

The Social Media Starter Kit

Part 1: The Tools



Several times a day, I hear folks asking about how to get started with all this social media stuff.

What tools they need, what sites they should look at so as not to get overwhelmed. This is the nuts and bolts stuff, not so much the "why" (we'll cover that more in depth in the next ebook). This is individually focused, but many of the same things can apply in a business context if you use your business goals as a guide. I hope it's helpful! Feedback or questions you'd like me to answer along the way? [Email me](#) or [send me a ping on Twitter](#).

Last caviat: These recommendations are clearly biased in favor of the way *I* use social media, because that's what I know best. Your viewpoints are more than welcome and encouraged; this is meant to be helpful guidance and suggestions, and your mileage may vary.

Any good social media system requires a few key tools to manage it. These are my can't-miss tools, but by all means, suggest your own and tell me what works for you to manage your online world.

A smartphone.

I love my iPhone and I'm a recent Blackberry convert. The mobile web alone makes it worth it, especially when I can browse the web on the 3G network when I'm stuck in an airport and too chinsy to spring for wireless. But if having mobile web isn't important to you or something you'll make heavy use of, a BB is a power email workhorse (I had the Curve and liked it a lot).

Cost: \$199 for the phone (8GB iPhone), about \$45/mo for unlimited data plus whatever phone plan you sign up for.

A Twitter desktop client.

In my personal view, the web interface for Twitter is limited and cumbersome, so I recommend using a third-party application. I'm a fan of [Tweetdeck](#), and I make great use of the groups option to manage my large stream of connections.



Twhirl is also a popular option, and takes up less screen real estate. For me, the real estate doesn't matter because I'd never have it running alongside another application, anyway, so I just flip windows (command + tab on my MacBook Pro). If you're an iPhone user, I like Tweetie as the mobile app, and used TwitterBerry on my Blackberry.

Cost: Tweetdeck, Twhirl, and TwitterBerry are free. Tweetie is \$2.99 at the iPhone app store.

A blog platform.

I'm a big **WordPress** fan, and it's the platform I use for my blog. If you're going to start a blog, you can host it easily on WordPress.com, but it's cheap and easy to buy your own domain name, get web hosting, and have your blog there. Many hosts offer one-click WordPress installation and you can get a blog up and running in less than 30 minutes. Other options for a blog platform include **Blogger** (free), **TypePad**, and **MovableType**.

I registered all my domains with **GoDaddy**, and I host with **InMotion Hosting**. My AltitudeBranding.com blog and theme was customized by the fabulous guys at **Men with Pens**, and I use the **Thesis theme** for my personal blog (which I love and recommend. Well worth the cost.)

Cost: GoDaddy domains are \$10 each. Hosting packages vary, but usually between \$7 and \$10 per month. Thesis theme is \$87 for a single personal use, and way worth it.





Twitter

If you're already on **Twitter**, you know it's more than just talking about what people have for breakfast. It's more like "conference call IM" to me. Link sharing, conversation, personal connections that break the ice before in-person meeting, professional networking. For me, it's become the equivalent to having another phone on my desk in a different form.

If you're just getting started on Twitter, you're probably a bit overwhelmed and looking for a few ways to help optimize your experience. So here's my take on Twitter, how I use it, and what I think you should pay attention to.

Getting Set Up

Use your real name and a picture on your profile. It lets your followers know that there's a real person behind the profile. I'm not a big fan of business names for handles (i.e. your Twitter name), but they can work if you have a real picture. In general, I'm of the mind that you should use something related to your real name if not your name itself, and stay away from things with tons of numbers (they can smell spammy to the casual observer).

Let your bio be a little fun, but have it there regardless. We want to know who you are. I encourage people to use their bio the way they'd introduce themselves in person, not as a 160 character "elevator pitch". That turns off followers that might like to connect with you, especially if they think they'll get pitched if they follow you. (Unless it's a purely business account, in which case a description of your company is probably the best approach.)

Following and Being Followed

When you're just getting started, you can search Twitter for people you know by entering their name. Twitter also has an option to search the contacts you have on Gmail, Hotmail, AOL and some others. Also, there are tools like Twellow, Twitter Grader, and Mr. Tweet that can help you get connected with people with similar interests or that are local to you. Use Twitter Search to plug in topics that interest you and see who's talking about them.

