



The Complete Guide for  
**BRANDS** and  
**BUSINESSES** to  
Build, Cultivate,  
and Measure Success  
in the New Web

# ENGAGE!

**REVISED and  
UPDATED**

**BRIAN SOLIS**

Foreword by

**ASHTON KUTCHER**



**Praise for**  
***Engage!***

“Social networks empower everyday people to become remarkable. How do you now earn their attention and also become remarkable in the process? *Engage!* is your answer.”

—MC Hammer

“It’s no longer an era of business as usual. Executives and entrepreneurs must embrace new media in order to not only compete for the future, but for mind share, market share, and ultimately relevance. This book helps you engage . . . without it you’re competing for second place.”

—Mark Cuban, owner, Dallas Mavericks, investor, entrepreneur,  
Chairman of HDNet

“Affinity is personal and emotional. Without personifying the company and what it symbolizes, it’s difficult for customers to connect with your brand. The concepts from this book can help your brand engage in a way that inspires communities to extend your message, promise, and reach.”

—Tony Hsieh, CEO of Zappos.com

“The power of top-down, A-list influencer is winding down. Now brands must engage on a direct-to-many basis. Social media makes this possible, and Solis makes this happen. Read his book or be left in the dust.”

—Guy Kawasaki, co-founder of Alltop

“Social media is changing everything about the way people relate socially, in commerce, and politics. *Engage!* gets you up to date regarding current trends and technology, and shows you how to build a serious social media strategy. It’s the real deal.”

—Craig Newmark, founder, Craigslist.com

“Brian Solis has shown once again his deep understanding of the power of new media. He shows how social media can give voice, credibility, and connections to both companies and their customers.”

—Price Floyd, VP for Digital Media Strategy  
BAE Systems

“What’s the secret to a successful company? Seasoned business owners know that it’s a combination of strong leadership and superior products. But that alone isn’t enough anymore. The leader of the future needs to connect with the customer of the future when, where, and how the customer wants, and Brian Solis lays out some of the guidelines here, going far beyond the tools that are today’s buzzwords.”

**—Scott Monty, Global Digital Communications, Ford Motor Company**

“Brian Solis documents new media’s evolution and its challenge to traditional marketing methods and corporate communications: Most profoundly, through social media the customer has become a more influential stakeholder. The book provides concrete guidelines on how companies must engage in the public conversation and how they must prepare for a new era of relationships with their clients, customers, and employees.”

**—Klaus Schwab, Executive Chairman, World Economic Forum**

“New media is forcing the democratization of old media. It’s how we engage that shapes our credibility and community . . . and ultimately our relationship with our newly empowered audiences.”

**—Joanna Drake Earl, COO Current TV**

“The road from where you are to your business’s future is neither paved nor marked. It’s yours to discover and this book is your compass to leadership.”

**—Peter Guber**



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**BRIAN SOLIS**



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# Foreword

New media is creating a new generation of influencers and it is resetting the hierarchy of authority, while completely freaking out those who once held power without objection. The truth is that most of the existing formulas, methodologies, and systems miss or completely ignore the role of new influencers to inspire action, cause change, spark trends, and recruit advocates. We are absent from the exact movement that can help us connect with those who guide their peers.

In light of the new media movement, how do brands approach this now? They spam the Web with useless rhetoric. (Who cares if you're on Facebook or Twitter?) They also distribute these horrible videos, uploading them to YouTube and then wondering why they never go viral. Look, you have seven seconds to entertain someone. If you don't grab them in seven seconds, then you can forget about someone sitting through the rest of the video—let alone having it go viral.

But if you know what people are looking for ... if you know where people are interacting ... if you know what moves people, you can engage the human algorithm to immerse viewers and trigger meaningful interaction and vibration across the social graph.

This is why we, we as in a collective of individuals who know what's best for us based on our passions, interests, and aspirations, are in charge of what compels us. To have any hope of attracting and earning our attention, you need to know who *we* are.

