

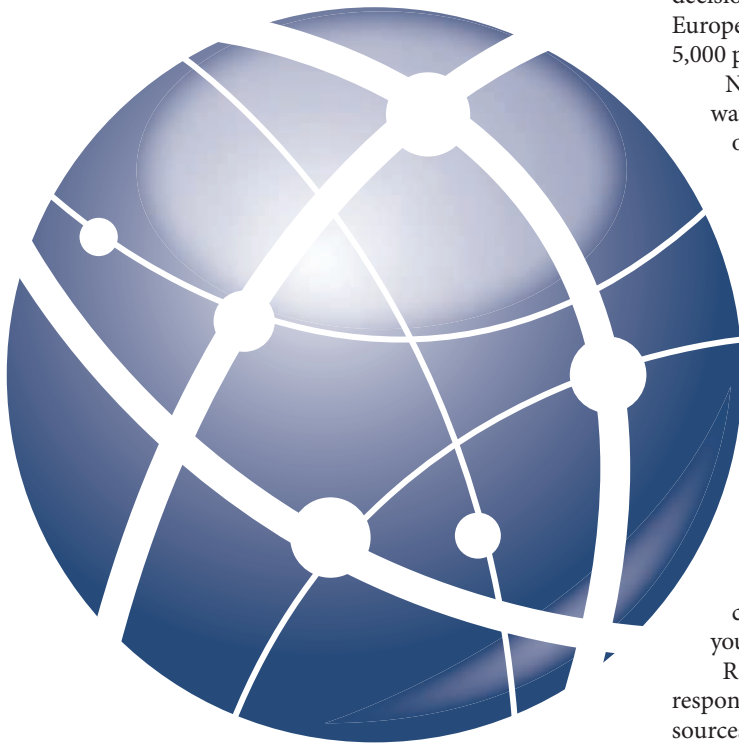
BY JOSH BERNOFF

## WHY B-TO-B OUGHT TO LOVE SOCIAL MEDIA

**WHEN WE WROTE** *Groundswell*, reviewers reading the first draft said, "What about business-to-business?" When I give speeches, it's the most common question. All this social technology stuff seems very touchy-feely, but B-to-B is all about driving results. So using social technology for B-to-B marketing can't possibly work, can it?

Except it turns out that marketing with social technology is not only possible in a B-to-B setting, but also it's actually easier than using social technology to reach consumers. You just have to make sure you never forget one principle: Companies don't join communities, people do.

Think about small-business people learning to use e-mail marketing services to connect with their customers. Constant Contact Inc. is a company that serves these customers. Small-business people know a lot about running a business, but



most of them don't know squat about e-mail marketing. That said, they're a lot more willing to listen to each other than to Constant Contact itself. That's why the Waltham, Mass.-based company created an online community called ConnectUp! for its customers. Within this community, as in any online community, people help each other with recommendations, not just on the use of Constant Contact, but on e-mail marketing topics like how not to run afoul of spam rules, how to create messages that get read and how frequently to contact customers.

Constant Contact's business runs on referrals, and that's how it knows the community is working. Participants in the community refer 30% more leads than other customers. And it works because ConnectUp! is a community for people who have a lot in common.

As it turns out, this works for buyers in big businesses, too. My colleagues Laura

Microsoft's own developers can reach their developer customers. Channel 9 is the complete opposite of refined marketing; it's the raw feed of engineers talking geekspeak to other engineers. That's why it works.

We've seen social applications work in the most unlikely markets. Take Jim Cahill, for example. His employer, Emerson Process Management, makes factory

*If you provide a place where they can share problems and solutions, they'll come. They'll listen. And you'll get your message across.*

Ramos and Oliver Young surveyed 1,217 information technology executives and decision-makers in North America and Europe; 43% were at companies of at least 5,000 people. Here's what they found out.

Nine out of 10 (91%) read blogs, watched user-generated video or otherwise consumed socially created content at least once a month. This is the highest number of any group of people we've ever surveyed, and I've looked at hundreds of these profiles.

Looking at participation of at least once a month, 55% were in social networks, and 58% had reacted to social content created by others by participating in discussion forums or commenting on blogs. For example, 43% created content themselves. These buyers are far more socially connected than consumers, and they're waiting for you to connect with them online.

Ramos and Young also asked the respondents whether they used these sources for business purposes. They do. Looking at monthly participation for business purposes, 69% had consumed social content for their jobs, 29% were using social networks for work purposes, 37% were reacting to work-related content and 27% were creating it.

How are B-to-B marketers reacting to this opportunity? Not aggressively enough. We see lots of blogs, but most of them are repurposed press releases, not real connections with customers or case studies that would draw people. Some companies are reaching out to their core audiences with communities, like Microsoft's Channel 9, a burgeoning community with blogs, videos and other customer connections where

automation systems that can sell for half a million dollars or more. The typical customer is buying a system to help run a chemical plant or an oil refinery. Jim blogs about factory automation at EmersonProcessXperts.com.

Amazingly, his blog has thousands of readers. As it turns out, people who run factories like to hear war stories about factory automation. That's what Jim provides, and it's not just warmed-over PR. The result is five to seven leads a week, coming directly from the blog. In a business where each lead can result in a six- or seven-figure sale, that's real ROI.

If you sell to businesses, your customers are already a community because they already have so much in common. They probably have the same job. They are suffering the same challenges and trying to solve the same problems. Their bosses are putting the same pressures on them, and their staffs are generating the same headaches. Of course they want to talk to each other. They go to conferences—or at least they used to, before the budget was cut—why wouldn't they connect with each other online? If you provide a place where they can share problems and solutions, they'll come. They'll listen. And you'll get your message across, probably more cheaply than with the traditional advertising methods you've been using.

What are you waiting for? **m**



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