As you get more followers, check out who *they* follow and connect to others you see them conversing with on Twitter. To me, that's the most organic way to build your network, and the way that I did it.

Be aware that if you run out and follow a slew of people out of the gate, Twitter is very likely to mark you as an account with spam potential and suspend you. It's not a race. Follow a handful of people, start talking to them. Grow from there.

I don't subscribe to the philosophy that more is better. I have a large network personally, but I built it connecting to people slowly over time, and it matters much more to me that I'm having a conversational, interactive experience. I don't put much stock in ranking/scoring/grading tools that claim to say who's a good follow and who isn't. And I don't fret if someone unfollows me; again, it's about each person's personal experience, even if I'm not their cup of tea.

I encourage you to consider following people as reaching out and shaking hands, connecting individually rather than just an accumulation of numbers. It's not a popularity contest. It's a communication experience.

Participating

The best advice I can give here is to treat Twitter like a conversation (because largely that's what it is). **Start with 30 minutes, twice a day (say morning and after work).** There's no "right" way to use it and your own feel for it will emerge over time, but there are a few tips.

90% of what I do on Twitter is conversing with other people. If you look at [my profile page](#), you'll see that "@ replies" comprise the bulk of my interaction. The other 10% is sharing links I find across the web that I think are interesting or useful, and about one out of a dozen times, I'll drop a link to my recent blog post. The important thing is that your links are much more likely to get attention - yours or otherwise - if you've spend the time to build the relationships behind the connections before you ask people to [Click Your Junk](#).

The best way to build relationships and a community on Twitter: participate. Spend some time sitting back and listening, then join the conversation. Jump on in, say hello. Don't beg for followers - trust me when I tell you that if you're interesting and interested in others, they'll show up. It's really that simple. Talk, share, contribute. And above all, have a little fun.

The Lingo

Twitter has its own lexicon of sorts. Here are a few terms you might see tossed about.

@ replies: This symbol precedes people's "handles" or screen names on Twitter when a tweet is directed at them. Want to reply to someone's comment? Start your tweet with @<their twitter name> so they'll know your reply is meant for them. You can track your own replies in the "@ Replies" tab on your Twitter page, or many of the Twitter clients will do so automatically for you.

RT: Stands for "retweet" and means that the tweet is being reposted from someone else. If I retweet something of yours, that means I'm passing it along for others in my network to see. When you see a tweet that starts with these letters, it means that the person is passing along something that someone else wrote. Many of the third party applications have a one-click button to retweet a post.

hashtags: You may often see tweets that end with a hashtag, or a pound sign followed by a term, such as **#conference**. The purpose is to keep track of tweets that are all part of a single subject, event, or topic. If you head to Twitter Search and type in the full hashtag, you can track all the tweets related to that term. You don't need to do anything special to use a hashtag, just make one up and tell folks to use it if you want them to tag their tweets for your event or discussion.

link shorteners: Twitter's 140 character limitation makes posting big links impossible. So you'll see shortened urls from services like TinyURL, Bit.ly, is.gd among others. They take a long URL and condense it down to a short version. Again, clients like TweetDeck have this built in, but you can use the web versions as well, many of which have a bookmark button you can use in your browser.

DM: This stands for Direct Message and is Twitter's version of a private message. If you DM someone, you send the message directly to them and no one else can see it. To send one, type the letter D and a space followed by the person's Twitter name (or use the Direct Messages tab on your profile page). The recipient of the DM needs to be following you for the message to go through.

Favorites: If you "favorite" a tweet, it's like your bookmarking it for yourself. You can see your favorites on a separate tab on your profile, and others can see them too.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is, to me, the virtualized and interactive version of that pile of business cards on your desk. True, it's home to your online "resume", but it's also a mechanism to both demonstrate your expertise and share in the expertise of others, make business connections, and help connect others in your network with each other.



So here's my down-and-dirty guidebook for LinkedIn and my handful of tips.

Use a real photo.

I like more casual shots because I think they exude more of the "real you", but hey. Do what makes you feel comfy. Just make sure it's really you.

