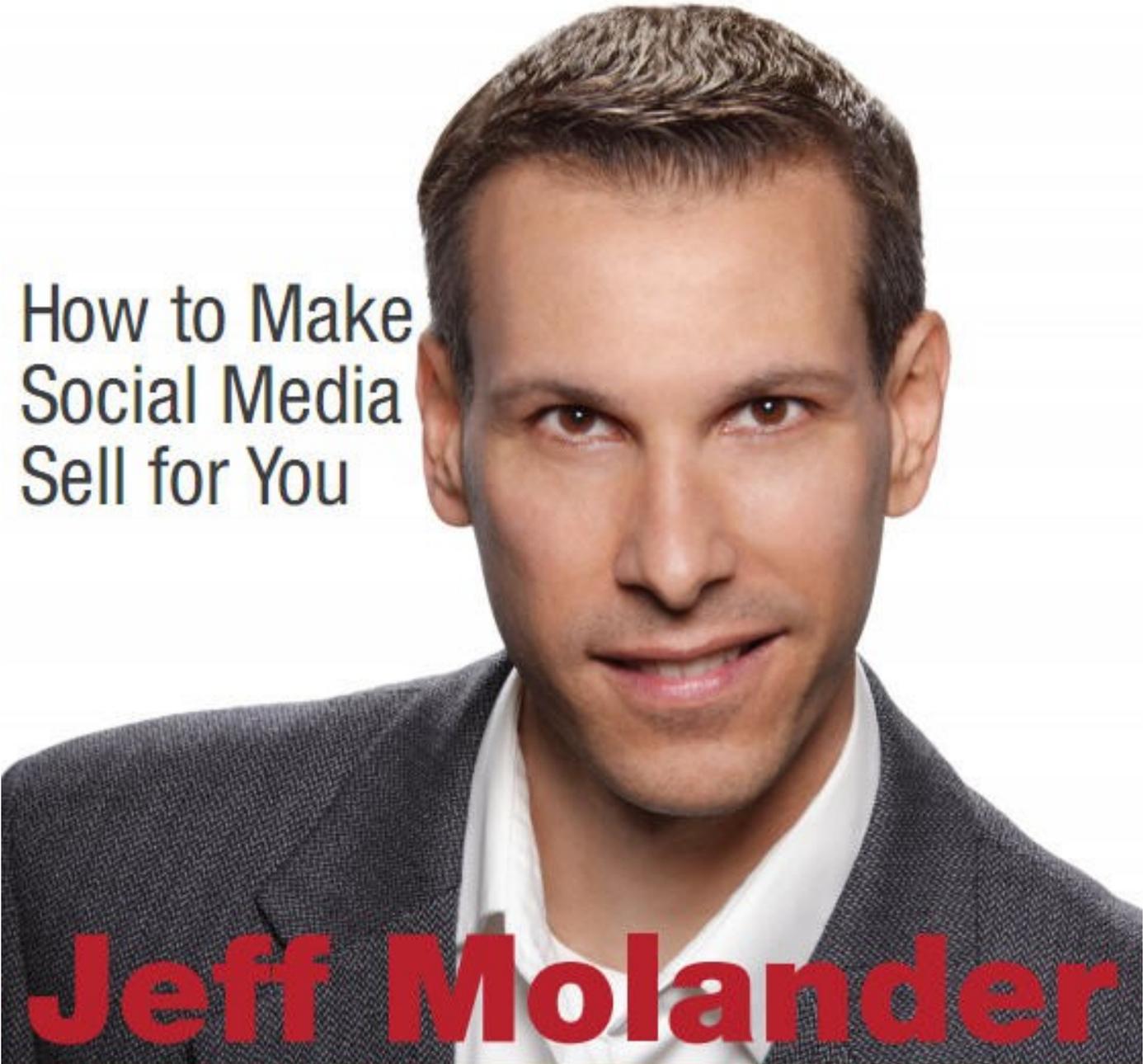


OFF THE HOOK MARKETING

How to Make
Social Media
Sell for You

A portrait of Jeff Molander, a man with short brown hair, wearing a dark grey suit jacket over a white collared shirt. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile.

Jeff Molander

Foreword by Bryan Eisenberg
New York Times Best-Selling Author

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About the Author

Jeff Molander is the authority on making social media sell and former co-founder of what is today the Google Affiliate Network and search division of Paris-based Publicis Groupe. Today, he is adjunct digital marketing faculty at Loyola University's business school and an international speaker who is constantly researching and teaching business people how to convert friends, likes and followers into leads, sales and subscribers using *practical* approaches to digital technology.

Molander is uncovering the surprising truth about the social media revolution. There isn't one. There is only evolution. The rest is hype-and-spin that's got most business folks spinning wheels. That's why Molander is traveling the globe sharing the good news: ***solving customers problems*** with social media is “the secret sauce.” Making social sell for you is simply a matter of answering customers questions in ways that connect to products and services. This practical approach is what today's most successful social sellers use to sell off the hook! And Molander, who cut his teeth in traditional marketing communications, is in the thick of it.

Foreword



“Does the world need another book describing the opportunity presented by social media? Probably not. Do businesses like yours need a practical way to make social media produce more sales and deepen loyalty? Absolutely.”

Few will question the impact social media is having on people’s lives. From breaking news, political revolutions, connecting to old friends and helping individuals find lost people in emergency situations. Social media is touching our lives in meaningful ways, daily. But with all the stories you're hearing about Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and other social networks the one question you should be asking is how can my business make money with social media?

Does the world need another book describing the opportunity presented by social media? Probably not. Do businesses like yours need a practical way to make social media produce more sales and deepen loyalty? Absolutely.

If you are looking for some black box or secret sauce don’t expect to find it. Social media is giving your customers more choice, more information and increasing their expectations. What that means is you need to work harder than ever before. You need to plan great experiences. They don’t come by accident. You need to have a solid plan and deliver it with precision.

If you want to make social media sell you'll need an ally. Someone who is uncovering a clear, mature business purpose for social media and who can help you take action on it.

Fortunately, you have in your hand just such an ally. In a world filled with so much hype, spin and charlatanism Jeff offers brave yet practical answers. For instance, Jeff wisely recommends *designing* experiences to solve customers' problems with social media. Doing so helps customers guide themselves toward products and services they need. Of course, if you're satisfied with hoping lots of Twitter followers or Facebook "likes" earns sales, that's your right. But if you want to sell products or services with social media read *Off the Hook Marketing* – and do it soon. You'll be glad you did.

Jeff's practical attitude about "making social media sell for you" is as refreshing as it is useful. He admits: The idea of conversation is not new. Talking with customers in ways that solves problems is a time-tested, effective way to guide them toward purchase. As it turns out, social media is not a revolution in how business is done. Rather, it is an exciting opportunity to improve on what most of us are already doing – being useful to customers.

When Jeff strips away the hype, Facebook starts looking more like a chance to become more relevant to customers' changing needs and less like something you update with "posts" about your blog or coupons. Seeing the opportunity differently changes everything. It makes taking action easier.

Having known him over the years I can attest to Jeff's remarkable integrity. His passion for helping others guides his every step. It is with this passion I hope you can connect to Jeff and find the way to make social media sell for your business.

Bryan Eisenberg

*New York Times Best Selling Author, international speaker and
Chairman Emeritus, Web Analytics Association*

Introduction

There is a simple way to make social media sell. Because it is based on a business's approach to marketing itself it's easy to understand and also easy to apply. In fact, it's so practical that any business can immediately gain benefits – regardless of its target market, products, services or size. It is the key to selling more with tools like Facebook, Twitter, podcasts, YouTube, LinkedIn and blogs.

This book will give you that key. It will empower you to make social media marketing produce sales – starting tomorrow. You may be a one-man or woman operation, a marketing executive, a student, a business owner or marketing professional. In pages ahead, you'll discover a step-by-step way to improve strategies and bypass pitfalls – a strategy that makes social media sell off-the-hook!

Business owners: You'll learn how to hook new customers more often and serve them in ways that create more referrals and repeat business. Marketing executives: The Next time you hear a pitch on social marketing from a staff member or agency, you can rest assured that it *will* create leads and sales. And junior or student marketers: This book will help you take “the opportunity of social media ” and turn it into a new job or pay raise.

There *is* more to social media than grabbing at customers' attention, answering their complaints in a new way or handing out discounts wherever and whenever they flock online. Social media marketing is a chance to help customers get what they need into their hands – your products and services. The truth is, most people dipping their toes in the social media waters aren't getting the results they want. They're honestly enthusiastic about tools like Facebook and blogs. But their experiences affirm the low expectations they've come to have. Think about it. It's completely believable when social media produces so little! What's going on here?

Web measurement luminary Avinash Kaushik once noticed how, for most of us, social media is like teen sex. Everyone wants to do it, but no one actually knows how to. And when it's finally done – surprise – it's not what we expected! But you can make social media a more powerful servant for your business. It *will* be. For instance, you don't have to cut prices and struggle to maintain profit. Social media can help you escape the pricing trap. I'll show you how. But you'll need to take action on the plain truth.

Design to sell

When I sat down to write this book. I noticed something shocking right away. Many business executives told me that sales are “just happening.” They write blog stories, upload videos, tweet, post on Facebook, and do other such things. And sales happen. The folks I was interviewing were uploading videos of something outrageous, or poking fun at themselves on YouTube. These videos went viral and caused sales to increase. Now, they couldn't *prove* that social media was working. It just *had* to be, even though they were already trying to create demand for their products by using TV or radio spots, direct mail, or other Web marketing. Social media was always a winner that never failed to deliver. Why? Because it was social media, silly! Then I began interviewing people who actually were creating leads and sales with social media. *They could prove it.* And they all told me the same thing.

