



LEAD INTERVIEW

PEOPLE FIRST

A Conversation with
Mari Smith

By Susan Sly

Mari Smith is one of the world's leading social media thought leaders, widely recognized for her Facebook marketing expertise. Fast Company calls Mari "a veritable engine of personal branding, a relationship marketing whiz, and the Pied Piper of the online world." She has been featured as a Forbes Top Ten Social Media Power Influencer several years in a row. Dun & Bradstreet Credibility named Mari one of the top ten Most Influential Small Business People on Twitter.

A passionate social media leader since 2007, Mari travels the world to provide engaging keynotes and in-depth training to social entrepreneurs. She has shared the stage with Sir Richard Branson, the Dalai Lama, Eckhart Tolle, Tony Robbins, and Arianna Huffington to name a few.

Mari teaches people and companies how to build a true social business with measurable profits from integrating proven marketing strategies. Network marketers who apply her expertise can expect to see increased traffic, lead generation, and conversion, translating into more customers and team expansion.

In addition to having a large, loyal following on her blog, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Google Plus, Mari has taught tens of thousands of business owners around the world with her popular social media webinars over the past several years.

On a personal note, Mari is Scottish-Canadian; she was born in Ontario, Canada, and spent her childhood in a small rural Quaker community in BC, Canada, then lived in Scotland for two decades before moving to San Diego, California in 1999.

What led you to your career today, and how does it tie in with your life purpose?

As a child, I was painfully shy and soft-spoken. I hated reading aloud in English class. I used to slouch down and hide behind my book so the teacher wouldn't call on me. I was sensitive to people's energy and struggled to really show up and be seen. As a child I remember a pivotal moment around age 9 where I saw my mother touch typing on an old-fashioned manual typewriter. I was standing behind her, watching the words appear on the page. She wasn't looking at the page or her hands. I asked, "Mum, how can you get these words to come out? If I covered your eyes, would you still be able to make these words on the page?" She said, "Of course, let me show you." She was a secretary and worked in an office. I said to

her, "When I grow up I'm going to be a secretary. I want to know how to touch type."

In my late teens I joined Toastmasters. I wanted to hone and polish my public speaking and communication skills. I had this longing to be able to communicate well in both the spoken and the written word. The two themes throughout my life have been *people* and *technology*. As I look at my career now, it's this perfect blend of people, relationships, and technology.

You have a strong spiritual connection. How do you bridge the two worlds?

I believe we're all spiritual beings in a body, no matter what our faith. To me, mindfulness, metaphysics, conscious breathing, communing with a higher power, with yourself, with your guides,



Presenting at SMMW 2014-2015.

your angels, whatever that might be—these are all aspects of a spiritual life. For me, it's really an integral part of everyday life. My spiritual life isn't something I do outside of business hours. I have really lived that way for decades. I was fortunate to be raised by parents who were both practicing Quakers. They taught in a Quaker school in a remote part of British Columbia, Canada. This foundation helped pave the way for my spiritual life, being respectful of others, and allowing the

life force to flow through me so I can be of value to others.

Fast forward to today, I confess I can get “addicted” to my technology. It absolutely draws us in, because people and relationships are so important to me. I literally have to make myself put down my iPhone, switch off the computer, and have time for a life in the evenings and on weekends. Only just in the last few months have I started to be more deliberate about taking week-



Connecting with fans at events.



As leaders we have to set the example of what is balance.

ends off, and it's wonderful. I come back to work feeling so refreshed, energized, with an abundance of creative ideas. I'm a work in progress, like anyone else. Some days I will stay up late and be overcommitted and just do too much on the computer, and then I have to step back and remind myself, "Let's carve out time to go for a massage and a facial, to have a day in nature." That really makes a difference.

On that note, you might have seen or heard those acronyms people use. FOMO is *fear of missing out*. There's FOBO, which is *fear of being offline*. Teenagers especially experience this fear of being disconnected. I read an article in *The Huffington Post* last year, and it replaced the acronym with JOMO, which is *joy of missing out*, or JOBO, the *joy of being offline*.

