

42TM Rules

*of Social Media for
Small Business*

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FOREWORD BY JORY DES JARDINS



“42 Rules of Social Media for Small Business” Book Excerpt

By Jennifer L. Jacobson
Foreword by Jory Des Jardins

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Foreword by Jory Des Jardins

Congratulations on taking the first step and acknowledging that the world is changing, for the better.

Ten years ago—heck, even five years ago—you did not have tools of influence at your disposal like you do today. It's an empowering, and intimidating thought. Anyone who starts a small business now has the ability to generate thought leadership—and customers—any place in the world that has a Web connection. This fact also makes true a new reality: A lot of digital clutter exists in the world and, without a smart, actionable way to take advantage of these tools (and a lot of patience and hard work) you won't rise to the top of Google searches, get indexed on lists of top blogs, or attract immediate responses to your Tweets. Your efforts, like most of the poorly executed online campaigns, won't be seen.

But this isn't an either/or proposition. Even people who don't have ten hours a day to spend online (I acknowledge that people who aren't in digital media might not) can build businesses from engaging in social media. Not all of us are trying to be blugebrities or have the most friends on MySpace; many of us are just trying to grow a business. I can accept that some of you simply want to leverage these tools, but don't blame me or Jennifer if in the process you become obsessed with them.

You see, once you begin to actively engage in social media you find that making connections for yourself and for others becomes a way of doing business. A close friend asked me, three years ago, how she could change careers

through blogging. Before setting her up with a blog account, I suggested she read blogs of natural interest, perhaps even comment on a few. She did that, and began making connections with others in her field. Soon, when she determined she was ready to launch her own blog, she had a built-in audience of followers who read her posts about people making a difference for non-profits. At this point she wasn't running a business but a well-positioned dialogue that listed her prominently in Web searches around tech and non-profits (a nice little side benefit of engaging in blogging). Today she runs a consulting business for non-profits seeking viable online marketing programs. Her podcasts are featured on iTunes and she's constantly approached with new consulting projects. Blogging has given her income, options, and a flexible lifestyle.

Others need to cultivate customer communities, like the online shoe retailer, Zappos, whose CEO has developed a legendary status for his approachability on Twitter, or attract a niche base, like Sarah Endline, whose blog, Sweetriot, has made a name for her free-trade chocolate business. Some leverage social media to re-establish relationships, like Dell did for its small business customers by creating a Facebook page with useful tools and resources. Dell isn't a small business, but it approached social media like one-starting small, and attracting the right people to its page. Some, like Canadian small business Mabel's Labels, amplified their low-budget marketing initiatives by announcing them on Twitter. In early 2009, the brand offered a free ticket to a popular conference for women bloggers (one that my organization, BlogHer, produces). Women immediately responded on Twitter by telling their audiences about the giveaway and encouraging their blogging peers to enter the contest by posting about what inspires them to blog. Mabel's Labels earned 2,355 blog mentions and, according to site tracker Alexa, more than tripled its page views from the best month the corporate site had all of the previous year.

All of these businesses used social media, and none of these initiatives happened overnight. They began with a decision to embrace social media tools and a commitment to use them well. Like with anything powerful, there are misuses, downright abuses, and failures. This isn't a medium to be taken lightly. When you aren't thoughtful, the end user remembers, and the Web refuses to let you forget. What seemed like a harmless picture posted of you enjoying an NRA rally on Flickr could come back to haunt you. If there's anything you take away from Jennifer's book, it's that you must take the time to understand not only the technology, but also the implications of using it.

Once you have taken this time, there's nothing to be afraid of, except maybe for the breakdown of your server from an onslaught of a million customers immediately seeking your services.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

Jory Des Jardins,
Co-Founder of BlogHer

The Changing Context Of Communication

History has seen the opening and closing of many frontiers. John Ford's films document the closing of the Old West. The 'Little House on the Prairie' book series documents the same closing, from a more personal perspective. Even my own grandmother has stories from her Oklahoma childhood—about riding her horse at night, only to hear the chanting of Native American tribes drifting on the wind from miles away. After the spoken language, humankind invented ways in which to write and send messages. We created (to name a few) written histories, the Library of Alexandria, the telegraph, the telephone, the radio, the television, the computer, and the internet. With each new technological medium for advancing communication, humankind has invented new rules and structures. And as our capacity to communicate across new technologies grew, humankind has seen new worlds, and cultivated and occupied those new worlds until our gaze reached beyond the next horizon, beyond the next ocean, and up to the moon, and stars.

