

SOCIAL MEDIA

The latest happenings in national and international social media plus advice from social media experts

The social media revolution is over

The Social Media Revolution is well and truly over. There should be no doubt in your mind that Social Media is here to stay – Social Media is not a fad, it is not going away, it is evolving and with it communications and strategies must evolve, writes CHRISTIAN HUGHES.

Social Media is undergoing a distinct phase of evolution. Part of this phase is being driven by the continued improvement and ever increasing penetration of smartphone technologies. The US alone saw a jump from 16% to 21% of mobile phone subscribers with unlimited data plans (between December 2008 and December 2009) last year, and an overall smartphone ownership increase from 11% to 17%.

However, the biggest factor driving the evolution of Social Media is the users themselves.

SOCIAL MEDIA IS FED BY THE REAL WORLD

Social Media is the way that people digitally communicate with each other in open publically accessible platforms.

Social Media itself is a natural progression of digital communications from one-to-one, to one-to-many, to many-to-many. But beyond straight forward chat, Social Media is the democratisation of information, and the transformation of people from content readers into content creators. This content is the key factor in Social Media's evolution.

For the vast majority of Social Media users the content that they create is personal. The thing that all of this content has in common is that it's all based on real-world, offline interactions and experiences.

To use Social Media you have to be part of the real-world. Someone sitting in isolation in a box will have little or nothing to contribute to a Social Media profile, whatever form it takes.

Your own personal interests and likes drive your Social Media consumption and creation. These things will most likely also strongly affect your personal community. Social Media is a direct extension of your offline interactions, of your life.

NOW THE REAL WORLD IS BEING FED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

What we are experiencing now, however, is an evolution of this content creation. While Social Media was very much about the offline world



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driving the creation of online content, there is a growing trend of offline activity being driven by a want to create specific online content.

People who previously used Social Media purely to share and profile what they were already doing offline, such as taking photographs or expressing their opinion on events they attended or films they watched, are now choosing certain offline interactions so as to create particular online content.

Social Media has in effect come full circle.

GOWALLA BE GOOD

Consider what may happen when you go to meet friends. You arrive at a bar and whereas previously your first reaction was to either look for your friends or grab a drink or get a table, now your first reaction is to check-in to Foursquare or Gowalla.



Perhaps you're sitting down to a meal in a restaurant and as your food arrives your first reaction isn't to dig in and eat. Instead you reach for your phone to 'foodporn' the fantastic dish in front of you with a picture on Twitter.

These may be the extreme examples but even for those that don't use Twitter or one of the many location-based Social Media services out there, consider how you've recently chosen what book to read or movie to watch.

Social Media is driving your offline experiences and helping you determine where to go and what to do.

THE AMBASSADOR

So where does Social Media go next? Well the person who can predict that, or at the very least make the right guess, is probably the next Biz Stone or Mark Zuckerberg.

People will continue to consume information and with the colossal amount of information being generated by the modern digital world they will look for ways to streamline information.

Social Media is just that. Social Media is where you will turn to seek advice in an ever increasing manner for daily life.

The next big question isn't where Social Media goes next, it's how will businesses use Social Media to promote their brands and products in more dynamic and intuitive ways?

What will marketers do to turn you from a consumer into an advocate? How will they convince you to be an ambassador for their brand, recommending it to friends and fans? That's the challenge.

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