Social SEO & Cross Channel Marketing

a bloomThink & Squirrelworx whitepaper

Billy Cripe & Gary Sirek

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Executive Summary

We are all social businesses.

This joint BloomThink – Squirrelworx whitepaper introduces the concepts of social SEO and cross channel marketing. It outlines four key questions businesses should use to diagnose their social SEO readiness. It presents the complementary nature of traditional SEO and social media. It looks at three key principles for understanding and executing social SEO strategy. These include a discussion of the roles of content, context and engagement.

We discuss why social SEO strategy is not simply a check-box task for interns and raw recruits. Rather it is a business strategy that needs to be crafted with and adopted by senior management then executed according to the trajectory that was mapped out.

Finally the paper outlines foundational SEO concepts and the ways they are impacted by social business practices.

When it comes to SEO organizations need to realize that social cannot be ignored. There is no shortcut for strategy. There is no shortcut for the hard work of focused execution. It must be coordinated. The orchestration between the web team responsible for SEO and the social team responsible for user engagement is vital.

SOCIAL SEO & CROSS CHANNEL MARKETING

All business is involved in cross channel marketing. This is because the rise of social technology has given everyone access to all those channels. Employees blog. Executives tweet. Support engineers answer customer questions on forums. Sales people develop and send out their own email campaigns. Do your employees have smart phones? Studies show that 91% of all internet access from mobile smart phones is social[i]. Even if you think you're not a social business, chances are your employees, your peers and your customers think – and act – differently. Whether your corporate marketing department is out ahead of the social curve or behind the times, your business is a social business.

Cross channel marketing is simply the communication of your message through various media channels like print, web, mobile and social.

Like it or not, you are already doing it.

The growth and acceptance of social media and enterprise 2.0 technology has shifted customer expectations for company interaction. Customers have a reasonable expectation that they will be able to contact someone in the company. Employees with a Twitter or Facebook or Google Plus+ account are now legitimate front-line contacts in the mind of the consumer. Their title does not matter. These socially connected employees are the new face of your company and are equally as important to your brand as the sales, marketing and support teams.

The customer's expectation is that if the person they tweet does not know the answer to their question, they will find it – or facilitate an introduction to someone who does. Just a few short years ago, this would have been covered by a support escalation workflow with service level agreements and corporate policies governing response times. Those policies no longer apply. The conversation is starting with a generic employee in a social media realm rather than a trained support worker in a call center. But the customer has the expectation of better, faster and more accurate service. Easier access to the company – so customer thinking goes – should lead to easier resolution of issues. Companies that hide poor service behind policy documents are dinosaurs doomed for extinction.

The focus on awareness within our new reality of social engagement drives the need for a social SEO strategy. The key concepts are explained here.

DIAGNOSING YOUR SOCIAL SEO READINESS

Audience awareness is the key in the new era of social media and cross channel marketing. Here are four questions you can use to diagnose your social SEO readiness. If you have clearly defined purposes for each area you are starting off well. If you also have clearly defined *and implemented* processes for each area you are doing better than most. If you have efficiency-boosting technology supporting your processes and shared purposes in each area you can stop reading and get on with your day. But if you are like most you have only a vague idea of what *specifically* you are trying to achieve (purpose). If you are like most you have some loose processes that are tucked away in someone's head that supposedly govern how you do things (process). If you are like most you are enamored with technology. You have probably spent more than you thought you would trying to use shiny-new-technology to plug the holes left by your lack of defined purpose and implemented process. Here are four questions you can use to check your social awareness pulse:

1. **Are You On Message?**
   The question for your Marketing and Communications departments is how are they enabling *everyone* in the organization to be on-message? This is not a command and control task.

2. **Are You Synchronized?**
   The question for your intranet team is how are they ensuring that everyone across the organization is synchronized? This means that sales, support, consulting and R&D/Manufacturing teams all know that new campaigns are kicking off. Those campaigns, or special deals or new product launches are likely to drive demand and raise questions. Everyone doesn't need the details but they should be ready to answer questions, address concerns and point customers in the right direction.

