1 ONE SIZE WON’T FIT ALL
I’ll start by saying something contentious: you might not need social media at all. This book doesn’t advocate social media for the sake of it. Rather, it helps you look at your business and your desired outcome and work backwards to find the best way to achieve that. It’s all about business planning and using the technology that’s available and easy; it’s not about how clever the technology itself is.

To be a little more constructive, social media may not be the answer to your business problem because there’s every possibility you haven’t defined the problem itself well enough yet. Throughout this book you’ll find me looking for an objective, a desired outcome in any social media endeavour – this is a business book rather than something about leisure so you need to focus on that outcome.

Say you’re a window cleaner in Edinburgh and you want more customers. You do a little decorating on the side and you’d like to make some more money out of this, so you set up a website and start writing a blog. I’m basing this on a real-life example of someone who once asked me how they could use the web to expand their window cleaning business.

So you’ve got the website and you’ve got the blog. We’ll go into ways of putting a professional-looking blog up later, but for the moment let’s assume it looks snazzy and you’re not finding any technical problems. Now, what are you going to write on this new online diary? Let’s guess:

- Monday, cleaned some windows.
- Tuesday, cleaned some windows.
- Wednesday, strained ankle slightly cleaning windows...

Apologies to any window cleaner reading this, you’re probably an interesting person, but we’re talking about a professional blog rather

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**A blog, or web log, is essentially an online diary you upload regularly to the Internet. Other people can subscribe and get your updates through a mail newsreader or other means, and they can also comment if you allow that.**

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than a personal one. Oh, and someone in Boulder, Colorado might think you sound like a really neat person to employ, but if you’re in Edinburgh you’re not going to decamp to America to clean this person’s windows.

You don’t need social media at all. What you need is to change the sign on your van to ‘decorator’ so people see it in the area in which you work. You need to change your written bills to include the word ‘decorator’ somewhere so that your existing customers, who already use your services quite happily, will think of you in another context. You can, if you’re feeling flush, take out an ad in the local paper, or maybe – just maybe – an online directory like Yell.com. But you don’t need social media.

As I’ve already said, this book won’t bang on about technology for its own sake. For example, for a while I had my Facebook, Plaxo and Twitter feeds synchronized so that the updates always say the same thing, give or take a few minutes’ updating across the different networks (don’t worry about the names, we’ll come on to those later). And I have no idea how it worked. I don’t want to know how it works, just as I don’t want to know exactly how my car works as long as it gets me around. What I care about is that once I was running about trying to keep a whole load of information feeds updated and now I don’t have to. In other words, I knew which question I needed the technology to answer before I started adding bits to the way my set-up worked. That’s the way we’re going to work through this book – starting with an objective and working from there.

Your objective

Why did you buy (or borrow) this book? What was your objective? That’s a serious question. It’s not a book you’d buy for your leisure
time or to unwind at the end of a long day. Presumably you bought it because you wanted to improve your existing business, or to start the right way when you begin a new one. One thing is almost certain though. When you bought the book you thought about your desired result and not the process. You didn’t think: I’m going to walk into the store and lift this book off the shelf then take it to the checkout people and pay for it, or I’m going to buy it from an online bookseller. The process itself would have been of very little interest.

For some reason a lot of people lose sight of this when it comes to setting up some sort of social media for their business. They think: I ought to get onto Facebook because I’ve heard a lot of businesses are doing it; some people have apparently done well from appearing on MySpace, so I ought to do the same; I ought to be on Twitter because so is everybody else. So they focus on Facebook or MySpace rather than any likely outcome or what’s going to go into making their use of these media effective. In no other part of their business will they have been so inclined to put a process in place as an end in itself. This book takes that idea apart and puts the desired outcome first.

So, what exactly do you want to achieve for your business through this strange new technology?

Let’s say you want more customers; as straightforward as that. That’s a respectable aim. Who exactly are your existing customers? How do they behave?

Start by thinking about how you regard certain categories of client. Get away from preconceptions and prejudgements. If you’re selling to an older customer base, do you think they won’t be using this stuff very much? When she heard I was writing this book, my mother-in-law told me she thought that was strange, as she didn’t think I used
Facebook very much. She certainly did, to keep networked with her colleagues at the retail chain where she works. She’d been looking at my page and didn’t think I was using it as well as I could. I now know my mother-in-law is monitoring my Facebook account: beware, it could be you!

