



Your website needs a social life

You're proud of your website and you should be: it's easy to use, looks great and is packed with fresh content. But while you've been working hard to keep your website current and compelling, the wider web has been changing around you. And the way people approach websites like yours is changing too.

A website used to be a place to read things.

» Now it's a place to do things.

A website used to be only about creating great content.

» Now it's also about creating great web experiences.

A website used to be a one-way medium.

» Now it's more than two-way, it's a many-to-many conversation.

Any site worth its salt needs to enable user interaction and content sharing

GARLINGHOUSE, YAHOO

This 'Social Web' transformation – driven by the wildly popular social media experiences like Facebook, YouTube, Flickr and Twitter – is changing the way the web works and the way your visitors think.

The social web is about fully engaging users and treating them as more than just consumers of content or adherents to your agenda. In the social web, visitors are full participants, sharing their views, their content and their contacts.

The result is an exponential increase in user involvement that is changing the fundamental principles and dynamics of marketing.

Brands that succeed in tapping into this enormous power will reap the rewards – in traffic, loyalty, revenues and market share. And brands that fail to learn the new rules of the social web will be left with the scraps.

This Primer is an introduction to the concepts of the social web and a guide to their implications for digital marketers like you. Yes, we have an agenda here: we're a CMS vendor with particularly strong support for social web functionality. But we promise to hold the sales pitch until the very end, (by which time we hope we've earned it).

We hope you enjoy this eBook and that it will help you think about how to bring your web into the social era. We also hope you'll give us a call to discuss your next build (but hey, no rush).

Go forth and socialize!
The EPIServer team



What is a social website?

Glad you asked...

A social website is any site that invites people to participate by publicly sharing their thoughts, feedback, opinions, links and any content they've created as well as images and videos.

It also encourages them to share their experiences with friends or colleagues – whether on the site or beyond – and makes it easy to do so.

Your customers are building your business for you.

The social spectrum

Where does your site sit?

Almost every website has at least some degree of sociability – but some live, breathe, eat and sleep in social mode.

Where do you fall on the Social Spectrum?



Wherever your sites are along the spectrum, you're probably experiencing an inexorable pull towards the right. Don't fight it. Go with the flow...

Our users love to connect through shared passions, whether it is the music that they love or the causes they believe in.

CHRISTINE NORMAN, PRESIDENT, MTV

Why you need to be more sociable

No, you can't just sit this one out

There are plenty of reasons to make your website more social than it is today. Here are some of the most important ones:

» Engage people more fully

Your customers, prospects and target audiences are human beings. And they appreciate being asked what they think about things. Nobody likes to be talked at. It's not polite.

» Boost credibility

People are more likely to trust another user than they are to trust you. Harness that force to your advantage by giving a forum to your brand advocates – yes you give airtime to detractors too, but this in itself shows confidence and boosts credibility.

» Increase stickiness

'Unique visitors' is no longer the killer metric of the web. Engagement metrics like time on site, page views and repeat visits are. Anyone with a budget can generate raw traffic. It takes sociability to turn that traffic into something more valuable.

» Listen to your users

Instant feedback from your customers and site visitors is of incredible value – but often an under-exploited asset. A social website gives your brand ears.

» Influence your market

You can't join the conversation until there's a conversation to join. Once you've started one, it's a great opportunity to get involved, address negative comments, defuse time bombs, acknowledge positive input, reward your brand advocates and generally get your views across.

» Better target your messages

The more you know about someone, the better you can tailor your messages to them. Active involvement in your community gives you priceless insight into attitudes, behaviors and propensity to buy. It also sharpens your segmentation and feeds your personalization efforts.

*If your best friend says,
'Hey these jeans are the best
things I've ever seen' you just
might buy them.*

JOHN SQUIRE, COREMETRICS



» Harvest great content

User-generated content – from blog comments to photos and video – enriches your site and makes it more interesting, entertaining and valuable to other users. And it's free if you ask nicely.

» Boost your search engine results

Google spiders love lots of new, relevant content. The more you can attract, the better you'll do on search results pages and the more traffic you'll generate.

» Generate buzz

Static websites that don't engage visitors look and feel like ghost towns. Websites that are bubbling with activity, community and participation show that your brand is young, vital, successful and popular.

What, you need more reasons than that?



Forrester Research's 'Five Eras'

Are we there yet?

Forrester's independent report 'The Future of the Social Web' says that the online social experience will evolve through five eras:

» The era of social relationships

This was the first stage, in which people connected to each other using simple profiles and friending features to share information, discussions and media.

» The era of social functionality

Today's social networks support social interaction apps and provide new meaning and ways to communities.

