
“As the online environment has evolved, so has the way we communicate. Social media is on the rise, and is changing dialogue between businesses and their customers, enhancing communications by allowing for a much higher level of interactivity.”
– **Sam Saltis**

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Introduction

From small business to global enterprise, social media has taken the corporate world by storm, and it's here to stay. So what is social media? And how do you decide where it fits in your online strategy? This whitepaper aims to offer users a social media "kit" which can help answer these questions.

1.

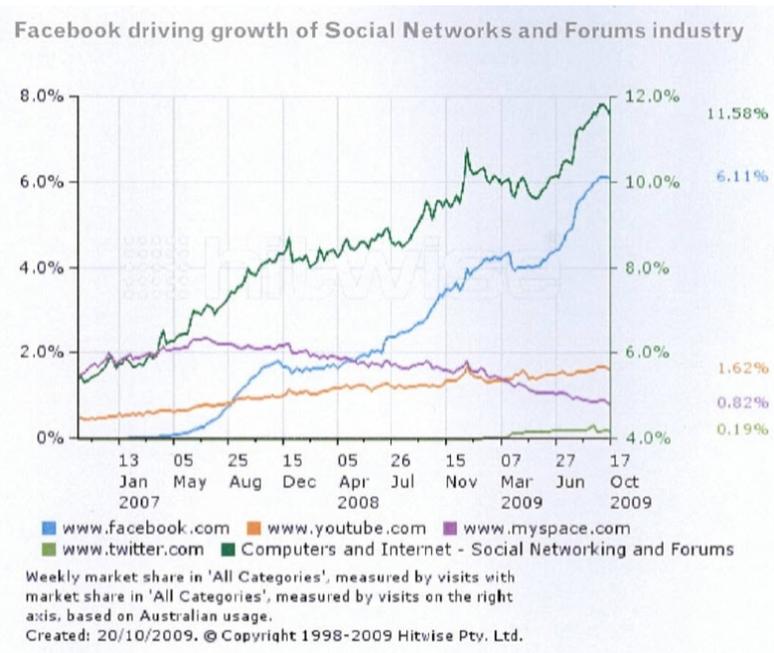
What is Social Media?

The term "social media" generally refers to social networking websites which allow users to privately or publicly publish (or "share") content online. Examples of social media include [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [YouTube](#).

In reality, the term encompasses any online application which allows users to share content, and a [blog](#) or [forum](#) may also be considered social media.

Blogging, commenting and social networking can enable your business to connect with customers and gain wider reach; increasing brand awareness, showcasing thought leadership and driving traffic to your website while strengthening brand loyalty and promoting positive word of mouth.

The following chart represents the past three years of growth in the Social Networks and Forums Industry.



The steady growth and widespread adoption of social media are evidence that social media is here to stay. [This popular YouTube video](#) is often used to demonstrate this fact.

2.

Is Social Media Right for Your Business?

Whether social media is right for your business is largely dependent on your target market. If your target audience does not participate in social media, then there is no point wasting valuable resources managing a profile – spend your time and money engaging customers and prospects where they can hear you.

Spend time researching which, if any, social media you will most effectively reach users. If your direct competitors are in this space you probably should be too. Visit competitor profiles and gage their success in the arena, and learn from their mistakes.

This quick quiz might also help you determine whether or not your business is ready for social media:

Question	Yes/No
Do you enjoy social networking?	
Is your business already part of any social networks?	
Do you regularly update site content? (can be direct-streamed)	
Do you have a spare half hour a day to talk to your online community?	
Can provide thoughts and opinions that aren't sales related?	
Do you communicate with customers via newsletters direct mail or e-marketing?	
Do you have the facility to communicate on the run?	
Do your marketing and business strategies include online activity?	
Are you genuinely excited about your business?	
Are you prepared to keep at it over time (3 months, 6 months)?	
Are you prepared to cope with negative feedback?	

If you answered mainly “No” then you should probably revisit your online strategy, and come back to social media at a later date. If you answered mainly “Yes” then your business is probably at the stage where you could make a great success out of one or many social media profiles. Check out our blogs for tips on how to [maximise your social media strategy in 2010](#).

3.

How To?

