), the biggest service providers in the emerging [sharing economy](#), rely largely on host and driver reviews, respectively, to determine who benefits from the service.

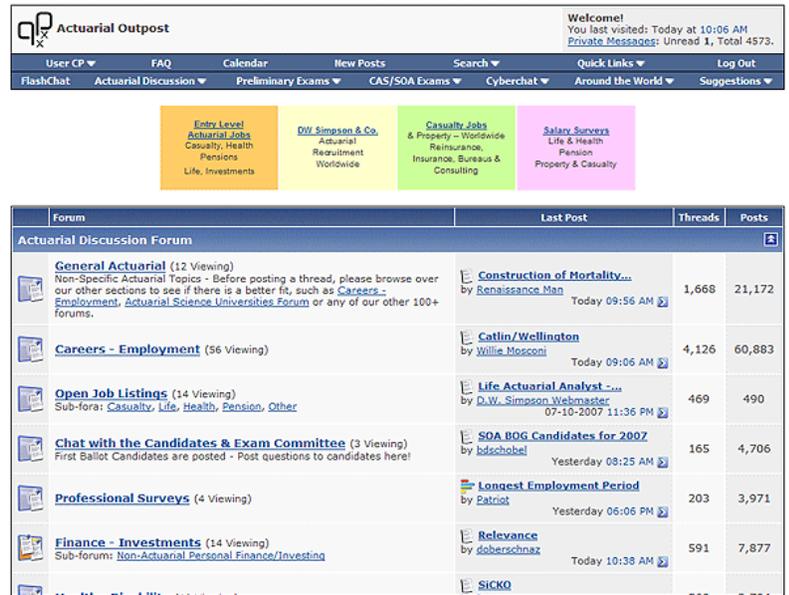
It's vital for your brand to have the ability to leverage user reviews, whether positive or negative, to maintain client relationships. Another favorite quote of mine is that "every cloud has a silver lining." If you worry about having your business listed on these review sites because of that "what if" someone posts a bad review. The silver lining is that you can respond in a professional manner and turn that frown upside down. You'll find that you'll get more business from how you handle a bad review than from a good review.

The Internet is a huge collective knowledge base, and more and more [consumers choose to consult the public opinion online](#) to determine whether the brand is worth their business. In order to do this in a cost-effective way, select a customer success team member to address reviews on sites relevant for your business. Entrust them with answering any questions or concerns from clients with average or dissatisfactory experiences, and see if there is anything that can be done on your end to turn a possible detractor into a fan (see silver lining above).

Discussion Forums

This is one of the oldest types of social media. Before we connected to our first university friends on The Facebook, we discussed pop culture, current affairs, and asked for help on forums. Perhaps it's that unquenchable desire to get a share of collective knowledge that accounts for the wide reach and numerous users on forums such as reddit. "The front page of the Internet," as well as other forums like [Quora](#) and [Digg](#), seldomly require the person's name to register and post allowing for complete anonymity, if desired.

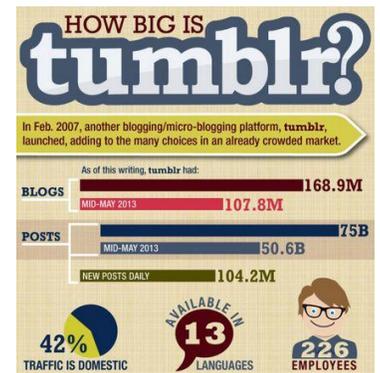
However, while anonymity may be an attractive feature for some users, we don't recommend that brands adopt it. This defeats the purpose of being present on such a network; your best bet at promoting your business on a forum is by sharing content relevant to a discussion, and participating in as many discussions as possible. Be very careful to avoid explicit self-promotion – if you can, leave promotion of your brand to your [brand ambassadors](#). Both moderators and users on networks such as reddit are sensitive to advertising disguised as a post, and this can seriously damage the perception of your brand. The best strategy is to offer expertise in your field by joining an existing discussion and linking to an article hosted on your official blog or a how-to video tutorial, for example.



Social Publishing Platforms

Social publishing platforms consist of blogs and microblogs, where long and short-form written content can be shared with other users. These platforms range from real-time interaction networks such as Twitter; which, while officially placed in the category of microblogging platforms, is not normally included in the blogging category by most users; to [Medium](#) and [Tumblr](#), which are battling it out for the title of the best interactive social publishing; to more traditional blogging platforms such as [WordPress](#) and [Blogger](#).

