



# Marketing How-To Guide

## **Marketing How-To Guide:** How to Choose the Best Web 2.0 Strategies for Your Company

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# MarketingProfs

## Marketing How-To Guide

### How to Choose the Best Web 2.0 Strategies for Your Company

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### How to Choose the Best Web 2.0 Strategies for Your Company

#### INTRODUCTION

Social media and social networking sites are quite a popular topic among businesses wanting to improve their marketing efforts. If utilized properly, Web 2.0 tools can greatly improve your understanding and communication with your customers.

Unfortunately, many businesses approach Web 2.0 tools as a new way to market to their customers, instead of as a way to improve their marketing.



This is an important distinction to make, because Web 2.0 tools work best not as promotional tools, but as ways to promote communication and understanding between a company and its customers.

Consider for a second why this is important. When your customers have more ways to give you feedback and more ways to communicate with you, you can better understand their wants and needs. Armed with this knowledge, you can greatly improve your ability to effectively market to this audience.

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#### *Introduction ... continued*

Also, if you have more feedback from your customers, you can use this data to improve the customer service you provide. From the customers' points of view, if you are more effectively marketing to them, and if you are acting on comments they provide, then it becomes much easier for them to become evangelists for your business.

So don't think of Web 2.0 tools as marketing tools, but as tools that can enable you to better communicate with and understand your customers. This will result in more efficient marketing—which will also lower your costs—and make it easier for your customers to understand and trust you. This Guide will give you an overview of Web 2.0 tools and walk you through the process of selecting the tools that are best for your business.

## OVERVIEW OF WEB 2.0 TOOLS

### Social Media

Social media is a broad term designed to cover media created by people in text, audio and video forms, and which can be shared and distributed easily. In most cases, the authors and creators of social media continue to create new content on a regular basis and incorporate feedback from people who view, read or listen to their content.

### Blogs

“Blogs,” short for web logs, are the best-known form of social media, and have been in existence for at least a decade. A blog is a publishing platform that allows quick, easy addition of new content. Most blogs publish new content, called “posts,” on a weekly or daily basis. Some blogs publish multiple posts daily, while many business blogs publish two to five new posts a week.


Bloggers (those who write blog posts) can let their readers leave feedback on their posts, in the form of comments. These comments often lead to discussions that focus on and expand upon the topics raised by the blogger in the original post. Bloggers can also not allow readers to post comments on their blogs, but since a business blog is a marketing tool, it’s not generally advisable to prevent readers from leaving comments on posts.

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#### *Overview of Web 2.0 Tools ... continued*

A blogger can add a link (short for "hyperlink") to another blog post (or to another podcast, Web site, etc.). The reader clicks on the blogger's link and is redirected. It is a good idea to open up your blog to other people and information by linking your posts heavily. This means your ideas are being shared and seen on more blogs and sites by more people.

A well-written blog can greatly improve a company's reputation. Dell's [Direct2Dell](http://www.direct2dell.com) ([www.direct2dell.com](http://www.direct2dell.com)) corporate blog is a good example. Since the company began blogging, negative blog posts about Dell have fallen impressively, from 49% to 22%.



**Dell** Home Community Ideas IdeaStorm Blogs Direct2Dell Videos StudioDell Discussions Forums Dell.com Support

BLOGS:  
**DIRECT2DELL**  
A BLOG ABOUT DELL PRODUCTS, SERVICES, AND CUSTOMERS

Home »

**Dell @ HP Americas Partner Conference** Tue, Mar. 04, 2008  
by Mark Jarvis, Chief Marketing Officer

This month, Dell launches its new "Partners Wanted" advertising campaign. HP partners got a sneak peek at the ad campaign at the HP Americas Partner Conference in Las Vegas this past week, where we distributed samples of the Dell ad to approximately 800 HP partners attending the conference. Only the highly-efficient and professional Caesars Palace security staff prevented our team from reaching all 1,100 HP partners in attendance.

**\$9 BILLION IN WORLDWIDE CHANNEL BUSINESS LAST YEAR. 30,000 PARTNERS AND GROWING...**

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**CATEGORIES**

- Battery Recall (13)
- CES 2008 (9)
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- E-Commerce (65)
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- Gaming (71)
- IdeaStorm (25)
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- Linux (74)
- Products (334)
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- Second Life (12)
- Services (28)
- Simplify IT (48)

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*Overview of Web 2.0 Tools ... continued*

#### **Podcasts**

Podcasts are audio files that can be created and shared online. Just as a written piece of content is produced and published on a blog is called a “post,” a podcast is audio or spoken content that is created with a microphone and saved as an “audio file.” To create a podcast you need a microphone and must understand how to record and post your content.

Podcasts can be delivered via Really Simple Syndication (RSS) to services such as iTunes, or can be hosted on blogs. Popular options for many podcasters (people who create podcasts) include creating a separate blog to host their new podcasts or linking to each new audio file from their existing blog. Many listeners download podcasts to listen to while away from their computers, such as when exercising or traveling. For example, [Kiplinger's Personal Finance](#) ([www.kiplinger.com](http://www.kiplinger.com)) magazine creates weekly podcasts with audio versions of its most popular stories.

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*Overview of Web 2.0 Tools ... continued*



The screenshot shows the Kiplinger.com website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with categories like 'The Basics', 'Starting Out', 'Investing', 'Your Money', 'Your Retirement', 'Spending Wisely', 'Your Business', 'Guides & Centers', and 'Our Best Lists'. Below this is a search bar and a 'Subscribe to: Magazine | The Kiplinger Letter' link. The main content area features a 'Kiplinger's Podcasts' section with a large 'K)' logo. The text describes the podcasts and lists a 'Featured Podcast' titled 'Covercast: Make More, Keep More' by Fred Frailey. There are also links for 'Listen | Download | Full Story' and a 'Sign Up for Free E-mail Alerts' box. A 'Previous Podcasts' section is visible below, featuring 'Target Funds Under Fire'.

