

RELATIONSHIP MEDIA:
**EXPLORING
THE DEPTHS OF
SOCIAL MARKETING**
WITH MARI SMITH

SUCCESS STORY



Becoming one of the world's most influential people on social media is no small feat. Author and entrepreneur Mari Smith explains that it comes down to a love of technology, and above all, a love of people.

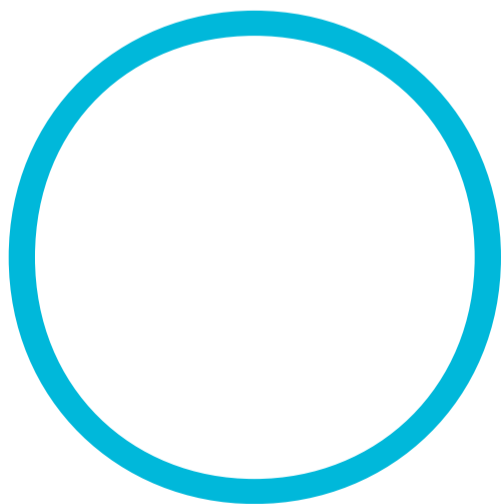
It'd be an understatement to say that social media has fundamentally changed how we communicate and ultimately do business around the world. Some people have a natural flair for it, others have to be trained. Mari Smith is one of the former. Widely recognized as the top Facebook marketing expert in the world, Mari Smith is the coauthor of Facebook Marketing: An Hour A Day and lead author of The Relationship Age, a collection of strategies from leading social media experts to help users navigate the world of social media. Smith is a relationship marketing specialist among the world's foremost experts on using Facebook as a marketing channel.

She is a Forbes top 10 Social Media Influencer and travels the world to deliver keynote speeches and trains businesses on how to use social media.

Speaking exclusively with Foundr, it's easy to see how Mari Smith has thrived on social media: her warm personality and her value of people underpins her every sentence.



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Sir Richard Branson, Tony Robbins and the Dalai Lama. "Sometimes I literally have to pinch myself," she says with a rich and mellow laugh. "Am I really living the American dream? How did I get here?"

Speaking with a sonorously intoned voice, Smith's accent is hard to pick. She was born in Canada to Scottish parents. When she was 12, her parents separated in a time that Smith

once a softly-spoken girl, Smith was shy to the point of disliking to read aloud in class. However Mari Smith now makes a living as an entrepreneur with a consulting and training business from her home in San Diego, and is a successful public speaker sharing the stage with names like

describes as the most difficult of her life. Accompanying her father back to Scotland with her sisters, she remained there for the next 20 years, before coming to San Diego in '99. Despite knowing only one person in California, she explains the move was "one of those defining moments in life." **Armed with 50 British pounds in her pocket and knowing only one person, Smith relied on the "sheer determination" that would characterize the rest of her career.** Within six weeks, she'd found an immigration attorney, a sponsor, and "a whole new network of people." That experience served as a cornerstone to her entrepreneurial future.



When she arrived in the United States, Smith had no prior experience of running a business. “But the common themes in various jobs in sales or marketing or public speaking was my love of people and my love of technology.” A union created in social media heaven.

Flashing a megawatt smile, Smith admits, “A long time ago, I used to build websites, programming and coding.” But **despite being a technological adept, her first love was “people and the psychology of what makes people tick.”**

However, when describing the lead up to her first experience with Facebook, Smith explains that her love of social media site was not a foregone conclusion. “I thought, ‘Oh man, not another online social networking site’. I’m on LinkedIn, Myspace, forget it. I thought: ‘what is this Facebook thing?’” However, when she first opened Facebook.com, all her doubts dissolved. “It was like the angels were singing,” she laughs. “I thought something magical was happening.” And that was before Facebook had hit their first hundred million users.