I used to sleep with my phone on my bedside

table. My excuse was that I do these mediations at night and in the morning, and the music is on my iPhone. Then I got this brilliant idea to take my old iPhone 5, which is still Wi-Fi enabled. I deleted every single app and all I have is my music and Sonos speaker controller, and that's now my bedside device. I do not bring my main phone into the bedroom anymore—and it's made a huge difference. I can feel it in the quality of my sleep. Previously I would check email and Facebook, last thing, first thing.

That FOMO or FOBO, that fear is actually unfounded, because once you take a few hours off, and then a half day, and then maybe a full day, and you go back online. Guess what? The world is still spinning. Nothing imploded. Life went on.

If we can lead by example and give people permission, they understand we can actually be successful without burning out or working 24/7. Nobody ever got to their death bed and said, "If only I'd sent one more Tweet or liked one more Facebook post."

Why is network marketing such a social media friendly business?

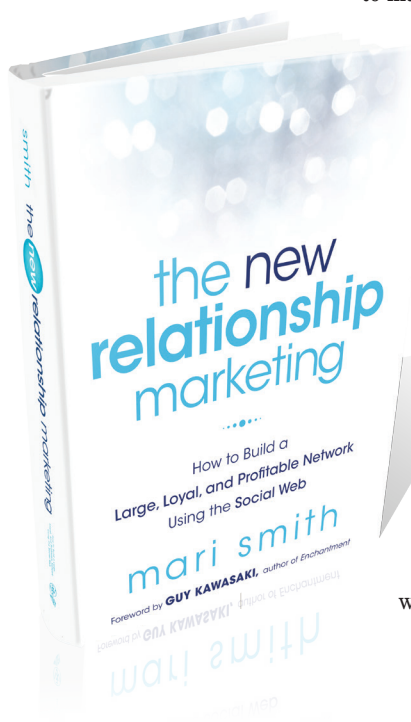
Absolutely hands down it's because it's all about relationships. We do business with people we know, like, and trust. Two people could be out there online or offline selling the exact same product, but it's first and foremost about that connection, about that relationship you have with the person. I've found over the years with social

media when your intent is just to share, to add value with no other agenda, that's when magic happens. You're not thinking to yourself, "If I just help this person, then maybe they'll join my network marketing business." That's almost like a side benefit. Maybe you're helping person A, and person B is watching, and person B becomes the one who signs up in your business.

It's a beautiful thing. We have this huge playground now in which we can all collaborate, connect, support, and build each other up. We don't have to be competitive; there's plenty to go around for everyone. The focus is on relationships, and that's the title of my book that came out in 2012, *The New Relationship Marketing*. The term relationship marketing had been around since the 80s. I popped the word *new* in there, the new element being this technology that allows for a whole new way of communicating and relating and marketing. We now have this piece of technology as part of the connection, and the goal is to make the relationship building and the marketing component as close to the in-person experience as possible.

If you were starting a network marketing business today, how would you create your social media launch?

Putting myself in the shoes of a total newbie, I would absolutely plan, plan, plan. You can't just go haphazard and hope to get some signups. I would create what I call a launch calendar. This will allow you to get all your different pieces lined up. I have a free gift which is simply a shared Google



Mari's Success Formula = Content+Engagement + Conversion



For conversion, use a call to action (CTA), but don't link directly to your website. Have people come to a simple landing page where they get a free gift (a report, video, or audio) in exchange for their email address. Start building your list as part of conversion process.

Calendar Doc you can download at bit.ly/promocal. It lines up all the different parts, the emails, the blogs, the various social channels, and then you can set dates for each part of your plan.

I would start with setting up a Facebook account and make use of both my personal profile and a fan page (business page). The reason I would choose to do both, and utilize both for business purposes, is Facebook gives us three opportunities to be seen in the newsfeed. One is when we post to friends on our profile. Two, you want to open up what's called the follow option that allows people who are not your friends to follow your public posts you put on your personal profile. Third is your fan page you can build up over time, and that allows you to place very targeted ads in the News Feed.