3. **Are You Converting Your Existing Social Media Leads?**
   One of the worst things you can do is pretend that social media matters for your business then ignore sales and marketing leads coming in from social sources. So the question for your sales

team is how are they incorporating leads from non-traditional sources into their workflow? Do you even know when you get a lead from a social source? Do you know what to do with it? How to qualify it? How to route it to the most qualified rep to take it from there?

4. **How do individual contributors answer social requests?** Because everyone is potentially on the front lines of customer engagement, how are you equipping individual contributors to deal with the heightened awareness and interaction that successful SEO drives? How are your line workers, back office admins, and other staff connecting the casually interested with the appropriate experts inside your organization who can take that interest to the next level?

Business has always been social. Technology is what now enables engagement in ways and at scales never before possible.

IT IS ABOUT THE CONVERSATION

There are many parts of the social business equation. It is important to remember that social systems, whether systems of record or systems of engagement, are not important. It is the *social* piece that is important. Some might say that content or context is king. But it is important to remember that the power and opportunity resides in the *engagement.* Content is payload. Context ensures the correct destination and arrival time.

Many technologies from vendors big and small facilitate the back and forth communication. But before any of that can happen, awareness must happen. You cannot have a conversation with a person you do not know exists and who does not know you exist. Awareness of the other must exist in both people. Only after awareness is established do context, content and social communication technologies actually matter.

Where companies used to tightly control brand image and message, now they must seek to engage customers and prospects in a conversation. If someone is just not that interested, they will not

Some say content is king. Some argue that context is really king. It's important to remember that the power and opportunity reside in engagement.

Content is payload.

Context ensures correct destination and arrival time.

Awareness precedes both content and context. Without awareness you cannot have a conversation.

engage. If they do not know you exist, they cannot engage. No engagement, no conversation. No conversation no exchange of ideas, no opportunity for persuasion, no buying and no selling. This is a radical shift in perspective and one that has impacts for search engine optimization (SEO), marketing and corporate communications.

SOCIAL SEO

SEO strategists can no longer ignore the impact of social media. Gone are the days when meta tag keywords and a smattering of comments on competitive blogs would boost search rankings. Social media is old-style communication newly applied to online spaces. It is conversation.

SEO	Social Media
Seeks visibility of companies	Amplifies messages
Seeks increased awareness	Creates relationships
Makes content accessible	Creates engagement around content

In short, social media and SEO are a match-made for giving traditional cross channel marketing efforts a badly needed boost.

Consider the launch of a new product. Not only do you want to get the word out, you want to coordinate and cultivate rich conversations through every channel at your disposal.

Social conversations and recommendations are beginning to show up on main search engine results pages and there is evidence that these results are displacing some that would have displayed based on traditional SEO. This demonstrates the importance of having a blended strategy that leverages the tactical SEO strategies combined with the modern prowess of Social media to become effective. It truly depends on how well defined your approach and objectives are to understand the most effective strategy.

CONVERSATIONS FEED STRATEGY

Three items are clear:

1. SEO strategy must take social media into account.
2. There is no substitute for good content.
3. Social SEO is not for novices.

First ensure you are maximizing what you already have. *Hint*: it is more than you probably realize. You have already spent time and money creating interesting content. Whether it is blog copy, great graphics or big-market ads, do not distribute it through only one channel. Make sure that your content is discoverable. This is the point of SEO in the first place! Content like videos, images, ads and blog posts are not shareable if they are not findable.

Second, ensure that your content is easily sharable. Social means sharing. People like sharing their opinions about links, cool images, blog posts, even press releases. What they don't like doing is reformatting that content into social-ready snippets. So make sure that your press release headlines and key facts are ready-made to 140 characters. Make sure they're ready to copy/paste into a tweet. Better yet, put a tweet this link next to key stats, headlines and findings you want shared. The more work you do for people the more likely it is that they will amplify your message. The more amplification through social channels, the greater your discoverability. This is the network-effect, in effect, affecting your business and building your awareness.