### Video Blogs

Video blogs are similar to text blogs. Instead of creating new written blog posts, the “vlogger” creates new videos to post to his or her “vlog” (short for video blog). As with a written blog, a vlogger can allow viewers to comment on each video that’s posted. And, as with podcasts, some bloggers simply create the occasional video and post it to their text blog.

Video blogs have enjoyed a boom in recent years as video-sharing sites such as YouTube have gained in popularity. Many vloggers create videos and upload them straight to YouTube, then post them from YouTube directly to their own blog or vlog. Now that video-sharing sites have become more



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#### *Overview of Web 2.0 Tools ... continued*

popular, companies are rushing to develop technologies that make it easier to create and share videos. Today, cell phones and hand-held cameras can shoot video and upload it straight to YouTube, or to a person's vlog.

#### **RSS**

RSS allows you to quickly and easily distribute social media content, and allows others to subscribe to your content so it's delivered to them as soon as you post it. For example, if a reader of your text blog subscribes to your blog's RSS feed, they will be notified in their feed reader every time you post. Likewise, people can subscribe to your podcast's or vlog's RSS feed. [FeedBurner](http://www.feedburner.com) ([www.feedburner.com](http://www.feedburner.com)) is a service that makes it very easy not only to create an RSS feed for your social media content, but to track a great deal of information about your subscribers. All you need is a URL for your blog, vlog or podcast, and FeedBurner does the rest.

### How to Choose the Best Web 2.0 Strategies for Your Company

*Overview of Web 2.0 Tools ... continued*

#### Social Networks

Social networking sites give people a place to share information and interests with others. These sites allow people to “friend” each other, creating a personalized network in the process. Social networking sites are popular because they allow friends to exchange information and content quickly and easily, as well as make new friends.

#### Facebook

[Facebook](http://www.facebook.com) ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)) is a popular social network that was originally designed for college students. While the majority of Facebook’s 60-plus million users remain under age 25, Facebook is gaining older members as college graduates continue to use it and bloggers and other online groups discover the site.

Facebook allows you to create a “profile” through which you can share as much or as little personal and professional information as you like. You can choose from hundreds of “apps” (applications) from third-party developers that let you further customize your profile. As a result, a Facebook user can position their profile as anything from their online resume to a forum for keeping friends updated on their social activities. Members can also let friends leave a message to them on their profile.

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#### *Overview of Web 2.0 Tools ... continued*

In addition to individual profiles, Facebook includes groups organized around a particular topic, company, person or event. These groups allow people with similar interests to exchange ideas. They also frequently have message boards where group members can ask questions and start discussions with each other. Each group can include an area where members can leave comments. Below is a screenshot of Target's popular Facebook group.



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*Overview of Web 2.0 Tools ... continued*

#### **LinkedIn**

[LinkedIn](http://www.linkedin.com) ([www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com)) is a business-oriented networking site with approximately 20 million members. The site is aimed primarily at professionals who want to network with other professionals and with possible employers. Many employers and recruiters use the site to find potential candidates for open positions. A LinkedIn profile is very similar to a resume, and allows members to expand and discuss their professional, educational and personal accomplishments in great detail.

Since 2007, LinkedIn has begun to incorporate more social elements into its service. The company launched a blog in 2007 and has added and changed features on the site based on feedback from members.

#### **MySpace**

[MySpace](http://www.myspace.com) ([www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com)) boasts the largest membership of any social network on the Internet, currently over 300 million. The service originally was popular mainly with artists and musicians, but has since become popular with high-schoolers, and now caters to wide segments of every age group, from preteens to senior citizens.

The network also lets you create a profile and befriend other members, as on Facebook. Since MySpace places a much greater emphasis on musical artists and entertainment, very few members use or view the service as a “professional” social network such as members do with LinkedIn or, to a lesser extent, Facebook.

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#### *Overview of Web 2.0 Tools ... continued*

Members can also leave messages on each other's profiles and join groups. As with Facebook's groups, members of MySpace groups can leave messages and discuss topics based on a group's focus.

Here's a screenshot of the Nike Soccer MySpace page:



### Ning

[Ning](http://www.ning.com) ([www.ning.com](http://www.ning.com)) is a rapidly growing site that lets you quickly and easily create your own social network. Ning lets you create a customized social network with individual profile pages for members, groups and discussion forums. It also allows members to share photos and videos.

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#### *Overview of Web 2.0 Tools ... continued*

Ning could easily be an outlet to create a network for your customers or partners. You can edit privacy settings to make your network viewable only by current members, and you can elect to extend memberships by invitation only.

#### **Other Social Networking Sites**

While MySpace, Facebook and LinkedIn include members from most backgrounds and age ranges, other social networking sites are focused on specific audiences. For example, [Hi5 \(www.hi5.com\)](http://www.hi5.com) is popular among Latin-Americans, while [BlackPlanet \(www.blackplanet.com\)](http://www.blackplanet.com) caters to African-Americans.

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*Overview of Web 2.0 Tools ... continued*

#### Collaborative/Community Tools

Collaborative and community tools allow your customers and partners to create content with you. They are excellent ways to establish and share knowledge and can help strengthen communication between all parties. While other Web 2.0 tools have collaborative properties, the following are specifically and primarily designed to be collaborative.

##### Wikis

A wiki lets many people contribute to the creation of information or a document. The popular Web site [Wikipedia](http://www.wikipedia.org) ([www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)) uses wikis to create its entries. Over time, as new information is added and as existing information is scrutinized, the quality of each entry should improve.

Wikis are useful if you need to collect information from many people. For example, if you have a conference scheduled and want to know who will be attending, you can create a wiki that allows attendees to share contact information and travel schedules. [PBWiki](http://pbwiki.com) (<http://pbwiki.com>) is a popular site that lets you create wikis for free.

##### Forums

Forums and message boards allow members to create discussions around certain topics, as well as participate in existing conversations. Many forums require visitors to register before they can post new messages, but some allow visitors to sign in as a "guest" or as "anonymous." The forum can assign moderators to monitor existing posts, as well as to address comments and concerns raised by members.

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#### *Overview of Web 2.0 Tools ... continued*

The [Vault](http://www.vault.com) ([www.vault.com](http://www.vault.com)) offers many message boards that address individual companies and allow job-seekers to come together and share information about potential employers.