If you're limited on time and resources you might want to start with Twitter, because Twitter's actually easier to understand and master. One of my favorite tools to build and manage your Twitter following is called ManageFlitter.com. It allows you to search bios and tweets to find people who are your ideal target market and/or who are talking about the very issues your network marketing products help to resolve. There's a real fine art to this. Obviously we're not going to follow someone who's talking about weight loss and go, "Try my product!" Instead, you could start to build up the relationship. You might direct them to a valuable resource, like a free blog post.

Any other social media sites you recommend?

If your target market is women, I'd set up an account on Pinterest. If you have the bandwidth to include one more, I would add Instagram, one of the fastest growing social networks. LinkedIn is also terrific for business to business.

Here's the critical point for network marketers with all these different social networks, and even when it comes to blogging: my focus is never going to be on the product. I probably would not even set up these different social accounts with the name of my product or company. Instead, make it something related.

I was just talking to one of my network marketing clients yesterday. They have an intimate product that helps couples in the bedroom. We didn't want to put this on their fan page, so we tied it to something else: we make it about romance or relationship tips, where people feel inspired to share and engage with content pertaining to something related to the product.

A terrific example of this is a Facebook page called Beauty Addicts. Last time I looked at them they were closing in on 2 million fans. It looks like what's called a *passion page*. A passion page is simply a fan page around a passion; it's just a term the users made up. A company called Preen. me owns the Beauty Addicts Facebook page, and they sell cosmetics and other beauty products. It's a brilliant example of how to build an active, engaged community around an interest, but they

have this underlying way to monetize it. Their posts are driving people to the website.

It's going to take some time to build up those social profiles. In the meantime, I might get out there and do some webinars and some public speaking, and some in-person networking. With that launch calendar I mentioned, my marketing plans would be lined up ahead of time, and then on my chosen launch day I'd flip the switch and just go for it.

What are your best tips for profile photos?

Our eyes and our brains are wired to recognize faces. In a split nanosecond, we subconsciously assess the person's gender, age, race, color of skin, eyes, whether the person is friendly or not, their expression and so forth. A major corporation like Starbucks will use their logo on their profile, but most network marketers are better off building a personality-based brand. You're building a brand and following around your name. Therefore your photo should be a head shot. The more cropped in, the better. Ideally, just head and shoulders. An effective technique for social profile photos is to crop the top part of your head. It creates more of a sense of intimacy, because you're closer to the camera frame—and appear closer to the person looking at you online.

I recommend updating your head shot once every twelve to eighteen months, and certainly if you've lost or gained weight or lost or gained hair (by getting extensions or growing your hair out). This is crucial, because it's all about trust. If you do not look like your profile picture, it actually will diminish trust when people meet you in person.

How would you respond to the person who says, "I'm not at my ideal weight," or "my skin isn't perfect"? Is it better to wait and have photos done once you're looking the way you want to look?

This is a brilliant question. As women we will often compare the inside of ourselves to the outside of others, and we have to stop that. We don't know what's going on inside people's worlds. Don't think you need to have a model body to be talking about a weight loss or fitness product.

Imagine there's a scale of 1-10 in whatever niche, whether it's health or relationships or finances. One is just getting started, 10 is total mastery. Let's say right now you are at level 5 or 6. You're getting your way up to mastery, but you've got a way to go. Guess what? You can help everybody who's a 1 to 4, even a -1. There are people out there at totally different levels than you are, and by holding yourself back, you're probably holding others back you could help.

Honesty is the best name of the game, always. Just say, "I'm taking the products and I've lost X amount of weight," or "my skin's improved," whatever the result is. Be honest about your journey and say, "I'm going to be right there along with you. In fact, we have this whole accountability program and we'd love for you to join our Facebook group." A lot of my network marketing clients have this wonderful community where the leader is equally sharing results and it inspires people.

If my intention is to build a brand, how much sharing is too much? When does it get too personal?

I remember around 2008 some people—mainly mature adults—were getting a little uneasy about having to live in a glass house. The words *authenticity* and *transparency* were just flying around the internet. Most of us don't want to feel pressured to share every detail of our life, so here is what I tell people: our personal and professional lives are inextricably linked. Who we are as a person and certain aspects of our daily life might be interesting to people in our business world. Even my Facebook personal profile, it's all business,

or is an aspect of it. People are watching you. It's a component of your branding. Some areas people love to relate to on social networks are family, travel, and hobbies. Even though I personally put some caveats on sharing about family and intimate relationships. If you have young children, you want to be protective of their identity. So that's personal vs. professional.