CHART: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SEO OBJECTIVES AND SOCIAL MEDIA OBJECTIVES

Legend:
- Very Effective Social Media Objectives
- Very Effective SEO Objectives

Objective	Very Effective Social Media Objectives	Very Effective SEO Objectives
Increase brand or product awareness	37%	42%
Improve brand or product reputation	37%	29%
Improve public relations	36%	27%
Increase website traffic	33%	57%
Increase lead generation	18%	35%
Increase offline sales revenue	10%	17%
Increase online sales revenue	9%	26%

MarketingSherpa ©2010
Source / Methodology: MarketingSherpa Search Marketing Benchmark Survey / Fielded April, 2010 N=2,194

Third, SEO is no longer the realm of the IT web-head and marketing interns. While members of the fresh-from-college clan have an uncanny ability to use social technology for themselves, few come into the workforce with the business savvy that understands how to channel that social connectivity to business trajectories. Organizations must find internal resources, or leverage outside experts like BloomThink or SquirrelWorx to drive strategy and align resources to realize the promises of social SEO.

Remember, too, that every employee is potentially on the front line of customer engagement. So help everyone understand the basics of SEO. Employees' normal and every-day social activities can help the business and delight customers.
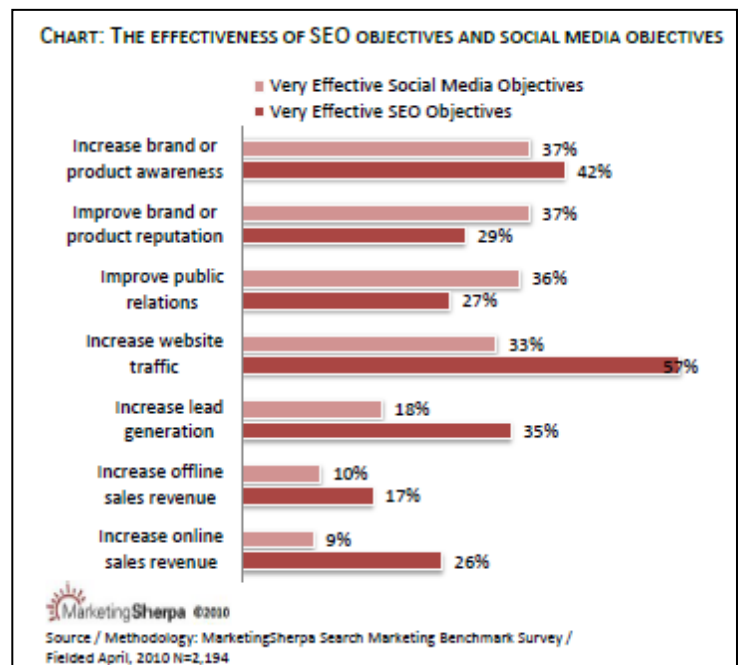
SOCIAL SEO BASICS

Here are some basic SEO concepts and how they are impacted by social media. Don't blast these out to all employees or force them to read this whitepaper. Incorporate these simple concepts into the fabric of how you and they work. Encourage social reviews. Solicit and accept constructively critical feedback. Ask your peers what you can do better. Lead by example.

When you make sure your social strategy incorporates these concepts, you will see uplift in awareness, in conversation and in social engagement.

AN IMAGE IS WORTH A THOUSAND KEYWORDS

Social strategies for boosting site rank can significantly benefit from having others doing the work for you. Create incentives that engage and entice customers, employees and business partners to generate unique content. Images and snapshots work well. They're easy to take and upload with the hyper-ubiquity of phone cameras. Create an *easy* way for users to upload and share their images of them doing stuff with your product to your site. Free and cheap examples include promoting a Twitter hash tag for user photos or encouraging photo sharing via Facebook and your company tag. More advanced examples include soliciting customer or partner photos uploaded to your website. Then have a gallery where users can view their pictures and those of others. Yes, make sure you have someone responsible for curating those photos. That is simple common sense.

1 – "There's Your Expert"
http://www.flickr.com/photos/conferencebasics/4196118898/sizes/l/in/photostream/ Creative Commons Attribution

A STRONG RELATIONSHIP IS WORTH EVEN MORE

Create a zone of exclusivity where influencers and experts are incented to share their thoughts, designs and advice with your audience on your web property. Social is sharing. And sharing is two-way. Make sure that

the incentives you provide are real and impactful. They don't need to break the bank but they should be note-worthy. When you are remarkable people tend to remark. That is exactly the behavior you are after. When you engage users and influencers, you spur their promotion of your site as well.