I grew up within a strong small business economy in the nurturing light of California's Silicon Valley. At that time, the possibilities for rapid growth and unforeseen wealth loomed in front of the local economy like a golden specter and Silicon Valley was affectionately referred to as the new Wild West. Today however, we are witnessing the closing of a great virtual frontier. With the dotcom gold rush and subsequent bust behind us and the rise and plateau of new and

social media, many businesses are wondering if they missed something; if it's too late. Others are still asking the question; *what is social media?*

This book has been written to give small businesses a long-term perspective on digital communication, because in my experience, a long-term perspective is essential to the survival of any business, organization, or idea. For this reason, '42 Rules of Social Media for Small Business' is not filled with wiz-bang, techno jabber that is prone to constant change. It is, however, filled with the principles of online communication as well as guideposts around what to do, what not to do, and why. Frontiers evolve. Technology changes. A hot, trendy social media hub today might be old hat six months from now. Ideas that are well conveyed, however, do not expire. Small businesses don't have an unlimited amount of time to constantly research and test new social media sites. They do, however, have time to do their homework, select a few social media platforms, stick with them, and make an impact. The small businesses that learn to adapt quickly to the ever-changing landscape of technology will better position themselves for success and long-term survival.

Social media is affecting the ways in which people communicate, both on a personal and global scale. Chris Hughes, co-founder of Facebook and coordinator of the Obama campaign's social networking site³ (<http://www.mybarackobama.com>), champions the individuals behind social media technology. "What has made My.BarackObama unique hasn't been the technology itself, but the people who used the online tools to coordinate offline action," Chris wrote in his blog in November of 2008.⁴ "My.BarackObama has always been focused on using online tools to make real-world connections between people who are hungry to change our politics in this country." For small businesses, the ability to involve your target audience online can mean the difference between success and failure. It is with high

hopes that I encourage you to learn from this book, the rules of communication in this wonderfully changing frontier.

1

Rules Are Meant To Be Broken

You don't need to know everything there is to know about social media to make it work for you.

In May of 1996, unsuspecting Vermont resident Jim Griffith was online, looking to upgrade memory in his old IBM PS/2 computer, when he ran across, and fell in love with a website he had never used before—eBay. In no time at all, Jim, or "Griff" as he likes to be known, found himself spending upwards of 90 hours a week fielding eBay customer questions on a gratis basis. In a sense Griff was breaking the rules—he was spending extensive amounts of his own time working for free, in a marketplace that wasn't very well known. But working hard at something you love has its ways of paying off. By mid summer of 1996, eBay's founder, Pierre Omidyar, and his business partner, Jeff Skoll, invited Griff to join eBay as their first Customer Support Representative. Today, Griff is the official "Dean of eBay Education" and serves as a spokesperson, ambassador, and weekly radio show host with "eBay Radio" and "Ask Griff." So, while some say it's important to play by the rules and do things by the book, in many ways, life is all about following what you love and breaking the rules.

While it may seem counter intuitive to start a "rule book" with a rule about breaking rules, remember that it is the rule breakers who make history. These are the people who push the envelope, who ask "why," who listen to their own curiosities, and make their own observations.

There is a fascinating BBC series called *Connections*. Started in the seventies, the series explained how a rubber band is connected to digital computing and how the concept of the vacuum is connected to the atom bomb. James Burke, the science historian who hosted the show, poses the fundamental problem with the nature of his profession: "By the time you have learned something, it is already obsolete." I believe it is not too far of a stretch to say that by the time you have learned all you can about social media, and by the time you fully understand how to put it into practice, what you have learned will be obsolete.

This is the fundamental problem of the dog chasing its tail. The tail is always in front of the dog, and always behind the dog. So what is the secret to social media success with business? How do you learn all you can about your child, before she becomes an adult? How do you try to look younger, while every year, growing undeniably older? This question is one that is at the heart of existence.

Perhaps the question itself is flawed. For social networking I offer an elegant, simple solution that transcends the question, and in bypassing the initial question, I too am breaking a rule. It is not about learning everything there is to know about social media. Social media is like any other social situation. It's all about exposing yourself, getting into new situations, learning new things, and adapting to new circumstances. Social media is meant to be used and explored. Explore the world of social media as it appears to you. Visit new sites, take notes, learn about your virtual surroundings, and remember, there is no one right way to do it. You don't need to know everything there is to know about social media to make it work for you. You just need to know enough and if you can learn a little extra you'll be better off for it.