The screenshot shows the Vault.com website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'join', 'log in', and 'log out' options. Below that is a search bar and a 'GO' button. The main content area is titled 'Welcome to the Smith Barney Employee Message Board.' and contains a list of 15 topics, including 'Aptitude test (1) - 2/19/08', 'Smith Barney Group (1) - 2/11/08', and 'Smith Barney vs. UDS (5) - 1/18/08'. There are also links for 'Start a new topic' and 'message boards FAQ'.

### E-Commerce/Rating Sites

An e-commerce site is a Web site where products are sold and support is offered before and after the sale. These sites can easily be used in conjunction with social media and networking tools such as a blog or a Facebook profile.

Many e-commerce sites also allow customers to rate the products being sold, and/or write reviews of the products. [Amazon](http://www.amazon.com) ([www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)) is a great example of a company that has combined customer-submitted ratings with




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#### *Overview of Web 2.0 Tools ... continued*

customer-written reviews of products to help increase sales. The screenshot below shows a book that was reviewed quite favorably by previous Amazon buyers. You can imagine the positive impact such raves might produce on potential buyers. Since customers increasingly conduct pre-purchase research online, adding reviews and ratings for products at your e-commerce site is a great way to provide value to customers, and potentially close the sale at the site.






**Rate This Item to Improve Your Recommendations**

[Sign in](#) to rate this item  
  I own it

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**Customer Reviews**

34 Reviews

5 star:		(27)	<b>Average Customer Review</b> ★★★★★ (34 customer reviews)
4 star:		(6)	
3 star:		(0)	
2 star:		(1)	
1 star:		(0)	

**Most Helpful Customer Reviews**

25 of 26 people found the following review helpful:

★★★★★ **The Book Works! I'm Evangelizing a Book on Evangelism**, March 22, 2004  
 By [Dana Vandenheuvel "Dana VanDen Heuvel"](#) (Green Bay, WI USA) - [See all my reviews](#)  
REAL NAME™

**This review is from:** [Creating Customer Evangelists: How Loyal Customers Become a Volunteer Sales Force \(Hardcover\)](#)

It seems fitting to be writing a review to evangelize a book written on the topic of making evangelists out of your customers. I can't help but think after reading *Creating Customer Evangelists*, "how can I let as many people as possible know how wonderful this book is!"

I'd venture a guess that many of you reading this review have delved into a lot of business books in your lifetime. I'm sure that the best of intentions were taken into each book, only to find out that ½ way through the majority of them, they had lost their relevance and hadn't delivered on their promise. I mean, really, how many books about marketing can possibly have any really interesting and immediately helpful ideas?

While CCE is not a fiction thriller, it will keep you as engaged as any good novel would, because at it's heart, it tells a lot of great short stories, and it tells them with insight and conviction. The book follows a "case study" approach and illustrates a world-class case example of a company doing CE right in each chapter. And, unlike those feel-good business books about how breakthrough something is that leave you happing with no action items, CCE includes a full

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#### Micro-Media/Formats

Micro-media and formats are smaller, “bite-sized” pieces of information that can be created and shared on your social media site, or in your social networking profile. This class of Web 2.0 tools is still emerging, but has already become popular with online users.

#### Widgets

Widgets are codes that you add to a Web site, blog or social networking profile that pull information or media from another source and redisplay it on your blog, Web site or profile, for example, the current weather for your hometown. You could add a widget to your blog to display how many links your blog currently has. Recently, widgets that pull information from multiple sources at once have become popular, for example, a Facebook profile widget could display the newest blog posts from, say, five blogs of your choice. Or you could simply have the widget in your Facebook profile display a link to your latest blog post.

#### Micro-blogging

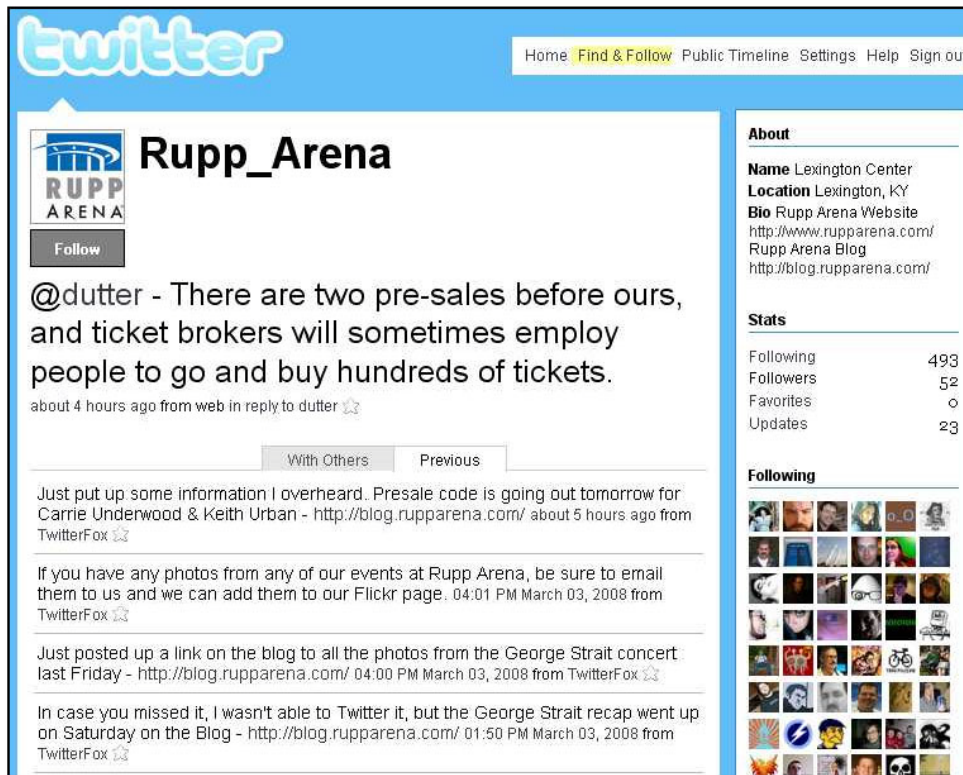
While still quite new, micro-blogging is already popular as a social media and Web 2.0 tool. With micro-blogging services, you can send others short messages and links, even via your cell phone. Additionally, you can display, via a widget, the messages you and others have left each other on micro-blogging services on your blog or profile.