A word of warning here is to keep it unique. Buying into the whole content farm concept can be a risky proposition. It worked for a while but search engines got wise to and changed up the algorithms to prioritize original and unique content. Ideas on how to do this abound.

Gamification – a recent social buzzword – has a big role to play in this space. By providing incentives – whether credibility ratings, badges for collection, points that can be redeemed or peer accolades you spur engagement. Hotels and airlines have been doing this for some time with their points-based loyalty programs. By providing that incentive, outlining the path to achievement and explaining the rewards they not only gain the loyalty of a customer, they foster a relationship that extends their reach and provides valuable constructively critical feedback when things start to go wrong.

DO THE PRE-WORK & IT PAYS OFF

Scalable link building is a strategy that really impacts your SEO. Some of this is pure grind and there is no substitute for hard work. You need to contact webmasters of complementary sites and mar/com departments of complementary companies and build those relationships. Start with your partners. You already have a relationship there.

However, even with the power of social media one to one contacts are not the most scalable activities you can do. But if you build up popular social accounts that provide real amplification value for those who you want to link to you, then you are on the right track. If you provide badges, reusable widgets for their site, an engagement or reputation service that they can use to increase their reach as well, then you're thinking correctly about social SEO.

As hip and cool as these folks are, remember that the easier you can make their job for them, the more likely they are to engage with you. So do their work for them and get them to "click the button".   It can be a

"Tweet This" button, a "Blog This" button or a "Like" button. The power of the Facebook "Like" button is wide spread but it was not a new idea! In the days before "Like" people could still copy and paste URLs into emails. Some did. What make Facebook's "Like" so powerful is that it made the amplification and sharing terribly easy; one-click easy! Remember though, social SEO is about having conversations and building two-way relationships. If you are not providing anything of value to them – if your social site benefits only you – then you're not really making their lives easier. Anyone you hoodwink into joining up early is likely to get wise and then feel slighted. The backlash can be worse than doing nothing at all. So do it right. Provide *shared* value, and make it easy for them. They will link back in droves.

This is one of the most difficult concepts for the old guard of command-and-control to grasp. The idea of sharing value in order to amplify brand and awareness and thereby gain a greater share of the minds, markets or money is a difficult one to swallow. But it has been proven time and time again. This is the new normal. If you have never read the fable of *stone soup* now is a good time to do so.

SMILE FOR THE CAMERA

Video content is important for social SEO and for improving Google search results. Rich content is vital. We are visual creatures and wired for story-telling. That's what videos do: Tell visual stories. So if you want to have the maximal effect on your audience, use video. But you already knew that. The real trick is optimizing video so that it appears in search engine results pages – SERPs – as rich content. If it is found it can be shared. When hidden beneath the same kinds of textual links as everyone else, the likelihood of engagement goes down.

So how would you make Google search results "know" that your video is there for the Facebookers and Tweeters of the world to chatter about? Make your videos and upload them to your page or site then use the video XML sitemaps feed to send them to Google so that they appear as rich snippets in the search results. If you are scratching your head right now, that's ok. The specifics of how to do it can be found here – creating a video sitemap

START WITH THE END IN MIND

Knowing where you want to go, helps you understand what and how to measure. If you are not measuring activity, awareness, relationships, conversions and influence you're wasting your time and money. True business intelligence tells you why something is happening and what you can or should do about it. Social SEO is, at its heart, about metrics. After all, the "O" in SEO stands for "optimization". You cannot optimize something you are not measuring. But understanding how and what to measure are non-trivial items.

TOOLS & TECHNIQUES

There are many tools out there that range from free to expensive. Most of them have gaps so a hybrid approach is required. While traditional SEO will look at page rank and keywords and hits social SEO will also look at engagement.

