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Marketing Thought Leaders

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Smashing the Social Media Silo: A 10-Step Action Plan

By [Nancy Pekala](#)

Marketers are at a crossroads. They must decide to be either social media experts or agents of change. Both roles are needed, but for organizations to succeed in serving the customer of the future, marketers must actively seek to drive transformational change.

Bottom line: its time marketers took an active part in smashing the silos.

During the AMA's recent virtual event, "[Changing the Game: Innovations for Future Success](#)," keynote presenter [Brian Solis](#), Principal, Altimeter Group and author of the new book, "[The End of Business as Usual](#)," stressed that marketers need to flex their leadership muscle and set about exerting influence within the organization to drive change.

"Without leadership from marketing, any social media programs will simply be traditional marketing disguised as social," Solis explained. "Marketers must build a center of excellence and lead a social media task force that unites the organization around a renewed mission and vision."

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Solis also stressed that marketing strategy must be focused around the "customer voice" which is expressed through shared experiences and which collectively become the brand. "Much of today's social media is actually anti-social," he said. "We're seeing the end of Social Media 1.0. The evolution of social media should be viewed through the lens of the customer; it's not about technology."

He added, "Community is much more than belonging to something; it's about doing something together that makes belonging matter."

Solis also suggested that lack of engagement that is occurring in a brand's Facebook page and other social channels is a reflection of how organizations value connections and how they invest in technology. "Engagement is not defined through likes, comments, shares, re-tweets or impressions," he emphasized. "That activity is a result of engagement. Instead, engagement is by design."

Too often, when crafting their social media strategies, organizations think in terms of cultivating social media champions. But Solis argues that another social media champion is the last thing today's brands need. "What you need is a customer champion, an employee champion, a champion for change," he said. "Social media must be viewed as an enabler of improving relationships and experiences. I don't care how many hash tags you introduce, how many

Twitter and Facebook icons you put on your marketing materials or e-blasts, none of that is improving the customer experience. Those are just gimmicks.”

In fact, according to recent Altimeter Group research conducted by Jeremiah Oywang, on average, 178 accounts existed for every business interviewed for the study. “That’s ridiculous,” Solis said. “It’s a free for all and it’s just ridiculous. It has to stop. We are working against ourselves and we don’t have the luxury of time to figure this out.”

He added, “Why did people unfriend or unfollow you, or otherwise cut the tie? It’s because we used those channels as yet another marketing device,” Solis suggested. “We’re still pushing things at people. But people are getting smart. These are their domains. They can leave if they want to without losing anything. Once they are gone, you’re never going to get them back unless you do something dramatic.”

As a result, brands must work much harder at crafting customer experiences that matter. “This is how we’re going to do it,” Solis suggested. “We’re going to stop asking people to follow us on Twitter and Facebook. We’re going to stop looking at the technologies. We’re going to stop throwing iPads at people if they like us. We’re going to stop using the Like button on our brand page as this ransom we’re holding over your head so that you can like us in order to get some sort of content. That’s not what social is about at all.”

Ultimately, to execute a new social strategy and to drive transformational change within organizations, marketers must work at smashing the silos. Solis stressed that social media must not be segregated to the marketing department within organizations. “The reality is that people see a massively disconnected experience today. What people see and what you want them to see are very different.”

Solis also suggested that marketers must add another “p” to their marketing strategy where the “p” stands for people. “They have unique needs,” he said. “They’re not the ones using traditional channels. They’re not even the ones who like your website. They’re your digital customer and you need to get to know them very well.”

He added, “Your Facebook page can’t just be about marketing. You need to develop different tabs for different experiences so that there are different outcomes all within one page or different pages which are effectively connected.”

Figure 2. Companies Average an Overwhelming Number of Corporate-Owned Accounts

Platform	Average # of accounts
Twitter	39.2
Blog	31.9
Facebook	29.9
LinkedIn	28.8
Forum/Message Board/Communities	23.4
YouTube	9.4
Foursquare	6.3
Gowalla	0.3
SUM	178

Source: Altimeter Group. Base: 140 global corporate social media program managers at companies with over 1,000 employees (Q2 2011)

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Marketers interested in transforming real change in their organizations rather than merely being the social media expert for their brand can start the process by following a 10-step action plan suggested by Solis.