She was mistaken in one thing: my use of Facebook is entirely appropriate for someone wanting to use it primarily as a source of sales leads and keeping in contact with editors. But I’d made the classic mistake of thinking someone from an older generation would be on other websites. If I’d been selling services or goods to my mother-in-law I’d have missed a possible means of contacting her, and a very cheap one at that.

So, who are your customers and how do they behave? Above all, do they behave as you think they do? There are ways of finding out. If you were going to take out an advertisement in a local newspaper, you’d find out which one your clients read by talking to them and asking. There’s nothing wrong with getting a few customers to fill out a questionnaire and finding out what they actually do in terms of ordinary media, social media, how well they respond to fliers through the door, all that stuff.

Once you’ve found out a bit about if and how they use social media, read through the sections in Chapter 3 and think about what sort of expectations people on that network will have. It is simply no use sailing onto Twitter and announcing that you have a sale of cheap yachts happening from Saturday to Monday; only people who follow you voluntarily will find out about it. Here are a couple of basic guidelines that apply to most social media:

- Facebook, Twitter et al. have millions of users, but you won’t be heard by all of them, people need to make a conscious decision to
follow you first. So in terms of attracting new customers a particular site might or might not be right; if someone’s searching Twitter for your particular goods or service you might strike it lucky, but equally you might not.

- It’s the same with setting up a profile on Facebook, or even a discussion group or forum. Never forget that you’ll be seen only by your ‘friends’, people who’ve decided to hook up with you on the site. It’s a bit like the early days of the Internet when some people thought just putting a website up would increase their business, and were then bewildered when it didn’t do so. People have to be persuaded to come to your website or your Facebook page. Then you have to keep them there with compelling information, competitions, whatever is appropriate. Fail to attract the customer and you might as well be knocking at the door of an empty house trying to sell your wares.

I’m not trying to put you off, it’s just a matter of working from the desired outcome backwards. Let’s continue assuming that you want new customers; say, 10 more people to come into your classical music shop. Working backwards, how do these people get into your shop? How do they hear about it?

Crucially, do they all hear about it through social media? I’ll bet they don’t. If you’re going to get to all your potential customers, then working backwards should help you get an idea of what you need: word of mouth, local ads, and yes, probably social networks. Remember the word ‘networks’, it’s particularly important. A network is an engaged group of people who’ve spoken to each other and told their friends about you. So, working backwards another step, what did they tell each other? Presumably not that you go online every five minutes to advertise your shop. They might, though, tell each other if you were a particularly knowledgeable source of information on
classical music; maybe you have a particular passion for Baroque and can answer just about any question that’s put to you in that area. That’s something that might well get classical music buffs flooding to your Facebook site in numbers. At that point you might want to think about whether you should sell online too if you have enough customers, so you link your Facebook site to an online store and people start buying from you after engaging with you for some advice. You might find the profile of your customers has changed a little, but that doesn’t matter. In this instance you’ve found a new set of customers and it didn’t cost much. You’ve learned that engagement comes before the exchange of money and that’s also fine. It’s a productive use of your time.

Getting new customers is one objective, making more money out of your existing customers is another. New customers are and difficult to find, while making more money out of your existing customers is frequently easier and cheaper, as you’re likely to get their attention a great deal more easily. The question is how to make them spend more or somehow become an advocate of your brand, which you can often achieve through social media.

In the preface we looked at photographer Simon Apps and his success using Twitter. It’s interesting to note that his objective was pretty clearly to attract more customers, but to do this he had to get away from simply being corporate. ‘I found trying to do corporate tweets that were suitable to appear on the website very difficult and to be honest, quite boring. So within a week I had created a new Twitter account, @simonapps, which is not published on the front page of the site but deeper within the site on my bio page at http://www.professional-images.com/who.htm, therefore making it clear that it was my personal account,’ he says. ‘It is this account that has attracted the followers, so I guess I must be doing something right! Clearly, building a relationship
with the person and not the business is the way to go. Personally I find people I follow that do nothing but try and sell their services extremely tedious and tend to ignore them whilst scanning through the tweets of those I’m following. Ultimately they will be unfollowed.’