» The era of social colonization

The next stage will be one in which users take their social connections with them as they travel the web (think OpenID and Facebook Connect).

» The era of social context

As sites recognize personal identities, they will begin to customize the user experience accordingly, in the next 12 months.

» The era of social commerce

Starting about two years from now, the power will shift from corporate websites and CRM systems to communities, which will become the driving force for innovation.

Source: Forrester Research Inc
'The Future of the Social Web' April 27th, 2009

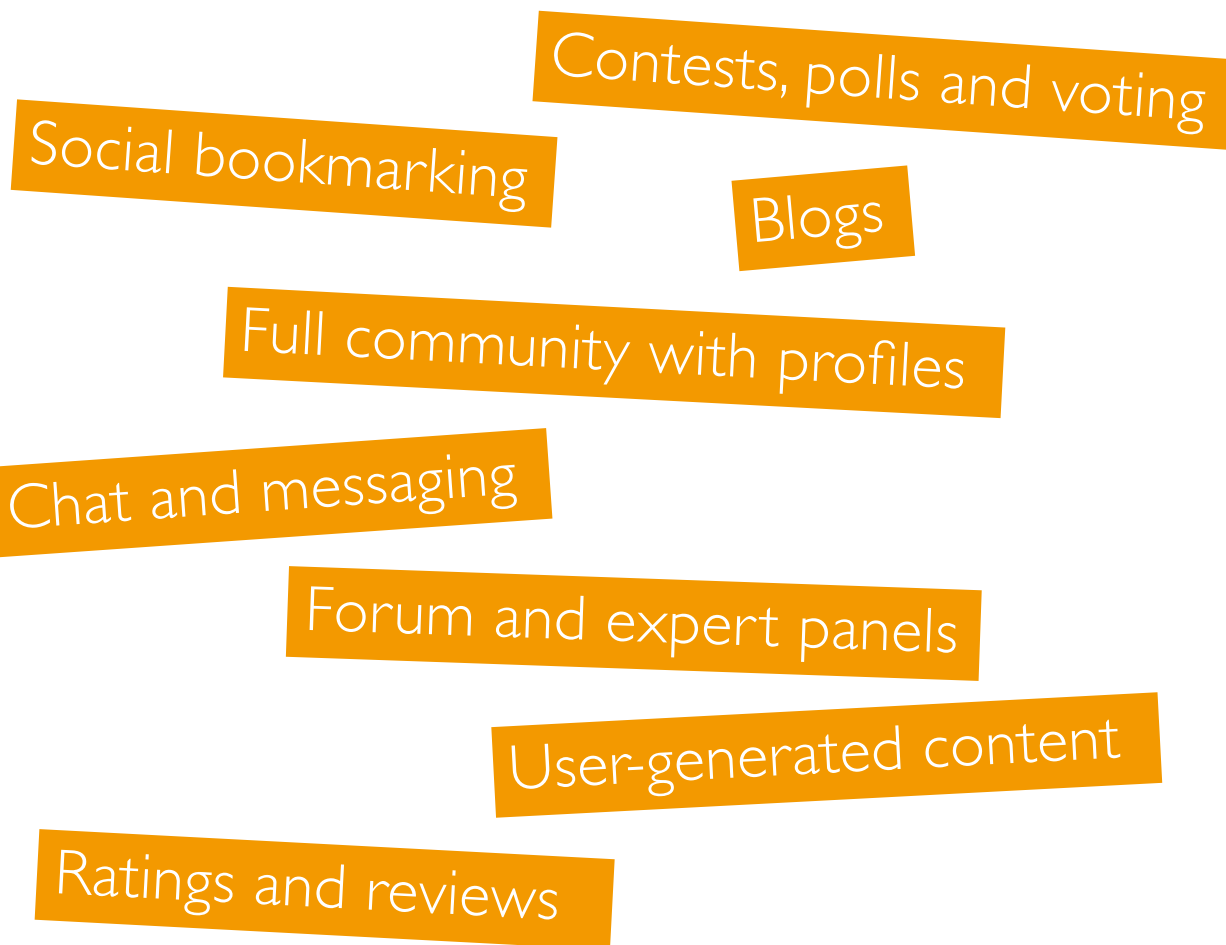
Clearly, the social web isn't standing still. The key is to get into the game and develop your social skills as you grow.

When we added the ability to comment on your friends' status updates to the Facebook mobile site, we didn't expect we'd receive nearly a million status comments in the first 24 hours.

JOHN SQUIRE, COREMETRICS

The elements of the social web

Let's take them one at a time



Blogs

Start here

A brand without a blog is a brand with nothing to say. If you're just starting out on your social web journey, start here.