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#### *Overview of Web 2.0 Tools ... continued*


Currently, the most popular micro-blogging service is [Twitter](#) ([www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)). This service is somewhat similar to a chat room, except that only those people who “follow you” can see the messages you send. You can block whomever you choose from seeing your messages. And you can use services such as [Tweetscan](#) ([www.tweetscan.com](http://www.tweetscan.com)) to search messages from Twitter users who post without blocks. This allows you to see, for example, who is talking about your company, and what they are saying to others about it.

Here’s Rupp Arena’s Twitter page:



twitter

Home Find & Follow Public Timeline Settings Help Sign out

 **Rupp\_Arena**

Follow

@dutter - There are two pre-sales before ours, and ticket brokers will sometimes employ people to go and buy hundreds of tickets.  
about 4 hours ago from web in reply to dutter

With Others Previous

Just put up some information I overheard. Presale code is going out tomorrow for Carrie Underwood & Keith Urban - <http://blog.rupparena.com/> about 5 hours ago from TwitterFox

If you have any photos from any of our events at Rupp Arena, be sure to email them to us and we can add them to our Flickr page. 04:01 PM March 03, 2008 from TwitterFox

Just posted up a link on the blog to all the photos from the George Strait concert last Friday - <http://blog.rupparena.com/> 04:00 PM March 03, 2008 from TwitterFox

In case you missed it, I wasn't able to Twitter it, but the George Strait recap went up on Saturday on the Blog - <http://blog.rupparena.com/> 01:50 PM March 03, 2008 from TwitterFox

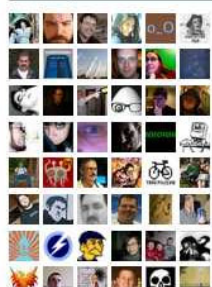
**About**

**Name** Lexington Center  
**Location** Lexington, KY  
**Bio** Rupp Arena Website  
<http://www.rupparena.com/>  
Rupp Arena Blog  
<http://blog.rupparena.com/>

**Stats**

Following	493
Followers	52
Favorites	0
Updates	23

**Following**



## How to Choose the Best Web 2.0 Strategies for Your Company

### BENEFITS AND DRAWBACKS

Now that you've been given a brief introduction to many of the most popular Web 2.0 tools, let's look at the major advantages and disadvantages of each.



#### **How Steep Is the Learning Curve?**

Many, if not all, Web 2.0 tools involve interacting with other people, whether that means exchanging content or co-creating it. Each group of tools allows you to communicate with others in a different way, so you'll need to spend some time "getting your hands dirty" with each group to truly master it.

#### ***Social Media***

When it comes to blogs, the good news is that you can have a blog up and running in literally minutes. And a well-written blog can be an efficient and effective marketing tool. The act of blogging itself is fairly straightforward, and you will quickly grasp the basics in your first few weeks. Many bloggers report an improvement in their writing ability as an unexpected side benefit.

However, creating a truly exceptional blog can take years, and bloggers quickly discover that their blog's success depends on the level of interaction they have with their readers, as well as with other bloggers. New bloggers must learn how to engage readers, and paradoxically to leave their own blog in order to drive traffic back to it. This means reading and commenting on

## How to Choose the Best Web 2.0 Strategies for Your Company

### *Benefits and Drawbacks ... continued*

other, topically similar blogs as well as reading the blogs of readers who leave comments.

With podcasts and video blogging, how quickly you grasp these tools depends on two factors: how comfortable you are at creating and recording audio and video, and how proficient your editing skills are. New podcasters and vloggers often comment on how difficult it is to edit the podcasts and videos they create, especially when they are just starting out. Normally though, the editing process becomes easier after the first few attempts, and the person usually becomes more comfortable with the entire creation process over time.

As opposed to writing blogs, the learning curve for creating podcasts and vlogs is generally much steeper at first, but flattens quickly after a few attempts.

### ***Social Networking***

When considering whether to join or create a social network, there are two separate learning curves. First, you have to become familiar with using social networks. This usually involves figuring out how to create your profile and how to make and interact with friends on the network.

Secondly, you need to learn how to interact with other members of the network. This goes beyond simply contacting other members. You must keep in mind that most people who use social networking sites are extremely leery of being marketed to. If you attempt to join or create a social network solely to promote your company to other members, it will most likely cause other

### How to Choose the Best Web 2.0 Strategies for Your Company

#### *Benefits and Drawbacks ... continued*

members to denounce your activities harshly and accuse you of “invading their space.”

So while the learning curve for using social networks isn't too steep (they're probably a bit more difficult to get comfortable with than blogging, but easier to master than podcasting), the most difficult lesson for companies that join social networks to understand is that they must check their marketing hats at the door. Failure to do so could easily cause more harm to your company than good.

#### ***Collaborative/Community Tools***

Collaborative tools such as wikis, forums and e-commerce and rating sites are fairly easy to set up and maintain. In fact, they're almost as easy to set up as blogs.

The biggest challenge may be getting comfortable allowing “outsiders” to create content. You have to trust that the community will give its honest opinions about the products you allow it to review. Another hurdle these tools present is to bring together and enable members to work together, and give them a reason to coalesce into a community.

#### ***Micro-media/Formats***

Third-party widgets and micro-blogging services are very easy to set up and maintain. As with other Web 2.0 services, the biggest hurdle with these tools is simply learning what they do and how to use them. It may help to watch how others employ them, especially those acknowledged by their peers as exceptionally skilled at their use.

### How to Choose the Best Web 2.0 Strategies for Your Company

*Benefits and Drawbacks ... continued*

#### **Associated Costs**

The great thing about Web 2.0 tools is that many can be used for little or no cost. A few require an investment in additional equipment to fully utilize their capabilities.

