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#chapter 10

SURVIVAL TIPS

Conditions in the rough terrain of social media are unpredictable. The tools and technology change all of the time. To protect yourself and your business from this volatility—and ensure that you don't become virtually irrelevant—be sure that your online marketing survival kit is adequately packed with relevant tools that you know how to use well.

This chapter will explain why and how to use multiple channels for your social media work. For now, it's important to know that your messaging across platforms should be consistent and reflective of your brand. It's also smart to stay reasonably up to date on emerging social media channels and to carefully assess their appropriateness for your own campaigns.

Diversify

As mentioned in Chapter 5: Social Media Channels, each kind of social media platform, from social networking to bookmarking, has a certain purpose and can help you achieve different kinds of goals. Heck, each specific *channel* within the various categories comes with an entirely different set of pros and cons. And the different options work together in varying degrees of harmony. So surviving in the ultra-competitive marketplace of our plugged-in culture depends on choosing the right suite of gear. Don't make the mistake of relying exclusively on one tool to do it all. It won't work.

Think of stocking your online communications bag as you would select gear for an outdoor adventure. What you need depends on what you want to do. So whether you're setting out to climb a mountain, trek across a desert, kayak through a canyon, or launch some other kind of excursion, one tool is not likely to keep you alive. I'm thinking you'll probably need some kind of shelter as well as appropriate shoes, clothing, food, a compass, etc.—and, of course, a bag to hold it all together.

It's the same for a social media program. In most cases, basic provisions will include:

- **Facebook** Accounts (personal and business)
- **Twitter** Account
- **Website**
- **Blog**
- **Email** Marketing (newsletter) Program

It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.

Author unknown, although quote is often erroneously attributed to Charles Darwin

And while we surely know the stand-alone value of each of these starter essentials, the really, *really* remarkable aspect of online social tools is their potential interconnectivity. When used together, the seamless flow among the various channels makes it possible to achieve truly unified messaging that reaches a diverse yet targeted audience. Let's explore this a bit more.

Integrate

Before social media tools came along, marketers could broadcast similar messages across different platforms, but that's where it ended. It was nearly impossible to truly integrate the communications tools and tell a deeper story—the way we can do this today. I mean, a billboard, print ad and brochure could certainly all say the same thing, but there was no way to link these formats together. There was a single message—often a clever promotion—and many static platforms.

But now, the online tools of social media make it possible to truly integrate content and expand our stories. The gig is cross promotion.

When all of your online content is linked to everything else, your visibility grows and your messages become more shareable across platforms. So use tools like Twitter, Facebook, and Flickr to advertise your blog content or eBook with an end-game goal to move people to your website and convert them to email subscribers, buyers of your photography services, and/or advocates. The multi-pronged approach makes it easy for readers to share your content with their own networks, thereby widening your audience.

The strategy is to share. Tactics depend on platform. Ask yourself:

- Which platform works best for your content and audience?
- Is a particular broadcast appropriate for all social media platforms and worthy of such wide exposure?

The latter is something many don't consider, because if every post is simply repeated—and not customized for the platform—then perhaps the audience won't follow all profiles. Maybe one will suffice. So mix it up. And only repeat something if it's worthwhile for all to see.

For example, post different information and images on Twitter, your Facebook business page and Facebook personal page to gently force everyone to follow you everywhere. Of course, this requires you to produce three times the content, but it's something to consider.

Below are some easy ways to integrate your social media efforts:

- List all of your social networking profiles on your website's most frequented page (Home, About, Contact) and in the sidebar of your email template.

- When you write a blog post, post an update on your Facebook page that links to the blog post with all relevant tags.

- Tweet a link to your Facebook updates or blog posts with an @mention of any individuals or topics you're covering, if available.

- Include your Twitter handle, Facebook vanity page link, and website address on your business cards and online profiles as well as any print materials, including brochures, letterhead, portfolios, print photos, etc.

- Encourage your blog readers to subscribe to your email list by including an easy-to-find Subscribe button on blog posts.

