



## **Social Media 101: A Beginner's Guide**

If you've heard all the buzz about "social media" but you still aren't sure what it actually *means* for your business, here's a handy primer to help clarify all those pesky Web 2.0 terms... like, for example, "Web 2.0"...

### **Glossary (*aka, "What Are They Talking About?"*)**

**Aggregator** – In a social media context, an aggregator usually refers to a website or service, like Google Reader or iTunes, that enables a user to collect (or "aggregate") all of the text, audio and video content he/she subscribes to from across the entire internet and have it all arrive in one easy to use place. Think of it like an email inbox for everything you read, watch and listen to online.

**Blog** – The standard abbreviation for "web log" (*a/k/a* a web journal), a blog, is the web version of an op-ed column. Usually written by armchair journalists or hobbyists in their specific field, blogs are the modern equivalent of '90s "zines." Some blogs are intended solely as a creative or informational outlet for the author(s), while others develop higher levels of mass media authority due to the credibility of the author or the fervor of that blog's fans. Corporate blogs are now becoming a necessary tool to reach out to present and future customers. If done well, the corporate blog provides expert advice as well as providing a forum for interested or concerned customers.

**Captcha** – Developed by the web wizards at Carnegie Mellon University, a "captcha" code is one way to verify that the person attempting to leave you a blog comment or add you on a social network is actually a human being, rather than an automated commenting / adding program (which, in most cases, are used for spam, which we all agree is evil). A captcha code requires a person to re-type a series of letters / numbers which have been encoded or obscured in a way that would be discernible by a human but would (usually) baffle a computer program.

**Comment** – Most blogs allow their readers to leave comments as an addendum to the original post as a way to continue the conversation. Usually text-based, some blogs and websites allow for audio and video comments as well. These comments can often be seen as “link bait” to lead readers back to the commenter’s own website. Some unscrupulous companies and websites litter the blog world with completely unrelated comments that, as in email, are referred to as “spam.” Fortunately, most blogs have developed safeguards to avoid this.

**Flame** – A term carried over from the days of web forums, “flaming” occurs when a blog conversation descends into baseless insults, name-calling and other conduct unbecoming of a well-heeled web citizen. Most often encountered on political and sports-themed blogs, flaming can pop up wherever strong opinions meet arguable facts (or an obvious lack thereof). This is when it becomes necessary to remind your blog’s readers to play nice or they will be blocked from the site.

**Link Bait** – A (frequently) derisive term used to signify forum posts, blog comments or other seemingly innocuous web content which, upon closer inspection, has less to do with adding to the conversation at hand and more to do with leading participants away from the initial subject and directly to the website of the person who posted the supplemental content. (For example, visiting a blog post about a baseball player’s recent injury and leaving a comment about how that player wouldn’t have gotten hurt if he’d been wearing your company’s brand of shin guards – with a link leading to your company’s shin guard sales page – would be considered link bait. And, most likely, would be flamed by the blog’s other readers.)

**Meme** – A meme is a phrase or concept whose impact upon the cultural zeitgeist far exceeds its intended usage. For example, in 2003, marketing guru Seth Godin authored a book called “The Purple Cow: Transform Your Business by Being Remarkable,” which focused on creating businesses and ideas that are so unusual as to naturally generate their own word-of-mouth publicity. His visual shorthand for such a concept was the image of a purple cow, which would obviously stir discussion if one existed in reality. Hence, any such “outside-the-box” idea or business may be referred to by those familiar with the concept as a Purple Cow.

**Podcast** – A catch-all term used to describe audio or video content distributed on the internet – as in, not a broadcast, but a podcast. Originally intended to refer to content that could be downloaded and listened to on a portable playback device (i.e. the iPod), the term has since become outmoded, as this same audio and video content can be distributed and consumed in far more ways than the coiners of the term ever expected. However, since a more accurate term has yet to become widely accepted, this misnomer is still generally applied to all audio / video content distributed online.

**RSS** – The acronym for “Really Simple Syndication,” an RSS feed is the way most people subscribe to the web content of their choice. The creator of a blog / podcast will create an itemized list of each post / episode, usually in an XML file – which is basically a variant of a simple HTML file – and host that file on their website’s server. When someone wants to subscribe to that content, they can click the link to that site’s RSS feed(s) and then that feed is added to the aggregator of their choice. (Or, to use an analogy, just like most magazines allow you to order back issues from an order form in the current issue, think of RSS feeds as a website’s back issue order form AND a subscription card, all in one.)

**Social Media** – A catch-all term for blogs, audio, video, and any other web content (photography, animation, etc.) that encourages interaction among the creators AND the readers / consumers / users of the content. As opposed to traditional media, which is seen as a one-way monologue delivered from the media publisher to the masses, social media is considered a two-way dialogue where the readers and recipients can have an impact upon both the content and the creator. Some social media relies upon direct action from the viewer / user (such as video mash-ups, audio remixes, etc.), whereas other examples are considered “social” due to their implied invitation to create a conversation among all participants (like blog posts, widgets, etc.).

**SMS** – The acronym for Short Message Service, SMS is often elaborated as “SMS text,” which is mildly redundant. Services which enable users to send and receive updates via text messages on their mobile devices often denote such features as “SMS compatible” or other variations of the term.