A new blog can be started for little or no cost. Services such as [Blogger](http://www.blogger.com) ([www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com)) and [Wordpress](http://www.wordpress.org) ([www.wordpress.org](http://www.wordpress.org)) offer free blogging platforms, while others such as [TypePad](http://www.typepad.com) ([www.typepad.com](http://www.typepad.com)) and [MovableType](http://www.movabletype.com) ([www.movabletype.com](http://www.movabletype.com)) charge a few dollars a month. Blogger and Wordpress are probably the two most popular blogging platforms.

For podcasting and video-blogging, you need equipment to create audio files for podcasting, and videos for your vlog. Generally, a good microphone setup for podcasting costs from \$50 to \$200, depending on quality. A simple camera to record a video for a vlog can cost around \$100 to \$200.

As both podcasting and vlogging gain in popularity, look for more products to hit the market that cater to podcasters and vloggers by making the creation process still easier. With this trend, equipment prices will most likely fall.

It's free to create a personal profile page on most major social networking sites, such as MySpace, LinkedIn and Facebook. It's also free to start a forum with a service such as [Nabble](http://www.nabble.com) ([www.nabble.com](http://www.nabble.com)), and you can start a free wiki with a site such as [PBWiki](http://pbwiki.com) (<http://pbwiki.com>).

### How to Choose the Best Web 2.0 Strategies for Your Company

#### *Benefits and Drawbacks ... continued*

An e-commerce and ratings site can run anywhere from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars, depending on how complex you want it to be. As with most of the above tools, these prices should continue to come down as companies create and distribute “do it yourself” suites that walk you through setting up your own Web site.

Widgets are free, and services such as [KickApps](http://www.kickapps.com) ([www.kickapps.com](http://www.kickapps.com)) can create custom widgets for you. Micro-blogging sites such as [Twitter](http://www.twitter.com) ([www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)) and [Pounce](http://www.pounce.com) ([www.pounce.com](http://www.pounce.com)) offer services for free.

#### **Time Commitment**

The great thing about most Web 2.0 tools is that they help cultivate relationships. Constant attention is needed for these relationships to grow. Web 2.0 tools must be used with the understanding that there is a long-term commitment involved. Think of using Web 2.0 tools as weight-training: in order to see ongoing results, you must continue to train. If you stop, your body will lose muscle and your efforts will erode; the same can happen with the relationships you initiate through Web 2.0 tools.

#### **Which Tools Encourage and Facilitate Customer Participation?**

Most Web 2.0 tools enhance communication. That’s one of the qualities that make these tools so potentially valuable to businesses. But some of these tools are better suited to encouraging outside participation than others.

Blogs, for example, are very well-suited if your want to collect and respond to feedback from customers. The level of participation that your blog attracts from your customers greatly depends on whether you encourage readers to



### How to Choose the Best Web 2.0 Strategies for Your Company

#### *Benefits and Drawbacks ... continued*

leave comments, whether you respond to those comments, whether you moderate comments, and how quickly you respond to your readers. Overall, blogs can offer about the best “bang for your buck” available to encourage customer participation.

Podcasts and vlogs can also promote participation, but usually are aimed more at providing instruction and information than at engaging dialogue. Still, either can be used in conjunction with a written blog to offer customers a place to quickly and easily leave feedback.

Social networks also allow customers to leave feedback, but in general aren't as effective as blogs. As with other Web 2.0 tools, the level of customer interaction greatly depends on your efforts to engage your customers in conversation.

Wikis, forums and ratings sites require that a larger community contribute and co-create, and these tools usually work best in conjunction with other Web 2.0 tools. For example, a business that blogs might also let customers rate the items it sells on its e-commerce site. Then on its blog, the business can encourage readers to contribute by rating and reviewing the items it sells on its site. Or if a business isn't blogging, it could still add a forum to its site as a way to collect feedback from customers and facilitate conversation with them.

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#### *Benefits and Drawbacks ... continued*

Widgets don't do much to encourage customer participation, but businesses can use a micro-blogging service such as [Twitter](http://www.twitter.com) ([www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)) to communicate quickly and easily with their customers. A software supplier can run a search to see if conversation is happening about its products on Twitter. If some Twitter users are complaining about a problem with a program that Company A has created, a rep from Company A can use Twitter to send messages to those customers to help them resolve questions about the program. This type of real-time support that micro-blogging permits offers great potential for businesses.

### How to Choose the Best Web 2.0 Strategies for Your Company

## THE REQUIREMENTS

Let's now delve a bit deeper into what exactly these tools require for effective use.

### Time

Web 2.0 tools require a long-term time commitment to be truly effective. Most require weekly, if not daily, attention. This is the trade-off with social media: many are free or inexpensive to use, but most or all require constant attention.

Count on having to devote the most time to blogs, forums, wikis and e-commerce and ratings sites. These can gather feedback any time, which must then be monitored and approved frequently. So with these tools, you should factor in giving them daily attention.



Profiles on social networking sites, along with micro-blogging formats and video blogs, probably won't require as much attention, but you will still need to check these tools frequently. In general, with any Web 2.0 tools, the more time you invest in using them, the more interaction you'll have with others (meaning current and potential customers and partners), and the more positive results you'll see.

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*The Requirements ... continued*

### **Human Resources**

Now let's turn to how much people power these tools require, and whether you'll need to provide special training, or even outsource or hire new employees. In general, it's a good idea to have at least two or three people familiar with the Web 2.0 tools before you implement them. But it's not vital. If you want to launch a blog and no one at your business has experience blogging, you can still launch a "private" blog and get your feet wet there before you launch a blog to the masses.

Some tools are more specialized, however, such as podcasting, video blogging and creating forums or e-commerce/rating sites. If no one at your company has experience with these tools, it may be a good idea to outsource their development to an expert. Fortunately, as social media has become more popular, it's given rise to many well-qualified social media consultants who can train your business to use any of these tools.

### **Costs**

Now let's look at potential costs, not just of using the tools, but of any equipment and training that might be necessary.