Then, you need to have another category called *private*. Anything that goes in the private category you just *do not* share online. I have this rule of thumb where I ask, "Would I be proud of this piece of information, this post, this content, to be seen on the front page of the *New York Times*, or found in a Google search in years to come, or proud of for my own mom to see?" If I can't say a resounding yes to all of those, then it goes in the private category, and it does not go online.

Say I want to use Facebook as a recruiting tool. Is there a magic formula?

For the number of posts? Based on the way the algorithms work on Facebook, on my business page I'm going to post maximum twice a day. My average is about once a day, and I don't mind skipping a day now and again. I used to post 7 to 10 times a week. I'm probably more at 5 or 6 times

With Guy Kawasaki, San Diego 2015.



With Eckart Tolle in 2014.



a week now, but I don't typically skip Fridays, Saturdays, or Sundays. People are on Facebook and social networks in general more in the evenings and on weekends. So Friday afternoons, and then all Saturday, Sunday, those are prime times for posting content, getting more visibility and engaging with your online audience.

There are different schools of thought out there. I see some pages that post once an hour. That's a lot, however, with the way the Facebook News Feed algorithm works, your fans and followers are not seeing every single post you publish. On my personal profile it's similar. I post once a day at most, and I mix it up. My rule of thumb is 90 percent of posts are of a personal nature, and 10 percent is business. On my fan page it's the other way around, 90 percent business and 10 percent slightly off topic.

Twitter's different. I tweet about 6 to 10 times a day. That might sound like a lot, but we've got wonderful tools like Buffer or HootSuite, and I have a wonderful Online Content Manager on my team who helps me find content to schedule. I'm a big proponent of using what I call OPC, which is Other People's Content. We are living in the information age. There's no shortage of content to share, and you want to do this blend between creation and curation. You're creating original content on your blog and on your social channels, but you're also mixing in sharing other people's content. Obviously, you would not necessarily share content from a direct "competitor." You don't want to drive your audience to someone else's page if they're in the exact same business. Still, it's all about attitude and having an abundance mindset.

Mark Zuckerberg recently said in the near future Facebook will be almost 100 percent videos. Should network marketers post their own content videos?

People love video. Not everybody's comfortable be-

ing on camera and sometimes we're our own worst critic. Especially women think, "I have to get my hair right and my makeup and my clothes, and the background and the lighting. Then there's editing... It's too much effort. I'm not going to do video."

The good news is there are many ways to do video in this day and age. Aside from the camera (using a higher end camera or simply your smart phone), you can do what's called *screen capture*. You narrate to some slides and use ScreenFlow or Camtasia. There are also some terrific mobile apps. One of my favorites is Flipagram. You select a variety of photos and add a short music track. You can add words if you like. Another app where you can record audio is Shattersong. You could go out, take a photo of something pretty, a flower, animal, scenery, or a product you're offering, and then you press a little button and record a short testimonial. "I just had my morning shake" or "I just did my workout. I'm feeling so great." This little app turns a single still photo into a video in seconds.

With more and more of these apps coming online, there's really no excuse to not make videos. We have to get it out of our heads that we can only shoot video when we're camera ready and looking perfect and pretty, get all the lighting right, and get our perfect script down of what we're going to say. Shorter works better, a little 30-second clip. Instagram's 15 second. Vine is 6 seconds.

What are some mistakes you see network marketers make with social media?

The number one mistake is *posting the wrong content*—things that are inappropriate, off topic, or too diverse. For instance, you want to establish yourself as the go-to expert in health and vitality for single moms age 35 and up, but then you talk about all kinds of crazy, unrelated topics. It confuses your audience and no one will respond. Same with posting too much or too little. If you

put one tweet out, and then three months goes by, or you update your Facebook page, and then a week goes by, you're sending the message that you just don't care that much about providing consistent great content.

