



# Net Success with Social Media: A Practical and Potentially Profitable Approach for Business

*Systematically capitalizing on social media is pure common sense. It's all about building the plan and then working it, just like any other marketing effort.*

- Dan Harris

## Looking for a way to make sense of all the hype?

Whether you're a business owner, marketing professional, self-employed or the person who's been tasked with creating a social media presence for your organization, you need to know how to best utilize the tools, tap into the conversations, connect with the right digital demographic and capitalize on networking to benefit your company, your cause or yourself personally. Take a few minutes to [complete a networking self-assessment](#) to determine where you stand with a social media strategy. There are no links or percentiles with this one. It's simply a set of questions to help you consider networking in new ways.

**Dan Harris** is a social networking practitioner and pioneer. Founder and CEO of [TasteCasting.com](#), he also consults, teaches, lectures and coaches organizations and individuals on the principles and processes he has proven to be effective. Follow Dan on: [www.twitter.com/@8101Harris](#), [www.twitter.com/@TasteCasting](#), [www.facebook.com/dannydharris](#), [www.linkedin.com/in/dannydharris](#), [www.danonit.com](#), [www.favorwritefoods.com](#)

Every day, Dan Harris is proving principles of social media. In an arena as wide as the web, he applies the structure of best-practice sales and marketing techniques for clients as diverse as bakers and brokers. And he's getting results.

"Using social networking well is similar to marketing effectively through any other medium," says Harris. "Every organization will have different goals, their own specific approach and unique results, but they can start with realistic expectations. That means you have to assess where you are on the networking continuum, define a purpose and strategy, implement that plan, analyze the results then constantly correct and improve."

## Be careful what you wish for

Expect some key differences from your experiences with other media, however. Your social media audience will be a unique subset of your traditional audience. "By networking, you can explicitly define and unquestionably reach the specific target you desire," says Harris. "You can hit the right demographic within a self-selected community of interest and, with the right approach, they will become quality followers. But expect them to be extremely interactive and conversational. They'll have questions. They'll respond and react publicly. They'll be quick to critique and even quicker to share their perspectives with others. Be prepared," he laughs.

As a result, Harris recommends that every social media strategy include policies, procedures and even legal guidelines to protect your business and move it forward. "People tout networking as lower cost, but it's not necessarily low risk. For example, consider the ramifications of too much response, either positive – more orders than you can scale to handle – or negative – viral criticism or complaints, and prepare your business strategically and operationally before you jump.

## Time is money

Is the cost of social media really so low? "Networking can represent true value with an extremely high return on financial investment," says Harris, "if you are willing to invest time in several ways." First, he cautions not to expect immediate results. "Even with the right infrastructure in place, including an effective website and the tools to track results, it will take at least three to four months to begin to realize SEO (search engine optimization), four to six months for results to build on web campaigns and more than a year to establish real brand awareness." Plus there's significant people time: "Dedicate the right people – the ones with the passion to do the ongoing

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#### Contact:

Michael Doran  
Vice President of Sales  
614.850.2684  
mdoran@nugrowth.com

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research and work the connections, the communication skills to represent your organization effectively in real time, and the business savvy to analyze data, manage results and use them to achieve your goals. Then free them up to be a constant presence. And recognize there will be opportunity costs....”

#### So, what do you want?

Clearly this is the question. Is your goal to build awareness? Collect qualified leads? You can take a proactive approach with your social media strategy, building your network over time, and constantly working it by engaging, connecting and communicating with a growing number of followers. Or you could choose a non-conversational listening post approach, using your website as a brochure for corporate news, following competitors, tracking customer comments and being prepared for conflict... “But don’t try either one if you’re not willing to commit,” says Harris. “Ignore it, let it go flat, and your public will think, ‘If they can’t even keep up with a LinkedIn account, then how effective are they in their core business?’”

Whatever approach you choose, systematically capitalizing on social media will take structure. “So, if you’re not convinced networking will work for your whole business, choose one aspect or product and take it through all five steps: assessment, strategy, tactics, action and results. Even a test should be structured appropriately and deployed long enough for optimal results and real ROI.”

#### Let them eat cupcakes

The Suisse Shop Bakery conducted a test last year. Wedding cake specialists, they worked with Harris to market their higher-margin cupcakes, which they had been selling at a rate of 30 per week. The strategy was to build a network with social media connections on Facebook™, LinkedIn® and Twitter™ to introduce and promote the bakery to the community, establish conversation and build

They created a series of tastings through an increasing network of bloggers and followers, and began participating in local events. This led to the creation of an “editorial calendar” of promotions and reference-able information that could be spread through social and local media, leading to newspaper, television and magazine coverage – all contributing to a viral campaign that took them from 30 to 300 cupcakes a week and over \$700,000 in business last year.

No cupcakes to sell? Perhaps your business is Software as a Service. Obviously your target clients have issues and challenges. To best serve them you ask, “What do they really want?” “How can I help them?” “How can I show them that my solution will make them more productive or efficient?” Those questions propel you to build the relationships from which you can sell effectively. They’re the same questions you ask to optimize social networking and build connections with your target audience. And the answers you come up with – your consistent presence plus materials and tangible resources that target your audience’s special concerns and needs – become a commodity of value that allows you to start conversations and exchange information. They help establish you as a thought leader and begin to build awareness and trust for your organization with a quality, connected constituency.

Regardless of your product or service, Dan Harris would urge you to “take stock of where you are and where you realistically want to be, put the processes and infrastructure in place to implement your plan, and build in the metrics that allow you to assess your effectiveness. Systematically capitalizing on social media is pure common sense.”