Rose and Crown

Rose and Crown is a hairdresser in London’s Covent Garden area. It’s trendy and up market, but it’s in a basement and not easy to find unless you’re looking for it. It’s competing with the likes of Trevor Sorbie and Nicky Clarke, the actual salons in which the famous hairdressers work rather than a franchise of some sort. The owner felt that word of mouth would be the best way to get people through the door, so he registered with a local online directory (we’ll come to those in Chapter 4). This directory allowed people to add reviews of where they’d been, such as hairdressers and restaurants. The owner wasn’t concerned about bad reviews, because everybody gets those from time to time, but he wanted to increase his visibility. Reviews started coming in and so did more customers. Rather cleverly, he now has a laptop in his foyer so if anyone feels like reviewing their experience quickly before they leave, they can do so. This means Rose and Crown actually gets more reviews than everyone else because it’s convenient for customers to leave a note on the site. The few negative reviews actually add some credibility.
It is also useful for dealing with negative criticisms. There was an occasion on which ITV was covering an FA Cup football match and was unlucky enough to cut to the adverts when the only goal was scored. Twitter went crazy with fans saying what rubbish ITV was. The company’s communities assistant Gary Andrews, who is also on Twitter, was able to engage with the complainers, assured them he shared their frustration at not seeing the goal and promised to find out what went wrong. There was no getting away from the fact that someone had goofed, and in a big way, but the contempt subsided quite quickly. ITV was seen to be listening.

‘I immediately got several texts from friends asking me what was going on. As soon as I’d established what had been broadcast, I logged onto Twitter on my personal account and posted a couple of messages along the lines of I couldn’t say what had happened as I didn’t know myself, but would be doing my best to find out in the morning and posting as much on Twitter about the incident as I was able to say and told them to check the ITV feed. I then went onto ITV’s official account, apologized, again stressed we couldn’t say why it had happened but as soon as we knew, we would post links and information,’ says Andrews. Things changed quickly: ‘Up to that point most of my Twitter stream had been filled with very angry comments about the game. Once I’d posted, people were actually a lot kinder (probably realizing that I’d be having to deal with the firefighting the next morning). There was a bit of gentle ribbing, plenty of ‘thank yous’ for at least coming onto Twitter and saying something and once the Tweets had been passed around, it seemed, on my stream at least, people had calmed down.’

Did the companies in the last two examples get extra sales or customers out of these engagements? I doubt it. Did they want to? I doubt that too. They were both using their chosen social media – and they could have achieved much the same on Facebook – to sustain
contact and take part in a conversation with their existing customers or viewers. They had their objective, they had ascertained that their customers would be on Twitter and they used that medium to achieve their desired outcome.

Here's a flow chart of how a lot of people work out their social media strategy:
Do your customers use social media?

Don’t know

Find out!

No

Monitor the situation in case they change, but for the moment you won’t get a response from your existing customers

Yes

Do you have a specific objective for social networks?

No

Think very carefully about why you’re bothering. No objective, no measurement, no success!

Yes

Which ones?

Twitter  Facebook  LinkedIn  YouTube

Can I honestly put something appropriate and compelling onto this network and measure its outcome against my objectives?

If yes, consider social networking as part of your marketing plan – never all of it!

You’ll notice something specific about my ‘better way’: it puts the customer first, then a specific objective. Here’s an important point: this is in no way unique. It is how the best business plans work: they look at the desired outcome and how best to get there, and they follow the plan. Granted that external factors, like the economy, can work against you, but overall your business plan should be there to serve a purpose rather than to serve the business in its own right.
Budgeting your social media activities

As a business owner you need to look at social media not just as an add-on to your marketing, bolted on as some sort of afterthought; you need to look at social media as a central part of your company and something that matters a great deal to you. It needs to be in your business plan and it needs to be thought through. Questions to ask yourself include:

- What am I aiming to achieve through social media?
- Is this realistic?
- Is it budgeted?
- Is it measurable?
- Can it turn around and bite me later on?

You can then start putting this into your business plan. Don’t skip this step – if it’s going to be any use, social networking needs to be part of your overall strategy.

And it needs to be budgeted. You may think that social networking is mostly free, and up to a point it is. Much of it – the blogging space, Twitter and Facebook membership – won’t cost a penny.

But let’s have a look at where money does start to become an issue:

- **Free stuff:** blogging space (basic, although of course you can spend money on web space too), Twitter/Facebook/LinkedIn/Plaxo/other network membership.
Name: fancy a catchier name for your blog? When I set up the blog to go with this book at http://guyclapperton.wordpress.com, I soon realized that this wouldn’t be a catchy title, so I spent £8.99 on the domain www.socialnetworkingblog.co.uk for two years.

Content: let’s continue to use my blog as an example. I write for a living and I wanted a good blog with some depth (and a load of established entries) to help promote the book – in other words, I had a reason to write it for no money up front, but it’s time I would otherwise be spending earning cash. You’ll either have to do the same or ask a member of staff to do it. Staff members given extra duties are inclined to want extra payment or extra incentives of some sort and all of this will take up resources. You might find you want to outsource the writing to a professional; that costs, too.