Don't recite your job description.

When you pen your profile - especially the summary - think in terms of what you accomplished and what your goals are, not the tasks you're responsible for on a day to day basis. Those are interchangeable for other people with your type of job. Instead, focus on what makes *you* and *your abilities* different than the next person with your same title. Write as though you're the one looking to recruit you. What would you want to read? A job description, or a colorful picture of what you've done and aim to do?

Think outside your office.

Your current and past positions can and should include personal endeavors if they'll give insight into your overall expertise. For instance, aside from my position as Director of Community for Radian6, I list that I'm a blogger and speaker because, well, I am. (Which reminds me, don't forget to include a link to your blog and RSS feed on your profile).

It offers a more well-rounded look at what I do, and illustrates that I'm more faceted than just the job I hold during business hours. Remember, this isn't a resume submission in a traditional sense. It's your chance to outline the dimensions of your expertise in several areas.

Function as a hub.

I'm with [Chris Brogan](#) on this one, and I don't follow LinkedIn's advice that you only connect to people you know. Why? Because I think of it as building a network not just for me, but as a network **for** my network.

If I make lots of connections and I can help someone use me as a hub to connect with someone else they need to reach, I think I've been helpful. (And yes, I vet those requests just to be sure I'm not sending a craptastic shiller to one of my friends or colleagues). Networking isn't just about you. It's about being a point on a matrix, at least in my view. I check in every couple of days to accept connection requests and find those I might have missed.

Quick tip: Take a moment to personalize the stock email that LinkedIn gives you when you're sending out network requests.

Get and give love.

Ask for recommendations from those who know your work, and display them on your profile. There's no greater testimonial for your capabilities than in the words of someone else who's worked with you. And don't forget to give back. Offer to write recommendations to those whose work you're familiar with.

When it comes to either, a good recommendation focuses on what attributes of a person's work you're most familiar with, not just a glowing generic recommendation. If they're a great project manager, say that. Great networker? List that too. But skip the generalities; it doesn't help them or you to just say "they're fantastic".

Lend a hand.

Check the LinkedIn Answers section for opportunities to lend your expertise to questions in your field. There are categories for just about everything under the sun. Be selective and answer questions where you can contribute something of value. And don't shill. Believe me when I tell you that if you offer up a solid, helpful answer, people will check out your profile further to learn more about who you are and what you do.

I spend about 30-45 minutes, twice a week, checking out the categories I'm interested in and posting responses if I find something interesting.

Applications.


LinkedIn now offers application plugins for a few popular web applications. Add the WordPress application to have your recent blog posts show up on your profile. I've added the Slideshare application too, to point to presentations and e-books I've uploaded to that site.

Groups.

I don't belong to a ton of LinkedIn Groups, but some people swear by them. Like groups on other social networks, they're meant to connect people of like interest, industry, or professional affiliation. Groups can post questions among themselves and facilitate other information sharing. Check out your company or industry organizations to see if they've got a LinkedIn group that might be interesting to you.

Answers


Answers Home | Advanced Answers Search | My Q&A | Ask a Question | Answer Questions


 [Get insights from target customers and industry experts using LinkedIn Polls. Learn More.](#)

Browse Open Questions

Open Questions | Closed Questions | Experts

sorted by: Degrees away from you | Date

Q. **Can a Share of Conversation metric help provide value to understanding online brand awareness?**
1 answer | Asked by Warren Sukernek  | 2 days ago in Public Relations, Internet Marketing

Q. **What makes a TV commercial memorable? The results are in...!!!**
0 answers | Asked by Steve Olenski  | 5 days ago in Advertising

Browse

- Administration
- Business Operations
- Business Travel
- Career and Education
- Conferences and Event Planning
- Finance and Accounting
- Financial Markets
- Government and Non-Profit
- Hiring and Human Resources

The Facebook logo, consisting of the word "facebook" in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font on a blue rectangular background.

Facebook

Ah, Facebook. This is far more of a personal social network for me than a business one, though I do know people using it for business (and if you're out there, I'd love to hear from you about your tips and suggestions).

But there's no denying it's popularity, and it can be a comfortable way to get acquainted with what it means to participate in social networks, so here's my Facebook guide to getting started.