From a "bang for your buck" standpoint, blogs, wikis, micro-blogging and profiles on social networking sites are probably your best bet. All these tools can be used for very little or no cost, and give you a great way to communicate with and engage current and potential customers and partners. At the other end of the spectrum, unless you have programming and coding



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#### *The Requirements ... continued*

experts working for you, you will most likely want to outsource the creation of an e-commerce/rating site to someone else, which can easily run into hundreds or even thousands of dollars. Also consider that you'll need to invest in equipment for the creation of podcasts and videos. This can cost anywhere from \$50 to \$200 for basic setups to \$500 or more for higher-quality equipment.

## How to Choose the Best Web 2.0 Strategies for Your Company

### WHICH TOOLS MAKE SENSE FOR YOUR COMPANY?

Before we can determine which Web 2.0 tool(s) will work best for your company, we need to consider what your goals are.

#### *Match Each Tool's Potential with Your Goals*

##### **Build Awareness**

Always remember the “social” in social media. If your primary goal for using Web 2.0 tools is to build awareness for your business, you should gravitate



toward the tools that make it as easy as possible to exchange and share content. This is where blogs and micro-blogging services shine. Blogs allow you to post new content constantly, and also allow your readers to leave comments and feedback. Additionally, you can link to other blogs to further elicit feedback. Micro-blogging services such as Twitter take this exchange process to the next level, allowing you to

quickly share links and comments with others, 140 characters at a time. You can also think of blogs and micro-blogging as a great one-two punch in building awareness, with your blog as the place where you share new content, and a micro-blogging site such as Twitter as the place to share any breaking news or conversation.

### How to Choose the Best Web 2.0 Strategies for Your Company

#### *Which Tools Make Sense for Your Company? ... continued*

After blogs, your best bet for building awareness is probably social networks, since these also allow you to share and exchange content with others, although not as freely, in most cases, as you can with a blog. Video blogs as well as podcasts can also be successful avenues for reaching others. However, if you want to build awareness, think blogs and micro-blogging first, then social networks.

#### **Facilitate Dialogue with Customers**

If you want to talk to your current and potential customers, you'll need to consider which Web 2.0 tools they use regularly. Again, blogs move to the head of the pack. And remember, you can also effectively reply to customers by leaving a comment on their blog. Don't be afraid to follow up conversation initiated on a blog with a plain old email, which certainly still does the trick.

You can also use those groups that already exist on many social networks to reach and interact with customers. Many customers will ask questions about products and services or voice concerns by starting new messages within these groups. This gives you a chance to interact with them on your company's behalf to answer questions and help solve their problems.

#### **Expose Your Business to New Customers**

If you want to use Web 2.0 tools to give you access to new customers, then initially, social networks are probably your best bet. I say "initially" because if you start blogging, as your readership grows, new readers will tell others about your blog, exposing you to still more new customers. However, if you create a profile and a presence on social networks, then you are entering a

## How to Choose the Best Web 2.0 Strategies for Your Company

*Which Tools Make Sense for Your Company? ... continued*

space that already has an established audience. Your ability to interact with this audience and provide value to the social network's members will determine how many new customers you gain from being there.

Also, you should think of forums as a way to meet new customers—not so much by starting your own forum, but by interacting with people on existing forums. Here again, be very careful to interact with the forum's users on their terms, not yours. If you join forums and immediately start to promote your company's products, this will irritate the forum members and could get you banned from the site, which would be quite embarrassing. If you can, instead, interact with forum members by solving their problems and providing value, you can quickly win new evangelists for your company.

### **Time Requirements and Equipment Costs**

When thinking about time requirements, consider that some tools require more time than others. Blogs, forums, wikis and e-commerce and ratings sites require almost daily attention. That's because these tools allow for the most interaction. If you have a presence on one or more social networks, these too will need to be checked more than once a week, and daily, if possible. As a rule, the more time you put into social tools, the more interaction you will have with others, and the more your business will benefit.

As for potential equipment costs, unless you plan to create an e-commerce site, a podcast or start a video blog, you can begin using social media or social networking tools for little or no money. This is the tradeoff with many Web 2.0 tools; most need constant attention, but require little or no money to use.



## How to Choose the Best Web 2.0 Strategies for Your Company

*Which Tools Make Sense for Your Company? ... continued*

### Find the Return on Investment for Web 2.0 Tools

Here's where the rubber meets the road. How do we determine whether your social media/networking efforts are paying off?

Fortunately, there are two big advantages to most Web 2.0 tools. They cost little or no money, and the more you use them to interact with others, the better your results. The major point to remember is that the higher your level of participation with others as a result of using these Web 2.0 tools, the better.

### Social Media

For blogs, you will want to track your traffic, your feed subscribers, your links and even the number of comments your posts receive. These measurements will tell you whether the content you are posting on your blog is attracting visitors, and also whether you are converting these visitors into readers. There are many free traffic-tracking services available, such as [SiteMeter](http://www.sitemeter.com) ([www.sitemeter.com](http://www.sitemeter.com)) and [StatCounter](http://www.statcounter.com) ([www.statcounter.com](http://www.statcounter.com)). Earlier, we discussed how to create an RSS feed for your blog with [FeedBurner](http://www.feedburner.com) ([www.feedburner.com](http://www.feedburner.com)). You can also use the service to track your number of feed subscribers. Finally, you can measure how many links your blog is receiving from other sites with [Technorati](http://www.technorati.com) ([www.technorati.com](http://www.technorati.com)). This shows you not only how your blog has performed over time, but it can also help you

### How to Choose the Best Web 2.0 Strategies for Your Company

*Which Tools Make Sense for Your Company? ... continued*

judge whether a recent post has been particularly popular with other bloggers by how many links it has received.

For video blogs, measure traffic, links and comments as well as the number of times each video was viewed. As with regular blogs, you can calculate how many of those who view your blog post or video leave comments. This can help you decide whether you need to craft your content in a way that encourages more readers to comment or whether you are doing enough to spark participation.

With podcasts, pay close attention to the number of subscribers you have. This shows whether or not you are building an audience for your podcast. Also consider that maintaining a regular schedule for releasing new podcasts is critical to maximizing exposure for your show.