The roles are reversing and individuals and brands have the ability to reach and rouse powerful and dedicated communities without ever having to pay for advertising. I'm just part of the bigger movement of empowering the people who care enough to change the word. Social media is socializing causes and purpose, and inciting nothing short of a revolution in stature and influence, but more importantly, literacy and innovation.

As we engage, we learn. And learning is what this is all about. But we can't grow without admitting that we have something to learn and at the same time, we have to believe in ourselves and our ability to push things forward. In the end, everything starts with engagement.

This is our time. This is your time. Engage.

ASHTON KUTCHER  
Co-founder of Katalyst



# Preface

We are at the beginning of something new and incredible, and its paths and processes are for the most part undefined and far from standardized. Social media is a great equalizer and it's leveling the playing field for those who can adapt and lead. If this is you, it's time to speak up. It's time to show executives, peers, and stakeholders that you care. With a little homework, the case can be made quite easily and impressively. It just takes a little bit of extra time and passion to do so.

You are needed now more than ever to help the brand best position itself to compete in the *now Web* and for the future.

It takes a champion to rally support from within.

It takes a champion to connect customer needs with company solutions.

It takes a champion to become the customer the business needs to reach.

It takes a champion to guide decision makers within the organization on how to best implement social tools and services, how to use them, how to establish guidelines, and how to measure success and return on investment.

You're a purveyor of new media, but then again, so is everyone else, it seems. Suddenly, everyone is a social media expert, but very few are indeed champions and far fewer are change agents.

So what are you going to do to rise above the fray while also delivering true, uncontested value to those you are helping?

Ask yourself ...

Are you an evangelist or a consultant?

Are you an extension of your company brand or are you an employee?

Are you a leader or a follower, or are you meandering through your profession?

Are you confined to the role you're in now or do you represent something with longer-term value?

Everything that's transpiring around us is actually improving the existing foundation for our business, from service to marketing to product development to sales to executive management, and everything in between.

Social marketing revitalizes and empowers every facet of our workflow and its supporting ecosystem. Seeing the bigger picture and tying our knowledge to the valuable feedback from our communities will help us guide businesses toward visibility, profitability, relevance, and ultimately, customer loyalty.

In every single case, it doesn't take only an expert, it requires a champion to make an impact.

You are that champion.

Advancement doesn't come without investment, though. Social media may at first blush, look easy and free, but as any true champion can attest, it's so much more than we see superficially.

You may be saying to yourself, "I already have a full-time job that keeps me busy, more than busy, for eight to nine hours a day as it is. How am I going to squeeze in the time to learn everything required for this new role, and how will I balance my workload based on what I already have to do?"

Sorry. I don't have an easy answer or a shortcut for you.

What's taking place right now, right in front of you, is something so tremendous that to proclaim that a cheat sheet exists would actually cheat you from truly grasping this new opportunity for personal and professional growth.

This is something so much deeper than anything I could cover "for dummies." It's a matter of taking the easy route versus immersion. Success and maturation is tied to the latter.

The good news is that you have this book. Now let's work together to get you that MBA that will really help you excel in your career, wherever it may take you.

Think about it.

Investing extra time after hours and on weekends is the minimum ante to enroll in what I call the New Media University. With every day that passes, enrollment multiplies. The question you have to ask is whether you want to lead or follow. Please note that the risk of following is that the field will quickly become congested with competition and stagnation. In contrast, when you choose to take a leadership role, you will find that challengers are scattered and in short supply. The cost, however, is that you go back to school for the near future to help you learn and acquire the skills necessary to lead your brand into the future.

While many will ask questions, few will have answers. Which side of the dialogue do you choose?

# Introduction: Welcome to the Revolution

By the time you read this book, you may have already heard or will soon hear whispers, rumblings, and rantings that social media is playing out.

Tune them out.

The truth is that social media may very well cease to exist as a category one day. However, while the term and category has and always will invite debate, social media's practices and benefits are indisputable and enduring. And they will always serve as an important and revered chapter in the evolution of new media.

