

New Rules, New Game: Welcome to the Age of the Consumer

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We have to do more than keep media giants from growing larger: they're already too big. We need a new set of rules that will break these huge companies to pieces. — Ted Turner

What good is a powerful, resonant message if no one hears it? What good is a valuable product or service if no one knows about it? There are thousands, if not tens of thousands of people looking for *you* right now. You have to help them find you.

The new game of marketing your practice is based on two premises that, by definition, must work together. You must create messaging that tells the world *why* you exist and what you believe first and *what* you have to offer that makes the world a better place second. Then you must disseminate that message everywhere, cast a broad net and attract those who believe what you believe; people who will, when the time is right, become ideal, loyal customers. If you follow the formula, you will build a business based on the right people and grow it indefinitely.

The problem is that because of [the Internet](#), the rules of marketing and advertising have forever changed. Traditional methods of getting your message out there no longer work and are completely lost in the noise. People have built an immunity to advertising; to the point that newspapers and other print media are going out of business left and right, television ratings stand at record lows, critics of all types have lost their influence and the only voice we pay attention to is the voice of our peers. We have entered the "Age of the Consumer."

Changing Marketing Rules



Think about it: For most of the past century, big business controlled the majority of the messaging you heard and were exposed to. Coke versus Pepsi, Nike versus Reebok, Ford versus Chevy, BMW versus Mercedes; whoever had the deepest pockets put their message in front of the largest number of people in an effort to garner market share and sell their products.

Along came the Internet, making it suddenly easy, fast and cheap for anyone to have a voice – though not the slightest bit easy to have that voice heard on any large scale. In fact, most messaging has become increasingly lost in the sea of mass communication that overwhelms us all on a daily basis.

For a while, behind this tsunami of new voices, big business still controlled whose message was heard, though in this case, through a mechanism called search engines that dictated with complex algorithms who would be found, and with what frequency and ease. Deep-pocket enterprises turned a substantial flow of their dollars toward these search engines, hiring search engine optimization companies to help them "rank well" and [social media](#) companies to create "profiles" and brand awareness.

Quietly, while big business continues to battle over their turf at the grassroots level, a groundswell has built a tidal wave of such immense power that it can no longer be stopped or ignored. The rules of the game have forever changed.

The Power of the People

The power now belongs to the people; the people who endorse your product or service through an online review, the people who applaud your service with a "like" on Facebook or make you disappear by unfriending you, people who support or slam your product with a picture on Pinterest, give you or take away business with a positive or negative Tweet, and so on. This movement is so big that it is now forcing all business, even leading-edge Internet companies such as the search engines, to adjust the way they stay relevant in the marketplace.

And it's happening at lightning speed. The old model of ranking high through relevant content, unique new material, number of backlinks and other so-called "best practices," is falling by the wayside like overripe fruit.

The new model showcases the power of "social signals." In the Age of the Consumer, what matters is what your friends say, what your inner circle approves, what your peer group agrees upon or disparages; in other words, what matters is the voice of your network.

Consider the following shift. Before you buy a book today, you pay no attention to the words of the author or publisher. You look at the reviews from other readers. Before you go to a restaurant, the first thing you search for are the reviews of other diners. Before you stay in a hotel, you check how many stars previous guests gave it and glance through their comments. We no longer depend on the television, radio or mainstream media to help us become informed or educated about a product or service. We look to our peers.

The ramifications of this are immense when it comes to your business. Old methods of advertising and marketing have become obsolete almost overnight, while this new era allows you to position yourself with the same level of relevance as the "big boys" if you can tap the "social signals." Think "word of mouth" referral marketing on an immense scale where you can potentially attract everyone who shares your interests and passions.

Networking Potential and the Small-Business Advantage

And there's an added advantage for those who get this and get it right. Social media is designed for a person-to-person connection. Therefore, small business has a massive advantage over large companies. The face of a small business is a person. The face of a large company is a brand. Through social signals we connect people to people who get to vote for each other, like each other, message about each other and more importantly, link to each other's products and services – on a human level.

Tim and Tina Sims own a chiropractic practice. Through the social network, I can check them out, find out what they stand for, take a look at what others are saying about them, ping a few friends for their opinion, learn as much as I want completely incognito – and make the decision for myself, based on what they express to me, whether or not they are "my kind of people" such that I might first of all connect with them, and second, exercise the voting power of my wallet to buy something from them.

Pepsi can't do that. Yes, it can tout "The Next Generation" all day long. Except I can't shake hands with

Mr. Pepsi, get a read on Ms. Pepsi, find out from my network who has dealt with Mrs. Pepsi, who has been treated fairly or mistreated by Mr. Pepsi, etc. The social network was designed for people to connect with people. In this regard, small business has a huge edge over big companies.

This global shift levels the playing field between big business and you. In the Age of the Consumer, your prospects don't value brands or corporations. When they need or want something, anything, they will turn to the one place they totally and completely trust: their own network.

To become relevant in the marketplace today, you have only one choice. You must build a network ... one that you control and can expand at will.

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