Monitoring: if you want someone to monitor Twitter or Facebook for mentions of your company and address any difficult people posting about you, you’ll have to build it into an existing person’s job or hire someone new. As this book was being commissioned I saw that Sky News had advertised to hire someone specifically to monitor Twitter. Unless you’re a news gathering agency yourself you’re unlikely to have to do that, but all of this stuff is going to take time. And time costs money.

Marketing: you want a newsletter to keep your customers informed of your new offers and services? Great, but you’ll need to pay an editor, a writer and a designer and if you want a physical newsletter then there will be printing and delivery costs. Don’t write the idea off: it might be exactly right for your customers and only you’re going to know that. But putting bulletins up on Facebook or adding a video interview to YouTube instead of relying on plain text to get attention can get to as many people if you market it properly and will cost a great deal less. Maybe you want to do some cold calling?
That’s equally time consuming and most people say ‘no thanks’. Let’s say you sell or service vintage cars and you want to get more customers. You can probably source a list of owners to cold call, but some of them will no longer own their vehicles, a percentage will have died, and the list could all be out of date depending on its age. You might get better results by looking for blogs on the subject and trying to engage with the writers; a well-read and well-regarded blog giving you a positive mention is likely to attract a lot more attention than a cold call from someone the recipient doesn’t know.

**Legal:** if you want, sensibly, to put together an acceptable use policy of some description for your social media (we’ll come to this in Chapter 6), you’ll need to factor in some sort of payment for your solicitor.

The activity’s not a pushover then, but there are a load of benefits to be had from good, competent use of social media. Take the hairdresser we were discussing earlier. Take ITV talking their customers down when they were becoming belligerent and turning some of them into advocates for the brand they’d only just been trashing. Take media companies, an obvious area for social networks and one in which Channel 4 News has managed to engage with its viewers and so did the BBC’s *Working Lunch*, to the point of reading some of its viewers’ tweets on the air and indeed sourcing interviewees with expertise in particular areas.

It’s not just media companies either. The London Club organizes events in the evening and boosts its numbers by making sure social networking is part of its marketing mix, having first looked at the profile of its customers and where they’re likely to be. As another example, a small business investor went on Twitter to allow people to contact him but also – and this is the really clever bit – to force
them to distil their proposals into a really short message, which saves him time and means they have to really, really think about what they’re writing.

There are plenty more. There’s a trainer and life coach who gives a free one-hour session over Twitter once a week and finds he gets loads of new customers moving on to the paid-for services afterwards. The Arctic Monkeys didn’t put their own songs on MySpace, that was the fans, but doing so shot them into the charts and international success. I grant you, you’re probably not going to be a star like the Arctic Monkeys, but entertainment is another business that social networking has pushed forward. It’s done brilliantly and there’s no reason you shouldn’t do as well by the same low-cost means.

If you take only one thing away from this chapter it will ideally be that your use of social media in your business needs to be strategic and planned rather than haphazard.

**Action points**

At the end of every chapter I’ll be putting in some action points, something you can actually go away and do. The doesn’t make this some sort of ‘in 24 hours’ guide; for example some of today’s points will take longer than some of the suggestions in the rest of the book. But here are two sets of actions. One is stuff to think about – really think about it or you’ve wasted your money on this book – and the other is on stuff to go and do.
Thinking matter

1. Who are your customers and where do they get their information on your services?

2. How old are your customers; are they likely to engage with social media already, and if not will they do so in future? Filling in the table here might help crystallize this in your mind. Use whichever age group or other variant you want.

3. Is there someone out there who is already posing as your business (yes, this does happen)? Or worse, is there an authentic employee out there who people think represents ‘your voice’? We’ll come on to examples where this has actually happened in Chapter 6.

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<th>WHICH SOCIAL NETWORKS</th>
<th>NAMED MEMBER OF STAFF WHO CAN ADDRESS THIS NETWORK</th>
<th>PROBABLE COST IN TIME</th>
<th>PROBABLE INCREASED INCOME AS A RESULT</th>
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Do list

- Start to redraft your business plan and incorporate social media in it if you’re convinced that’s appropriate.

- Set specific targets: if you want to bring more people to your website through social media, decide how many and keep reality checking it. Measure your success.

- Move on to Chapter 2 – we’re not ready to set a revised business plan in stone just yet!