This is not open to debate.

Influential conversations are sparked and steered by influential people right now and they exist and flourish outside of your organization. The practice of listening to and learning from these conversations in and around the social networks where they transpire is invaluable and indispensable.

New Media is simply a matter of digital Darwinism that affects any and all forms of marketing and service. In the world of democratized influence, businesses must endure a perpetual survival of the fittest.

Engage or die.

In June 2007, I wrote and published *The Social Media Manifesto*. What started as a blog post intended to help marketers grasp the emerging and rapidly shifting landscape of social media quickly ascended into the rallying cry for a new, in-touch epoch of direct-to-consumer engagement. *The Social Media Manifesto* introduced the methodologies, tools, and social networks that would eventually inspire a movement to evolve from top-down, broadcast programs to complementary forms of collaboration rooted in mutually beneficial exchanges. It served as the foundation to effectively redesign marketing communications and customer service organizations based on the art of observation, listening, engagement, learning, and adapting. It

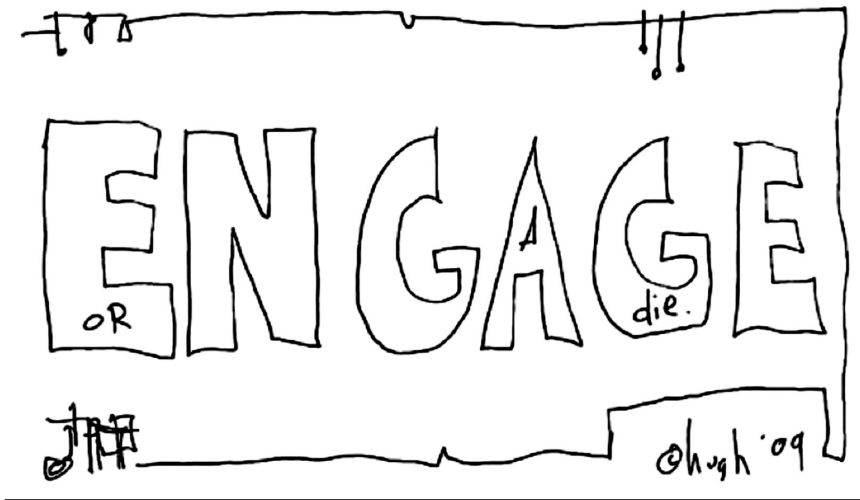


Figure I.1

Source: Original drawing in honor of *Engage!* by Hugh MacLeod, author of *Ignore Everybody* and also [blogger@gapingvoid](mailto:blogger@gapingvoid).

also introduced the mechanics and benefits for humanizing and diversifying the company story based on the unique and varying needs of customers and peers who populate online communities and create channels of influence.

And here we are now: united in our efforts to discover meaning in the philosophies and processes we long operated without. We seek inspiration and we, too, endeavor to inspire. The people we attempted to reach over the years appear before our eyes as if they are long-lost friends and relatives. The faceless have revealed their identities through their actions and words. Socialized media and the people powering the convergence are accelerating an era of engagement driven by collective consciousness. It's inspiring a new type of business, one that is socially aware and participatory. After all, customer acquisition is only rivaled in value by customer retention.

The science of procuring attention is complemented by the delicate art of earning and cultivating relationships. Social media peeled back the layers of infrastructure, data, numbers, demographics, politics, procedures, and all of the corporate red tape that dug trenches between our brand and our customers.

*This is our time to engage!* In doing so, it is your declaration of independence, breaking the shackles that have bound us to hollow marketing practices of yesteryear. It serves as your framework to chart your own path and create your own destiny. It is your key to unlock the

doors that prevent you from reaching your customers where they're interacting and seeking solutions today *and* tomorrow.

Together we are building the foundation for corporate and personal significance. We are the architects who are drafting the blueprint for a more efficient and yearned-for bridge between our story and the people who can benefit from it as well as the stories from which we can benefit.

