



Social Media Marketing and Search Engine Optimization

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Introduction

Social Media Web sites have been the craze since MySpace became popular. The phrase, Social Media Marketing (SMM) has recently been coined to describe a new frontier of online advertising. SMM is tied very closely to Web 2.0, the concept of user-generated content Web sites. There is virtually limitless marketing potential from the myriad of Social Media Web sites that exist today. SMM is much like SEO was in 1999. It is the Wild West with a new generation of marketers testing the waters and their limits. These sites offer opportunities for traditional Search Engine Optimizers to leverage them in SEO campaigns.

This Whitepaper will examine Social Media Marketing, the top players, and some of the marketing techniques being used on Social Media sites today. It will also cover implications in Search Engine Marketing Campaigns and Brand Protection.

SMM Defined

What exactly is Social Media? Wikipedia (a type of Social Media site) defines it as “the online technologies and practices that people use to share content, opinions, insights, experiences, perspectives, and media themselves. Social media can take many different forms, including text, images, audio, and video. The social media sites typically use tools like message boards, forums, podcasts, bookmarks, communities, wikis, blogs etc.” This definition is interesting because of the mention of message boards and forums. The World Wide Web evolved from old BBSes (Bulletin Board Systems) and Chat Rooms. Essentially the advent of Social Media Web sites is a rebirth of the very roots on which the Web was built. The main difference between today’s Social sites and those of twenty years ago are the publishers. In the 80s and 90s the publishers were techies and computer gurus. Today the publishers include every demographic from pre-teens to grandparents.

Types of Social Media Web Sites

Social Networking Sites – These are the most common Web sites that have redefined Social Media and its importance to the Web. These sites are typically online communities with the goal of social involvement.

Picture Sites – These Web sites act as a repository for pictures online. They include many built in functions that allow the pictures to be categorized, tagged, and shared.

Video Sites – These sites act as a repository for videos and clips online. They include many of the same tools as the picture sites.

News Aggregators – These sites can be traffic powerhouses for news articles that show up on their top pages. They function on article submissions and user voting for top placement.

Forums / Message Boards – These sites are typically organized by subject matter. They can be repositories of information on any topic. Successful forums can unite topic experts with neophytes looking for answers.

Blogs – These sites can range from personal blogs to corporate blogs. They are timely, direct-communication channels that allow for reader feedback. Due to their ease of use, anyone with access to a computer and the Internet can be a publisher.

Social Bookmarking – Tagging puts the ability to organize and categorize Web sites into the user's hands. These sites allow for remote access to favorites and sharing of favorites.

Other – The types of social sites are continually expanding. There are music sharing sites, new mini-networking sites, answers' sites, podcasting sites, virtual reality sites, gaming sites, and more!

SMM Marketing Techniques 101

Social Media Web sites create new marketing challenges and opportunities. Some of the techniques for marketing can be used on all types of Social sites, while others need special considerations. The basics are covered in this section. Specific tips can be found under the SMM Players section below.

Profile Content – The first place to be concerned about marketing on Social sites is the profile area. The picture and description are the initial items other users of the site may see. Profiles should be completely filled out with valuable information. In the case of corporate profiles, include an abstract of what the company does and good keyword-based links back to the company's Web site where possible.

Email – Many social media sites have their own internal email systems. These systems can be utilized for email blasts that are specific to members of the Web site. If done properly, the open and delivery rates can be much higher than typical email campaigns.

Friends – Many social media sites are based on networking principles. It is beneficial to increase “friends” that are associated with the account. Approved friends become the network that can easily be marketed to via email, bulletins, conversations, or other online interaction.

Groups – This can be a faster way to increase the network of friends associated with the account. Groups can be organized by common interests or other unifying factors. Groups can be another target for marketing.

Comments – A very common communication channel in Social Media is some type of comment area for each member. This area can be used for marketing purposes with banners, text ads, or links.