- Write blog posts and e-newsletter articles based on threads from your social network sites.

Stay Current

Anyone who uses Facebook knows that it is always evolving. It can be tough to keep up with all the new features. What's here today may very well be gone tomorrow. Nothing's guaranteed.

In fact, entire channels appear and disappear on a moment's notice, if we're lucky enough to get any notice at all. Like MySpace and Friendster, it's likely that today's most popular social media channels will be replaced eventually—maybe even fairly soon. It's already starting to happen. Facebook was once the cool site, because of its exclusivity via .edu email address membership, but it's become ubiquitous. Slowly, niche social networking sites are already chipping at the Facebook empire.

So remember to stay reasonably current on what's happening in the topsy-turvy world of social media, and remain nimble enough to adjust your tactics as needed. Remember what you're trying to accomplish. Focus on your goals.

For many photographers, as we mentioned in Chapter 2: Strategic Planning, social media marketing is used to connect with key groups in the marketplace (e.g., clients, prospects,

The SS Maheno was used as a hospital ship during World War I. After being declared outdated, it was sold for scrap metal. During her voyage to Japan (buyer), SS Maheno crashed at Fraser Island, Australia. HDR photo taken by Lawrence Chan at 16mm f/6.3.

industry thought-leaders, and potential advocates) and to build meaningful relationships with them in order to establish expert status, build clientele, and increase profits.

So if you're using social media to engage your audience and earn their loyalty, and your favorite social media channel turns into a ghost town, it's no longer serving its purpose. That's why it's important to keep up with the quick pace of change. That's also why it's a good idea to ground yourself in some of the more stable platforms, such as a blog, website, and email.

If a new social media platform comes along that is right for you (e.g., Google+), you can easily notify your audience with a blog post and email blast.

Back-Up Plan

While it's true that email doesn't have the group-interaction feature that makes social media so appealing and effective, it is a secure way to control your key online assets.

Reliable

Email lists are quite reliable in terms of direct access to your target audience. Given the near-universal hatred for spam, it's quite an act of intimacy for a person to share his/her email address. It's a big deal commitment, at least in my book, and it indicates sincere interest in engaging with you—over and far above liking you on Facebook or following you on Twitter.

Plus, email is a much more stable kind of medium than social media accounts. Honestly, I've changed my physical address more often than my email address.

Visible

Another benefit of email is that it's very likely that people will see what you broadcast to them via this medium, primarily because it doesn't have the expiration element of the more real-time-centered media. And people tend to access their email account multiple times each day. For me, checking email is the first thing I do when I wake up.

Sometimes people go for days without checking Facebook, and sometimes I do little more than skim over tweets. But we rarely leave an email unread. At minimum, I look carefully through subject lines and sender information.

For instance, my Twitter following is roughly 7,200 right now. I've tested it time and time again, and only about 100 people click through on links each time I tweet. I attribute this to three main things:

1. People are in different time zones from me.
2. People don't want to use Twitter as much anymore.
3. People go on vacations and don't check their Twitter feed.

Yet emails are opened much more frequently. With my list of about 12,000 email addresses, my email blasts get roughly 8,000 opens.

Management

To help manage your email subscriber lists, engagement metrics, and overall campaign activities, I recommend using a third-party system. Companies that provide this service will keep track of your subscriber names and contact information as well as track their engagement.

These services also provide campaign metrics, including the number of opens per email, number of click throughs, percent of clicks, percent of unsubscribes, and more. This will help you hone your email program and ensure that you're getting the results you want.

Testing … Testing …

To determine the most effective way to present your content via email, conduct a few A/B split tests to find out which version your subscribers respond to best. For example, you can test:

- Different subject lines
- Different intro paragraphs
- Different calls to action

"Do Not Reply"

For the most part, we use social media and email campaigns to engage with our audience groups. So do not use "do not reply" email addresses. And if a recipient responds to an email you send, be sure to reply!

In fact, encourage your email subscribers to respond to you. That's the name of the game, right? Ask questions. Here are some ideas:

- **Pet Photographers:** At the end of your general content, ask, What is the breed of your dog? Do you have a photo? Reply back!