Welcome to marketing providence. The crusade you join is growing in importance each and every day. You're surrounded by like-minded individuals who seek to improve the dynamics between people. The tools, methodologies, and stories shared within this book will reveal a wealth of *unmarketing* principles, strategies, and devices. It is this idea of unmarketing that inevitably extends all of the goals and objectives merited by traditional marketing, while also elevating the experience for everyone on both sides. This stimulates advocacy so that it can better expand your presence and impact in the mainstream and distributed communities that influence perceptions and decisions.

While the methodologies, theories, experiences, and social tools discussed in the original manifesto still stand, a deeper and more modern look is necessary to garner support and champion change from within—specifically an examination of what to do and how to measure success. It is through adaptation and engagement that we earn experience, connections, and prominence. There's no doubt that the proven tenets introduced in this book will ensure your success and career longevity. The doctrines that we examine and propose are in fact representative of best-of-breed ideals and methods unearthed and mashed-up from existing and extinct tactics to renew, edify, mature, and hone our proficiencies, conviction, knowledge, and experience.

*Engage!* will serve as a new manifesto, a reference point for all inward-outward-facing initiatives that incorporate two-way communication. And in the process, we'll see unmarketing emerge as one of the most effective forms of marketing, after all.

Until the proliferation of interactive media, traditional influence has followed a systematic top-down process of developing and pushing controlled messages to audiences, rooted in one-to-many faceless broadcast campaigns.

Personality wasn't absent in certain media, but it was missing from day-to-day communications.

For the most part, this pattern seemingly served its purposes, fueling the belief that brands were in control of their messages, from delivery to dissemination, among the demographics to which they were targeted.

It scaled and served very well over the years, until it didn't. . . .

Unbeknownst to many companies, a quiet riot has been amassing over the last two decades, one that we document clearly in this book. And slowly but surely, the whispers eventually intensified into roars.

The socialization of the Web and content publishing disrupted the balance and is now forcing a media renaissance that is transforming information distribution, human interaction, and everything that orbits this nascent ecosystem.

It is the dawn of a democratized information economy, which is fueling the emergence of champions, facilitators, and visionaries who are leading a more media literate society while transforming the way we engage with one another.

The interactive Web heralded the arrival of mainstream consumer influence and a global ecosystem that supports and extends their observations, complaints, opinions, referrals, and recommendations.

It served as a great equalizer, capsizing the existing balance and redistributing influence—and continues to do so.

Not only is it changing how we create, decipher, and share information, it is forever reshaping how brands and content publishers think about their markets and the people who define them.

Engage.



# Chapter

## The Social Media Manifesto

### ■ THE SOCIALIZATION OF MEDIA IS YEARS IN THE MAKING

In my 20-year marketing career, I've dedicated the last 14 years specifically to the practice of and experimentation in online interaction. My findings are based solely on the chemistry of failure, success, and, well, ambivalence, which equals either defeat or promise. The constant theme throughout has been the sustained balance between the pursuit of new influencers and the incorporation of proven traditional methods. This experience, and the experiences of others, ultimately serves as the foundation for creating a new communications bridge between companies and customers.

Socialized media has:

- Rewired the processes by which consumers share experiences, expertise, and opinions
- Broadened the channels available to consumers who seek information
- Changed how companies approach markets
- Altered how companies develop products
- Remodeled the processes by which companies connect with and show appreciation for their customers
- Transformed the method of influence, augmenting the ranks of traditional market experts and thought leaders with enthusiasts and innovators who self-create content-publishing platforms for their views
- Facilitated customers' direct engagement in the conversations that were previously taking place without their participation

A fundamental shift in our culture is under way and it is creating a new landscape of influencers, as well as changing how we define




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### Engage or Die

Source: Original artwork by Jesse Thomas (<http://jess3.com>).

influence. By establishing an entirely new ecosystem that supports the socialization of information, this shift is facilitating new conversations that start locally, but ultimately have a global impact.

