



Building the Best Organizations in the Insurance Industry

BE A SOCIAL MEDIA LEADER AND INFLUENCE THE MARKETPLACE

By: Paul Chaney

In 2006, well-known Web usability expert Jakob Nielsen developed the Community Participation Pyramid, otherwise known as the 90–9–1 Principle. Nielsen's findings, which remain prescient about social media behavior to this day, state the following:

- 90 percent of users are lurkers (i.e., read or observe, but don't contribute).
- 9 percent of users contribute from time to time, but other priorities dominate their time.
- 1 percent of users participate a lot and account for most contributions.

I fall into that one percent bracket and tend to think everyone else either does (or should) as well. They don't and, according to Nielsen, they won't.

Rather than be dismayed at the lack of participation, perhaps those of us who are assiduous creators of content should view this as a blessing in disguise, in that it gives us the opportunity to become all the more influential.

The Relevance of Social Media

Personally, I did not get into blogging and social media just to have a bully pulpit. While I enjoy sharing my points of view, my chief goal has always been to start conversations.

I've long held the view espoused by Internet pioneer Dave Winer, who once said, in regard to blogs, that comments left by readers are often more insightful than the post itself. True conversational marketing "nirvana" is achieved when conversations within the comment thread take on a life of their own. The original post becomes nothing more than tinder to start a fire. Still, in spite of the promise social media holds for allowing everyone to be proactive contributors, the fact is, most won't.

What are the implications of this trend as it pertains to content creators? We have the opportunity to [become a center of influence using social media](#). Being a member of the "one-per center" club means there are 99 percent that we have the ability to influence.

Becoming a center of influence via social media is easier now than ever. Perhaps the real promise of social media is not that everyone participates equally, but that those who choose to take up the mantle of "one-percentership" have the opportunity to do so with fewer obstacles. We can become tribal leaders. Think of the ways that social media could benefit your business.

"There's an explosion of new tools available to help lead the tribes we're forming," said Seth Godin in his book *Tribes*. "There are literally thousands of ways to coordinate and connect groups of people that just didn't exist a generation ago. All of it is worthless if you don't decide to lead."

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With influence comes responsibility. We cannot take this issue of leadership lightly. We have a responsibility to use our influence not for selfish motives but to benefit the community as a whole, and those who take this responsibility seriously will be rewarded by those very same communities.

Here are some ways you can [use social media to exert influence](#):

Express servant leadership. Lead by example and have a “do unto others” attitude. That’s the mindset I believe an influencer needs to have. In other words, be a mentor and a “*mensch*.”

Provide valuable content. Value is subjective of course. One person’s trash is another one’s treasure. Nonetheless, I think there are some common sense principles that can be applied to content creation.

Think in terms of what will benefit the community. Face it, most people don’t really care what you or I have to say unless it benefits them in some way. You have to win the right to be heard. Think of the example of Jesus feeding the 5,000. Only when he had met his followers “felt” needs could he go on to meet their real ones (think Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs).

I don’t mean to imply that people are selfish by nature, but one thing is for sure, we are strapped for time. We only have time to consume the information that will provide the most benefit. If your aim is to become an influencer, be the person who serves that function.

Don’t take it personally. While social media is a personal medium, people will tend to value your content before they value you. For example, if I’m in the market to purchase a home, I’m probably going to search for properties before I search for a realtor.

One of the people who best exemplifies the highest and best of this leadership ethic is new media marketing consultant Chris Brogan. Even he said via a Twitter message that sometimes he feels “more like a service than a human.” It goes with the territory and is one of the hazards of the job.

Research, research, research. There was a time when creating content for the Web was much easier than it is now. For example, on average a given blog post may take as much as two hours to write. (Two hours! And some take much longer than that, believe it or not.) That may be in part because I’m getting older and not as fast on my feet as I once was, but I think largely it’s due to the fact I try to substantiate my commentary with appropriate documentation and cite a number of other resources. It’s a far cry from the pithy, anecdotal rants and raves of days gone by.

There is more I could say, but you get the point. If Nielsen’s numbers are valid, and experience tells me they are, a great opportunity lays at your feet -- to become an influencer, the leader of a tribe.