Setting up a profile on a social network is quite intuitive. To get the most out of your profile, here are some handy hints to follow:

- **Profile Name:** Use your brand or registered business name
- **Email Address:** For receiving any mails regarding the updates and activities
- **Image:** Choose a logo that best fits the size of the profile picture
- **Website URL:** Display your website’s URL (eg. <http://www.bwired.com.au>) and hyperlink it.
- **Description:** A short description within the allowed character limit that explains the services in few lines (Using Keywords might be helpful when people make an internal search)
- **Contact Details:** Add all relevant contact details, including a phone number, toll-free number, postal address, email address, fax, contact name and website URL. This is particularly important as it enables users to contact you by their preferred means, easily.
- **Content:** Here you can add more detail such as information about products, services, events, and blogs.
- **Extras:** Ask your web partner to help you create a personalised background, stream your blogs to your profile and add links to your other websites or social media profiles.
- **Keep it Active:** Keep your profile active. Start discussions, stream blogs and update with your latest news.

4.

Key Considerations

The key implementation considerations that have been raised when using this medium as a communications tool in building your brand revolve around operations, timing and resources, technology, and perhaps most importantly, the way in which you communicate.

Firstly, in relation to operations, the most important thing to consider before jumping on the social media bandwagon is that it needs to be planned. Plan, practice, and THEN put into action. Designate who will be responsible for monitoring and managing the medium and set aside the time for this to be done.

Social media is often framed as a cheap and effective business tool, and it is relatively cheap in terms of actual cash spent, but it does have a cost. Getting it right requires a significant investment in time – either yours or someone else's. Allowing for timing and resources is critical for communications to be meaningful, and by recognizing what will be required, you can maximise your return on investment. In order to measure your success, firstly set objectives (whether it be in relation to reach, brand awareness, number of leads generated etc.), then make sure you have the right measurement tools in place, and finally be prepared to test, learn and iterate.

Technology is at the core of the issue, and for that reason it is crucial to get it right. Make somebody responsible for the technology aspect of any campaigns you are running, ensuring that where relevant you have scaled appropriately and your technology is capable to avoid negative press. Prototype before you run wherever possible.

The way in which you communicate with customers and prospects is perhaps the most important consideration. Social media is all about engagement, interactivity (don't intrude, make yourself part of the conversation), and open and honest dialogue (conversation vs. advertising). Don't just use this medium as a means of promoting your brand, get to know your consumers by getting involved and finding an emotive way to get across what your brand stands for and demonstrating your thought leadership in your industry through interaction. Once you enter this space you're there for good, so make it count. Modern branding is about letting people share your brand and take ownership on some level. There are mutual benefits, but as with any social interaction you "need to bring something to the party"- give to get- it's about reciprocity and positive value exchange.

Social media provides the opportunity for debate, reflection, idea generation and response to negative feedback; but it can be risky business...

5.

Risks

Social media can be a cost-effective tool for building brand awareness and engaging customers and prospects, but it is not without its risks. The risk most organisations fear is negative publicity. While it is true that

social media opens the door for users to post negative feedback, if you don't provide this opportunity on "home ground" (which then gives you the chance to respond and attempt to manage that feedback), they will do so via their own avenues anyway – you just might not hear about it. In which case, you're better off keeping lines of communication open to avoid negative word of mouth.

Interestingly, Neilson's Social Media Report 2010 identified 86% of Australian internet users are looking to fellow users for opinions and information about products, services and brands. "Australians' engagement with online word of mouth communication is going to increase in coming years as social media plays an increasingly important role in consumer decision making", says Melanie Ingrey, Research Director for Nielsen's Online Business.

Other risks include confidentiality, loyalty and privacy issues; which are also bred from these outlets.

Examples include

- Employees using social media to promote company work
- Employees promoting themselves
- Employees raising issues such as internal or client related problems in online forums which may unknowingly be visible to both competitors and the media
- Employees connecting with competitors
- Employers accessing personal information about staff members

There are some obvious problems which could arise from any number of the actions taken above, but the most glaringly obvious problem is that company [policies regarding social media are nowhere near where they should be](#). Both organisations and employees should make themselves more aware of this "dark side" of social media, and at the very least put guidelines and preventative measures in place.

A great example of social media guidelines to work from is [IBM's Social Computing Guideleines](#).

