

Social Media

Enabling relevance at scale in an always-on,
always-connected world



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In an age of information overload and unlimited choices, any marketer worth their salt knows that brand engagement is driven by providing precisely relevant experiences that attract and hold the attention of each consumer.

Consumer relevance cannot be episodic. Maintaining relevance continuously as consumers move seamlessly from one interaction point to the next is a new demand of the digital age. The imperative for consumer relevance requires a brand to harness deep contextual knowledge about each consumer and apply it intelligently to create persuasive experiences at every touchpoint. This ability to be "relevant at scale", will determine which brands win and which brands get lost in the war for consumer attention.

To deliver relevant experiences at scale companies need to be able to tap into the wealth of data sources that provide valuable signals on what can attract and hold consumer attention at any moment in time—not just data about geo-location, gender and age, product preference or purchase, but also more importantly likes, interests and who they talk and listen to. With the explosive growth in the use of social media, social networks provide a richness of data that can help build more precise insights into consumer context and will allow companies to tailor brand experiences making them more compelling, more persuasive and more relevant.

Tapping the social media opportunity
That social media allows us to connect with others in new and meaningful ways is evident to anyone with a Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn account. Importantly, it's not just the hundreds of millions of individual users who are lured to the always-on, always-connected world. Companies, too, are recognizing that social

media can fundamentally change what it means for them to be engaged.

To date, general appreciation of social media's power has rarely translated into dynamic strategies that lead to relevance at scale. That may soon change as companies learn to use social media to transform how they engage with customers, collaborate with internal and external partners, and align their operations to a common purpose and a new vision for high performance. Here's what they can do to embrace social media's potential.

Industrialize engagement

In addition to enabling breathtaking numbers of simultaneous interactions, social media allows users to draw unprecedented volumes of content and ideas from trusted sources. News is one example. Not long ago, people relied on television to provide them with what local stations believed was relevant information. Today consumers are as likely to pull news from the Twitter feeds and Facebook pages of people in their networks, or set up "like" preferences, Google+ or RSS feeds to personalize their news. News consumption has, in a sense, become a "curated" activity that is ultimately under one's own control.

Shopping has evolved in a similar way. Consumers control more of the experience by being able to quickly compare prices online to find the best deals. They use devices in multiple ways—from scanning barcodes for additional information, to photographing items for further consideration, to completing transactions with the swipe of their phone. Perhaps most important, they can use social media to shape or confirm their preferences. Who has not sought out reviews and recommendations or asked friends for feedback when making a purchase—from apparel, to home appliances, financial investments or insurance policies? Social networks enable this on a scale previously not possible.

Companies that make it easier for their customers to integrate these types of activities are better able to deliver a singularly satisfying and multi-faceted experience—one that should keep customers coming back again and again. Amazon shows how this can be done with a scalable platform that provides integrated access to information, recommendations, reviews, and other products and resellers—all geared toward millions of consumers' unique interests.

There's no reason other companies can't use the power and reach of social media in a similar fashion to harness insights, create relevance, hone relationships and target stakeholders in more meaningful ways. While every company can't become another Amazon, every company can move beyond using social media simply as a tool for monitoring their customers' preferences. There is no shortage of data or opportunities to "listen", but how many actionable insights are driving change? As outlined in *Viderity Technology Vision 2012*¹, the potential for providing context-based connections for both existing and new customers is fast becoming a reality, making the opportunities to engage stakeholders as pervasive as social media itself. Companies that clearly articulate their social purpose and harness the potential of the data captured by aligning their actions accordingly, stand to benefit most.

Supercharge collaboration

Workplace access to information has historically been dictated by hierarchical organizational structures. In this paradigm—and under the watchful eye of the IT organization—senior executives are trusted with sensitive data and insights, while lower-ranking employees generally must secure various permissions first. It's no surprise that employees routinely look for ways to circumvent barriers to access. If their company won't grant access to the data that will help them perform their jobs

more effectively and efficiently, they will find it elsewhere—namely, in the vast knowledge and data repositories of their social networks.

Rather than fearing the use of social media in their organizations, business and IT leaders should manage and encourage it as a way to service customers more effectively. A number of companies have shown what is possible when key stakeholders from within and outside the organization are allowed to generate and share ideas in an open, unfettered environment. Dell's Social Media and Community Teams strengthen the company's social innovation capabilities by engaging a number of stakeholders via blogs, wikis and networking groups. In another example, a global communications company built an internal social sales capability for 3,000 sales and marketing professionals. The company saw improvements in both sales performance and employee engagement after implementing the capability and was positioned as an innovator in workforce collaboration.³

These and many other companies have recognized that social media can change the traditional ecosystem of the workplace and can allow employees to work better and smarter. The key is to incent, empower and encourage employees so they can become the listening posts for consumer signals to ensure a precise and timely experience is provided at every brand touchpoint.

Transform operations

Social media is making one thing crystal clear: Customers do not care how a business is organized. It doesn't matter to them that their negative shopping experience is due to a logistics problem, a production hitch or an R&D issue. What matters is that the company responds appropriately. Increasingly, customers air their complaints (and, to be fair, their praise) via social media channels.

For companies that don't have a social media presence, those comments go unheeded. Even when companies do monitor social networking sites—a task that typically falls to the marketing department—the comments often don't reach the group that can resolve the issue. This is because many organizations still operate as a series of unconnected silos.

For social media to contribute to an organization's pursuit of relevance at scale, information can no longer remain packed away in different functional areas. Companies increasingly need to integrate multiple sources of customer data using real-time analytics, and then make sure the right people are able to use the knowledge generated to support ongoing relationships and more personalized products and services.⁴ Companies that want to get serious about delivering a precise and relevant experience to their customers need to create a social media-ready organization. This could mean:

- Establishing customer relevance as the business function that matters—and organizing the enterprise to scale around that. Options might include combining marketing and IT activities to create a comprehensive approach to customer management, or integrating traditional customer data systems with social media platforms such as Facebook, which has arguably become the largest customer preference database in the world.
- Breaking down barriers that exist between functional areas. The goal is to create new ways of working based on alliances with previously isolated parts of the organization such as sales, service or R&D.

The chief marketing officer is often the right person to take the lead in making these changes. But he or she can't do it alone. CEOs must be engaged in driving change, empowering cross-functional collaboration and aligning incentives

around a common purpose. And all employees must support the creation of a relevance-driven business in a social world.

Building social scale

The social media phenomenon has not just created a new channel to communicate; it has fundamentally changed the ways in which people interact. As companies expand their focus from being relevant to being relevant **at scale**, they would be wise to consider the role that social media could play in enabling that transition. Just as Google has adapted its ranking prioritization algorithm to include social context, companies that harness social media will have the ability to deliver up-to-the-second customer preferences, greater levels of trust, a mechanism for direct and dynamic interaction, and more—and more usable—data upon which business decisions can be made. Armed with these advantages, social media can allow any company to not only engage, collaborate and operate in entirely new ways, but also achieve high performance in a networked world.

Viderity offers a comprehensive suite of contemporary marketing services and software to CMOs and brand leaders to drive up marketing performance, drive down the cost per interaction and create relevant consumer experiences on a massive scale. By fusing consumer analytics, technology platforms, and world-class marketing talent, we help the world's leading brands understand the big picture and the fine detail, and enable campaigns targeted at the most profitable segments. Visit us at www.viderity.com.

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