Select Metrics Used by US Marketers to Measure Interactive Marketing Performance, March 2011
% of respondents

Metric	%
Clickthroughs	58.7%
Traffic to website	53.3%
Lead generation/user opt-in	43.3%
Page views	38.3%
Incremental sales	34.1%
ROI	31.9%
Customer retention/reactivation	29.8%
Offer response rates	28.3%
Requests for more information	27.9%
Brand lift or awareness	24.6%

Source: Chief Marketer, "2011 Interactive Marketing Survey," May 20, 2011
129176
www.**eMarketer**.com

The key is to remain nimble and always be trying to relate new things together. Bring together the link data that comes out of Yahoo! Site Explorer, or the Google link command Keyword Spy or SpyFu with Webtrends, Google analytics, Omniture and IPaddress geo-tagging. Mash that up against downloads and site registrations. Mash that up against your CRM database of company names or individual names (if you're that lucky) then use industry trend data from public sites to benchmark your performance.

The goal is not just to boost fans, followers and friends but also to engage with customers. You want to turn followers into advocates. You want to convert the curious into customers.

All this requires a holistic approach to metrics. Unfortunately, all too often the SEO team is completely separate from the social media team. It is vital that these teams be brought together in a cross-functional
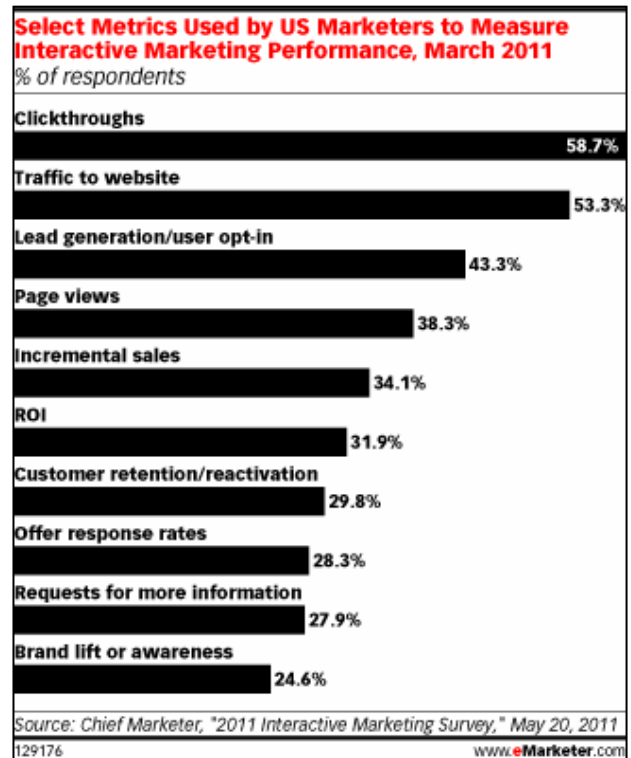
steering committee or working group. At the very least they should provide regular updates as to what is going on and what trends they're seeing. That way they can reinforce each other's work rather than each fight the same battles for relevance and attention time and time again.

Every blog article or web page has a checklist. Here are some good metrics to consider:

- Understanding how important the domain is to SEO and social sharing. If it is fantastically unique but too difficult to remember or type into twitter then you're not maximizing your capabilities. If the domain is highly ranked, do you enable social engagement everywhere?
- Understanding how important specific pages are. If most folks are headed to one or two pages, make sure you're making social engagement push-button easy on those pages.
- Understanding specific metrics about where a link is going to be placed on a page. SEO the anchor text and make sure the content of the link itself is a keyword rather than a "click here".
- Understanding that you want to put your best foot forward. Make sure all the other page content - especially links – are legitimate, useful and authentic. Those other ancillary links are the ecosystem in which your links and content live. If people land on a spam-full page they are likely to have an unfriendly reaction. Even if you have a content gem- why surround it with a midden heap of ugly links?
- Understand what your competitors and partners are doing. Take a look at Compete.com or similar services. Use Hitwise to benchmark yourself and compare to industry trends.
- Socially you want to measure fans, followers and friends. But more importantly, you want to measure the influence of those people. Using services like Klout or PeerIndex will help. Then focus on engaging your most influential fans, followers and friends with incentives, special information or "backstage" access. They are your first step to engaging a wider audience and boosting awareness.