Bulletins – This is a creative way to let all of the friends in a network or group be notified about something through a mechanism that is in between an email and a comment. This is a very efficient path for marketers to get their message across.

Note also that there is a dark side to this medium. Much like early Search Engine spammers, unscrupulous individuals have found ways to manipulate and exploit Social Media Web sites. Programs (bots) exist that can create fake profiles and make fake friend requests. These fake profiles can be used for spam emails, links to undesirable Web sites, or lead to spyware / adware software infections. An increase in spam on any Web site can cause mistrust and lead to user abandonment. These abuses, if left unchecked, can lead to the demise of a Social site.

Why SMM Can Be Part of an SEO Strategy

Natural Search Engine Optimization is the key for long-term, sustained traffic and success of a Web site. Once the typical optimization methods are completed on a Web site, the two main areas for continued growth are links and new content. In some cases Social Media sites account for content growth external to the main Web site (Blogs, Images, Video, Podcasts).

Link-building campaigns are one of the most difficult strategies associated with Organic Search Engine Optimization. Link building involves an ongoing and committed effort to finding high-quality and relevant Web sites and Directories. While great sites full of rich content naturally gain links, sometimes extra effort is required for

sites to get the ball rolling. Social Media sites have opened the door for quick and easy quality links. One thing that always has to be kept in mind is the “anchor text” ([Top Search Engine Optimization Company](#) vs. <http://www.morevisibility.com>, where the first example is using good anchor text and the second is just a plain url). Anchor text should be varied using good keyword phrases. Linking to deep content within a Web site is also a good idea. Here are a few ways to use links in Social Media:

Profiles – Be sure to fill out “your company url”. Where possible use the company’s name and a keyword-rich slogan as the anchor text. If there is HTML access to other areas of the profile, add a few deep links to other content in the Web site. Perhaps link to a relevant whitepaper or important product page.

Comments – Occasionally post links in your friend’s comment areas. This area can also be utilized for banners or pictures that link back to the Web site.

Signatures – Much like an email signature, a blurb can be used at the end of posts on forums or message boards. This is a nice area to have a keyword-rich sentence or two about the Web site and good keyword links.

When using any of these techniques, adhere to the rules of the community. Some will allow links, some will loosely restrict links, and others will allow only one or two.

Tagging is a Web 2.0 phenomenon that is reminiscent of the early days of meta tags. It is a way for users to organize and define their content with keywords. Tagging creates a link structure that Search Engines use to associate keywords to content. This keyword taxonomy is important in today’s search engine algorithms and will be a bigger part of the next generation of search. Whenever a Social Media Web site gives you the opportunity to tag, label, or describe something, use good relevant keywords or keyword phrases. For example: “Joe’s Picture” vs. “Mini Season Lobster Diving 2007”.

Google typically limits results from one domain to two urls per SERP (Search Engine Results Page). Social Web site profiles can rank nicely in SERPs. This can be used for brand protection and to suppress negative search results. Build profiles with unique content for each. Rewrite corporate abstracts and optimize for the company name where possible. Owning SERP real estate is very valuable.

Google Universal is a hot topic in the world of Search Engine Marketing. It is the expansion of common search results to include images, video, local, maps, and product information. A search for “Google Webmaster Tools” on Google has a Matt Cutts’ video with an eye catching mini screenshot in the top results. A search for “Danica Patrick” on Google has image results at the top and a video result. A search for “mortgage” on Google has a news video result at number one. Ranking at the top of Google does not mean just optimizing Web pages anymore. Videos, images, news and more need to be optimized. Some of the social sites are designed exactly for this task.

Social Media Marketing Players

There are many players in each of the Social Media categories. Only the top few are examined below. This list is not inclusive of the only sites considered when embarking on a Social Media Marketing campaign.

