



The CMO's Guide to the 2014 SOCIAL LANDSCAPE



SEO

Brand Awareness

Customer Communication

Traffic Generation



Twitter

Tweets about a Web page have become increasingly influential in generating higher Google search rankings. By one estimate, they are among the 10 most important ranking factors.

While tweets come and go quickly, consistent placement of brand messaging is easy with applications such as HootSuite and TweetCaster. Sponsored Tweets can be purchased to highlight brand content.

Twitter is top-of-mind for social-savvy consumers seeking customer support online. Engaging one-on-one with people in this space is simple, easy to track, and can be done publicly or privately.

Referral traffic from Twitter is growing faster than on any other social media platform. Photos and videos can make tweets even more clickable, while Promoted Tweets can reach new audiences.



Facebook

Facebook shares, comments, and likes are among the top social media activities determining how high a Web page gets ranked in Google search results. Organic reach might be limiting, however.

Facebook allows for easy posting of links, photos, and videos. Yet a recent survey of 100-plus brand pages shows organic reach fell 49% in the four months after October 2013.

Of those who are using social media for customer support, three-quarters say they do so via a company's Facebook page. That spells opportunity for marketers.

Facebook remains a traffic leader thanks to an algorithm that rewards engaging content with better news feed placement. But its share of referred visits fell 15% year-over-year in 2013.



LinkedIn

The platform isn't among Google's top influencers in social media, but personal and company profiles contain plenty of text that's easily searchable and, anecdotally, appears high in search rankings.

Many free opportunities exist, including business pages and LinkedIn Influencer posts. In February, the network opened its publishing platform to members. Sponsored Updates are paid and provide added reach.

Nearly half of people who use social media for customer service say they do so with a LinkedIn Company Page, while more than 40% do so with LinkedIn Groups.

LinkedIn certainly generates referrals, but it's a second-tier source at this time relative to other social media platforms. At the end of 2013, referrals fell in Q4 from Q3.



YouTube

Google-owned YouTube features plenty of text, tags, and other searchable content. With 1 billion-plus users, YouTube offers a vast audience. At the same time, its sheer size can limit the ability to find desired material.

Channels unite people around targeted content, and subscriptions heighten viewership. At the same time, gaining subscribers takes time, and videos paired with pre-roll ads can get lost in the shuffle.

YouTube and other video sites enjoy users' ready attention when it comes to finding customer support on social media. Easy-to-use tools allow marketers to respond to user comments and ratings.

YouTube is an important source of traffic, but its share has dipped. A recent survey ranked it above LinkedIn and Google+, though referrals fell 35% Q3 to Q4 in 2013.



Google+

In general, links with more +1s appear higher in Google search results than similar engagement (e.g., likes, retweets) on other platforms. It's at the top of the heap to date.

Google+ not only favors higher search placement for branded Web pages, but also the authors of those pages. That means higher overall exposure and a rich platform for sharing multimedia.

Google+ enables targeted messaging to interest groups through Circles, as well as the ability to communicate broadly to search engine users. Still, research doesn't indicate consumers use the platform for customer service.

While Google+ generates less referral traffic, its market share is growing among social media platforms. A recent survey showed referral traffic rose 19% from Q3 to Q4 in 2013.



Pinterest

Pinterest activity associated with a Web page is among the top 10 factors that generally result in a higher Google search ranking, according to a recent survey.

This platform puts photos and animated GIFs front and center, allowing content marketers to be creative and repackaging branding. Its Interests tool helps users sort through heaps of visual information.

While brands and consumers can leave public comments and repin visual content, additional personalized interaction, such as private messaging, is nonexistent. That limits its utility as a customer service platform.

Pinterest is the rising star of social referral traffic because each photo links back to a source Web page. Its share of referred traffic rose 89% year-over-year.



SlideShare

While content uploaded to SlideShare includes tags, titles, and other details, informal research indicates links such as those inside PDFs within a presentation are better for SEO than others.

Slide presentations are easily embedded in a Web page. Messaging is presented in a linear format, allowing brands to build a case in a controlled environment with relevant information.

While slides can include links and be shared easily, seamless interaction between brands and consumers isn't SlideShare's strong suit. Consider a well-positioned slide with a phone number or email address.

SlideShare contributes referral traffic to Web pages, but the process is clunky. For success, embed SlideShare presentations on a company Web page, and then include that link in an e-newsletter.



Instagram

This platform shines more on mobile than on desktop, so its SEO value is limited. However, it's feasible that this could change: Its owner is Facebook, whose activity factors into searches.

More than 70% of the world's largest brands are using the platform. It is easy to use, makes registration simple, features a clean interface, and is highly visual—creating plentiful opportunities.

In just a few short months, Instagram introduced video, advertising, and private messaging. That should allow for more engaging interactions and easier one-to-one contact with individual consumers.

Short of sharing a photo or infographic depicting a Web address, Instagram doesn't create referral traffic. Users can't click on a link and be redirected to a brand page.