TURNING CONVERSATIONS INTO CONVERSIONS

The most important measurement you can understand is *conversions*. Fans and followers are useless to your business if they're not amplifying your message, buying your product or engaging with your organization. Tracking the way you move a new Facebook fan to a targeted campaign for your product and measuring the results is vital. Tracking how often Twitter followers retweet your messages and what they respond to is important.

The common thread is to get conversations moving about your company, and that powerful tool yields results. A positive conversation can deliver many conversions.

CONCLUSION

This joint BloomThink – SquirrelWorx whitepaper has introduced the concepts of social SEO and cross channel marketing. It outlined four starter questions businesses can use to diagnose their social SEO readiness. It presented the complementary nature of traditional SEO and social media. It looked at three key principles for understanding and executing social SEO strategy. These included a discussion of the roles of content (payload), context (timing and address) and engagement (the goal of the whole thing). We have looked at why social SEO strategy is not simply a check-box task for interns and raw recruit. Rather it is a business strategy that needs to be crafted with and adopted by senior management then executed according to the trajectory that was mapped out. Finally the paper outlined several foundational SEO concepts and the ways they are impacted by social business practices.

When it comes to SEO you need to realize that social cannot be ignored. There is no shortcut for strategy. There is no shortcut for the hard work of focused execution. It must be coordinated. The orchestration between the web team and the social team – even if they are small and especially if they are large – is vital.

BloomThink and SquirrelWorx have experience with business and passion for social media. We stand ready to help.

- 90% of consumers trust recommendation from people they know; 70% trust recommendations from others even if they don't know them

- 83% of consumers share information from people they know

- 81% says they've received advice on a product purchase from friends or followers on a social network site

- 74% say that advice was influential

- 71% claims reviews from family members and friends exert a great deal of influence on what we buy

- 67% of consumers spend more online after receiving recommendations from friends

- 61% of people rely on information from reviews when making a purchase decision

- 14% of people trust advertising

Sources: Econsultancy, eMarketing, ClickZ, Internet Retailer, Bazaarvoice

ABOUT BLOOMTHINK

BloomThink is an Enterprise Information Management consultancy. Billy Cripe is a recognized expert on the intersection of social business, mobility and Enterprise Content Management technology, practice and architecture. He is the founder and Principal BloomThinker of BloomThink an information centric social business and mobile strategy consultancy. Billy is an Oracle E2.0 ACE. He is author of two books: "Two Types of Collaboration and Ten Requirements for Using Them" (2010 Smashwords) and "Reshaping Your Business With Web 2.0" (2008 McGraw-Hill). He has over 11 years of experience in ECM and is a recognized speaker, author and evangelist for Enterprise 2.0, mobility and social business.

Billy has developed and implemented EIM strategy and projects around the world. His past work includes strategy, selection program management and implementation for large Hollywood movie studios, Brand management and security for a global entertainment company, GRC architecture and optimization for global bio-pharma organizations, Executive workflow design for a well known news media firm, and many other groups around the world.

Contact Billy:

LinkedIn at: http://linkedin.com/in/billy

Email: billy.cripe@bloomthink.com

mobile: +1 612 205 3762

twitter: @billycripe

web: http://bloomthink.com

facebook: http://facebook.com/bloomthink

about: http://about.me/billycripe

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ABOUT SQUIRRELWORX

Squirrelworx delivers relevant business and marketing services in a responsive and affordable model that strengthens the brand, makes the business more efficient, and boosts profitability. They are able to handle the things that you know you should be doing for your business, but don't have the time.

Founder and Creative Director Gary Sirek has 21 years experience servicing businesses ranging from Fortune 100 to single person startups driving customer interaction strategy, enterprise business analysis and strategic marketing delivery. Most recently focused he has his business focused on balancing innovative marketing services and critical strategic thinking to break into new ways of leveraging digital media to achieve results. By using a balance of business skills, creative marketing expertise and common sense, Squirrelworx will quickly demonstrate a better way to do business.

There is always a better way.

Contact Gary:

LinkedIn at:
http://www.linkedin.com/pub/gary-sirek/5/785/953

Email: gary@squirrelworx.com

mobile: +1 651-274-9854

web: www.squirrelworx.com

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