



Six Social Media Trends for 2012

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by David Armano | **Comments (102)**

Each year at this time, I look forward and predict trends in social media for the coming year. But first, I look back at my predictions from last year (http://blogs.hbr.org/cs/2010/12/six_social_media_trends_for_20_1.html) . How'd I do? Not bad.

Social media continues to move forward toward business integration, a trend that I identified last year. In a joint study (<http://www.buddymedia.com/newsroom/2011/10/booz-company-and-buddy-media-research-highlights-capabilities-key-to-capturing-value-from-social-media/>) from Booz Allen and social platform developer Buddy Media, 57 percent of businesses surveyed plan to increase social media spending, while 38 percent of CEO's label social as a high priority.

I was also partially accurate in predicting that Google would "strike back" in 2011. They did, with Google Plus, a formidable initiative that acts as Google's "social layer" (http://darmano.typepad.com/logic_emotion/2011/07/google_plus2.html) "to the Web. Part social network and part social search, Google Plus has industry observers scratching their heads, wondering if Facebook will be given a run for their money or if the service evolves into something complimentary in a highly social Web.

I had one big swing-and-miss on Facebook's intrusion in the location-based services war. While Facebook still supports location tracking in a number of ways, it has not put Foursquare out of business. Foursquare still enjoys a niche audience of highly active participants who enjoy telling the world where they are and post pictures to prove it. It is however worth noting that Facebook recently acquired (<http://www.digitalspy.co.uk/media/news/a354447/facebook-announces-expansion-buys-gowalla.html>) location based network Gowalla, so continue to watch this space.

So what can we expect in 2012 in a world that seems to grow ever connected by the hour? Here are six predictions to ponder, in no particular order:

Convergence Emergence. For a glimpse into how social will further integrate with "real life," we can look at what Coca Cola experimented with (<http://www.psfk.com/2010/08/rfid-bracelet-brings-facebook-to-the-real-world.html>) all the way back in 2010. Coke created an amusement park where participants could "swipe" their RFID-equipped wristbands at kiosks, which posted to their Facebook account what they were doing and where. Also, as part of a marketing campaign, Domino's Pizza posted feedback (<http://mashable.com/2011/07/25/dominos-comments-times-square/>) — unfiltered feedback — on a large billboard in Times Square, bringing together real opinions from real people pulled from a digital source and displayed in the real world. These types of "trans-media" experiences are likely to define "social" in the year to come.

The Cult of Influence. In much the same way that Google has defined a system that rewards those who produce findable content, there is a race on to develop a system that will reward those who wield the most social influence. One particular player has emerged, Klout, determined to establish their platform as the authority of digital influence. Klout's attempt to convert digital influence into business value (<http://klout.com/corp/perks>) underscores a much bigger movement which we'll continue to see play out in the next year. To some degree everyone now has some digital influence (http://blogs.hbr.org/cs/2011/01/the_six_pillars_of_the_new_inf.html) (not just celebrities, academics, policy makers or those who sway public opinion). But for the next year, the cult of influence becomes less about consumer plays like Klout and more about the tools and techniques professionals use to "score" digital influence and actually harness, scale and measure the results of it.

Gamification Nation. No we're not taking about video games. Rather, game-like qualities are emerging within a number of social apps in your browser or mobile device. From levels, to leaderboards, to badges or points, rewards for participation

abound. It's likely that the trend will have to evolve given how competition for our time and attention this gaming creates. Primarily, gamification has been used in consumer settings, but look for it in other areas from HR, to government, healthcare and even business management (<http://www.newcommbiz.com/could-gamification-replace-management>) . Perhaps negotiating your next raise will be tied to your position on the company's digital leaderboard.

Social Sharing. Ideas, opinions, media, status updates are all part of what makes social media a powerful and often disruptive force. The media industry was one of the first to understand this, adding sharing options to content, which led to more page views and better status in search results. What comes next in social sharing is more closely aligned with e-commerce or web transactions. For example, Sears allows a user to share (<http://www.edelmandigital.com/2011/10/13/please-steal-this-idea/>) a product or review with their networks directly from the site. Sharing that vacation you just booked, or recommending a product, or service from any site to a social network is where sharing goes next. We probably don't know what we are willing to share until we see the option to do it.

Social Television. For many of us, watching television is already a social act, whether it's talking to the person next to you, or texting, tweeting, and calling friends about what you're watching. But television is about to become a social experience in a bigger and broader sense. The X Factor now allows voting via Twitter (<http://adage.com/article/mediaworks/tweet-partnership-pays-x-factor/231102/>) and highlights other social promotions, which encourages viewers to tap social networks while they watch. Another way media consumption is becoming social comes from a network called Get Glue (<http://getglue.com>) which acts as something of a Foursquare for media. Participants can "check-in" to their favorite shows (or other forms of media) and collect stickers to tell the world what programs they love. Watch for more of this this year as ratings rise for socially integrated shows.

The Micro Economy. Lastly as we roll into 2012, watch for a more social approach to solving business problems through a sort of micro-economy. Kickstarter (<http://kickstarter.com>) gives anyone with a project, the opportunity to get that initiative funded by those who choose to (and patrons receive something in return). A crowdsourcing platform for would be inventors called Quirky lets the best product ideas rise to the top and then helps them get produced and sold while the "inventor" takes a cut. Air BnB turns homes into hotels and travelers into guests, providing both parties with an opportunity to make and save money. These examples may point to a new future reality where economic value is directly negotiated and exchanged between individuals over institutions.

These are a few emerging trends which come to mind. As with anything, looking to the past often gives us clues for what may come in the future. Please weigh in with your thoughts: where do you see "social" going in 2012?