**“Solve customers' problems with Facebook.
Hook them with answers. Keep them on the
line and induce purchase.”**

I wasn't crazy. I was right to be suspicious. They told me that sales don't “just happen”; instead, their secret to success is *designing* social media to cause sales. They started explaining to me how trusting *traditional* business instincts more often is helping them *sell* more often. To my surprise, these businesses are spending *less* time seeking customers' attention with social media, but more time helping customers *solve problems*, hooking them with answers and keeping them on the line until they purchase.

The more I learned about how these businesses succeed, the more I started thinking about fishing. No, not because I wanted a day off, but because of what happens when people go fishing.

Think about the last time you went fishing – when you actually had catching fish in mind! You probably gave thought to how you will *attract* fish – what bait you will use. But attracting the fish is only the beginning, isn't it? Once you find a school of fish, attracting one is easy. You use bait: corn, worms, buzzbaits, spinners, jigs, minnows, squid, or shrimp... whatever. But then the *real* work begins. Eventually you get a bite and have a chance to set the hook. If you're lucky, you hooked one good. If you're not, I'm afraid you're like me! But once a fish is hooked, you have more work to do. You need to keep it on the line and land it. And that's precisely how sales works in social media.

Shift focus

Getting customers to bite on Facebook, Twitter, or a blog is the easy part. Earning a *sale* from them is the hard part. Right? So that makes it smart to invest *more* of your precious time in mastering the part that leads to sales. This means shifting focus.



For instance, what separates professional tournament fisherman from the novices? Believe it or not, it's not the fancy equipment. My buddy David (a semi-pro bass fisherman) let me in on the secret. Often, catching *more* big fish means spending *less* time worrying about attracting them. In other words, you need to learn how set the hook in the fish's mouth before anything else. It's critical to spend time learning and practicing setting the hook—*not* to mention keeping the fish on the line (“tip up, tip up!”) and getting it into the boat (“crikey, where's that net?”). Otherwise, you risk being surrounded by fish, only to keep missing the bite and catching nothing. You risk trying to set the hook over and over, but missing over and over; and landing fewer fish. You'll get “blanked” or “skunked” (as my dad would say). Now, think about

how *you* are using social media. Does it seem familiar?

Remember the first time you tried to set the hook on a fish? You missed didn't ya. And it took a while to get it right. But once you did, you caught one! And it felt *great*. Well, it's the same with social media marketing. Attracting customers is relatively easy. Therefore, it should be taking up *less* of your time. Getting customers to bite on Facebook, Twitter or a blog and earning a *sale* from them is the hard part. And that means this part should occupy *more* of your precious time.

But rock star gurus claim sales “just happen.” All you need is blogging “compelling content,” or being “more transparent,” or updating Facebook X times per day. Or whatever secret formula they offer that week. But successful sellers on social media know better. The customer's attention is fleeting. You'd better know how to set a hook and have the skills needed to get that customer into the boat. And that's *never* been easy. Sure, sometimes it takes just a few seconds to reel customers in, but other times it takes a few months. As your uncle always told you, “that's why they call it fishing, not catching!” Success requires technique.

That's why I've written this book. I'll prove to you how simple it is design social media to sell – by helping customers solve everyday problems.

And I've written this book to teach you that technique and help you re-focus your time investment. Everyone I interviewed in this book told me essentially the same story: the trick to making social media sell is, yes, finding and attracting customers. But the real key is to spend time perfecting *ways to land them*. And you do that by helping customers solve everyday problems. That's what this book is about.

How to read this book

I've organized the book so it's easy to read and use. When I explain a concept or principle, I "bring it to life" by offering examples of successful companies. I'll also introduce you to the people who run them, like Amanda Kinsella of Logan Services, a Dayton, Ohio-based residential air conditioning and heating business. She's using Facebook to generate a constant flow of local leads. You'll learn about savvy marketers like Rachel Farris of PetRelocation.com who uses blogging to generate leads quickly. She's delivering more prospects—that convert more often into clients—to her lean-and-mean sales team. You'll also meet Ryan Safady. When he's not renting Lamborghini cars and Boeing business jets on his blog, he uses Facebook to sell fabric to do-it-yourself crafters. By day, he rents luxury cars, yachts, homes and planes at his start-up company, Imagine Lifestyles. By night he's selling novelty fabrics at his family's fifty-year-old New Jersey-based fabric store. He's using social media to sell off the hook too.

Of course, you'll meet large, multi-channel, product-focused public companies, like rural lifestyle and gardening retailer Tractor Supply Company. In partnership with *The Chicken Whisperer*, TSC's Andrew Heltsley is finding ways to use video and blogging to attract new customers, increase referrals, and sell more products, both online and in-store. And you'll learn the latest successes of the small business powerhouse Intuit, as their team finds new ways to sell using Facebook. I'll also tell a handful of horror stories, exposing what doesn't work. We'll learn what they could have been done differently to improve the outcome, so you won't make the same mistake.

Each chapter shows you how leading businesses are investing time, energy, and money in social media marketing in ways that create more leads and sales. But I also want to provoke action in your everyday life. That's why most chapters conclude with action-oriented reflection questions.

Chapter one gives you glimpses into the lives of businesses that are selling off-the-hook. You'll meet remarkable product and service marketers who are quietly thriving.

Chapter two focuses on the good stuff: How to start capturing more sales using social media marketing. We'll learn how selling someone something doesn't require engagement, conversation and a relationship; rather how engagement, conversation and relationships are created by selling them something! *And* you'll learn two practical, easy-to-remember success principles that always get results.

Chapter three will help you move beyond listening to customers and start *translating* their evolving needs. For instance, you'll learn how **prompting customers to “signal”** what they're most interested in, when, where and why leads to more sales – especially when mixed with **publishing** useful, relevant **tools** and information that fit customers' buying contexts. I'll even show you how to start designing **processes** that guide customers toward destinations they choose – your products and services.

Chapter four explains why most businesses struggle to make social media marketing sell. This is where we focus on debunking and overcoming roadblocks to success. You'll have some fun in this chapter. You might even feel a bit satisfied as we take aim at popular social media best practices that often do more harm than good.

Chapter five will help you steer clear of pitfalls being thrown at you by a variety of forces. For instance, we'll learn how “influencing the influencers” may not be The Holy Grail that gurus say it is and how molding customers' behavior is a more practical way to induce sales.

Chapter six is where we get action-oriented. I'll show you how to put everything to work, starting now. I'll give tips on maximizing your own, personal time investments and larger strategies. You'll learn practical, “no-bull” methods to make social media produce sales without the headaches. You'll learn how easy it is to make each social tactic connect to the sales funnel. The concluding chapter cements your new perspective and sends you off with the needed motivation. You'll have the tools and confidence needed to solve customers' problems like never before.

And by the way... all my ideas are weighted the same. No matter how you choose to use them – in part or in whole. You bring your own strengths and weaknesses to this book. So I encourage you to make creative use of my tips. Also, when I use the term business, company or organization in this book, I'm really talking about any kind of entity or individual. Just the same, when I use the term buyer or customer I also mean subscribers, voters, patients, donors, applicants or worshipers. The principles you'll learn are flexible enough to be applied widely.

Just think about it for a moment. Won't it feel great to *sell* using social media? To know that everything you're doing will ultimately result in leads and sales? Whether you're a one-person operation or multi-billion dollar corporation today's successful social media marketer pulls a paycheck by generating sales. They get paid to sell off-the-hook. Period. Now let's get going!



Chapter 1

Generate leads and make sales, now



“You don't sell someone something by engagement, conversation and relationship. You create engagement, conversation and relationships by selling them something.”

Bob Hoffman
“The Ad Contrarian”
CEO, Hoffman Lewis

Selling bracelets with blogs

Meet Jenna White, of Lauren's Hope (www.laurenshope.com) a manufacturer and retailer of designer medical identification “alert” bracelets. She's a one-woman marketing juggernaut who's increasing year-over-year sales by forty percent using Facebook and a blog. How? By helping new customers find solutions to problems. And in return, she's earning the business of skeptical, reluctant customer groups. She's finding new ways to solve an old problem – eliminating barriers between potential customers and her products. She's selling off-the-hook.

For millions of people, it's vital to wear a medical identification bracelet from diabetes to Alzheimer's to having a food allergy. An increasing number of Americans need protection from an increasing number of threats. In cases of emergency, bracelets save lives or help avoid unnecessary (or even damaging) medical procedures. First responders and emergency room doctors need to know *exactly* what they're dealing with, immediately.

That should be enough reason to wear some kind of ID. But too often it's not. Nor is this seemingly “must have” item very popular. Demand is actually weak. Mostly because traditional medical alert bracelets draw attention to illness and lack fashion sense. They're just plain unappealing. Enter Lauren's Hope, a small business providing stylish, attractive and functional medical ID jewelry to men, women and children. This fifteen employee business sells bracelets, necklaces and specialty items like temporary medical ID tattoos, dog tag necklaces and ankle bracelets.

Historically, the company markets itself at trade shows, using direct mail, (purchasing lists) appearing at craft shows, participating in health-related support groups and using a public relations agency. In 2000 the company launched into ecommerce. But until White's arrival Lauren's Hope wasn't fully positioned as a strong online seller. Namely, the company wasn't being discovered by new customers via the Web often enough. Even with increasing numbers of potential customers seeking knowledge about ID products online, this seller wasn't popping onto buyers' radar often enough.

