

*New technology offers booksellers countless tools for self-promotion, allowing you to broadcast your store's unique identity—its expertise; its personality; its events, initiatives and in-store conversations—to the masses and capture the attention of kindred customers.*

*By Mark Leslie Lefebvre*

Unique and far reaching marketing doesn't necessarily come from great outlays of cash, but rather from something that has existed for centuries: *Word of mouth*.

And though it's always been with us, it has certainly changed in significant ways. Let's look back a few years.

It's 1992. Bob is impressed with the great selection of how-to books at his local bookstore. A couple of days later, he's chatting with his neighbour Frank over their backyard fence. When Frank mentions plans to construct a new deck in the back yard but isn't sure where

to start, Bob mentions the store and their great selection of do-it-yourself titles. That's word of mouth. One person is impressed enough with something they have learned or discovered to pass that along to someone else.

Word of mouth has evolved significantly from just a decade ago, exploding into something known as viral marketing. Today, while Bob is likely still happily having those face to face conversations with neighbours, his son Robbie is doing something a lot further reaching. Robbie can communicate with thousands of contacts in his social networks through email, text messaging, blogging, twittering and various online communities.

In his latest book, *grown up digital* (McGraw-Hill), Don Tapscott examines details about the generation that has grown up in an entirely digital environment, looking at how differently they interact with the world around them than their parents or even older siblings do.

Exploring their behaviour as consumers, Tapscott offers suggestions to marketing professionals on potentially successful methods to guide marketing plans. Tapscott suggests not just focusing on the customer, but engaging them. And rather than creating products and services, efforts should be made to work at creating consumer experiences. Today's young generation aren't as interested in being consumers as they are in being "prosumers" which is defined by Tapscott as when producers and consumers both actively participate in the creation of goods and services. To do so, owners must be willing to let go, open up products



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# Talk the Tech

*Useful terms in social-networking speak.*

## Blog

A **blog** (a contraction of the term “Web log”) is a website, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order. “Blog” can also be used as a verb, meaning *to maintain or add content to a blog*.

## Blogosphere

**Blogosphere** is a collective term encompassing all blogs and their interconnections. It is the perception that blogs exist together as a connected community (or as a collection of connected communities) or as a social network.

## Chatroom

The term **chat room**, or **chatroom**, is primarily used by mass media to describe any form of synchronous conferencing, occasionally even asynchronous conferencing. The term can thus mean any technology ranging from real-time online chat over instant messaging and online forums to fully immersive graphical social environments.

## Facebook

**Facebook** is a free-access social networking website that is operated and privately owned by Facebook, Inc. Users can join networks organized by city, workplace, school, and region to connect and interact with other people. People can also add friends and send them messages, and update their personal profiles to notify friends about themselves.

## LiveJournal

**LiveJournal** is a virtual community where Internet users can keep a blog, journal or diary. LiveJournal’s differences from other blogging sites include its WELL-like features of a self-contained community and some social networking features similar to other social networking sites.

## MySpace

**MySpace** is a very popular social networking website with an interactive, user-submitted network of friends, personal profiles, blogs, groups, photos, music, and videos for teenagers and adults internationally.

## Podcast

A **podcast** is a series of audio or video digital media files which is distributed over the Internet by syndicated download, through Web feeds, to portable media players and personal computers.

## Social Networking

A **social network service** focuses on building online communities of people who share interests and/or activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others. Most social network services are web based and provide a variety of ways for users to interact, such as e-mail and instant messaging services.

## Tumblr/Tumblelogs

**Tumblr** is a Web community of tumblelogs—a variation of a blog that favours short-form, mixed-media posts over the longer editorial posts frequently associated with blogging. Common post formats found on tumblelogs include links, photos, quotes, dialogues, and video.

## Twitter

**Twitter** is a social networking and micro-blogging service that allows its users to send and read other users’ updates (otherwise known as tweets), which are text-based posts of up to 140 characters in length.

## Viral Marketing

**Viral marketing** and **viral advertising** refer to marketing techniques that use pre-existing social networks to increase brand awareness or to achieve other marketing objectives (such as product sales) through self-replicating viral processes, analogous to the spread of pathological and computer viruses. It can be word-of-mouth delivered or enhanced by the network effects of the Internet. Viral promotions may take the form of video clips, interactive Flash games, advergames, e-books, brandable software, images, or even text messages.