**Social Network** – Any web destination built around one or more communities of users, all of whom are interconnected by various levels of familiarity and are therefore able to share information and content with other users, within the limits of varying restrictions. Popular examples include MySpace, Facebook and LinkedIn, although there are innumerable others.

**Tags** – Similar to keywords, tags are descriptive words or phrases used to aid site visitors and search engines in locating related web content. Most blog and podcast websites provide an editable field that allows submitters of content to add any tags they think will help others find their media. (For example, a video clip of a chili competition in Boston might be tagged “chili,” “food,” “contest,” “Boston,” “beantown,” “Red Sox” and “Patriots,” because even though sports fans may not initially be looking for chili videos, Boston-based sports fans might be interested in the competition *if only* they knew it existed. When tagging, creativity counts.)

**Trackback** – The act of citing another person’s blog post within your own, and accrediting the original blogger with having started the conversation. Most blog

services allow for automated trackbacks, which then appear in the comment section of the original author's blog post. Highly popular (or controversial) blog posts will often have dozens of trackbacks, each of which will link to the (other, newer) blog post written by the commenter, allowing for curious readers to follow the conversation in multiple directions (and across multiple websites or blogs).

**User-Generated Content** – Any text, audio, video, image or other web content created by a member or user of a site or service. Intended to denote content created by “amateurs,” fans or the general public, rather than paid professionals, it can also apply to content created by literal users of a product or service, such as the commercials created by fans of Doritos that were then aired and voted upon by viewers of the 2007 Super Bowl.

**“Web 2.0”** – The nebulous term that refers to the highly-interactive, community-driven web culture of the mid-2000s. (From a cynic's point of view, this can also be a term applied to any seemingly pointless internet “business” that relies upon user evangelism and a falsified sense of “belonging,” apparently to the exclusion of any legitimate revenue stream or business plan. Often characterized by company names conspicuously missing at least one vowel, or which do not appear to be actual words at all – i.e., Flickr, Frappr, Twitter, Vimeo, Ning, etc.)

## 10 Great Social Media Starter Sites

**Blip** ( <http://www.blip.tv/> ) – The closest thing the web video world has to an actual “channel,” Blip is home to the web's budding TV and film moguls. Unlike YouTube, their services are designed for original video creators who intend to produce multiple episodes or videos over a long period of time, rather than arbitrary and unconnected content. Blip's homepage features a rotating lineup of some of the web's best original video series, with easy navigation, searchability and subscription options.

**Blogger** ( <http://www.blogger.com/> ) – The best beginner blog service, powered by Google, allows users to surf blogs randomly or search them using keywords / tags. Once you feel you've gotten the hang of reading and commenting on blogs, Blogger makes it incredibly easy to launch a blog of your own – or multiple blogs, all under the same login.

**Facebook** ( <http://www.facebook.com/> ) – Originally a social network only available to college students, Facebook has since opened its doors to all users, resulting in explosive growth. Facebook's designers are dedicated to open source code, which allows anyone with a working knowledge of the programming languages used to power Facebook to create applications and widgets that will run within it – essentially, a social programmer's paradise.

**Flickr** ( <http://flickr.com/> ) – One of the largest photo-sharing sites on the planet (and powered by Yahoo), Flickr offers users the ability to host, share, comment

upon, print and order merchandise featuring the photos they (and their fellow users) have taken and uploaded to the site.

**Google Reader** ( <http://www.google.com/reader/view/> ) – The default RSS feed aggregator for most social media explorers, even longtime web veterans admit that its simplicity and functionality make it hard to replace, even though other, flashier services are available.

**LinkedIn** ( <http://linkedin.com/> ) – The working professional's social network, LinkedIn allows coworkers and collaborators to connect with each other online, recommend each other via testimonials, and introduce their colleagues to one another if they don't already know each other firsthand.

**Mashable** ( <http://mashable.com/> ) – *The* blog for Web 2.0, Mashable reports on all new products, websites and services for the social media set, including regular “Top 10” or “100 Best” lists that serve as mini-primers for everything from contact management to web video tips and everything in between – plus, a touch of opinionated snark for color.

**MySpace** ( <http://myspace.com/> ) – The original trend-setting social network, now owned by FOX/News Corp, perceived privacy and content control issues have caused MySpace to fall out of favor with the more web-savvy Facebook crowd. Recent improvements have returned the site to a more stable, enjoyable atmosphere, but there's one large reason MySpace will continue to be undeniably relevant regardless of performance issues: their user base is *gigantic* – it's perpetually among the top 10 most-frequented websites on the planet.

**Twitter** ( <http://twitter.com/> ) – A cross between a public forum and a private instant-messaging tool, Twitter is compatible across multiple web applications and mobile devices. It's also, for many users, inexplicably addictive.

**YouTube** ( <http://youtube.com/> ) – The best-known and most highly-trafficked web video site in the world, YouTube is a repository for user-generated videos, classic commercials, music videos and pop culture oddities of all stripes. If it's ever been committed to video, odds are, it's on YouTube (legally or not).

Authored by Creative Concepts ( [www.Creative-Conceptsllc.com](http://www.Creative-Conceptsllc.com) ) (April 2008). To get a tour of social media for your business, contact Creative Concepts directly.

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