#### **Social Networking**

With social networking sites, the return is a bit harder to measure. You can track the number of messages you receive on these services, the number of replies to any messages you post to groups on the sites, and the number of traffic referrals you receive to your Web site or blog from the networking site. This is another reason it's usually advised that companies maintain a presence on a social networking site, but only as part of a larger social-media marketing effort. When used in conjunction with other tools, such as blogs and e-commerce sites, a profile on a social networking site can help increase awareness of your business online.

### How to Choose the Best Web 2.0 Strategies for Your Company

*Which Tools Make Sense for Your Company? ... continued*

#### **Collaborative/Community Tools**

With collaborative and community tools, you are counting on other people to create most of the content. For example, with a forum, you can track how many new threads are created, or how many replies are posted. This number should increase over time, as should the number of registered users. This indicates that the current users are not only spending more time on your forum, but also promoting it to others.

With wikis and ratings sites, you also want to see an increasing level of input from visitors over time. Again, exposure for these sites can be greatly increased if they are used in conjunction with another social tool, such as a blog.

#### **Micro-Media/Formats**

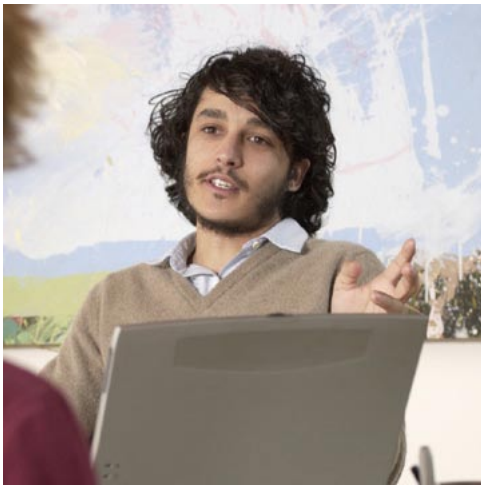
With micro-blogging services such as [Twitter \(www.twitter.com\)](http://www.twitter.com), you can easily track how many people are “following” you, or tracking what you write. If this number increases, it’s a good sign that people are interested in what you are saying, and that they are telling others. Some widgets also allow you to track how many people are reading your content. For example, the “Blog Friends” application for [Facebook \(www.facebook.com\)](http://www.facebook.com) will tell you how many “fans” there are of your blog posts. If this number increases, it’s a good sign you are creating content that readers enjoy and find value in.

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## CONCLUSION

By now you have been introduced to the variety of Web 2.0 tools, and have been given an overview of what they are and how to use them as tools to grow your business. Following this conclusion to this Guide is a lengthy list of resources that can further expand your understanding of these tools. The Appendix also provides examples of companies that are currently utilizing these tools successfully to grow their businesses.

While exploring and using these Web 2.0 tools, remember that their potential for growing your business lies in your ability to use them to promote value



and communication, not as tools to promote your business. This is a difficult concept for many companies to grasp about Web 2.0 tools because the natural tendency is to view these amazing tools as new promotional channels.

Instead, these social media and social networking sites work best for companies when they position these tools as ways to increase communication and value for customers. If you position these tools not as direct promotional channels but, instead, as channels to *directly provide value for customers*, your business will thrive. Some corporations, such as Dell, have realized this and are using social media to communicate with their customers online, and are gaining a huge advantage over their

### How to Choose the Best Web 2.0 Strategies for Your Company

#### *Conclusion ... continued*

competitors that are ignoring Web 2.0 tools. The good news is that we are still in the early days of utilizing Web 2.0 tools at the corporate level, so any company wishing to embrace these tools can still gain a huge head-start on its competitors that aren't willing to join them.

In conclusion, the best advice I have for companies concerning Web 2.0 tools is to be curious. Learn all you can about the amazing potential of Web 2.0 tools by reading guides such as this one. Begin to monitor the blogosphere with tools such as [Google Blog Search](http://blogsearch.google.com) (<http://blogsearch.google.com>) and [Technorati](http://www.technorati.com) ([www.technorati.com](http://www.technorati.com)), so you can see what is being said about your company right now. Don't be afraid to respond to bloggers, and to act on their suggestions. And as you become more comfortable interacting with bloggers, this could also make you more comfortable with the idea of starting your own blog. If you do, the bloggers that you have already responded to would no doubt be some of your first readers!

Web 2.0 tools hold such enormous potential because they make it incredibly easy for people to create and share content and information. For customers, this is very empowering; but at the same time, they can greatly benefit companies that are smart enough to reach out to customers via these tools. Thanks to Web 2.0 tools, companies have never been more empowered to communicate with and understand their customers. The growth potential for companies is enormous, and I wish you well in your efforts to grow your business via these amazing tools.

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## APPENDIX

### Web 2.0 Resources

#### Blogging Platforms

[Blogger](http://www.blogger.com) ([www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com))

[WordPress.org](http://www.wordpress.org) ([www.wordpress.org](http://www.wordpress.org))

[WordPress.com](http://www.wordpress.com) ([www.wordpress.com](http://www.wordpress.com))

[MovableType](http://www.movabletype.com) ([www.movabletype.com](http://www.movabletype.com))

#### Blogging Search and Resources

[Technorati](http://www.techorati.com) ([www.techorati.com](http://www.techorati.com))

[Google Blog Search](http://blogsearch.google.com) (<http://blogsearch.google.com>)

[Ice Rocket](http://www.icerocket.com) ([www.icerocket.com](http://www.icerocket.com))

[Blog Pulse](http://www.blogpulse.com) ([www.blogpulse.com](http://www.blogpulse.com))

[What is RSS?](http://www.whatisrss.com) ([www.whatisrss.com](http://www.whatisrss.com))

#### Examples of Superior Corporate Blogs

[Direct2Dell](http://www.direct2dell.com) ([www.direct2dell.com](http://www.direct2dell.com))

[LinkedIn's Blog](http://blog.linkedin.com) (<http://blog.linkedin.com>)

[Patagonia's The Cleanest Line](http://www.thecleanestline.com) ([www.thecleanestline.com](http://www.thecleanestline.com))