- **Food Photographers:** Following your email message, ask, What is your favorite food? What is your least favorite food? Mine are tacos and broccoli. Reply back with a photo of your answers!

- **Wedding Photographers:** End your email message by asking, How did you meet your fiancé? I love stories. If you have a moment, reply back!

Make it your own, of course, but continue to interact. I know it can be a lot of work to maintain conversations with people this way—especially if everyone replies!—but dialogue leads to stronger relationships. And isn't it good for people to be so engaged that they reply to your emails? Think about all those brand evangelists you could be creating!

Commitment

As mentioned earlier, sharing an email address indicates intimacy with your brand. Subscribers trust that the content you'll send will be valuable. To further strengthen this carefully cultivated bond with subscribers, be sure to create and send out several follow-up messages for new subscribers. This will set up anticipation for them to receive future value.

At the one-week mark, consider sending new subscribers an email with a link to an old blog post that has good, relevant information. Refer back to the information on content strategy in Chapter 4 for a refresher on how to develop relevant content for your audience.
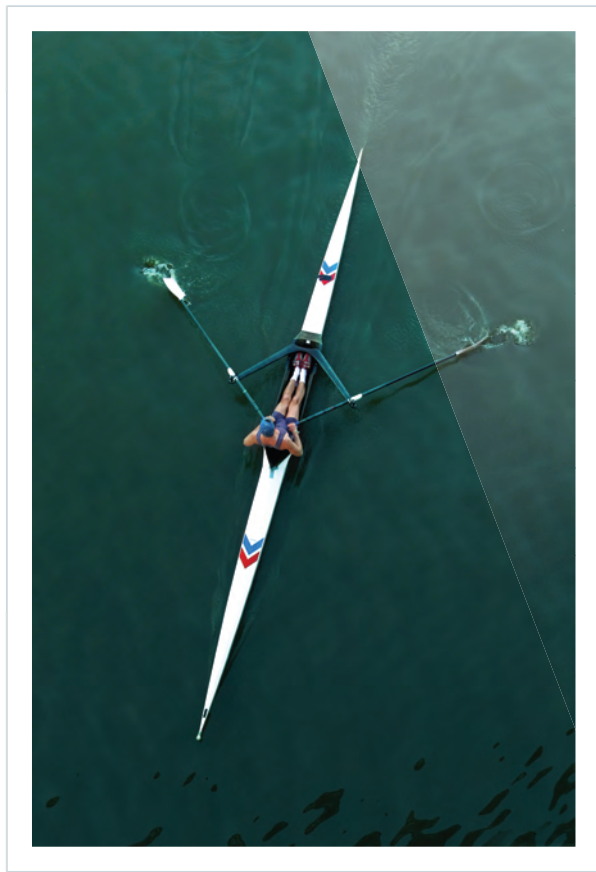
A rower must use consistent strength in both arms to maintain a straight path. Similarly, consistency in the frequency of emails is critical for reader expectations. Photo of rower on Yarra River, Melbourne, Australia, taken by Lawrence Chan at 35mm f/4.5 for 1/320 second.

At two weeks, or shorter depending on your frequency, send another. And at three weeks, send yet another. The point is to train your subscribers to open emails in predictable intervals. And this kind of commitment on the part of you and your subscribers establishes consistency, which builds trust. And trust leads to business.

You can easily send follow-up emails automatically by having them queued in your email management system.

Rewards

Be sure to give your audience a good reason to sign up for your emails. In fact, think about setting up a few different subscription forms based on the level of engagement you've established with different audience groups. For example, maybe you have a general subscription form for those who already find value in what you write on your blog or other communication platforms. Another form could be

used for those who may not yet be convinced. A reward subscription form would offer something of value in exchange for the subscription. This something could be any of the following ideas or something else meaningful to your target audience:

- **Special resources**, such as behind-the-scenes video footage or insider tips for a successful shoot
- **Free eBook** of your responses to photography questions or top blog posts
- **Recommendations** on industry-related products (e.g., children's clothes, doggie treats, wedding vows, etc.)