After insisting to company founders that she saw potential to make serious improvements, White began blogging in 2010. But she didn't focus her attention on learning how to operate blog software or install plugins. Sure, she knew the technical details were all necessary. But they wouldn't help her generate sales. This one-woman marketing department realized something important.

Knowing how to “do social media” is worthless without knowing how to *design it* to produce sales.

“While my partner and I believe we're good at what we do, we're also smart enough to realize what we're not good at,” says co-founder LeAnn Carlson. “Jenna brought our weak search engine position to light, but more importantly she brought us solutions!”

Today, Lauren's Hope is netting more sales because White uses her blog to nurture *behavior*. While competitors are occupying prospects' time by “engaging” them, she's publishing useful information that *solves their problems*. And she's mixing in traditional marketing concepts like promotions. THAT is how her company is generating sales with tools like Facebook and blogs. Now doesn't that sound like something *your* business can do? Of course it does.

Today, White's e-commerce and informational Web sites are being discovered by more prospects, more often. And her blogging is generating an increasing number of sales. Because she's priming her pump. Lauren's Hope is earning meaningful relationships with prospects – *even when they're not ready to buy*. And when the prospect *is* ready to purchase a medical ID White isn't just top-of-mind. She's become woven into the fabric of her prospects' lives. She's always ready with a call-to-action.

While competitors are occupying prospects' time by engaging them, Lauren's Hope is selling to them... by solving their problems.

For instance, White cooked up a practical promotional idea called Free Stuff Friday. She offers three lucky, randomly-selected winners the chance to have their pick of fancy ID bracelets or necklaces. It's a simple give-away promotion. But in return she earns a subscriber to her blog (an email address), a fan of her Facebook page and a story about Lauren's Hope posted on the contest participants' blog. In essence, this earns White a sales lead – in return for giving her prospect a chance at a free product. She acquires a relationship with a potential customer who's actively demonstrating need for her product. And by tapping into her participants' Facebook networks with compelling calls-to-action, she's earning access to more potential customers.

FREE * STUFF * FRIDAY

This is driving increasing numbers of prospective customers to sign up for Free Stuff Friday and download handy “wallet card” medical alert guides among other behaviors. In other words, prospects are recruiting more prospects!

“Once someone has become a blog subscriber they are now exposed to promotions, useful tips, information on what to engrave on IDs, customer stories, guest blog posts from customers, charities and other educational Web sites,” says White who is finding new ways to convert her leads over time. “As evidenced by the comments prospects and customers are leaving on blog posts, being exposed to the conditions and needs of fellow medical ID wearers has formed quite a strong community.”

Using these kinds of clever, but traditional, marketing ideas White earned 1,500 subscribers within the first five months of blogging. Today, her prospecting database is nearly 2,000 prospects strong. And it's growing every week.

Make no mistake; White is building a prospecting list. And she's doing it using some of the oldest tricks in the book – a give-away promotion, for instance. An “ethical bribe” if you will. These goodhearted gestures are the company's hook. This smart strategy gives Lauren's Hope a reason to reconnect with people that do not win the contest. At the same time it gives contest participants incentive to help build the company's prospecting list. These promotions serve everyone's interest.



Promotions are but one of White's secret weapons. She's also a problem-solver for a wide range of potential customers. For instance, one segment of White's potential customers already uses medical IDs, but they're not aware of the elegant, beautiful options Lauren's Hope presents. Other times these prospects are wearing IDs that do not contain proper medical information. And it's White's job to point that out by offering a specific solution – what

information needs to be engraved, when and how. Blogging offers that opportunity. Rather than advertising what she has for sale she's answering important, related questions. She's solving problems that potential customers are actively seeking answers to.

“We are not only providing customers with useful information,” says White. “Social media gives us a new chance to answer their questions on an emotional level.”

Another customer segment for Lauren's Hope has yet to realize they should be wearing a medical ID. These prospects often turn to the Web for information on coping with, treating and overcoming various health conditions and diseases. White is attracting these prospects with stories and tips focusing on risks associated with not wearing an ID in specific situations.

Everyday events like “Your child has a bee sting allergy and, while at a friend’s house, is stung by a bee” or “You are at risk for a stroke and are in a setting where people are unfamiliar with the symptoms.” White wisely recommends wearing an ID if “You are a caregiver of an older adult and are in an accident... unable to communicate your responsibilities.”

All of these 'real life' scenarios give White fertile ground to plant seeds – talk about solutions, educate and provide answers to people who need them.

All of these “real life” scenarios give White fertile ground to plant seeds – talk about solutions, educate and provide answers to people who need them. Sometimes she provides prospects with a better way to protect themselves in case of emergency. Other times she's giving advice on more elegant, fun or sharp ways for women, kids and men to stay safe.

Yes, White blogs about new products on occasion. But she focuses on meaningful stories and useful information. And she's always finding new ways to connect her blog to a process that captures and nurtures demand. A system *designed* to sell off-the-hook.

In essence, Lauren's Hope is marketing a product that an increasing number of people need.

But they often don't want or like IDs – even if one can save their life. The very idea of medical ID jewelry conjures up unappealing emotions. And that's when White started viewing social media as an opportunity - a chance to do what the company does best. That is, help people solve a variety of problems in a compassionate, empathetic and heartwarming way.

Best of all, White is experiencing how social media can empower her. She sees how it can scale her precious time across thousands of prospects. And she's jumping at the opportunity. Today, social media is helping her prove what seemed unprovable to her customers. That it IS possible to look good, stay safe and avoid medical catastrophes all at the same time. White is not only getting the word out about products and benefits. She's slowly but surely earning the business of skeptical, reluctant customers. She's finding new ways to solve an old problem – eliminating barriers between customers and Laruen's Hope's products.

Selling swimming pools with social media

Marcus Sheridan is selling more fiberglass swimming pools than any other local pool retailer in North America. His blog is so popular, influential and controversial that every major equipment manufacturer is courting him for some kind of strategic alliance. He's even selling installation and equipment leads to pool and spa companies across America – creating new revenue streams. And to top-it-off, his company no longer depends on leads from manufacturers. What's his secret? Sheridan says it's all thanks to social media. That is a focus on making social sell and a bit of elbow grease.

In 2006, the top national fiberglass pool company sold 500 pools. In 2009 they sold thirty-five. Lack of consumer spending is either killing-off or driving half of America's pool installers into the red. Pools and spas are luxury items. They're what people want, not what they need. But Sheridan's River Pools and Spas is thriving. In 2007, the business spent over \$250,000 in advertising to net roughly \$4.5 million in sales. In 2010, it spent \$40,000 to achieve the same sales number. Not to mention winning fifteen percent more bids and dramatically shortening its sales cycle - all during the greatest economic slow-down since the Great Depression.

Sheridan and his co-founders, Jim Spiess and Jason Hughes are living the dream.

“It’s all because of content,” says Sheridan who is generating local leads, increasing profit margins and closing sales faster using his blog.

“I’d been going on sales appointments and teaching people about pools for years,” reflects Sheridan who started up the Virginia-based company in 2001. “I’d sit down at the kitchen table with my customer and spend a couple hours teaching them about pools. Eventually I’d get around to spending thirty minutes trying to *sell* them a pool. That never made sense to me. I knew it was the wrong methodology.”



“With blogging I quickly realized how I could do all the teaching *before* I ever even met the prospect. They could meet me, get to know me by name... get to know my thoughts, my feelings and my approach to swimming pools,” says Sheridan who suddenly realized it *was* possible to make every minute of his day more productive by *publishing his lessons* on the Web.

Sheridan's big “ah-ha” was that blogging *could* serve a real purpose for his business. On that fateful day he started making blogging a useful part of his daily life. He saw a way – a simple process – to make Web publishing serve River Pools & Spas. To help grow it. And he never looked back.

How to start generating local leads with a blog

“In 2009, I said okay. I need to figure out a way to get more leads. I had fifteen to twenty percent of the leads that I had previously,” says Sheridan who needs to sell a minimum of eighty pools a year to break even, cover his overhead costs. “If I can't meet that number I'm sunk.”

Sheridan quickly realized he wasn't going to get the leads he needed to survive from his manufacturers. In fact, he felt far too dependent on manufacturers - and that was a problem. As was the idea of merely breaking even. He and his two partners have families to feed. So he began to blog based on questions he was getting from customers.

"Our approach was simple. We wrote down every question that's ever been asked to us by customers. We didn't care how generic or broad the questions were. We wrote all the questions down. These quickly became the tiles of our blog posts," Sheridan says in his typical blunt style.

"Our approach was simple. We wrote down every question that's ever been asked to us by customers... These quickly became the titles of our blog posts."

"We took all the questions and answered them, as only we can do. Really candidly. That's what prospects want. Within the first year of blogging I wrote something like two articles a week. Which isn't prolific... but I'm a guy that's busy selling pools and running a business," says Sheridan who admits he wasn't a very good writer.

"But then I figured out what my voice was... and that I just needed to write like I talk. And I eventually got pretty good at it. And then our Web site just exploded. Of course, I started getting visitors from all over the world. But I was also getting a lot of traffic from within my region – *which I probably would not have gotten* if I was using some other type of medium."

It worked. Sheridan knew that "early stage" prospects don't turn to Yellow Page or TV ads for advice about pools. Nor do they typically turn to manufacturers for advice. When customers begin to consider buying an "in-ground," fiberglass pool they're hungry for answers to a variety of questions. And they turn to one resource time and time again: The Web.