Depending on your target audience, a blog may well be the most important thing you can do on your site. As recent research (by Forrester and others) has shown, 'digital natives' increasingly expect the brands they value to have a blog – it's an open, informal way to share your thoughts and a great way to show that you're open to comment and feedback.

What you actually say in your blog is clearly important but the social part is what happens around each post, including:

Commenting

Not allowing comments is like going to a party and sticking your fingers in your ears. You may or may not choose to moderate all comments but you must encourage them. Invite comment in each post. Ask questions. Solicit input.

Sharing

Make it easy for people to share your posts with friends – using social bookmarking, tagging or 'Send to a Friend' features.



www.lta.org.uk, the winner of a 2009 Webby award is, among many other things, a platform for player blogs. Site built by Fortune Cookie

Blogrolls

Here's where you can link to other blogs, thereby encouraging them to link to you. That's good for new traffic and SEO.

Profiles

Profile your bloggers to show the real person behind the post.

Tagging

Tags and tag clouds make your blog easy to search and navigate.

Ratings and reviews

Feel the fear and do it anyway

A few years ago, letting people rate and review content and products looked like sheer madness. Now it's practically a default setting.

If you believe in your products and your marketing, you've got nothing to fear and everything to gain. If you don't believe in them, you've got bigger problems than just your website (go fix those first).

Brands that add ratings and reviews are always pleasantly surprised about how fair and positive the public tends to be. Yes, there will be cranks with axes to grind, but for every stinker there are hundreds of happy advocates.

In some case, you don't want to moderate your ratings and reviews – far better to let the community itself respond to any unfairness. The idea is to solicit honest feedback, in public, and to show that you put that feedback to good use by improving your products and services.

In short, ratings and reviews give you the kind of instant insight into your brand that many companies pay millions to find out. And the wisdom of crowds can help you to get some great ideas for improving your products. On your site, all this insight is free – if you bother to ask.

All businesses must now think about a customer base that broadcasts, that networks, that voices its opinions loudly, in the open...

CHRIS BROGAN, CHRISBROGAN.COM



Lets mix (www.letsmix.com) is an online platform where you can listen to music mixes and upload, share and promote your own music mixes. People can vote and rate your music.



The mission at the non-profit MyGoodDeed Inc (www.911dayofservice.org) is to create a lasting and forward-looking legacy that forever remembers and honors the victims of 9/11. Here you can share your good deeds or service plans, or recognize someone else for what they did to help others. You can start new projects and find existing ones.

Forums and expert panels

Making connections

Running a forum on your site is a big step towards an all-singing, all-dancing social web experience. But it's best not to think about a forum as a way to create community. Instead, it's a way to serve a community that's already there, eager to link up and share their thoughts.

Starting a forum on a site that has low traffic or low engagement with users may lead to an under-populated, inactive service that says more bad things than good about your brand. We often recommend testing the waters by monitoring blog comments or starting an expert panel first.

An expert panel stops short of a full forum, letting a few experts (in-house or outsourced) to answer questions posted by visitors – to create a more dynamic, open FAQ. The threshold for success is lower than a full forum but it often leads to one.

Forums are a great way to encourage your best brand advocates to step forward, acting as guides to the newer customers and prospects. They're especially valuable for sites that involve:

- Technical topics** – where people may need tips
- Hobbies and pastimes** – for sharing a passion
- Fan bases** – fanning the flames
- Niche interests** – connecting the like-minded

Social bookmarking and favorites

The new web utility

Millions of people use social bookmarking services like Delicious, Digg and StumbleUpon to keep track of their favorite web content.

If you make it easy for them to bookmark your pages, you're also making it easy for them to promote your site and boost its search engine rankings. Adding social bookmarking is too easy not to do. And 'favorites' is a way of letting users store and tag their favorite content on their own profile page so they can easily find it later. Making a piece of content a favorite also gives a quality and popular signal to other users.

The enhancement of social networking features will bring users in. Then there's another side effect – that they go and get their friends and pull them into it.

JAY ADELSON, CEO, DIGG



At Community of Sweden's website (www.communityofsweden.com) you can share your favorite vacation places in Sweden. You can share stories, photos, receive comments, rates.

User-generated content

Tap into an infinite talent pool

YouTube, Flickr and Facebook have fuelled a new social force: sharing content with friends and the general public online.

As a brand, you can ride the wave by letting your visitors upload their photos, videos or stories to the web.

As an ongoing feature – to deepen relationships and help capture the spirit of the brand

As a campaign – encouraging people to explore your theme

As a contest – with voting, rating and prizes for the winners.