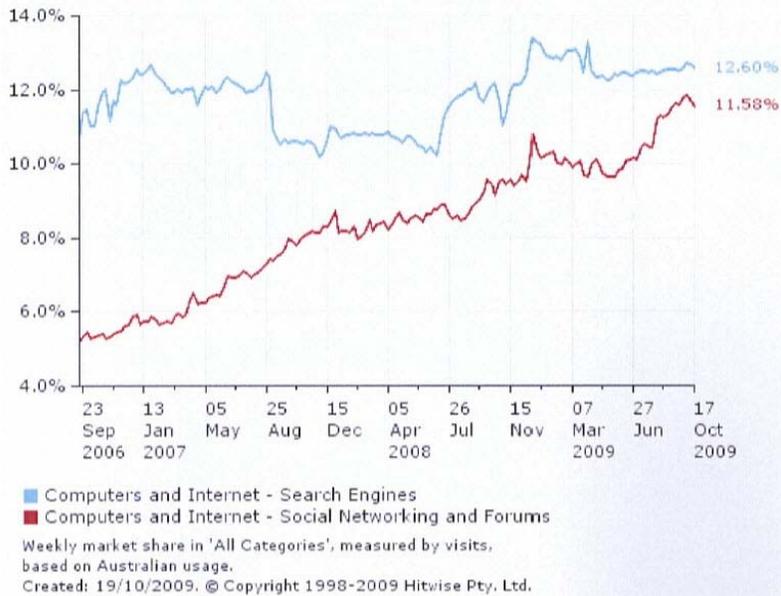
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Social and Search

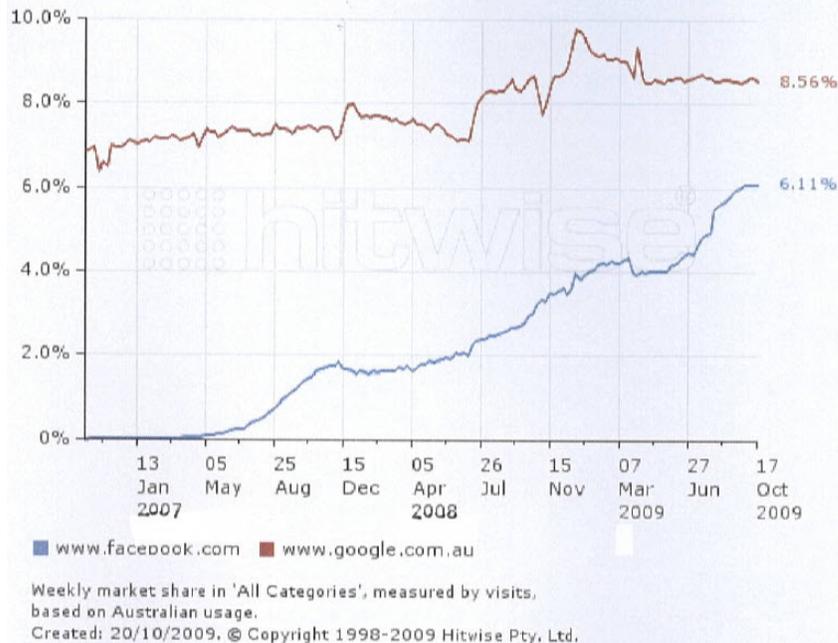
Widespread adoption of social media has had a significant impact on search engines, and as a result, SERPS (Search Engine Results Pages) are now inclusive of relevant social media content, indexed in real time.

As the graphs below demonstrate, social media are creeping up on search engines in the battle for market share.

Social Networks and Forums shaping up as a challenger to Search Engines



Facebook chasing Google Australia for number 1 ranking



By making yourself aware that activity in social media outlets has a direct impact on SERPS, you can capitalise on this link. By streaming news and blogs, and generating as much conversation around your brand as possible you can build brand awareness while boosting your search engine optimisation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, when used under the right circumstances, social media can play a critical role in a successful online strategy. It is vital that any organisation considering undertaking a social media strategy first consider target audience, implementation, risks and policies; and maintain an awareness of the link between social and search.

Our expert consultants are happy to share their knowledge. For obligation-free advice about incorporating social media into your online strategy, call one of our strategy consultants on 1300 780 566 or email info@bwired.com.au.

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