Social Networking Sites

MySpace – This is the granddaddy of the Social Networking sites. It is the number 3 most trafficked Web site according to Alexa – a Web site ranking service. It revitalized the online community structure. It was originally designed for up-and-coming music artists, but exploded to be part of pop culture. It is a community with no barriers to entry. Profile customizations are easy and common. It is a great way to communicate with friends and meet new ones.

SMM Tips – MySpace is riddled with Spam. Do not abuse the email, comments, or bulletins. It is still a marketing powerhouse for internal users. Corporations have successfully built great profiles and implementations of SMM. Example:

<http://www.myspace.com/improvftl>

SEO Tips – MySpace is now using its own third-party url for link redirects (mslinks.com). There is no link value passed from MySpace links.

Facebook – Quickly becoming MySpace’s number one challenger, Facebook recently opened its member-base beyond college students to the entire Web. Join groups, post on walls, network, and find new friends.

SMM Tips – Facebook has more widgets that cause social interaction. Explore groups and utilize the bells and whistles.

SEO Tips – Facebook is also using redirects on some of its links, therefore not passing link value. The Web site url links still work. Regardless of the lack of SEO value these links provide, however, both MySpace and Facebook can drive quality traffic to your Web site, so make sure good links are in the profiles.

LinkedIn – One of the first and most established professional networking sites.

SMM Tips – There is tremendous potential for linking to business associates. LinkedIn is a great way to keep contacts and be found by contacts after switching jobs. Dig through friends to find new contacts. Fully complete the profile and keep it up to date.

SEO Tips – These profile pages can show up highly in search rankings when querying someone's name. Use custom text for the company / job url.

Runners-up – Friendster, Hi5

Picture Sites

Flickr – This site has become one of the most popular picture-sharing sites since Yahoo purchased it and migrated Yahoo Photos into it. It has great searchability and can drive some traffic.

SMM Tips – Be informative on the profile. Be very descriptive on the pictures, organization of the pictures, and tagging of the pictures.

SEO Tips – Depending on the software used for editing the pictures, there is an opportunity to use keywords in the file attributes. While being descriptive of the pictures, organization, and tags, you should also consider using quality keywords. For example: Search "social media marketing" and you will see pictures of social media gatherings.

Snapfish – This site is very similar to Flickr, the same rules apply.

Photobucket – This site is very similar to Flickr, the same rules apply.

News Aggregators

Digg – This site ranks news stories according to popularity. Users vote on their favorite stories, moving them to the first page.

Articles on the homepage of Digg have been known to drive so much referral traffic to a Web site that it has crashed.

SMM Tips – Getting an article on the homepage takes roughly 50 diggs within a 24-hour period. The system for detecting fake digging methods gets more complex each day. Be part of the community and digg articles that you find useful, not just your own.

SEO Tips – Include good keyword anchor text in the articles. Add Digg buttons to the hosted articles to promote them being digg.

StumbleUpon – This site follows a similar concept as Digg, except it is about voting and commenting on Web sites. It can be a great source of traffic for new, exciting, creative, or undiscovered Web sites.

SMM Tips – Set up a complete profile and start building a “discovery” list of Web sites. Comment on other discoveries and participate in the community.

SEO Tips – Be keyword descriptive of any Web sites that are added to the discovery list. There is a handy toolbar to make the StumbleUpon process even easier. Networks of Stumblers can work together to get new, top-quality Web sites to the homepage.

Video Sites

YouTube – From Google’s acquisition to iPhone’s featured compatibility, YouTube is the top online video sharing site. It is full of clips. Some videos are amateur, while others are professional. YouTube provides widgets that allow videos to be embedded on any Web site, saving the hosting / streaming headaches and costs.

SMM Tips – Be informative on the profile, and be informative and descriptive of the video posts. It is likely that if someone likes one video, they will follow the profile to see what else they can find.

SEO Tips – Video is being scanned for text frame-by-frame and content through speech-recognition software. When developing video content, consider keyword-rich audio, strategically placed keywords in the slides, and possibly using closed captioning. Another good technique is to post a transcribed version of the content of the video as the abstract or summary.