Your Profile.

If you ever have any intention of allowing a business contact of any stripe into your Facebook realm, I strongly suggest you use a picture that doesn't have you drinking, flashing body parts, or wandering around a beach in a bathing suit. Hey, candid shots are great and I'm a big fan, but remember. Social networks are searchable, and you just never know who might come knocking at your virtual door. Better to be fully clothed when you answer.

A good thing to note also is that other profile details - like your birthdate and relationship status - are by default visible on your public profile. That means if you don't want people to know those details, don't post them. Likewise with your contact information like email, phone numbers, and website. I post mine publicly, but consider how you want people to be able to find you before you do so. (You can change who can see what on your privacy settings).

Finding Friends.

I tend to cross-pollinate between my social networks, friends and business acquaintances alike. But it's up to you how you want to use Facebook. You can search for people by name, and then you need to send them a friend request that they have to approve before you can view each other's pages and send messages. It's a pretty simple process.

I check in once a day or so to catch up with friend requests and peek at the "people you may know" sidebar, just to see who's lurking out there that I should say hello to. Some people prefer to keep their connections to people they know personally. I'm a bit looser about my criteria since I'm not posting anything on there that I think would be crazy personal. Again, you need to decide what's comfortable for you. There's no "right" answer.

Communicating.

Facebook offers myriad options for communicating with your friends, including live chat if they're online (at the bottom of your profile), wall-writing (public), in-network messages (private), post items (public) and status updates.

As to the latter, Facebook gives you the option to cross post your Twitter updates to Facebook, but I choose not to do that. Why? I tweet a lot, and not only would I feel like my FB friends were flooded with irrelevant chatter, but it doesn't afford me the opportunity to be present in all the places where conversation might be happening. Instead, I update my Facebook status manually with fun little quips or other comments about what I'm up to that might actually be of interest to my Facebook friends, but at a much more digestible pace.

Applications.

I'm going to come right out and say that I think most Facebook applications are downright evil and annoying. There are two that I use with regularity, and that's the birthday calendar (I like seeing when people's birthdays are so I can drop them a note) and the Networked Blogs application so I can demonstrate support for my friends' blogs in another way that's visible to those that might be outside the social media sphere.

If you're going to add a zillion applications to your profile, realize that when I see all the stuff you've got on there, it paints a picture of your personality to me. That could be a good thing, or not so much. What do your applications say about you, and what are you demonstrating to your connections when you ask them to participate in them with you?

NetworkedBlogs

My Blogs:



The BrandBox

Favorite Blogs:



Mashable



Marketing Magic



Copyblogger



The Viral Garden



I Can't Keep Up



The Brand Box



The Harte of Marketing



The Viral Garden



Annarchy



Every Dot Connects



Seizing The Day



WordPress:
kaposlogisztika

Posting stuff.

I'm not very good at this, but I'd like to be better. I see my friends posting interesting links all the time through Facebook, much like many of my connections do on Twitter. And I'd like to use it more because again, many of the people I know on Facebook have no idea about all this social media stuff in it's business forms, and I come across tons of great resources every day. It's better than emailing people a bunch of crap.

Groups.

I belong to a bunch of Facebook groups, and some are better than others. The ones that engage me are the ones that provide information, interactivity, engagement on behalf of the organizers, and help me connect to other people more easily. If you're thinking of starting a Facebook group, this is where I think business could make good use of it if they go about it well and tend it properly. But you can't park it there and walk away, it has to be nurtured, and many businesses haven't proven up to the challenge.

Blogging

Blogging is such a ubiquitous form of media today, but people are still incredibly intimidated about getting started with one. Is blogging something you should do? That answer will vary for everyone. Do you have something to say? Do you want to share thoughts, interests, ideas? Are you interested in others weighing in on what you have to say?

My getting-started philosophy: learn on the job. There's no better way to learn about blogging than to immerse yourself in it.

Read and Participate

The very best way to learn about blogging is to read. Read lots of blogs, both inside and outside your interest area. Pay special attention to things like tone, writing style, and how writers break up the content. Again, there's no "right" way to blog, but you'll get a feel for what resonates with you.