Of course, every man woman and child has a Facebook account now and it’s often hard to remember the excitement that accompanied its inception. But the thing that really stood out to Smith was that **“I realized that I could reach out and befriend people whom I long admired.** People whose books I read, whose seminars I attended and whose email newsletters I was on. All of the middle people were removed; no secretaries or gatekeepers.”

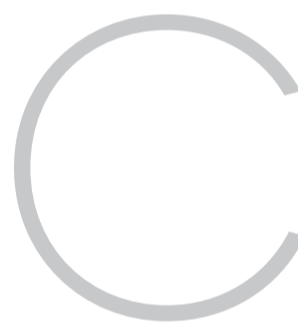
That instance fuelled her passion and excitement “which has not really waned over the last 7 years. I’m still an evangelist for the site.”



Now fast forward, Mari Smith is a Forbes top 10 social media power influencer. She explains her rise coming down to two attributes: focus and consistency. When it comes to focus, Smith's career is a lesson in single-mindedness and determination. "I like to think of it as going a mile deep and an inch wide." When it comes to business strategy, Smith strongly advises against generalization. "If you specialize deeply in a single area, you'll attract more attention, more business, more buzz."

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Smith is also the very model of consistency. The crown of social media influencer wasn't won by posting at sporadic intervals. "You've got to post everyday." If you think that sounds like a stretch, Smith agrees that at times it can be hard work keeping up, and mentions scheduling tools as a saving grace.



Challenging the notion of traditional marketing, Smith likes to avoid marketing focused on a single transaction. "Most marketing is transactional focused. Get the sale, close the deal, and move on. Whereas **relationship marketing is relational-focused. It's about the long-term value of a customer.**"

The idea that people do business with people they know, like and trust predates currency. However, transforming that into the online space is not something that comes naturally to most businesses.

"You keep adding value, engaging with your audience, and building community. It may take a year before a user becomes a client.

The focus is on building relationships which ultimately creates social equity. Eventually that translates to dollars in the bank."

In essence, this strategy bears similarities to content marketing. However, expounding on the relationship between the two, Smith shares a favourite saying: "Content is king and engagement is queen, but she rules the house."

The key differentiator is that relationship marketing focuses on the engagement. From a business standpoint, content is rendered useless if no one is reading or responding to it.

According to Smith, online businesses need to jettison more traditional push marketing methods, and instead freely offer content and encourage engagement with a less obvious drive to convert traffic to sales. However, even in relationship marketing, the conversion step is crucial. Periodically putting out a call to action asking for a sale is a fine art. The trick is not to overdo it. “80 to 90 percent of time, you are just sharing great content.” And then “10 to 20 percent of time, you’re interspersing that value adding content with invitations to do business with you, sign-up for a free report or free webinar.”



There’s a massive cacophony out there,” Smith says, “it’s really a very busy online world and it keeps doubling, tripling and quadrupling, and every time you turn around there’s more information coming at you like a fire hose.” However, Smith turned this content saturation to her advantage. **“I made a name for myself as being someone who is very particular about the content that I share,”** and this was a “major factor to my own success in building a presence online.” Smith claims she frequently shares other people’s content after a thorough screening and filtering process, coupled with content of her own.

Yet for those struggling with the time commitment necessary to maintain an active and healthy social media presence, Smith is reassuring. “Up until a couple of years ago, I was spending up to two hours a day finding great content, crafting the tweets, scheduling it into HootSuite and then in addition, answering questions on my fan page.” But now delegation is the key to success. “Content curation is one of the first things I suggest and recommend to people that they delegate.” Smith recommends that if you do delegate, keep a tight rein on your own voice and personal brand, and monitor every post.