Google Video – This site is very similar to YouTube, the same rules apply.

Forums

TripAdvisor – One of the top travel forums on the Web. It frequently shows up in search results for generic queries as well as location- and resort-specific searches.

SMM Tip – This site is a very real online community. Site users research their travel and make informed decisions based on other users' reviews, tips, and tricks.

SEO Tip – If you are a travel site, pay attention to your brand. Review feedback and make corrections at the establishment to correct the issues or try to provide resolutions to problems. Being proactive in these communities can go a long way. These recommendations go for any industry's forums.

WebmasterWorld – The online resource for Search Engine Marketing information and other Webmaster-related issues. This site has been around since the 90s. Its focus has morphed based on its users' needs.

SMM Tip – If you are new to any areas of discussion, ask quality questions. If you are an expert in an area or have valuable experiences to share, be helpful and descriptive. This is a community where a little assistance can go a long way.

SEO Tip – Links are rarely used. When they are, they may go through a redirect url. The profiles can get picked up, so fill them out completely.

Craigslist – The top online, mostly free message board in the world. If it can be talked about or sold, it can be found on Craigslist.

SMM Tip – Test the waters and advertise here. Post about your product or service and see what happens. The Job board can provide results that rival some of the popular paid online services. Follow the rules and do not Spam Craigslist. It can be a great source for local traffic. Be aware, however, that Craigslist has received negative press recently, due to illicit activities from some of its users in adult-related sections.

SEO Tip – Message posts are very simple by nature. Use good keyword titles when posting. Use keyword-descriptive content. Traffic can be generated by searches within Craigslist.

Blogs

There are a diverse number of blog options throughout the Web, including, Blogger, WordPress, and TypePad. See my [Whitepaper](#) on Blogs and Search Engine Marketing for more details.

Social Bookmarking

del.icio.us – Owned by Yahoo, this is the most popular social bookmarking site on the Web. It has a fantastic toolbar that makes it very easy to tag and organize bookmarks.

SMM Tips – This is a social network where anyone can view others' bookmarks. Organize the bookmarks, write great titles and descriptions, and tag sites with keywords as appropriate.

SEO Tips – Search Engines crawl the profile / saved bookmarks pages. They will pay attention to the organization and tagging structure. This equates to off-page optimization for a Web site.

Other Types of Social Sites

Second Life – This is a virtual reality world that is popular and worth looking into.

imeem – This is a music sharing site with an online-community feel.

Gather – This site is a mashup of many of the other types of Social Media Web sites.

Twitter – This is a new creative Social Media site that tracks activity.

Conclusion

With each passing day the Internet becomes more a part of everyday life. Social Media Web sites are not just for dating anymore. Social Media Web sites make the world smaller and more connected. If you meet someone on a vacation in Disney World, you may keep in touch with them on MySpace or Facebook. That same relationship could be continued by sharing pictures on Flickr. You may even blog about meeting that person, or write about your meeting in a trip review on a forum. Social Media helps bring people together – old friends, new friends, family, colleagues, business associates, and so on.

Social Media Web sites have caught on and are here to stay. They are being embraced by the corporate world as part of their marketing strategies. There are ample opportunities for marketing within social sites. Money and time invested in social sites should really pay off. If leveraged correctly, they can be a strong traffic referral source for Web sites.

Make a commitment to the social experience online. SMM can be an effective part of an SEM campaign. It can be a nice source of quality back links. Tagging can help Search Engines associate keywords with the destination Web site. Social sites can show up in SERPs, taking up more real estate with different domains. Optimized profile pages may help suppress negative results. Google Universal keeps enhancing its results pages with more information. Optimizing online media beyond standard HTML pages can get you top-quality rankings and traffic for pictures and video. SMM and SEO go hand in hand. Unify the marketing message across all media types and stay committed and active in the online communities. SMM plus SEO will equal more free traffic and better Search Engine Rankings.