“By publishing all those 'long tail' niche questions that we've been asked constantly... over the course of ten years... all of a sudden I had a very, very dominant keyword 'footprint' in search engines like Google. I was scoring huge benefits on my e-commerce and blog sites. And when the blog started to grow in popularity, inbound links started to come. People were citing us as a resource. Then referrals started to grow. It was a domino effect,” says Sheridan.

In-House Pool Construction Vs. Sub-Contractors: Which Is Better?

Posted by Jason Hughes

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If you're in the market for an Inground Pool you may have wondered about the importance of your pool contractor doing the work themselves verses using subcontractors. Today we're going to answer some of the most common questions consumers have about this topic. Let's get started!

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Sheridan understands two important facts. The Web is flooded with prospects seeking specific *answers*. No, they're not ready to buy yet. They're hunting knowledge. And they're considering a purchase. In early stages they're simply trying to discover authoritative, trustworthy advice before they buy. The Social Web is a gold mine of opportunity. All you need is the focus, tools and dedication to *nurture* prospects along – and ultimately be there to capture the sale.

Secondly, Sheridan realizes knowledge-sharing alone doesn't generate sales. That's why he constantly asks serious prospects for something *in return* for the knowledge he shares. Sometimes it's information on his blog. Other times it's a professionally produced, educational DVD or an e-book. In any case, River Pools and Spas doesn't give away the store. The business asks prospects to share *who* they are - and *where they are* in the purchase consideration process. Sheridan qualifies each of his leads.

How to increase profit margins with a blog

“I’m *always* the highest bidder. Sure, I lose jobs. And that’s okay,” says Sheridan as he discusses his market position. “For instance, I’ve got a local competitor in the Richmond area. He needs to sell two and a half pools for every one of mine... to make the same amount of money I do. Which is the better business model?”

Sheridan says he’s the highest price in town. But he’s *still* selling more pools – even when his competitors are beating him on quotes. Not being the low-ball bidder suits him just fine. And it’s all because his blog (www.riverpoolsandspas.com/blog) is part of a higher-caliber, consultative selling process. Said plainly, he “gives more to get more” from customers. And the people he wants to do business with see a *clear* difference between River Pools and Spas and the rest of the pack.

“My local customers realize very quickly that I’m the voice of the fiberglass pool industry,” says a modest but confident Sheridan. “They have an opportunity to buy from a brutally honest authority or some guy that’s never given them one valuable bit of information in their life – except a low price tag. Well, many times they’re going to choose our company.”

“It’s not about being the cheapest guy. I don’t talk about lowest prices – EVER.”

“It’s not about being the cheapest guy. I don’t talk about lowest prices *ever*. I’m not interested in that at all,” says Sheridan. And he doesn’t shrink from the challenge of backing up that high sticker price with quality products and services. He knows that’s an age-old business challenge. Every business owner and brand has been forced to grapple with quality expectations of customers. River Pool and Spas is stepping up to the plate and swinging for the wall.

Blogging to shorten sales cycles

Sheridan doesn't stop at keeping profit margins high. He works tirelessly to ensure prospects choose River Pools and Spas – without shopping around. Blogging literally lowers the number of competitive quotes his prospects need to satisfy thirst for “proper due diligence.” Don't believe it? Sheridan says he's living proof.

“The problem is this: In this economy everyone thinks they can get the deal of a lifetime – especially when they're dealing with a luxury item like a landscaper or a pool guy. These are things you don't have to have. So the homeowner thinks they can beat the living snot out of you. Because they know you're desperate for the work,” says Sheridan who points out this dynamic is not limited to the pool industry.

“So here's my solution. I want my prospect to be so enamored with me; so in love with my content; so in love with the value I've given them that *they don't shop*. Literally. And I get it all the time. I met with three people last week. All three prospects bought. You know how many got a second quote? ZERO. That doesn't happen in the pool industry. Ok, honestly one of the leads was going to get one - but she changed her tune when I reminded her who was 'there for her' as her guide before she decided to make the investment. But those three sales? They were home runs,” says Sheridan who seems endlessly enthusiastic.

“I met with three people last week. All three prospects bought. You now how many got a second quote? ZERO.”

“I literally tell hot prospects, 'you have read 200 pages of my Web site. You've done more due diligence than ninety percent of people who buys pools. Why do you feel like you need to do more?' And all the time people say 'you're right' - because I'm giving them the chance to do their due diligence. In fact, I want them to do their homework *before I get to their house*.”

“Look... when I go on a sales call I'm not going there to *teach* about pools,” says Sheridan. “I'm going there to SELL a pool to someone I've already gained the trust of – because of the content on my blog.”

Sheridan points out how businesses he competes with often run average, or below average, lead nurturing processes. For instance, he sees businesses sending prospects trite, meaningless emails saying, “Thanks for contacting our company, we appreciate it, we'll be in touch soon.”

Sheridan candidly says, “Well... I don't believe in that.” Instead, this savvy salesman knows all leads have one, two or even three deal-breaking, or deal-making, concerns. And this spells opportunity.

“Let's say I have a lead. And that lead identifies a specific set of obstacles to buying,” says Sheridan. “I help prospects get comfortable with each concern by placing articles I've written into each of my *personalized* follow-up emails. In addition to responding to their specific issues, I send out a standard set of information to prospects. They get my fifty page e-book (which is just a compilation of articles I've written). They get my reference list, five links to three or four videos, and two other articles.”

“I make sure that each prospect is so well informed – by the time I get in their house – that it's *impossible* for them not to know me - to really 'get' me and to know my products, the process, and the delivery. *Everything* that makes River Pools and Spas unique, worth doing business with,” says Sheridan.



“So when I get to the kitchen table I’m not teaching any longer. *I’m there to sell.* To me, that’s what content marketing is all about. It’s the greatest sales tool in the world,” says Sheridan with a smile.

Blogging works for local marketers

“I see many local small businesses saying, ‘I don’t want to blog because I’m just going to get visitors from outside of my area.’ Frankly that’s just a bad attitude. And worse, it’s not true. I’m living proof. But I’m convinced... people with this attitude aren’t seeing content as a useful, purposeful tool,” says Sheridan who believes blogging is “the greatest sales tool in the world – when it’s squarely *aligned* with sales processes.”

For instance, Sheridan says consider a search engine term his buyers often use: “Fiberglass versus vinyl liner pools which is better.” A prospect typing this phrase into Google is a pretty serious pool buyer. And Sheridan is writing content to match this search query.

Realistically speaking, out of 1,000 people who type that into Google, “maybe five are going to be from Maryland or five will be from Virginia,” says Sheridan. “But I’ll *take* those five or ten. I’ll play those numbers.”

Think of it this way, he says. It’s likely none of River Pool and Spas competitors is going to discover an early-stage lead from a manufacturer or general advertisement. And if a competitor *does* run into the prospect they’ll often send them toward “informational dead ends.” Even today, swimming pool manufacturers aren’t very good at providing the most basic, fundamental answers – let alone the brutally honest kind. In fact they’re nearly absent in helping early-stage customers. So Sheridan is jumping right in, head first, with Web sites that are designed to sell. And step one is educating customers as part of lead nurturing program.

“When I first got into blogging I realized – search engine optimization has nothing to do with blogging. It has everything to do with selling.”

“There are pool companies out there that don't get 1,000 visits per year. That's a fact. And yesterday I got a couple of thousand visits alone,” says Sheridan. “I wrote two articles that were pretty controversial, I admit. One was addressing a serious problem in the industry that evoked strong thoughts and reactions. I had tons of comments rolling in. Does this kind of thing help me sell pools? You bet it does. And then some.”



“When I first got into blogging I realized – search engine optimization has nothing to do with blogging,” says an exuberant Sheridan. “It has everything to do with *selling*.”

Sheridan is a go-getter by nature. And he's out to dominate his territory. But he's eager to share. That's why he teaches other business owners how to sell with social tools like Facebook, Twitter and blogs. His business blog has cast him as the nation's leading fiberglass pool expert, bar none. But he also publishes TheSalesLion.com (www.thesaleslion.com) where he helps small business owners generate more leads, more often, across multiple industries. Be sure to tune in!

Go fish!

I'd go fishing with Jenna White and Marcus Sheridan any day. Because they're laser-focused on hooking customers, keeping them on the line and landing 'em. And they're not afraid to rely on instinct – traditional sales skills and long-standing marketing ideas. Their businesses are becoming known, differentiating, increasing sales and keeping more customers – all by *diagnosing and solving customer problems*. They aren't just earning customers' attention in places like Facebook. They're doing something with it.

As pro bass fisherman, Babe Winkelman was fond of saying, “to catch more fish, think like one.” It sounds overly simplistic. But if you've ever had a successful day on the water you know it's true. Once you understand the simple, instinctual preferences of fish you'll have less trouble attracting them to your lure.

Just like customers, fish are purpose-driven. They've got problems to fix. Namely eating – and not being eaten. Now, I know your customers aren't fish. And this will be the last fishing metaphor I promise! But when we go fishing, most of us focus on things like water temperature, clarity, proper bait, the weather – the environment. We don't tend to focus on what's *really* driving the fish. Hunger and fear. When chasing customers in social spaces we tend to do the same thing. For instance, we focus on the technical aspects of Facebook or Twitter. We look to ideas like number of updates or posts to make per week. But pros like Jenna White and Marcus Sheridan know the technology is actually a huge distraction. And that's why they focus on *problems* customers face. White and Sheridan realize that helping customers *get things done* in life is where to focus.