User-generated content sites need some kind of moderation to ensure materials are appropriate and legal. But they're a lot easier to develop than they look (with the right CMS) and can add a lot to your site traffic and search results.

Thirteen hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute.

THEFUTUREBUZZ.COM



At the World Climate Community (www.worldclimatecommunity.com) the users create the content. The aim is to bring people, ideas, opinions and visions from all over the world together.

Contests, polls and voting

Engagement made easy

Contests, polls and voting are an easy way to get visitors involved without necessarily asking them to identify themselves (though you can do that if you like).

They're also a fun, open way to engage your community with a simple, fast feedback mechanism. Results can be displayed in real time or on a given reveal date.



At Today's Golfer (www.todaysgolfer.co.uk) you can vote on other members' swing. You can participate in different forums to discuss golf, receive tips from professionals, upload images and vote in polls about all matters golf.

Chat and messaging Gossip is good for business

More and more social sites let users see who else is online so they can initiate a chat session -- or leave a message for someone who's not online.

Some companies take this a step further, making it easy to contact or chat with their experts, business partners or even their customers whenever they're online. Offering visitors a quick chat is a great way of tapping into great knowledge -- or getting people to help man your site for you!

This kind of thing encourages a sense of community and helps visitors feel that the community really belongs to them and their friends. It also helps you deepen relationships and engage more fully with your community.

Full community with profiles

Social nirvana

You know you've arrived when you can host your own fully-fledged community on your site.

A community asks people to sign up, create a personal profile full of relevant facts, then join in group activities, including things like forums, news groups, blogs and user-generated content services.

Today's users expect a community to be full-featured -- they're used to Facebook and YouTube -- so don't skimp on richness or usability.

Your freestanding community can also be integrated with public social media sites, grabbing feeds, posting updates or 'tweeting' to Twitter.



At EPiServerWorld (world.episerver.com) you create your personal profile and can participate in all activities and receive full visibility. You can start your blog, comment on other blogs, ask questions etc.

Four of the top ten domains accessed via mobile devices are social networking sites.

OPENWAVE REPORT, OCTOBER 2009

How to go social

Top ten tips

Adding social features to your website isn't difficult but if you get it wrong, your failure will be rather... public. So here are a few tips:

» Moderate gently

Fairness is the core principle of the social web. If you kill every negative comment, you lose respect as a moderator and alienate your community. Better still to respond constructively to negative feedback in the same forum it was given. Only resort to censoring or banning in extreme cases.

» Open your kimono

There's no point going social if you're going to be overly defensive or 'corporate'. The social web is a great opportunity to lower your guard, give the spin doctors a Valium™ and just respond to people openly and honestly – you'd be amazed how much they're willing to forgive if you just say sorry.

» Look after your super-users

Every community has champions – the people who really identify with your brand (or the activity you're involved with) and get stuck right in. Identify these super-users and make sure they feel welcome and valued. Give them special privileges. Reward their loyalty. They'll return the favor.

» Walk before you run

Don't launch an über-community if you don't have any traffic, a blog or simpler forums. Build your community from the ground up, listening to your users as you grow.

» Don't forget great content

Social media never lives in a vacuum. You still need to populate your community areas with great content from your CMS to keep people interested, involved and coming back for more. You can't expect users to do all the heavy lifting. Just make sure your CMS can easily connect content and community (we know of one that's great at it).



» Respect privacy

This is absolutely essential. The kind of people who participate in web communities are the kind to get really rabid when their trust is abused. Only use data in exactly the way you say you will. No exceptions.

» Go beyond your site

A social relationship with your community doesn't stop at the borders of your own site. Go out and meet people where they congregate. Join Facebook groups, comment on blogs, set up a YouTube channel and a Twitter account. All are great forums for listening – and for recruiting people to your social website.

» Get the back end right

Some social features (like social bookmarking) are fairly easy to set up. Others require a significant amount of back-end programming and integration. Make sure your developers know what they're doing – and start with a Content Management System that you know can handle the job, one that the social functionality is already pre-coded and templated.

» Performance matters

Social sites make much greater demands on your servers than simple content sites – especially if user-generated photos and videos are involved. You may need a platform that can handle millions of users and billions of page views per month. If your CMS can't scale to the demands of the social web, you risk frustrating (or losing) your users.

» Analytics are critical

You need to actively monitor and measure all activities on your social pages just as you would on the rest of your site. Make sure your social features include rich reporting and analysis. User stats to drive insight.