RSS Reader

I use [Google Reader](#) to aggregate my blogs. If you're not familiar with RSS, Common Craft has [this kick butt video](#) that explains it. But in essence, it's the easy way to get a blog's content delivered automatically right to you. It's easy and tidy.

Start small; select 6 or 10 blogs that interest you, and visit them often. Check out the blogrolls of the blogs you're reading to find other blogs that might be relevant. You can also use things like [Technorati](#), but I prefer the more organic approach. It's like having a friend recommend a book instead of picking one off the shelf.

All in all, spend 30 minutes a day browsing your feeds. You don't have to read everything in depth. Scan the titles and posts, and stop by for the ones that interest you or compel you to comment. And don't fear the "mark all as read" button. There are only so many hours in the day.



Comment

Don't be shy about commenting on blogs. Share your voice; the authors *want* to hear from you - it's part of their validation that they're writing something of interest. It's okay to not have all the answers. It's about furthering the discussion, not necessarily coming to a profound conclusion.

A great tool I use is [Backtype](#). You sign up with the URL you plug in when you comment on a blog, and it aggregates all of your comments for you. Add friends from your other networks to read their comments and see what blogs they're visiting. I've found amazing hidden gems this way.

Writing

If you're a writer by nature, blogging will come more easily to you than if not. But a good starter goal is to aim for three posts a week. They don't have to be mammoth, and at first, just worry about getting comfortable with the medium. It's just a blog.

Talk about what you know. And don't go into this with the idea that you're writing for traffic. Write for yourself, and to share something valuable with others. Passion and interest makes for better writing, and like building a network anywhere else, it will happen on its own if you're dedicated to it.

Topics

Keep a little text document or even a notebook around to scribble down post ideas when you have them. Write it all down, and edit later. And get in the habit of starting post drafts and saving them unfinished. You can always come back to them later when inspiration strikes. If you get a burst of writing done, schedule your posts in advance using your blog software and have a backstore of great stuff at the ready.

Share. Ask questions. Get people talking. You're a conversation catalyst. The means. Not necessarily the end.

Comments

Staying plugged into the comments on your blog is important. Commenters like to know that you're listening and paying attention to their contributions. How often and how deeply you respond is up to you ([here's a bit about my take](#)), but comments are an important part of the blog ecosystem, so find a way to engage in the comments on your own posts that feels comfortable for you.

Inevitably, someone's going to leave a snarky comment someday. That's okay - no one can be all things to all people. Learn to [deal with detractors](#) as best you can. The more people read you, the more of them you'll find.

Credit and Sharing

Link out to the posts that may have inspired your writing. Point your readers to resources relevant to your topic. Disclose relationships you have that may have bearing on the opinions you write about (most especially if you're being paid to do so).

If you're including other people's work, make sure to attribute it. For instance, I use photos from [Flickr's Creative Commons](#) for my posts, and credit them with a link at the bottom.

Just Do It.

Nike said it best, but really. It's a blog, not an earthshattering, irreversible endeavor. Wade in, get your feet wet. Test, try stuff, find your niche and comfort zone. Ask your favorite bloggers for a tip or two. Read, read, read. Read some more.

Then, go write.





Amber Naslund is a social media and marketing upstart, and the Director of Community for **Radian6**, where she's responsible for client engagement, community building, and helping companies tap the potential of online reputation management, customer engagement, and social media monitoring. She's spent the last decade or so raising funds, building brands for companies of all sizes, and messing with all things online.

Amber blogs at **altitudebranding.com**, focusing on elevating brands through social media and communication. She's also a contributor to the popular **Marketing Profs Daily Fix** blog, and keeps her personal blog at **Innaccurate Reality**.

This content is Amber's alone, so that means that it doesn't represent the thoughts, views, opinions or practices of her employer, friends, family, minions, pets, children, or that annoying neighbor that does the leaf blower thing at 6 a.m. on Sundays. If you'd like to reach Amber, **drop an email**.

Amber Naslund

847-302-3471

amber@altitudebranding.com

http://altitudebranding.com

Twitter: **@AmberCadabra**

LinkedIn: **http://www.linkedin.com/in/ambernaslund**