When chasing customers using social media we tend to focus on technology.

But it's actually a big distraction. Focus on solving customers problems instead.

For instance, most buyers have practical, easy-to-understand problems that need solving. From advice on raising kids to divorce or managing finances, people are constantly seeking answers to problems. Because humans don't plan much. Instead, we tend to react to whatever life throws at us. And we're increasingly turning to friends, family and other credible sources to make purchase decisions. Ok. Got it. So now what?

Well, smart marketers are “chumming the water” – making sure answers and bits of yummy advice (bait) are discoverable in search engines. They're making sure these tips are “portable” and easily shared by customers with others. And they're baiting customers with answers to problems. Sometimes mixing in promotions, free trials and other goodies. Of course, they never forget to set the hook – by asking customers to exchange a bit of

information about themselves. Keeping customers from wriggling off the hook is where things like “content marketing” come into play. We'll talk more about all of these concepts in the next chapter. For now, let's focus on how landing more sales, more often is a matter of solving problems for customers. And keep in mind how learning the technical ins-and-outs is *not* the secret sauce.

PetRelocation.com: Making social media sell

Until recently, Rachel Farris was a one-woman marketing extravaganza. And she's been selling off-the-hook with social media since the start. She's using tools like blogs, YouTube and Facebook to generate 200 leads per day for Austin-based business, PetRelocation.com. The company's “white glove” pet relocation services cost between \$1,200 and \$6,000. On an average day, social media is sending her \$12,000 to \$15,000 in new accounts. She's managed this all while eliminating spending on the company's sole source of advertising – pay-per-click Google ads. Yet Farris and a newly hired counterpart are only getting warmed up.

What's her secret? Social media serves her. Farris doesn't serve it. Her success is based on better “ways of working” with social media tools like Facebook and Twitter. Simple guide rails she's created. Think of it as “pre-designed marketing” that guides customers toward destinations they (customers) choose. And those destinations include PetRelocation.com's products and services.

She's not investing time in simply 'being liked' nor figuring out how much fans are worth.

Because these are not the key to success.

Maybe you're wondering... how often does Farris update PetRelocation.com's Facebook profile? How much blog or video content is she producing, how often? Or how many adorable pet photos she is posting and to where? You may be surprised to learn Farris is not meeting more customers by having answers to these questions. Having hoards of Facebook fans isn't earning her more sales either nor is she investing time worrying about being “liked” a lot – or at a certain ratio or frequency. And she

doesn't know how much each of her Facebook fans is worth because these are not the keys to success. And Farris knows it.

There's no such thing as a silver bullet. But there is a simple system – a practical way to *design* social media to sell off-the-hook. And that's Farris's secret.

PetRelocation.com is netting more sales because Farris is focusing tools like blogs on creating purposeful *behavior*, not “engagement.” She works diligently at *translating* customers' evolving needs, not sending them messages or offering discounts. And she's publishing useful knowledge that *solves customers' problems*. Farris isn't burdened by social media. She's empowered by it. It serves a mature purpose – to sell. She makes time for social media marketing without fear or anxiety. Farris and her colleague aren't fooling around with social media. They're building a business on it. And so can you.

Selling confidence



“People always say to me, ‘it must be so much fun to work at a pet company,’” says Farris, PetRelocation.com's director of operations. “They love their pets... and so they assume it would be fun to help relocate pets all day long, for a living.”

“But the fact is our customers are *moving*. They're relocating all over the world with their pets. And honestly, it ranks right up there with weddings and funerals... in terms of the stress created by planning. Once they look into it a bit, people don't like thinking about actually doing it,” says Farris who's company

specializes in international relocation since 2004.

PetRelocation.com's target market is a tough nut to crack. Once customers realize relocation is only a matter of time they turn to the Web for answers. They're busy, working professionals who love their pets. Understandably, they need to move with as little stress as possible. But they quickly discover government agencies to be dealt with, cultural differences and all kinds of confusing signals. "Facts" start coming from family friends and misleading sources on the Web. This sometimes panics pet owners – causing them to be emotionally torn. Should they even try to take their pet?

PetRelocation.com is trouncing the competition. The business is finding and closing more leads by providing answers to customers specific questions.

With customers' stress in mind, this fast-growing, nineteen employee-strong company is responding, boldly. Everything Farris does online gives potential customers *confidence* - not in how well the business can relocate a pet for them; instead, she is proving something more important. That is, relocating a pet across continents *can* be done - smoothly and successfully, joyfully and with confidence.

"Our hands-down most popular blog post is rather dry," explains Farris who says the path to making an emotional connection with people often involves putting out fires.

"The post (www.oth.me/petrel) explains how to get a specific type of health certificate issued by your veterinarian and then stamped by the state USDA office," she says. "People have tons of questions about how to issue this certificate, who can issue it, where to obtain the document, when it is needed, etc. This gives us a great opportunity to be a source of authority on something that is confusing and stressful for most people."

With the support of PetRelocation.com's founder, Farris is giving away her service team's best kept secrets. She blogs tips and produces videos on what they do, how they do it for customers. Yes, she's doing it to create awareness of PetRelocation.com across the vast Social Web. But it's also part of a larger plan – to sell off-the-hook.

Solve problems, make sales

Today, PetRelocation.com is trouncing the competition by becoming THE authoritative source on how to successfully relocate pets. The small businesses' e-commerce and informational Web sites are being discovered by prospects more often. And they're generating more leads. Because the company is providing answers to very specific questions – like how to move specific kinds of pets to specific destinations, without headaches.

The company is solving problems for pet owners. And in return, it's earning leads.

Sure, PetRelocation.com's blog and video tips are published to the Web in hopes of being noticed. But Farris isn't limiting herself to getting the attention of new customers. She is setting the bar one notch higher. Her approach is *designed* to help the company:

1. Get *discovered* in search engines by people looking for help with pet relocation *AND*
2. *Solve problems* for prospective customers that deliver meaning – practical know-how that also taps into emotional benefits *AND*
3. Discover customers' *changing needs* and cater to them in ways that sell.

First Name *	Last Name *
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Address (line 1)	Address (line 2)
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
City	State/Province
<input type="text"/>	Alabama <input type="button" value="v"/>
Zip/Postal Code	Country
<input type="text"/>	United States <input type="button" value="v"/>
Email *	Confirm Email *
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Type(s) of pets (check all that apply):

Dog(s)
 Cat(s)
 Bird(s)
 Fish
 Reptile(s)
 Small Animal(s)
 Other:

Your Question *

Join the PTC Club!
Your free membership gets you the latest information about traveling with your pet, featured pet-friendly accommodations and destinations, updates and announcements about the latest trends in pet travel products, special product discounts, and important tips you should know before and after you hit the road, trail or sky.

Get discovered the easy way

Ultimately, PetRelocation.com's approach to what's being called “content marketing” is driven by a process. First, the company aims to be discovered – within search engines like Google. To do that, she's constantly demonstrating *how* PetRelocation.com's experts are solving problems. This is a reliable way to attract, bond with and provide value to prospects. Farris works diligently to make sure her blog is *constantly* being discovered by people who are planning to relocate a pet.

For instance, she knows people are “out there” seeking answers to pressing questions. So she provides a free “Ask an Expert” Web form that collects a steady stream of inbound questions – all using very relevant, specific words and phrases that, “we could never anticipate,” says Farris. These phrases are detailed, often niche, expressions of customer need. Being able to access *exactly how customers are asking* questions gives her insight on what to blog, when and why. It increases PetRelocation.com's chances of “getting found” by potential customers using search engines.

Here is how it works. Each day, questions from the Ask the Expert form are delivered to a PetRelocation.com expert via an email alert. Inside the message is the question being submitted and a Web link to the company's blog management system. Experts simply read the email/question, click the link, answer the question with appropriate information and hit submit. This “knowledge tidbit” is automatically converted into a keyword-rich, properly titled blog post using a tool from blogware company, Compendium LLC.

One recent question was how to move a dog from Japan to Quito, Ecuador. Things like microchip IDs, vaccinations, health certificates and quarantines are involved. Another answer-seeker fell in love with a puppy in Thailand and wants to bring her back to Germany. She has obtained microchip identification and vaccinations but needs to know what else Germany requires.

When customers understand their problems more clearly they're better equipped to find the right solution – including relevant products and services.

Another question dealt with moving a pet rabbit from Kenya to Dubai. Yet another asks about transporting reptiles domestically via U.S. airlines. Yet another inquiry features a woman named Malika who “travels to Dakar, Senegal for extended periods and would like to know if it is possible to take my lovely Blue Heeler, Zeta with me and what the procedural steps would be?”

Each of these questions and responses are displaying on PetRelocation.com's blog site – linking to more information on “pet import rules and requirements” by country, for instance. PetRelocation.com constantly makes easy-to-understand answers available – ready to be discovered by people seeking the same answers. Some are quirky, some commonplace. But all of them are being constantly discovered by search engines – and pet owners who use them. And that's one way PetRelocation.com receives a steady stream of answer-seeking prospects.

Blogs and video that sell

But Farris is hungry. She wants more answer-seekers hitting her Web site. So she produces helpful, authoritative blog stories and videos focusing on useful tips for pet owners. They're easy to produce since they're based on her service team's success stories. They're simple and fun to whip-up. For instance, Phoebe is a fourteen year-old Belgian Malinois. This recent, slightly older, customer needed to be handled with care. She was moved with great success. It was a perfect excuse for PetRelocation to write-up some quick tips on relocating older dogs. Should one even attempt to move an aging pet? How do you make the call? And if yes, what are some quick tips on how to pull-it-off successfully?