The days of “hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil” have passed without lament.

Monologue has given way to dialogue.

The message is clear. Social media has introduced a new layer of influencers across all industries. It is the understanding of the role people play in the process of not only reading and disseminating information, but also how they create and share content in which others can participate. This, and only this, allows us to truly grasp the future of business, which is, for all intents and purposes, already unfolding today.

The socialization of information and the tools that enable it are the undercurrent of interactive media—and serve as the capital infrastructure that defines the social economy.

*Content is the new democracy and we, the people, are ensuring that our voices are heard.*

This is your chance to reinvigorate the tired and aging models of marketing and service, enliven a corporate brand, and increase revenue, all while paving the way for a brighter and more rewarding career.

How can companies implement an integrated social strategy quickly in this new social landscape? By focusing on desirable

markets and influencers where they connect. This will have a far greater impact on brand resonance and the bottom line than trying to reach the masses through any one message, venue, or tool.

Our actions speak louder than our words.

New media is constantly evolving and has yet to reveal its true impact across the entire business publishing and marketing landscape. But, social media is only one chapter in a never-ending resource that continues to evolve as new media permeates every facet of every business. In fact, new media is only going to become more pervasive and, as such, prove to be a critical factor in the success or failure of any business.

The life of the information offered in this book is interminable. New tools and strategies will be revealed, and they will be tied to exciting case studies that document the challenges, tactics, lessons, and successes for each.

We're just getting started.

The evolution of new media is also inducing an incredible transformation within the organization, introducing opportunities for internal and external collaboration in customer service, product, sales, community relations, and public—its most dramatic evolution in decades. In the world of customer and product support, socialized media is putting the “customer” back in customer service. Likewise, in the world of communications, the democratization of media is putting the “public” back into public relations. It creates entirely new roles and teams within organizations to proactively listen, learn, engage, measure, and change in real time. And we'll soon see it have a profound effect in the financial sector.

This new genre of media is not a game played from the sidelines however. Nor is this book written merely to inform you of the benefits only to have you go back to your day-to-day routine. Those who participate will succeed—everyone else will either have to catch up or miss the game altogether.

Businesses will evolve, customers will gain in prominence, and brands will humanize—with or without you.

## ■ THE FUTURE OF BUSINESS IS ALREADY HERE

The secret to successfully navigating the new landscape of marketing and service is understanding that social media is less about technology and more about anthropology, sociology, and ethnography. New media marketing and services are mash-ups of new and traditional media and processes that span across advertising, public relations (PR), customer service, marketing communications (marcom),

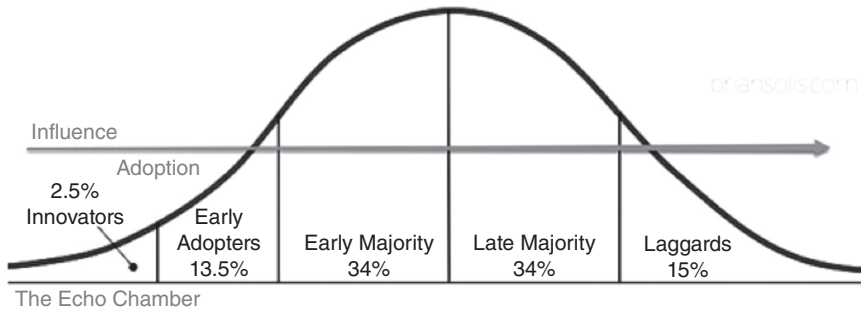


Figure 1.2

human resources (HR), sales, and community relations. We take the best practices from each and also introduce new social processes in and around them.

Communication, whether inbound or outbound, is now powered by conversations, and the best communicators always start as the best listeners. And the best listeners are those who empathize.

This is where and how the future of influence takes shape.

