



SOCIAL NETWORKING VS. SOCIAL MEDIA

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Social networking and social media – both have the word “social” in them, but they should not be confused as the same thing. In fact, unless you understand how they are different and how they interact, your attempt to use them in a digital campaign strategy is probably going to miss the mark.

In simplest terms, social networking is the “what,” and social media is the “how.”

Let’s start with the “what.” Social networks are made up of peers seeking and giving advice to make better decisions. Advanced social networking science can even tell us which people give out the most advice in the network and have the most influence. These people are called opinion leaders. Some social networks are very large but they tend to get smaller when decisions are more risky.

Now comes the “how” – as in how the social networks communicate. Social networks connect through traditional means, like face-to-face conversations, but we also use new-fangled approaches, such as blogs, syndicated videos, social bookmarks, and more, which we call social media. Unlike social network theory, which involves decision behaviors based on patterns of advice seeking, social media pertains to how this information can be shared online.

In a campaign, we often want to rush into the “how,” for example: “How can we use social media in our next campaign to sell more products?” This approach puts the “how” in front of the “what,” which is the incorrect sequence in virtually any strategy.

First, you need to evaluate the viability of leveraging existing social networks for your business objectives. There are many instances where online social networks do not exist, and if you apply social media to that type of environment, no one will be listening. As a general rule: the greater the gravity of the decision (i.e., the greater the risk), the more likely that social networking is in play and can be leveraged. Therefore, we need to begin by asking ourselves, “Do my customers want to reduce risk in making decisions?” and “Do they rely on peer networks to reduce this risk?” If the answer to these questions is yes, then we’ve settled the “what” portion.

The next question is whether social media can help us tap into this behavior. The answer is maybe. Social media are thriving hubs of social networking behavior and are naturally very desirable channels. But influencing them isn't so simple. The very reason the person is there is to make an informed decision on your industry without commercial interference on the decision process. Sometimes it makes better sense to take advantage of social networking behavior without social media.

At a glance:

1. Social networks and social media are distinct but connected
2. Social networks are patterns of advice seeking and advice giving used to reduce the risk of decisions.
3. Social media is a popular platform for delivering the social message.
4. You need to establish whether the social networking exists in your target market and whether social media is viable channel of influence.

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