Farris is always asking herself, “what other excuses do we have for talking about 'how to' tips?” That's how the company cooked up its “Pet Move of the Month” feature. And, yes, the stories (and pets within them) are often adorable. But entertainment is not the focal-point. Usefulness is.

Farris's goal is to become easily discovered by prospects using search engines. But she's also focused on shepherding customers – offering them practical advice. And giving them solutions to problems they can take action on. Yes, that advice draws on her target's emotions. That's why she showcases the joyful benefits of proper planning. But Farris tells stories with specific purpose in mind. She's out to earn more. She wants customers' *behavior*.

Prompt an action

PetRelocation.com's content marketing strategy is connected to a lead management process. Being discovered by prospects is step one. Getting them to take action – identify themselves as potential customers – is the key. And that means designing ways to prompt behavior. Actions that signal what stage of the “relocation decision-making” process the prospect is in. For instance, alongside each blog story Farris has placed three, very clear calls-to-action. Buttons that prompt customers to click. They are:



Clicking on each button brings targeted prospects to action-oriented landing pages. Domestic prospects are enticed to download MyPetRelocation – a free package that includes everything needed to relocate an animal, easily and cost-effectively. First name, last name

and email address are collected – exchanged for knowledge about the prospect. The company gives pet owners seven handy check lists, a free Health Certificate form and a Pet Friendly Airport Report. For added incentive, the company includes a \$100 discount coupon on any PetRelocation.com service.

International prospects land at a page offering a no-obligation consultation on their upcoming move. In exchange, they're asked to give PetRelocation.com their name, email, telephone and basic profile information on their pet. Departure and destination information are also collected along with estimated move date and reason for relocating. Qualitative information is also gathered on the prospect – such as what kind of special challenges they're facing and how soon they're expecting to actually hire a pet relocation service. (if at all)

MyPetRelocation is a new product specifically designed to make pet moving affordable.

The MyPetRelocation package includes:

- ✓ MyPetRelocation Guide – Includes seven MyPetRelocation checklists for keeping your pet move running smoothly
- ✓ Free Health Certificate Form
- ✓ Free Pet-Friendly Airport Report
- ✓ **Bonus:** \$100 Discount on Any PetRelocation Services



Simply put, the company cannot afford to gain prospects' attention and hope for the phone to ring. That's why Farris works diligently to gain *insight* into her prospects “state of need” – in return for the valuable advice she provides. Of course, all of the information gleaned is automatically fed from the Web form into a lead management/customer relationship management software tool. The prospect enters a predefined courtship cycle, involving email and telephone follow-up. The business also uses marketing automation solution, HubSpot, to understand the source of leads. And with a bit of elbow grease, Farris monitors conversion-

to-sale ratios of each lead referrer – from blog to Web site to Facebook and Twitter. This way, she knows which is performing best and is in better position to optimize return on investment.

Beyond keeping on top of practical metrics, Farris says helping a prospect feel like they CAN relocate their pet stress-free and safely is her primary goal. That's her hook – showing pet owners a compelling “emotional benefit” of a successful move. Deciding *if and when* the potential customer needs help from a capable, qualified business comes later. But it does come. And by design. That's why she's always prompting her prospects to act. And connecting that behavior to a lead management process aimed at converting prospects to customers.

Content marketing experts Anne Handley and C.C. Chapman provide practical advice in their book, *Content Rules*. “Share or solve, don't shill...show; don't just tell.”

Much like PetRelocation.com's blog stories Handley and Chapman say, “Good content doesn't preach or hard-sell. Instead it shows how your product lives in the world. It demonstrates...”

PetRelocation.com is proving that content marketing can be smart, effective. But is it *really* profitable? For instance, by giving so much advice away does a company risk chasing-away paying customers? Does one risk “giving away the store?”

Shepherding prospects

PetRelocation.com doesn't hesitate to give away their best tips and secrets. They recognize the mercenary truth: Almost everyone thinks they can relocate their pet. And Farris admits most people can. Unfortunately, not everyone wants to pay for the convenience of her service – at least not in early stages of consideration when a pet owner's need is still forming. That's

By shepherding prospects the company helps customers guide themselves toward or away from products.

why PetRelocation.com is keen to educate their prospects. Warm them up a bit. Nurture them.

Here's another way of looking at it. By *shepherding* prospects the company helps pet owners *guide themselves* toward – or away – from the company's services. Farris is letting prospects “self select” themselves as bona fide buyers. (or not) How? Through the process of learning about the *complexities* of pet relocation – and reminding prospects of a successful move's *emotional* benefits.



Like many service businesses, PetRelocation.com is ultimately selling *trust and emotional relief*. Yes, they're providing tangible, functional value. But ultimately they're putting a price tag on peace of mind. And that's not something every pet owner is able to afford.

Farris admits social media marketing isn't like eating pie all day long. She's constantly challenged. But not because she's giving away too much advice. In fact, she's attracting so many needy pet owners that “weeding the garden” is becoming more challenging. But Farris

is excited at the chance to find better, faster ways to connect with most needy, qualified customers. In a sea of tire-kickers, she's finding new ways to meet prospects that are most likely to purchase.

Make lemonade

Founded 2004 and now booking \$4 million in revenue, PetRelocation.com is an innovator. The company isn't stopping at pioneering content marketing on the Social Web. They're also finding ways to take "do-it-yourselfers" and generate new revenue. PetRelocation.com is being given a lot of lemons. And now they're making lemonade.

Giving practical answers to urgent questions using blogs and video can get a business discovered. And it can earn potential customers' behavior in the form of a lead. But the practice also attracts "do-it-yourselfers" – prospects who will ultimately never buy. Often, because they cannot. In this way, PetRelocation.com is no different than any other business. Thus, the company is finding that being discovered is relatively easy. But connecting with people willing-and-able to pay for a service is crucial – and a bit more challenging. Quickly identifying a poor lead and putting helpful information into their hands makes sense. But then again, PetRelocation.com has cooked up an even better approach to making content marketing pay.

PetRelocation.com is providing answers and tips to pet owners who do NOT want its service.

The company has found a new revenue stream. All by discovering what pet owners do NOT want.

Its downloadable MyPetRelocation tips package is changing – converting into a free, match-making service for pet owners who want to relocate pets, on their own. This innovative venture is giving pet owners who do *not* need PetRelocation.com's services the tools they DO need – to relocate pets themselves. For instance, the free service provides access to other like-minded, do-it-yourself pet owners through a digital community. This allows inexperienced pet owners to get tips and emotional support from seasoned veterans. The site also provides access to vetted service providers – many that already work with PetRelocation.com's service

team.

PetRelocation.com is not only providing answers and tips to pet owners who do *not* want its service – it's monetizing them. The company has found a new revenue stream. All by focusing on “getting to no” faster with prospects – discovering what pet owners *do not want*. The company is now, itself, delicately moving into the lead generation business for its suppliers.

Similarly, River Pool and Spas' Marcus Sheridan is making hay of leads outside his two-state territory. It didn't take long for him to realize the additional revenue stream he was sitting on too. Today, he's selling excess leads (coming from outside his region) to out-of-state business owners – and even manufacturers he represents.

“I didn't try to become the national fiberglass pool guru... I don't seek these things but they just happen if you produce content,” says Sheridan who is being flooded with email requests for advice and on-site consultations across the country. His blog readers often insist on flying him in – to oversee fiberglass pool installations. They're nervous about the quality and professionalism of the company they've hired. They trust him more.

“People tell me 'you've taught me everything I know about fiberglass pools and I have a few questions. In fact, during the summer time I get a majority of email inquiries from outside of Virginia and Maryland from people that just need help,” says Sheridan.

This demand combined with another realization. “Right now my blog is worth more than my entire company. Because of the value it has – the influence it has over the entire swimming pool industry,” he says.

“It's all from this little guy in a town that only has a couple of stoplights. It's not supposed to work that way but it does...”

After entertaining a constant stream of inquiries from out-of-state buyers and manufacturers asking to buy his blog or joint venture with him it became obvious. The blog was – like PetRelocation.com's – growing into a business itself.

“But it's all from this little guy in a town that only has a couple of stop lights. It's not supposed to work like that. But it does,” says Sheridan. “Simply because I was the first guy who wanted to talk about the industry – the good, the bad and the ugly.”

Sheridan says his decision to constantly address “the ugly” causes consumers to take a step back. People say, “Wow, this guy is the real deal.” He says his candor causes respect levels to go through the roof.

“Because when you're brutally honest customers know you're not invested in selling them junk – which is what they see with most Web sites. You know, the ones that are just glorified business cards and brochures that do nothing to *teach* customers. It really drives me nuts,” says Sheridan who's baffled as to why manufacturers aren't jumping into the educational, demand-generation pool.

But don't be fooled. Jenna White, Marcus Sheridan and Rachel Farris aren't simply “being honest and transparent” with customers or simply listening to them. These savvy marketing pros are leveraging a proven *system*. A way to make social media sell off-the-hook.

Be a thought provoker, not just a thought leader

“If you're using social media to show off what your business knows you're limiting yourself to the tired, unsuccessful practice of traditional ‘thought leadership,’” says Gunnar Branson, CEO of marketing and innovation consultancy, Branson Powers. (www.bransonpowers.com) Branson, like Marcus Sheridan, is reaping the benefits of *provoking* thought.