- It begins with respect and an understanding of how you connect with and benefit those whom you're hoping to help.
- Intent is defined by a genuine desire to evolve into a resource.
- Genuine participation is a form of new marketing, but is not reminiscent of traditional marketing formats and techniques—it's a new blueprint for *unmarketing*.
- Meaningful content can earn the creator trust, authority, and influence.
- Conversations can forge relationships, which are measured by social capital and trust.

Figure 1.2 shows the range of people you will be interacting with, from innovators to laggards.

## ■ WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS, WE ARE NOT MESSENGERS

While we lead the transformation of our company's marketing, sales, and service infrastructure, we must also ensure that our actions are discernible. Much in the same way that we attempt to create ambassadors by empowering our customers and advocates in the Social Web, we must become their ambassadors within—representing their

concerns, ideas, questions, and experiences. Internal change is part of the game.

Since this is a powerful new form of *social* media, it begins with how we think and act. This is the point at which most companies fall down, when they rely on traditional marketing models instead of creating or adapting new methodologies.

Messages are not conversations. Targets and audiences are not people. The inability to know people for who they are and what they represent prevents us from truly seeing and hearing them—which then impedes our efforts to connect. As Doc Searls, coauthor of *The Cluetrain Manifesto*, wisely stated, “There is no market for messages.”

The market for self-promotion is finite. Yet brands, even those that experiment with social media, confuse their role and place within these new digital societies. People do not create accounts on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, or any other social network to hear from brands. The bottom line is that people are seeking answers and direction, not messages or sales pitches.

People just don’t speak or hear things in the same way companies speak about their products and services. For us to be heard, we have to engage as though we were speaking person to person.

Social networks are hubs between the company and its customers. How we participate in each network defines our stature within them and also determines our ability to earn friends and followers while also promoting and instilling advocacy.

Everything we’re integrating into the marketing mix is now aimed at sparking and cultivating conversations, as well as continuously expanding a network of lasting relationships.

## ■ CONVERSATIONS HAPPEN WITH OR WITHOUT YOU

In his great essay titled “We Are the People Formerly Known as the Audience,” Jay Rosen introduced us to the people we’re now trying to reach. In many ways, Rosen’s essay served as a manifesto for the marketing, media, and advertising industries, serving as an eye-opener to the world of democratized influence and how to recognize and embrace the opportunity it represents.

To best reach people, we have to first figure out who they are and where they connect and how they share and find information. In the process, you’ll quickly discover that there is no magic bullet for reaching everyone, all at once. The strategy is in how to segment active communities from audiences.

Social media is about speaking *with*, not *at* people. This means engaging in a way that works in a conversational medium, that is,

serving the best interest of both parties, while not demeaning any actions or insulting the intelligence of anyone involved.

So what of those skeptics or apprehensive executives who claim that participating on social networks will only invoke negative responses and ignite potential crises?

As we're coming to realize, the social landscape is a vast sea filled with unforgiving predators—most of whom would love nothing more than to have marketers for every meal of the day. Nevertheless, succeeding here is the future.

The truth is that there will be negative commentary. However, that should not deter you from experimenting or piloting programs. Even without your participation, negative commentary already exists. In most cases, you just aren't listening in all of the right places. This is why I like to ask business leaders the following question: "If a conversation takes place online, and you weren't there to hear it, did it actually happen?"

Yes. Yes, it did and still does.

Assuredly, every negative discussion is an opportunity to learn and also to participate in a way that may shift the discussion in a positive direction. If there's nothing else that we accomplish by participating, we at least acquire the ability to contribute toward a positive public perception.

The conversations that don't kill you only make you stronger. And those negative threads that escalate in social networks will only accelerate without the involvement of inherent stakeholders.

## ■ SOCIAL MEDIA IS ONE COMPONENT OF A BROADER COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING STRATEGY

It's true that everything is changing. And in many cases, it's also true that everything old eventually becomes new again. The underlying principles of customer focus and service certainly aren't new. Instead, the attention on these elements may have waned, as businesses expand, contract, shift, and evolve based on market needs and trends, profit, and peer influence, as governed by the guidance of stakeholders and shareholders.