1. **Become the change agent for your organization.**

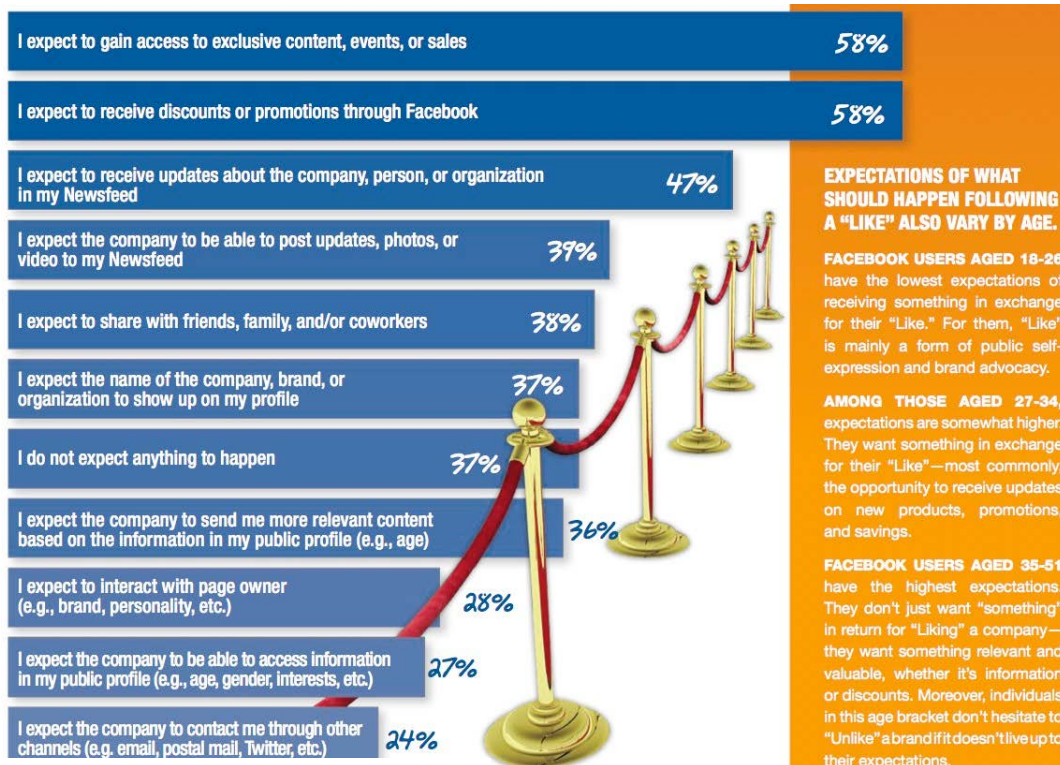
"Understand that where you are with social media and where you need to be is separated only by your leadership and desired experiences and outcomes. You are the one who is building social media strategies tied to business objectives and desired outcomes in order to improve thought leadership, employee advocacy, demand creation, sales/referrals, reputation management and influence."

2. **Develop an internal communications plan.**

"You need to assess the roadblocks within the organization to identify hurdles and obstacles. If it's about customer centricity, then you actually have to be customer centric. That means you have to look at how you can better engage moving forward."

3. **Align social media with internal business objectives.**

"Do you know what the business objectives are and they track against social media today? The Three "Fs"—friends, fans and follows do not track to a business objective. They can be a KPI but is not an ROI metric. Social media must always be an enabler of something. Therefore, the conversation about gaining support for social within the organization can't be about social."



Source: Via Brian Solis/Altimeter Group

4. **Identify your stakeholders.**

"Identify your stakeholders and learn from them. Create a stakeholder engagement program within the organization and bring them together. One of the outcomes of that exercise is to document and articulate how you want to use social media to improve customer relationships and experiences. That translates to a new vision, a new mission and a stated purpose. Social media is an emotional landscape. If people can't connect with you emotionally, then what does the word "community" mean if it isn't binding people at a deeper level than just the mere connection?"

An internal task force comprised of stakeholders should develop a strategy that empowers employees, defines their charter and supports their engagement now and over time. "This is about

helping them move the organization in the right direction. It requires information, training, architecture and informed engagement.”

5. Think like the customer.

Your internal team should work towards bridging the customer gap. Solis suggested this requires a focus on four key customer concepts. First, customers need to demonstrate they are *valued* in their engagement in various channels. Second, the architecture within each of those channels needs to be *efficient* for the outcome. Third, customers want to be able to *trust* you and you can't market your way towards trust. Fourth, customers want a *consistent* experience which means you have to use all of the channels for each one of its intentions, against each set of expectations in a consistent manner. “I can't tell you how many times I've looked at a brand's multiple profiles and the brand is off, even in terms of the messaging that is used. They don't contribute to the overall brand experience. A lot of times, these technologies are being used for technology's sake.”

6. Create a unified brand voice.

It's important to create a social media foundation that conveys “oneness”. “You have to define the voice, the persona, the characteristics of what that brand is going to be so that people know what they're working towards,” Solis suggested.

7. Define a listening framework.

“Don't just listen. You have to design a framework and workflow where information comes in and goes out somehow, some way. It's about monitoring, but also about intelligence, about feeding that information to the right people and having a decision tree or a path in a variety of scenarios that enable effective engagement. It's about roles and responsibilities.”

8. Develop a collaborative infrastructure.

It's important to organize internal efforts in a way that facilitates engagement based on the needs of the customer. “In order to be relevant, your company must be engaged, connected and adaptive. What you're really doing is creating a blueprint for a new era of conducting business, a much more connected era of business and one in which you can demonstrate how each of these new platforms allows you to meet the needs and expectations of customer.”

9. Design meaningful and shareable experiences.

“Design and introduce meaningful and shareable experiences through content, commerce (as it relates to information) and engagement programs,” Solis said. “As an information exchange, you are sparking meaningful conversations. You are providing helpful or useful information and allowing people to take action on it.”

10. Become a social architect and change agent.

According to Solis, now is the time for marketers to choose to drive change in their organizations. “This is your time to help your organization change from the inside out, to matter and to be relevant in an era of connected consumerism. You're competing for the future right now. That's why this isn't easy. This is about real business transformation.”

Solis added, “This is a full-blown revolution and it's wonderful because at the end of this, your business matters to a new group of individuals who find, share, and learn differently than other customers before them. Because of their connectedness, they can help you get to where you want to be a lot faster.”

[Nancy Pekala](#) is the AMA's Senior Director of Online Content and Editor of *Marketing Thought Leaders*.

Do you think marketers are at a crossroads when it comes to social media strategy? Share your thoughts in the Interactive Marketing Group of [AMACONnect](#), the AMA's online community exclusively for marketers. Follow us on Twitter @[marketing_power](#).