That said, Branson says he's been one of social media's biggest skeptics – having lived through VHS industrial videos, DVDs and mini-DVDs that “basically got put on people's desks and never looked at before they ultimately got thrown away,” he says with a smile.



“Whenever you hear lots of people talking about a great new way of selling... a great new way of marketing... there's a skeptic in me that goes 'ok, well that's all fine-and-good but at the end of the day it's probably not going to do anything,’” says Branson. “But interestingly for me, social media keeps delivering business. And more than just interest or buzz – it just keeps delivering business. And every time I think it won't deliver it does. It does for my clients. And it does for me, at a surprisingly consistent rate.”

That's because Branson is *provoking reactions* with social media rather than positioning as a thought leader. He's finding new ways to generate something along the lines of a “hmmm... I never thought of that” from customers. All with generating leads in mind.

“The key is to discover what you're seeing that most people are not seeing right now,” says Branson. “For instance, what might you know – right now – that's relatively *unknown and revealing*? Think in terms of a risk or opportunity that your listener/watcher/reader (ultimately customer) will react strongly to. Really strongly.”

Provoking “hmms” from customers is important, says Branson.

“Because what you're trying to do is shift people into a mode of thought... give them a reason why they need to think about whatever-it-is in a powerful, new way. And ultimately you must give them a reason to talk to you... so they can more clearly understand what you just provoked.”

Branson's approach is powerful to business-to-business (B2B) professional services companies like insurance, legal, financial services or consulting firms. And manufacturers like medical device, pharmaceutical, industrial equipment or computer networking suppliers. Especially considering how ineffective the practice of "being a thought leader" has become.

"Many businesses try to establish themselves as thought leaders so people will come to them for advice... to help them solve problems," says Branson. "That makes sense. But unfortunately, most thought leadership efforts just confuse, frustrate or bore people. For instance, businesses often write thick white papers on an issue. Problem is, that issue is typically already well known and a survey of that issue is usually a summary of conventional thinking. By default, a white paper becomes a way to prove that you know the subject – just like the book reports we all did in school. After distributing it to as many people as possible, it comes at a surprise that no one actually reads it. Too often we end up valuing thought leadership by its weight – not by what's actually inside it. 'Ooh, look how big it is, look how fine the typeface is... look how intelligent it seems to be.' Customers are rarely given new ideas that can help them do their jobs better."

What you're trying to do is give people a reason to think about whatever-it-is in a new way.

A way that compels them to talk to you... so they can more clearly understand what you just provoked.

Yes, Branson says social media is helping change that. But when customers are offered social media as another channel to receive "valuable information" they cut-to-the-chase.

"Clients are saying, 'you know what... I'm going to the conferences and listen to your brilliant people talk; I get the white papers that I don't read; I get all this stuff from you and the last thing I need is one more canned piece of communication. What I *really* want is what I get when I sit down with your people in person. Or even when I'm walking across town and get an insight into something occurring in the market that I'm not already seeing. Tell me something that I don't know."

Branson is taking that simple idea and running with it—along with his client, Jones Lang LaSalle (JLL), a global commercial real estate firm.

“We took the idea (of telling clients something new) and asked ourselves... 'What if we were to create short videos that tee-up useful insights on the most important issues facing clients? What would happen?’”

“For instance, everything is 'going green' lately,” says Branson. “Buildings are interested in conserving energy, getting green credits from local governments, etc. 'But wait – did you know that in the event of a storm, your building insurance designed to replace a typical tar roof won't cover the green landscaping or solar panels on your roof without specific changes in the contract?’”

Branson says this is just one example. There are plenty of bothersome problems plaguing JLL's customers. By focusing on urgent issues, instead of promoting JLL's services these video's prompt a steady stream of inquiries and leads. All through simple but provocative, 90 second videos. And by planning – making sure each snippet provokes response. Sure, there needs to be truly valuable information within the media itself. And we'll discuss the precise formula in a later chapter. “But beyond offering useful information, the success of marketing should be about asking, 'how do I get



Branson and JLL are formatting the video clips in ways that do not provide free advice. Rather, “we're trying to create an irritation in clients... we're trying to get clients to think about something that maybe they didn't before. That's valuable. But it's not advice in terms of 'how are we going to fix this insurance problem?' Instead it's 'here's a problem that you don't know you have.’”

“Actually, I think the success formula is incredibly close to the illegal narcotics trade,” laughs Branson. “That is... you give someone a sample of a substance which gives them some degree of satisfaction. But not enough for the desire to be completely sated. In other words, here... have a little bit of heroin. You will feel something that you will enjoy. But it won't be enough. And you'll want to have it again. So in order to have it again you're going to have to talk to me. And you're going to have to buy some more heroin from me.”

“Actually, I think the success formula is incredibly close to the illegal narcotics trade...”

That's why today's true thought leaders are thought provokers. They're the people putting interesting, valuable, addictive thoughts “out there” in ways that prompt customers to ask for more, more often.

Practically speaking, Branson says it's the difference between talking about everything that you might know, who your clients are, how great your products and services are and such. And instead talking about a particular change in the market lately. Being honestly useful to clients.

“To be effective, it should be presented as, 'I've been talking with someone who's really smart that pointed out something that I'd never even thought about. And the more I think about it... the larger the implications appear. That compels people to think: how can I get more of that kind of insightful information? that leads them to reach out – to call you and ask for more. What a great way to start a sales call,” says Branson who gives simple, actionable tips on this B2B strategy in later chapters.

Selling HVAC systems & services with Facebook



The Social Web sounds sexy. But finding customers, keeping them, trouncing the competition and profiting are *still* what matters to companies like Logan Services.

In just two weeks Logan Services netted 400 qualified leads using Facebook.

This small business isn't a dot-

com "digital native." But the Dayton, Ohio-based heating, ventilating and air conditioning business (HVAC) is generating

a constant stream of local hardware and installation leads using Facebook and blogging.

"We're definitely not selling an impulse item," says Amanda Kinsella, the company's marketing director, who points out that most Facebook leads are unlike those coming from traditional, local advertising partners.

"When people find us on Facebook it's not because they need our products or services. They need advice. And our job becomes one of shepherding them... leading them on a journey to discover that we have valuable solutions to their problems."

Kinsella started generating leads after sharing a few helpful blog stories on Facebook. Her update propagated across the company's Facebook network which includes the regional Better Business Bureau and ServiceMagic.com, a marketing partner. Her status updates caught the interest of needy prospects inside her budding network – many of whom clicked to Logan Service's blog. (www.logan-inc.com/blog-posts) There, prospects read helpful tips, saw clear calls-to-action in the sidebar of the blog page and requested estimates – many that converted to sales.

What does Kinsella blog about? Practical tips on what a home owner must do to qualify for a \$1,500 tax credit, for instance. Of course, earning credits has a lot to do with replacing old

heating and air conditioning systems with higher efficiency models. And if customers need it, Kinsella's Web site offers quotations. It's this kind of helpful, compelling advice that Logan Services' customers *need* these days. Saving money through tax credits is what they're actively seeking. Helping customers save money in economically challenged times earns attention, trust and is occasionally producing sales.

But be warned, say Kinsella. In social spaces like Facebook, being “liked” doesn't translate to an immediate customer need. In fact, research indicates Facebook “liking” doesn't translate to “permission to be marketed to” either. So hammering away with calls-to-action on Facebook isn't the answer. It takes a balanced approach.

Being 'Liked' does not translate to an immediate customer need nor 'permission to be marketed to' either.

For instance, Kinsella participates in (and prompts discussions about) “going green” – keying on courting customers with environmentally-driven needs. She also generates quality leads by conversing with customers about saving money. She points out rebates from local utility companies; how to save on heating bills using whole-house humidifiers that “hold heat in” longer; reducing symptoms of allergies or asthma using whole-house air filters and even retirement issues. Her intent is to foster *purpose-driven* relationships through sharing useful advice, “so we can be there when prospects need our products and services,” she says.

Kinsella's early Facebook experience inspired her to turn up the volume a bit. But in a very practical way. After all, she's a one-woman marketing operation. The company agreed to give-away a free Trane furnace on one condition: It needed 200 verifiable leads first. Once the designated number of contest participants was reached it was “game on!” This is commonly known as “group buying.” All participants need do is tell a compelling, personal story – explaining why they need a new furnace.

In just two weeks, Kinsella walked away with nearly 400 email addresses from local prospects – most of whom will be needing a replacement furnace. Not bad compared to a prior TV and

Web site-based campaign. That effort netted a measly thirty-nine leads over four weeks. Logan Services' Facebook friend count also went from sixty-five to nearly 400 in two weeks.

But wait. There's a bonus prize for Logan Services. Some contest participants ended up having a more urgent need. People who were really, truly needing a replacement furnace didn't take any chances. They signed up for the contest – but also prepared for a possible loss. If they didn't win the free Trane system they still needed a furnace. That's right, after entering, some contest-applicants clicked-through to Logan Services' Web site to get quotations.

Traditionally, Logan Services has relied on all the usual forms of advertising and marketing ranging from TV ads and Yellow Pages listings to partnerships with big box retailers like Home Depot.

They also set up booths at home improvement shows in shopping malls. Over the years, Kinsella says Logan Services has two kinds of prospects: Those with urgent need and those with latent or “early stage” need. But lately, using Facebook, she's beginning to tap into new kinds of leads.

“This has opened up a whole new category of people to talk to,” says Kinsella. “Before social media we were missing out on two different flavors of leads – people who don't know yet know that they need us and/or people who don't need us but know someone who does.”