This tactic ends up being a win-win. Your subscribers gain helpful information and regular updates from you, and you earn their attention and, hopefully, their business and/or referrals.

Expectations

One of the most important (mental) survival tips for your social media program is to not get discouraged by your audience's level of activity. The intense competitiveness of business has allowed consumers to get a bit lazy, while they expect more than ever. Check out my parody on this: http://tofurious.com/parody.

For instance, email used to be a premium service; now it's free. We used to assume we'd pay shipping costs on all Internet orders, but this too is now free much of the time. Even typing used to be required to get to certain websites or perform certain functions on social media sites, but that too has been alleviated with QR codes and programs like FourSquare.

People want things to be easy and instant. Give me instant rice, instant coffee, instant weight loss shortcuts, instant photo sharing, whatever. So don't expect much from your customers. That is, don't expect anyone to type a long response to your posts and fill out long forms. Instead, make sure that your contact form and your subscription forms are short. Requiring anything more than a name and email address is likely to lead to lost opportunities and fewer subscribers.

Also consider the "Clicks of Death" concept. Don't expect anyone to click many times to find something on your website. Navigation needs to be obvious and quick. And be very sure that your call to action buttons—Like, Share, Contact—are easy to find and use.

Handling Criticism

Considering the potentially ginormous audience of your online content, it's inevitable that you will, at some point, receive harsh and possibly hurtful criticism of your work or opinions. And this kind of engagement can result in intense emotions.

Many people agree that the lack of visual and audible cues in online, text-based interaction results in what many refer to as the "disinhibition effect." Psychologist Dr. John Suler has written on this subject extensively. He explains it like this:

> It's well-known that people say and do things in cyberspace that they wouldn't ordinarily say or do in the face-to-face world. They loosen up, feel more uninhibited, express themselves more openly. … It's a double-edged sword. Sometimes people share very personal things about themselves. They reveal secret emotions, fears, wishes. Or they show unusual acts of kindness and generosity. On the other hand, the disinhibition effect may not be so benign. Out spills rude language and harsh criticisms, anger, hatred, even threats. (Suler, 2002)

So what's the best way to handle these situations? Well, similar to any kind of conflict, here are some ideas:

1. **Calm down**. Log off and calm down before responding to a hurtful or otherwise aggressive response to something you've posted. It's usually best to sleep on it or wait about 24 hours before responding. Review the exchange again (maybe even trying out different tones) when your emotions are stable and figure out your next steps. A response is not necessary in every situation.

2. **Be rubber, not glue**. Try not to take things too personally. Sometimes people go online in a bad mood and take it out on you … and probably others as well. Jerks are everywhere. You will almost certainly be judged and ridiculed at some point online, so you're probably better off letting this stuff roll off without much fanfare. In some cases, consider asking a colleague or friend to read the exchange and get another opinion on if/how to respond.

3. **Get acquainted**. If a stranger harshly criticizes you, go check out his/her website, blog, or other profiles to get a feel for who (s)he is and where (s)he's coming from. Not everyone will agree with you, so don't agonize over every divergent opinion. But

To calm down, some people meditate, jog, listen to music, or swim a few laps.
HDR photo of Bondi Beach, Australia, taken by Lawrence Chan at 16mm f/9.

if someone is truly out of line or if the person's intent is unclear, consider responding with a DM (Direct Message), email or other type of private message to gain more clarity on what (s)he meant or why you received such a response.

4. **Agree to disagree**. While it might be easy to dismiss, block, or delete a negative comment, genuine interaction is ultimately a good thing. So try to respond to people, even your attackers, in a positive way. It's possible for your biggest critics to end up being your greatest fans. But you need to work through the tough stuff to make this happen. Stay positive and give the person the benefit of the doubt. Assume sincerity.

5. **Apologize**. If an offensive post or harsh response was sparked by an error you broadcasted, then accept responsibility, apologize, and move on. ★★★★★