While the benefits of [Twitter for business](#) are too obvious to recount, a blogging platform is a different story. If your promotion strategy includes content marketing (and if it doesn't, you might want to consider it), your business can gain visibility by keeping a blog. Not only does a blog help increase awareness of your business and generate more engaging content for your social channels such as Facebook, it can also help carve out a niche for your brand as a thought leader in your industry. If you find the idea of starting a blog as scary as scaling a mountain, here are some steps to help



you get to the top:

- [How to start a blog](#)
- [How to promote your blog on social media](#)
- [Content marketing idea: customer service stories](#)
- [Let your customers tell the story with user-generated content](#)

Bookmarking Sites



In the early days of the Internet (remember Geocities?), content discovery online was a difficult task. Nowadays, there is a plethora of interesting, useful and enlightening content online, and sifting through all of it on your own is simply impossible. Of course, search engines like Google come in very handy when you know what to look for, but when you only have a vague idea of content you'd like to read or watch, there's bookmarking sites. These are web services like [StumbleUpon](#), [Pinterest](#) and [Flipboard](#) where users collect content from elsewhere on the Internet, and save it to their account on the platform. This content can also be private or public, and shared with other users. Often, these bookmarking sites will then suggest content similar to the links or images you have already saved on the

network.

First and foremost, businesses can benefit from making their website bookmark-friendly. This entails [optimizing the headlines and images on your blog or website for RSS feeds](#), making them easier to access and read for your audience. Your brand might also benefit from ensuring the articles or videos can be pinned with Pinterest's browser extension. Finally, pay close attention to the images featured on your site or blog – these are the window displays of Pins, so you want them to be good representations of your content.

Secondly, bookmarking sites are great tools for content curation. You can create your own Pinterest board or Flipboard magazine to sort through the most engaging content on your topic of choosing from third-party sources, and showcase content from your own blogs. If your brand uses Hootsuite, you can then add content to your RSS feeds or bookmarking sites such as Pinterest or Flipboard right in your dashboard!

Interest-Based Networks

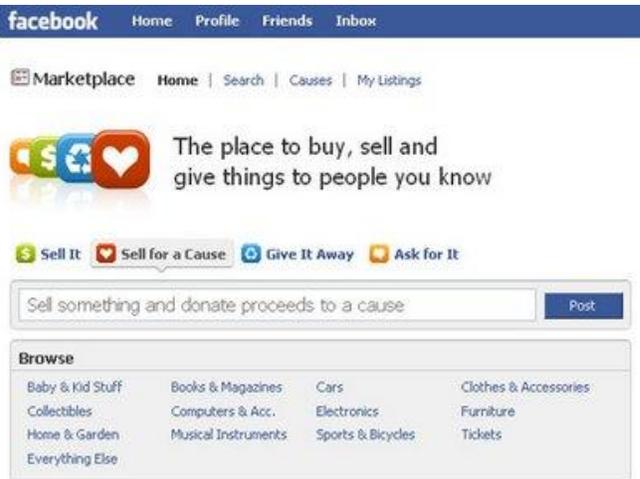
One of the most wonderful opportunities presented by social media is the ability to find people with common interests, no matter how niche these hobbies may be. In addition to Facebook and [LinkedIn Groups](#) and [Google+](#) communities, there are whole networks dedicated to exploration of interest – such as [Last.fm](#) for musicians and music lovers, and [Goodreads](#) for authors and avid readers.



Keeping an account on one of these interest-based networks may not be a wise use of your brand's resources – you don't want to end up with a neglected social media account. However, it's another story (get the Goodreads' pun?) if your customers and social audience all share a common interest, and you know this simply

due to the nature of your business. Such is the case for publishing houses, for example, and their book-loving clients. A hobby or interest-based network is a good place to keep up with current trends among fans of a particular industry or its products.

E-Commerce



Last but not least, a big trend emerging across all types of social media is the ability to view and purchase desired goods with a click of a button. Sites such as [Polyvore](#) aggregate products from different retailers in a single online marketplace, and services like [Etsy](#) allow small businesses and individual crafters to sell their products without an existing brick-and-mortar location. Over the past year, e-commerce elements have been adopted by many networks whose primary functionalities place them in different categories, such as Pinterest, Facebook and Twitter.

Many consumers, especially Millennials, are researching and making their purchases online. If the size of your brand allows is, an online store, or, at the very least, an online catalogue is essential to attract Generation Y clients. E-commerce sites and sites with e-commerce capabilities, such as Pinterest, can be a good solution for brands who aren't currently hosting an online store as part of their website. If your business doesn't have an e-commerce partnership with a major distributor like Amazon, you may soon be able to incorporate Buy buttons into social networks like Twitter.