The second mistake is *not engaging*. According to some reports, 5 out of 6 messages are left unanswered on social media. Major corporations, right down to solo entrepreneurs, are just not realizing the power of responding, plus what I call proactive engagement—really looking for people to engage with. When people tweet you or leave a comment on your Facebook profile or page, at minimum you want to like that comment, assuming you do like it. Let that person know, “I care, I'm here. I'm listening.” Studies out there have proven that engagement translates into money in the bank. People are more likely to want to do business with you, to sign up, to buy, if you are responding to them.

The number three mistake is *unprofessional branding*. What business are you in? What product do you sell? What problem are you the solution to? The branding is the look and feel, color, graphics, logo, head shot, and so on. Your brand is how people *feel* after they come in contact with any of your branding. People get these confused. Make sure you have a certain flair and style. If it's all over the map, and you look one way in one profile and completely different in another, nothing will stick. We want to present a congruent and consistent image and message. Where do

you see social media five years from now?

Social customer care will absolutely be the competitive advantage. We were just talking about how many messages go unanswered. Here's another stat for you: 71 percent of complaints made on social channels are on Facebook, and most of them go unanswered. Businesses are so focused on getting more fans, more reach, more conversions, but they're forgetting to take care of the people who are already in their community. We're going to see a distinct upward trend in businesses (including network marketers) that go the extra mile, delight and surprise people, and blow them away with incredible service and genuine care. You can't fake this.

I tell people, “You are important to me by virtue of you being a fellow human being on this planet.” I don't care how many followers you have, it could be 1 or 1 million. I don't care what your Klout score is, an arbitrary influence measuring system, 10 or 100. Who cares? None of that matters. We're all human beings, and I like to treat





Mari Smith

Relationships First

people as equals. Even Facebook in their recent developer conference had this new slogan, “People first.” Imagine that!

Facebook has a couple more technologically advanced components coming, including virtual reality. Mark Zuckerberg and his team are working intently on this whole company called Oculus. You’ll literally be able to put on a little eye mask, in a remote area, and you can have a visit with your doctor, as if you were sitting right there in the same room. Maybe we’ll be able to use this for business at some point.

With internet.org Mark’s vision is to connect the entire world. He’s providing internet to millions of people in remote areas through new technology broadcast by an unmanned aircraft. There is so much development we almost can’t even conceive it five years from now. And, no matter what, you can bet that social will be an ongoing, integrated aspect of all these advancements in technology.

In our business we often hear, “Take it offline as fast as you can.” Let’s say Mary posts on her wall, “I just helped one of my friends lose 5 pounds this week.” Her friend comments, “How did you do that?” What’s Mary’s next step?

You want to provide a simple and clear call to action next. One could be to private message you. That could be on your Facebook page, if you have the message button enabled. Now you’re in a private, one-on-one conversation. You might ask for their phone number and set up a call if you have a whole intake process.

Instead or in addition, you might have a

closed Facebook group just for your community. You might tell your prospect, “Would you like to join our Facebook group? It’s for people interested in health and vitality. We share stories and tips.”

A third strategy many of my clients use is “challenges.” A lot of network marketing products lend themselves well to doing a 30- or 90-day challenge with a specific structure and you’re inviting people to come and participate. There might be a nominal fee to it. It’s a gentle way to invite people in to take the next step and get a feel for what you and your product can do for them.

What’s your personal feeling about network marketing?

It’s a brilliant model because it brings a sense of community and built-in support. Being an entrepreneur can be lonely. One of the top benefits of being involved in a good network marketing company is you have an upline, a downline, conferences, calls, education, and plenty of resources. If you’re a person with integrity and character, and you apply yourself, there is no reason you can’t succeed. Because you have this community that’s absolutely one hundred per cent invested in your success.

We typically become the average of the five people we hang out with the most, so you want to surround yourself with the movers and shakers who are doing what you want to do. You’re never alone in your business. What I love about all the different network marketing conferences I’ve spoken at over the years is this feeling of family. There may be thousands of people at the event, but it’s like one big bonded family truly making a difference out there on the planet. ■