

## Let's get social

By Jonni Hegenderfer

Communication is a constant but the tools used to communicate are always evolving. With innovation in Web technology, Social Media now is a staple of communication for both personal and business reasons. From networking sites like Facebook and LinkedIn to blogs and microblogging platforms like Twitter and everything in between and beyond, conversations about brands and companies are taking place online every day—with or without your input. Social Media networks and tools provide individuals and special interest groups around the globe with an open forum to instantly share thoughts, ideas, compliments or complaints on any topic.



*As Chief Executive Officer, Chief Vision Officer (CVO) and founder, Jonni Hegenderfer stays up nights envisioning new paths for effective client communications—paths that have led to the agency's LIF™ Style PR and Social LIF™ strategies. By day, she counsels clients on brand-building initiatives, issues management challenges and break-through strategic executions.*

Companies must join the community and take part in the conversation in an open, transparent manner. The luxury of one-on-one marketing is now possible allowing a company to make a personal connection with its customers in a place and time that is convenient for each of them. The Web touches hundreds of millions of people every moment of every day. There is no doubt, Social Media has already changed the way companies interact with their stakeholders—and the options are just beginning to be known.

Establishing a Social Media footprint requires close attention to the three C's—Community, Conversation and Credibility.

**Community:** Your enthusiasts are out there. They're fans of your product or service, evangelists of your brand. And there's strength in numbers.

Use social media to build a global community providing a forum for fans to gather, talk, share and discuss their experiences, questions and observations. If customers are using the Web to find information about your business, to talk about you, or to buy from you, they will be eager for your company to connect and engage in the conversation.

Online communities—whether on a blog or a forum, perhaps a photo sharing site—create a personal, more intimate relationship between a business and its stakeholders. When you take the further step to connect enthusiasts with each other, you'll not only find new advocates, but you'll encourage your customers to come back to engage with each other—and your company—again and again. The research is clear—fans bring new fans to the party.

**Conversation:** It's a new, connected, interactive world where everyone has a voice and can be heard. Companies can no longer shout their messages into the void and wait to be heard. Communication works best when there is a shift from "broadcasting" out to a two-way, interactive conversation between the company and its various stakeholders.

Those who know and love your business want to talk with you and about you. Those who don't know you or those who may know you, but don't prefer your brand—or worse, disapprove or dislike your brand and/or products or services—they also need to be engaged in a forthright discussion. Conversation about your brand is happening online whether you're a part of it or not. Participating in the discussion to clarify issues, present facts and positions and to new directions for discussion is a far more effective strategy than turning off the channel or shutting down the pipeline.

Listening is a pillar of good conversation, too. Businesses that converse well learn to listen to their communities. Your community wants to know that you are listening and that you hear them.

There are a multitude of channels for listening to the online conversation and for creating dynamic, engaged dialogue with your stakeholders.

What you learn from this engaged community can add exponential value to your business, and create lasting relationships with your customers.

**Credibility:** Open, transparent businesses engender trust with their customers and communities. In today's instant information society, businesses that are not transparent are assumed to have reason to hide. While previously businesses could create and control brand and corporate messages, they must now be "forum" focused.

The Web has broken down the barriers. The online community is creating brand assets both for you, and in spite of you. Videos on YouTube. Photos on Flickr. Blog posts and tweets complimenting or criticizing your customer service. Podcasts by brand enthusiasts talking about your products. In reality, your brand is owned now by the community as much as it is by your company.

Smart companies are embracing this sea change and learning to work with their customers to redefine brands according to consumer relevance and need. Enlist online enthusiasts to serve as ambassadors for your brand and raise the bar for brand collaboration and trust.

Your stakeholders are your greatest assets. By listening to them, building relationship and allowing them to participate in building your business, you demonstrate the value of their input, insights and opinions as a critical piece of your success.

### Quick Facts

#### JSH&A

*JSH&A is an award-winning public relations agency known for its trademarked LIF™ Style marketing approach, Social LIF™ practice and issues management expertise. JSH&A is redefining strategic public relations with high-impact campaigns that build brands and corporate reputations. More information can be found by visiting the company's social media newsroom at [www.jsha.com/blog/socialmedianewsroom](http://www.jsha.com/blog/socialmedianewsroom).*

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 in the last  
**20**  
 years.



And, a lot hasn't.

While the Millennium has changed, technology and communication techniques have evolved. The LIF™ experts at JSH&A continue to perfect the art of connecting brands with key consumers. For the past 20 years, our PR programs, driven by LIF, a.k.a. *Life Influence Factors*, have made our clients' products shine in the marketplace. Just as brands and services are always changing, so too are the tools consumers use to communicate. The JSH&A Social LIF™ strategies integrate the latest online and word-of-mouth techniques with traditional media outreach for conversations that directly impact and influence consumers. For 20 years, JSH&A helped bring LIF™ to some of the best brands and companies in America, including Beam Global Spirits & Wine, Hershey®'s, McDonald's®, and redbox®. Are your PR strategies full of LIF™?

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