So while you learn about how to apply the rules in this book to your social media for business efforts, I encourage you to learn to think for yourself. Remember that you are a member of the human species that is constantly learning and discovering. Apply your new learning while you stay very much in tune with who you are and confident in what your business does for the world.

2

**Communication Is
Communication Both On
And Offline**

Customers appreciate genuine online communication as much as they do a sincere handshake and a smile.

If you have recently discovered social media and feel confused, this is perfectly normal. The mass that is you and your social media presence is miniscule compared to the vast realm of space. The amount of time you exist on this planet, (and the amount of time the planet exists) is so incredibly small compared with the timeline of the rest of the universe, that doing anything may seem futile. However, it is at this point of the story that I like to fall back on an idea, which I hope will illuminate your personal path to social media enlightenment, as well as enlightenment in general. The idea is this: *The meaning of life is for life to have meaning.*

Now ask yourself, "Why am I here?" You will find that you are not alone. Some ask this question while waiting in line at the grocery store, others ask it while watching the horizon as a storm approaches, and still others, late at night, while staring at a glowing computer screen. To this, I offer the idea that life is a series of events in which you find yourself, and in which you find others. The flip side also exists; a series of events in which you let go of yourself and in which you let go of others.

I suggest, and I am not the first to do so, that we can do two profound things with our lives—listen and communicate. It is okay to listen, to be still, and listen. It is okay to create, and it can be wonderful to have relationships. Technology changes, but the human desire to listen and communicate remains. So, if you have come this

far, then you are ready to venture into the rabbit hole that is social media because communication is communication, whether it happens through a social media platform, or through face-to-face interaction between individuals.

Kristen Nicole was a budding writer who would have had a rather sheltered childhood were it not for the online social networks she communicated through. AOL chat rooms, BlackPlanet, Friendster, MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter kept her in contact with her friends. Even when Kristen studied Biopsychology at the University of Michigan, she remained active in these networks because they enabled her to keep in contact with her friends in the undergraduate program. Kristen used social media to stay connected much in the same way people used to do with letters, phone calls, face-to-face visits, and even emails. While you may know Kristen today from Mashable.com, where she was their first employee and head writer, and also as the author of 'The Twitter Survival Guide,' there was a time when Kristen was new to social networks and social media. "Be genuine in building your networks," Kristen advises. "Otherwise customers will be turned off. Join the conversation—don't dominate it or impose yourself into it." The level of honesty that Kristen suggests is essential to effective online communication. "Use real names, real people from your business and engage others for personal as well as professional reasons."

Social media platforms are like a galaxy; every day we learn a little more about it, and every day it moves a little further away. Social media is, at its core, social. Online communication comes with rules, lessons, and messages just like face-to-face communication does. The key to effective online communication is to understand the signals you send and receive. Apply what you know about face-to-face communication to your online practices. You are, after all, representing yourself and your business, so communicate through social media to your customers with the same mindset you have when you see them in person. Virtual customers appreciate genuine online communication as much as they do a sincere handshake and smile.

About the Author



Jennifer L. Jacobson is a communicator specializing in Public Relations, Brand Identity, and Strategic Sales. As a Public Relations Professional, Jennifer creates powerful campaigns that have had her clients featured on Oprah and Friends, DisneyFamily.com, The Huffington Post, and The American Marketing Association's Marketing News. Jennifer's brand identity services have shaped company and product images for Retrevo, LookSmart Ltd., Merchant Circle, Impact Marketing, MarketCulture, and The Personal News Network. As a strategic sales professional, Jennifer has the unique ability to grow a sales campaign from the ground up and turn cold leads into clients almost overnight. Jennifer enjoys identifying and forging relationships with key decision makers from independent businesses to Fortune 500 companies.

As the Founder of Jacobson Communication, Jennifer guides strategic outreach campaigns and growing companies. Jennifer holds a Master's Degree in Broadcast Communications from San Francisco State University and has produced commercials, webinars, podcasts, blogs, social media campaigns, and web pages for many of her clients.

To learn more visit <http://www.JacobsonCommunication.com>.

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