Kinsella, who grew up on a farm, calls what Logan Services is doing “referral farming.” And she's been doing it at the company for a while now. Today, social media tools are breathing new life into the farming practice for Kinsella, who cringes at the thought of traditional “brand” advertising.

“Before social media we were missing out on two different flavors of leads.

People who don't know yet know they need us and/or people who don't need us but know someone does.”

“To gain referrals we cannot rely only on advertising,” she says. “For our company it’s all done by word-of-mouth. So if I can get an extra boost to my referral farming using social media I’m going to do it.”

To the company’s surprise Facebook is supplying a steady stream of leads from their multi-state market. Logan Services *does* serve younger, first-time home buyers. But its sweet-spot is the fifty-and-over crowd with an \$80,000 or more household income. And that demographic is (surprisingly) *predominant* within the company’s Facebook population.

But it’s not all sunshine and lollipops, Kinsella warns. Sifting through the leads, qualifying them and delicately following-up on them requires skill, dedication and patience. She is quick to point out that leads coming from social media typically require more nurturing. For instance, the Facebook give-away contest resulted in many dozens of passion-filled short stories from people who *really* needed a new furnace. Following-up with hundreds of prospects who did not win is an art form. In the end, she’s converting many leads to lower-cost maintenance plans for existing systems. But Kinsella sees the time investment as worthwhile – given her ability to access new customer relationships.

“A conversation is all we need to begin our sales process. I think we’ve found a new hook on Facebook,” says Kinsella who sees the Social Web as a chance to become an online advice center for residential heating and air conditioning.

If you think about it, Logan Services treats Facebook and blogs as an evolutionary next step – not a fundamental change in how business is done. Kinsella sees social media in a practical light and treats it accordingly. For instance, consider the idea of combining the lure of a free furnace system (a promotion) with time-tested direct response marketing techniques. That’s not a new idea. But boosting it with a “group buying” incentive on Facebook was.

Logan Services is investing in solving customers problems first.

Then combining traditional marketing promotions with Facebook.

Logan Services is proof positive: Selling off-the-hook happens when businesses start putting more stock in *existing* knowledge and strengths... and mixing them with new tools.

Is this revolution or evolution?

I remember the first time I found myself at the mercy of technology. It was 1989. And personal computing was revolutionizing the world. I had so many questions. Everything seemed like a priority. I was a television production undergrad who took a high-paying, high-profile public relations internship at telecommunications Goliath, MCI. I was a fish out of water. I quickly found myself staring at a cubicle, phone, a PC that looked more like a mini-SUV and all kinds of networked applications. Yikes, where was the video equipment? I was lost, scared and certain I'd not make it through my first week. I didn't have any of the answers about these new tools. And everything seemed like a priority.

Maybe you're dabbling in using the latest, most exciting social gizmos to market your business. Twitter, Facebook, blogging, LinkedIn. If you've got even a little bit of experience with them you're probably asking smart questions.

- How many blog posts are needed to make the exercise effective?
- How much effort must be invested in Facebook to see a return?
- How can I manage my reputation among critics and enthusiast fans?
- How much Twitter 'engagement' is needed to realize positive effect?
- How can I not "hard-sell" but still generate leads using LinkedIn?

I'd be surprised if one or two of these didn't sound familiar to you. They may even trigger an emotional response when you read them. Naturally, a lot of business folks I meet are stressing out over these questions. That's because answering and prioritizing them is daunting for most of us. Sometimes it feels like social media tools are beyond our abilities. Sure, social media marketing is "a must." But it's tricky; filled with new rules and strange words. Not to mention tips and advice. There's no shortage of the stuff! Everyone is busy saying that everything is a priority.

But are you really lost? Or are you just *convinced* you're without a map? Let's consider *where* your priorities are coming from. For instance, why is “managing your online reputation” and “developing enthusiasts” more important than generating sales? Because a company selling social “buzz monitoring” software



says so? Or why is the end-goal for Twitter something called engagement? Because someone who wrote a book on Twitter decided so? And who said you cannot use LinkedIn to generate sales leads? “Research” funded by an agency selling traditional advertising?

Chris Kenton, CEO of data intelligence company, SocialRep once said to me, “Ever notice how the people who are the most lost are the most confident in telling others how to find the way?”

It's not your imagination. These “must do's” are often being birthed by gurus, consultants and software companies who are well-intentioned. But they have something to *sell* us. And sometimes they can misguide us.

Be transparent, be authentic, be “human” and always listen, for instance. We're incessantly told these ideas are what companies must do with social media, *immediately*. They seem to make sense. And that's why we're focusing on them. But how practical are ideas like making your businesses “more human” as compared to “more focused on sales?” And haven't we always participated in conversations with customers?

Have you ever felt like you're being *sold* answers that don't connect to your questions?

The right coach

I remember freaking out at my desk... during my first day at MCI. The tools surrounding me were completely foreign. I started asking myself rapid-fire questions. “What are all these software tools – and how will I learn to use all of them in the right way?” And on and on. I convinced myself that the tools staring-me-in-the-face were technically beyond me. And prioritizing them, and my work, would require superhero powers.

My boss saw how panic-stricken I was. Doug was a true mentor. He sat me down and showed me something. That is, how to stop worrying about the tools. “Just take a deep breath... let me show you how these things work,” Doug said. And afterward I was promptly issued a long list of projects. Heh. I was thrown into the fire!



But suddenly I had all the answers. I dug in. I selectively applied my new tools to the tasks at hand. Writing press releases, pitching stories, effectively dealing with un-interested and verbally abusive editors... and managing crisis communications situations. Sure enough, I *already knew* how to do what needed to be done. And how to do it. I also knew how to prioritize my new tasks. I merely needed to take a breath, consider how to apply the new tools and get to work. I needed a bit of confidence in what I *already knew how to do*. That was the key to success.

I climbed a seemingly insurmountable mountain by focusing on making new tech tools produce outcomes. E-mail, word processing and clunky tools like Lotus Notes weren't that scary after all. Because I already knew how to make the *truly important things* happen. Tasks like writing effective press releases, responding to media inquiries and getting employee newsletters written and delivered. I succeeded because I never lost track of the end-goal. And because I had a *good guide*. The right coach. A true, credentialed expert who had *my interests* in mind. A coach who was *invested* in my success. He was someone who

focused me on outcomes – the task at hand. *My* task at hand. Which, of course, happened to be his too.

And that's why I've written this book. To guide you toward the outcomes you need.

Because after all... is understanding how to “do social media” worthwhile – without having a practical way to design it to pay you? What if you were able to invest time *only* in those conversations that are actually worth having with customers? Might it help you start to sell more with social media? What is more powerful? Using Facebook in ways that generate questions that you can help customers solve... helping them guide themselves toward answers like your products and services? Or is it better to keep posting updates to your blog on Facebook... or distributing promotions and coupons?

Think about these questions. And then consider joining me on a new adventure. Social media marketing challenges all of us to design conversations in ways that solve customers' problems. Because once a customer understands his/her problem more clearly he/she is better equipped to find the solution... navigate toward relevant products and services.

Think about it. Wouldn't it feel liberating to set aside the technical aspects of social media – and get back to basics? To trust your instincts? How would it feel to change the context... your entire perspective on social media? Join me. Change the question from “What should we be doing with social media?” to “How can social media make what we *already do* better?” Because if you do... that's when things start to get easier... more fun... and more profitable.

The bottom line is this: Starting today there is a SIMPLE way to make social media sell. And we just discovered it together. Your business can start selling more with tools like Facebook, Twitter, podcasts, YouTube, LinkedIn and blogs. Knowing this why would you hesitate to unlock your business's potential? Off the Hook Marketing is your guide book – the logical next step. I promise it will empower you to make social media marketing produce sales, starting tomorrow. Whether you're a one-man or woman band, a business owner, a

marketing executive, a student or a marketing professional. Invest in yourself. Get your step-by-step guide to improve strategies and bypass pitfalls – make social media sell off-the-hook!

So what are you waiting for? Fire up your Web browser and get your copy at MakeSocialSell.com.

Off the Hook Marketing: Chapters

Chapter ONE: Generate leads and make sales — NOW

You just read this chapter!

Chapter TWO: Design to sell

You will learn:

- How the businesses you just met actually make social media marketing sell
 - The 3 practical success principles that always get results
 - How to align tools like Facebook, LinkedIn, blogs and Twitter with sales goals using direct response
-

Chapter THREE: Translating need — going beyond listening

You'll learn how to:

- Converse in ways that generate more customer inquiries — questions that your products help them solve
 - Start translating customers' evolving needs, prompting them to move toward buying
 - Sell throughout the year — escape the restricting grips of seasonal selling
-

Chapter FOUR: This is evolution, not revolution (or why your social media marketing isn't working)

You'll learn:

- Why most social media marketing efforts don't sell anything and what to do about it
- How social marketing gurus trick you into spending on worthless tactics — and how to stop them dead in their tracks

Chapter FIVE: Avoiding the influence trap

You'll learn:

- Surprising truths about how most businesses are sabotaging their social marketing tactics
 - Common 'best practices' that often do more harm than good
 - Why chasing "influencers" or enthusiasts is probably costing you sales and what to do instead
-

Chapter SIX: Putting it to work

You'll learn how to put everything you've learned to work — step-by-step and starting tomorrow.

Chapter SEVEN: I can see clearly now

You will be able to:

- Start advertising less and capture incrementally new sales — at the same time
- Cement your confidence and power over social media
- Effectively convince others to follow your lead