Social media force businesses to reflect and adapt to markets and the people who define them.

Social media are never-ending fountains of lessons and insight, and they flow both ways.

Social media present a means, not an end.



Social media spark a revelation that we, the people, have a voice, and through the democratization of content and ideas we can once again unite around common passions, inspire movements, and ignite change.

It's not a one-way broadcast channel. We are now part of the community and we don't own it. We must establish prominence and earn influence so as to amass attention, instill enthusiasm, empower ambassadors, and create a community of loyal collaborators.

The previous hierarchy of messaging has collapsed. Now, in order to appeal to customers, clients, or potential stakeholders, we must approach them from the top down, the bottom up, and side to side. We must outmaneuver the elusive. We must outthink the pessimists. We must sanction and amplify the experts and empower the emissaries.

## ■ BUILDING A BRIDGE BETWEEN YOU AND YOUR CUSTOMERS

Since our efforts are outward focused, visible, and indexable on the Web for all to see and find, everything we do now contributes to the brand we represent. Arming employees with knowledge, guidelines, and objectives, and accordingly empowering them to participate on behalf of the brand and greater mission, they can create an influential and community-focused organization that engages stakeholders. Doing so builds an active collective of participants, powered by influential voices, in addition to employees, who will shape perception, steer conversations, and provide help to those seeking advice. The community that once operated without us now becomes an extension of our outbound activities, beliefs, passions, and value propositions.

We are both architects and builders of strategic relationships and alliances, and we are creating the blueprints for and also constructing the bridge that connects customers and the people (you and me) who represent the companies we believe in.

To truly help businesses and the decision makers responsible for their direction, we need to learn through real work. We have to get our hands dirty. There's just no way around it. We can learn from the mistakes and successes of our peers, but actions speak louder than words. The last thing we need are more cooks in a crowded kitchen. At the same time, we need direction and lucrative movement. We need thinkers *and* doers. It is the only way to get smarter and, in turn, become more valuable to those you're consulting or helping.

Immersion equals incontestable experience, perspectives, and knowledge.

Let's get to work, build the bridge, and open up the gateways to traffic on both ends.

## ■ BEING HUMAN VERSUS HUMANIZING YOUR STORY

It takes so much more than an understanding of the tools and popular networks to inspire change and build long-term, meaningful relationships.

The ability to set up a profile on Facebook or Twitter, the wherewithal to update status in each network, the capacity to connect with people within each network, is in fact, child's play. This is a learned practice not unlike the sending, filing, and reading of e-mail, chatting through instant-messaging tools, placing IP-based calls on Skype, or sending a text message from your mobile phone.

There's a bigger, more significant opportunity to make a true impact within an organization. The tools are just extensions of you and your expertise and artistry. Everything starts with a deep commitment to the brand you're representing—its culture, personality, overall potential, and people. Without it, you're pushing the same old rhetoric in new places, which hardly helps you achieve your potential. And it certainly doesn't inspire anyone to concern themselves with the brand's presence in these emerging social networks that are so vital to our corporate economy. After all, why should I care about what you do in social media when you don't?

Don't speak to me in messages!

Stop trying to market at me!

Give me something to believe in. Give me something to let me know that you *know* whom you're talking to and why.

I am influential. I am a social consumer. I have built a valuable social graph. I'm the gatekeeper among gatekeepers who need direction, insight, and answers for me to accomplish the tasks in my life and meet my personal and professional goals. You could be just what I'm looking for, but in social media, where I dwell, I wouldn't know it based on how you are or aren't participating.

I'm a human being and so are you. Treat me as such . . . act as such.

Alas, being human is far easier than humanizing your story. Transparency is just not enough to convince me that I need to pay attention to you.

Get a little empathy going on and you'll begin to facilitate meaningful interaction. This is the necessary commitment to adopting and embodying a customer service mentality fueled by empathy and the desire to deliver resolution—one strategic engagement at a time.