## Web 2.0

The term “**Web 2.0**” describes the changing trends in the use of World Wide Web technology and web design that aim to enhance creativity, communications, secure information sharing, collaboration and functionality of the web. Web 2.0 concepts have led to the development and evolution of web-culture communities and hosted services, such as social-networking sites, video sharing sites, wikis and blogs.

## YouTube

**YouTube** is a video sharing website where users can upload, view and share video clips.

*Definitions excerpted from Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org).*

and services and fully engage customers.

An example of this can be seen in the US in the University of Missouri-Columbia's "I Don't Hate The Bookstore" campaign (<http://www.idonthatethebookstore.com/>). Faced with the long-running misconception that the campus bookstore is gouging students, they asked students to come up with ads of their own to illustrate the benefits of buying their textbooks from the campus bookstore rather than places like Amazon.com.

The results were stunning and the winning team's product, one that spoofed the popular "I'm a Mac, I'm a PC" television ads, replacing the characters with "I'm a bookstore buyer, I'm an online book buyer" characters, was so popular that the bookstore commissioned them to make several more follow-up ads in 2008.

The success here corroborates one of Tapscott's conclusions. As encouraged in *grown up digital*, the bookstore let go of their marketing and put it into the hands of their consumers, allowing their own vision and message to be stated. Because the marketing campaign was created by customers rather than a marketing team, the messages were easier to digest and relate to and fun enough to spread virally.

Examples of the various viral ads created in this prosuming fashion, each of which have been viewed hundreds of times, appear at the following website:

<http://ca.youtube.com/user/BookstoreNewMedia>. Videos can be created on most standard PCs or Mac computers without purchasing any additional software. Recent versions of the Microsoft Windows operating system, for example, come with Windows Movie Maker, a simple yet efficient way to import pictures, video and music and combine them into a short video that can be uploaded to YouTube or other free online repositories for viral marketing.

Before adding content to your video you should ensure you're not using copyright protected material. Using a song or images that are not in the public domain for the creation of your marketing material is not advisable. But the good news is that there are many talented creators willing to allow use of their content provided that permission is granted and proper attribution is given to the copyright owner.

For example, when Titles Bookstore at McMaster University created a YouTube

video advertising that local band Skirmish would be playing in the bookstore during the September 2008 Rush, they used a song with permission from this local band as the background music for their video. Similarly, when Canadian Booksellers Association created a video advertising Independents' Day 2008 (a video created from a Microsoft PowerPoint slideshow—<http://ca.youtube.com/user/CanadianBooksellers>), they used a song from independent musician Kevin Closs, with the artist's full permission and a link to his website.

As mentioned previously, videos aren't the only way of using technology in your word of mouth or viral marketing.

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Bookstores can create simple websites or blogs in a manner that can engage customers. Indigo Community (<http://community.indigo.ca>) is an example of how a bookstore website can spark consumer interest in an interactive way, getting readers and authors to create content, dialogue and discussion appealing to book-lovers.

Of course, independent bookstores have neither the marketing funds nor the tech departments to generate such an elaborate community. But that's not to say they can't easily create a free fan page on Facebook as a place to engage and involve customers, or allow consumers the chance to add their own reviews to books on their website.

BakkaPhoenix, an independent speculative fiction bookstore in Toronto, ON, uses a blog linked from their main website (<http://www.bakkaphoenixbooks.com/>) to post short, cute and interesting updates. Their blog includes brief "overheard in the

bookstore" snippets of conversation, info about upcoming events and in store promotions as well as interesting tidbits, fun facts and figures. Customers post comments which evolve into dialogues that add further substance and uniqueness. BakkaPhoenix uses LiveJournal (<http://livejournal.com>), one of several different free online blog tools available, and one with which many of the store's web-savvy, sci-fi-loving customers are already familiar. "They're already there, and interested in our specialty and the things we do ... they're used to interacting through it—commenting and getting feedback," says BakkaPhoenix Manager Chris Szego. The

effort has been embraced by customers and staff, she notes: "So far they seem to enjoy the conversational nature of our blog, and it makes things much more fun for us."

Similarly, Tidewater Books, an independent bookstore in Sackville, NB, has a website that contains a series of updates and info about the bookstore embedded into a blog-style website, easy to navigate and including quick links to bestseller lists, off-site book reviews, info about their loyalty rewards program, local authored books and contact information.

These are just a few examples of the multitudes of ways that booksellers are using blogs, websites and social networks to engage customers. There's virtually no end to the possibilities that exist allowing you to make it easy for your customers to help spread the virtual word of mouth. The question might not be *what to do* but rather *where to stop?* 