Social platforms come and go, and for a new business, it can be puzzling to decide which one to focus time and energy on. So when it comes to growing a social presence, what platforms will stand the test of time? Smith's advice is to start with Twitter. "It's easier to get your head up around and much easier to grow a following." She continues: "every local business would do well to have an active Twitter presence. Once you have your twitter activity, then add Facebook. Then when you have some systems, even with the help of a social media assistant a couple of hours a week, you can add on whatever else makes sense: Google+, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest." However she warns, "but **don't try to do it all. It's not possible. You'll end up going crazy.**"



If you're a Facebook aficionado, you may be curious about algorithm change. Your page's reach is nowhere near what it used to be. To have that same reach you once enjoyed, paid advertising is necessary. In light of that, it's not uncommon to hear murmurs from entrepreneurs about giving up on Facebook and channelling their energies into their email list, simply because it can be controlled. However Smith reminds us: "Facebook is a rented land." Instead of giving up on Facebook and moving to email, "you want to do both. Keep an active presence on Facebook and build your email list."

She rationalizes having an active presence on Facebook "even if you're getting a 1 percent reach organically", simply because "Facebook is the number one social network, with 1.2 billion active users, 75 percent with their mobile devices, it has become an ingrained daily habit. So you've got to have a presence, you've got to have a page. The second reason is that **Facebook is the second most traffic website next only to Google. And Facebook pages are fully indexed on Google.**"



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mith explains that if you have a good content and a keyword-rich bio on your 'about' section, your Facebook page can rank high in search results. "Even if you've got very little engagement or few fans on your page, it doesn't matter."

Social media has created a fundamental paradigm shift of how we communicate as human beings, which ultimately impacts on how we do business. "There's no going back. We will never return to a society that does one way push marketing and ignores the needs and wants and voice of the consumer."

So, in an age of disposable messages in a flood of nonstop content, what does she see as timeless and enduring? Smith argues that it comes back to inclusivity. "When you have a mindset of inclusivity, of involving and including our market place more, our audience, our current customers, that is timeless."

Valuing people is timeless. You need a powerful corporate culture that is absolutely focused on brilliant customer service, so it's all about the customer. You put the customers at the center, you can't go wrong. The more you value people, the more successful you'll be."



**EXPAND
YOUR TOOLKIT:**

12 **ESSENTIAL
TOOLS EVERY SOCIAL
ENTREPRENEUR NEEDS.**

Mari Smith recommends her favourite apps and programs that have assisted in her rise to become one of the most influential social media users on the internet.

1. Hootsuite.

Primary twitter scheduler. Load up a week's worth of tweets, select the tweet times and then forget about them.

2. Manage Flitter.

A twitter optimization suite of tools. Manage your following, grow your following and proactively reach out to people.

3. Social Bakers.

Based out of Prague in the Czech Republic, they are a social media analytics company providing analytics tools for all platforms including Facebook, Twitter Google+, and LinkedIn.

4. Pocket.

Formerly called Read Later. Save things to pocket, then your social media manager can see what you've bookmarked, load them up as tweets and put them into HootSuite.

5. Photo pin.

Allows you to search Flickr creative commons. Take an image from Flickr, add some wording, and then when you post or share it somewhere you give credit to the original photographer or image creator.

6. Facebook scheduler.

Schedule your Facebook posts. Much more efficient than HootSuite when it comes to Facebook.

7. Google+.

Okay, so this is a platform of its own, but it's crucial to have an active profile on Google+ because Google owns search and that sets the bottom line. If you want better SEO, get some content, and put it on Google+.

8. Wordswag.

A beautiful and simple to use

app which allows you to use their images or your own to create gorgeous visual content with a range of fonts.

9. Canva.

A very simple graphic design tool to add some class to any online content. Very cool.

10. Picmonkey.

Another easy-to-use tool that allows users to create beautiful-looking visual content to share over all social media platforms.

11. Content Gems.

Content marketing made simple. A content curation tool that helps you find, create and curate quality content.

12. Spundge.

Another content curation tool. Aids in creating, delivering and monetizing content. Put in keywords, key phrases, it will troll the internet and find related quality content.



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David Halliday is a journalist and screenwriter. He's written for creative studios in Melbourne and New York, and a range of publications including GQ. He has authored a book on food history and has received awards for screenwriting.