[Nuts About Southwest](http://www.blogsouthwest.com) (Southwest Airlines) ([www.blogsouthwest.com](http://www.blogsouthwest.com))

[The Fiskateers](http://www.fiskateers.com/blog) (Fiskars) ([www.fiskateers.com/blog](http://www.fiskateers.com/blog))

[A Thousand Words](http://1000words.kodak.com) (Kodak) (<http://1000words.kodak.com>)

[The Fortune 500 Business Blogging Wiki](http://www.socialtext.net/bizblogs/index.cgi)

([www.socialtext.net/bizblogs/index.cgi](http://www.socialtext.net/bizblogs/index.cgi))

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#### **Podcast Resources**

[Podcast Pickle](http://www.podcastpickle.com) ([www.podcastpickle.com](http://www.podcastpickle.com))

[Podcast Alley](http://www.podcastalley.com) ([www.podcastalley.com](http://www.podcastalley.com))

[The Podcast Network](http://www.thepodcastnetwork.com) ([www.thepodcastnetwork.com](http://www.thepodcastnetwork.com))

[World Podcast Forum](http://www.worldpodcastforum.com/forum) ([www.worldpodcastforum.com/forum](http://www.worldpodcastforum.com/forum))

#### **Podcast Hosting and Recording Services**

[Odeo](http://www.odeo.com) ([www.odeo.com](http://www.odeo.com))

[Hipcast](http://www.audioblog.com) ([www.audioblog.com](http://www.audioblog.com))

[Audacity](http://audacity.sourceforge.net) (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net>)

[Talkr](http://www.talkr.com) ([www.talkr.com](http://www.talkr.com))

[Podbean](http://www.podbean.com) ([www.podbean.com](http://www.podbean.com))

#### **Video Blog Resources**

[Videoblogging Universe](http://videoblogging-universe.com) (<http://videoblogging-universe.com>)

[Vlogdir](http://www.vlogdir.com) ([www.vlogdir.com](http://www.vlogdir.com))

[Yahoo! Video Blogging Group](http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/videoblogging)

(<http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/videoblogging>)

[Vlogging Assistance and Storyboarding](http://www.blogger.com/storyboarding-resources-and-vlogging-assistance)

([www.blogger.com/storyboarding-resources-and-vlogging-assistance](http://www.blogger.com/storyboarding-resources-and-vlogging-assistance))

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#### **Social Networking Sites and Resources**

[MySpace](http://www.myspace.com) ([www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com))

[Facebook](http://www.facebook.com) ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com))

[LinkedIn](http://www.linkedin.com) ([www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com))

[Hi5](http://www.hi5.com) ([www.hi5.com](http://www.hi5.com))

[Ning](http://www.ning.com) ([www.ning.com](http://www.ning.com))

[Black Planet](http://www.blackplanet.com) ([www.blackplanet.com](http://www.blackplanet.com))

[Eons](http://www.eons.com) ([www.eons.com](http://www.eons.com))

[What Is Social Networking?](http://www.whatissocialnetworking.com) ([www.whatissocialnetworking.com](http://www.whatissocialnetworking.com))

#### **Resources for Community and Collaborative Tools**

[PBWiki](http://www.pbwiki.com) ([www.pbwiki.com](http://www.pbwiki.com))

[The 25 Best Ecommerce Sites](#)

([www.time.com/time/digital/reports/ecommerce/25best.html](http://www.time.com/time/digital/reports/ecommerce/25best.html))

[BoardHost](http://www.boardhost.com) ([www.boardhost.com](http://www.boardhost.com))

[Guide to Adding a Message Board to Your Website](#)

(<http://www.2createawebsite.com/enhance/create-message-board.html>)

[Wikis in Plain English](#) (Video) ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dnL00TdMLY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dnL00TdMLY))



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*Appendix ... continued*

### **Micro-Media/Blogging Resources**

[Twitter](http://www.twitter.com) ([www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com))

[Tweetscan](http://www.tweetscan.com) (search Twitter) ([www.tweetscan.com](http://www.tweetscan.com))

[Jaiku](http://www.jaiku.com) ([www.jaiku.com](http://www.jaiku.com))

[Pounce](http://www.pounce.com) ([www.pounce.com](http://www.pounce.com))

[Widget Definition](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_widget) ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web\\_widget](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_widget))

### **Books**

*Blogging For Dummies* by Susannah Gardner and Shane Birley

*Blogs, Wikis, MySpace, and More: Everything You Want to Know About Using Web 2.0 but Are Afraid to Ask* by Terry Burrows

*How to Do Everything with Your Web 2.0 Blog* by Todd Stauffer

*Marketing to the Social Web: How Digital Customer Communities Build Your Business* by Larry Weber

*Videoblogging* by Jay Dedman

*Web 2.0 social networks* by Steve Weber

*The Weblog Handbook: Practical Advice on Creating and Maintaining Your Blog* by Rebecca Blood

*Wikis For Dummies* by Dan Woods and Peter Thoney

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Mack Collier** is a social media consultant, and author of [The Viral Garden](#) ([www.theviralgarden.com](http://www.theviralgarden.com)), a blog focusing on marketing and social media. He is also a frequent contributor to the website Marketing Profs, as well as the marketing blog Daily Fix.

Known for his “community-first” approach to blogging and social media, Mack focuses on teaching companies how they can use social media to excite and engage their customers, as well as better understand and market to them. Mack is a requested speaker and has advised companies of all sizes on their social media strategies, from small businesses and startups, to companies as large as Dell and Microsoft. His writings have been referenced in several mainstream publications and websites, including The Washington Post, MSNBC.com, Ad Age, CNET, and The Boston Globe.



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### ABOUT MARKETINGPROFS

Founded in January 2001, MarketingProfs is a publishing company that specializes in providing both strategic and tactical marketing know-how for marketing and business professionals in organizations worldwide through a full range of online media.

With more than 300,000 members and 300 contributors, MarketingProfs provides marketers with practical tools and information in many forms, including: articles, online seminars, templates, benchmark survey reports, buyer's guides, a discussion forum and a blog. Updated weekly, MarketingProfs' content helps professionals to stay current and effective.