The role of your CMS

The Content Management System you choose will make a big difference in the success of your social web initiatives. The right CMS will not only make it much easier to introduce social features – it will also make for richer, simpler, easier-to-use social web experiences.

Ideally, you need a CMS that is:

» **Social-centric** – not every CMS is built to handle the more challenging social features discussed here. If social media is not in the DNA of your CMS, shop around. Ask to see the community templates.

» **Editor-friendly** – social sites take more editing and administration than static sites. You need a CMS that makes it easy for non-technical editors to add content, create pages and moderate comments.

» **Developer-friendly** – developers shouldn't have to learn a whole new language just to create social features for your site. You need a CMS based on a standard, open platform with lots of tools and templates to accelerate development.

» **Modular** – your CMS should always be growing by letting you add on new modules as they're developed.

» **Widely used** – a popular CMS has an active developer community to contribute modules, ideas, advice and experience.

» **Actively supported** – open source is great but when the going gets social, you'll want a CMS that has someone standing behind it – for support, development, training and advice.



Introducing EPiServer CMS

The EPiServer CMS is not only one of the world's fastest-growing, it's also the most social-centric CMS on the market. EPiServer helps you:

» **Develop better social sites**

With full-featured implementations of all the core social elements, from rich social blogging to full-fledged communities and everything in between.

» **Get them to market faster**

With a powerful developer environment based entirely on the Microsoft .NET platform.

» **Manage them more easily**

With simple, intuitive, role-based administration and drag and drop editing.

» **Monetize them**

With powerful analytics, segmentation, targeting and campaign management.

The core EPiServer CMS is a powerful platform for building any kind of website whether it is content-rich, highly social, design-driven or all three. You can extend its functionality with a growing portfolio of modules from EPiServer and our developer partners.

We're won't drown you in brochure-speak here – just a few highlights:

EPiServer Community

Add profile pages, blogging, forums, groups, voting, commenting, calendars, photos, videos, tagging and sharing, with flexible moderation tools to keep it all on track.

EPiServer Community is a high-performance social media platform delivering more page views per server, so users are never frustrated by slow response. Full analytics lets editors survey, analyze and segment the community in real-time based on activity.

EPiServer Community was first developed in 1999 and today supports dynamic communities in sports, music, fashion, politics and food – as well as social intranets. More than 5 million people are members of web communities powered by EPiServer Community, with over 500,000 logging on and contributing every day.

EPiServer Relate

A high-value bundle for running successful Web 2.0 sites, including EPiServer Community, EPiServer Mail (for running campaigns straight from the CMS) and EPiServer Templates (to accelerate development).

EPiServer Extras

Our global community of developers who constantly add functionality to the EPiServer CMS. Social Web-related modules include:

Tweets – shows the latest tweets from Twitter regarding a particular subject, a free module from OpenX

WikiX – our own open source wiki plug-in developed by our in-house R&D team

YouTube Videos Module – use YouTube as your video server, another free module from OpenX

MobiDove – send content to mobiles via SMS or the mobile web with this commercial module by Quedro

PLUS – open source social media modules for Facebook or Picasa integration, RSS feeds, social bookmarking, search, picture management, event registration and more.



Resources

Social Websites

The best way to learn about the social web is to visit some of the more popular social media applications out there. Here's a list (thanks Wikipedia):

Communication

- Blogs
- Micro-blogging/ Presence applications: Twitter, Plurk, Tumblr, Jaiku, fmylife
- Social Networking: Bebo, Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace
- Events: Upcoming, Eventful, Meetup.com

Collaboration

- Wikis: Wikipedia, PBwiki, wetpaint
- Social Bookmarking: Delicious, StumbleUpon, Google Reader
- Social News: Digg, Mixx, Reddit, NowPublic
- Opinion sites: epinions, Yelp

Multimedia

- Photo sharing: Flickr, Zoomr, Photobucket, SmugMug, Picasa
- Video sharing: YouTube, Vimeo, sevenload
- Livecasting: Ustream.tv, Justin.tv, Stickam
- Audio and Music Sharing: imeem, The Hype Machine, Last.fm,

Reviews and Opinions

- Product Reviews: epinions.com, MouthShut.com
- Business Reviews: yelp.com
- Community Q&A: Yahoo! Answers, WikiAnswers, Askville, Google Answers

Books

Trust Agents: Using the Web to Build Influence, Improve Reputation, and Earn Trust

By Chris Brogan

Groundswell: Winning in a World Transformed by Social Technologies

By Charlene Li, Josh Bernoff

Web 2.0: A Strategy Guide: Business thinking and strategies behind successful Web 2.0 implementations.

By Amy Shuen

The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom

By Yochai Benkler

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