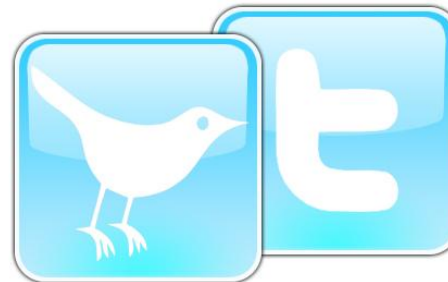


SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS NETWORKING 'ONLINE'



LinkedIn



INTRODUCTION

The first rule of online business networking is to conduct yourself just as you would in conventional networking.

For example, if you had just had your membership accepted at the local golf club, it is unlikely that you would consider arriving at the first club event sporting a promotional sandwich board, dishing out cheap company branded bios, and thrusting your corporate brochure at anyone who chooses to come near you. You would probably simply start 'chatting' to a few fellow club members, establish your common interests, and describe, when asked, what you did for a living – quite possibly resulting in the exchange of business cards. Over time, these relationships would deepen, until you realised that strangely your 'club' network was proving to be one of your biggest sources of referrals and potential new sales leads – all coming to you 'pre-endorsed' by your close-knit, trusted club community.

Online is exactly the same. Relationships are not forged overnight, and you will not be tolerated if you view the networks purely as platforms to broadcast.

In a more overt business example, if you join a dedicated offline 'networking group', you would not expect to get anything out of the network until you put some effort in – attending events, talking to people and following up on discussions in an appropriate manner.

Similarly online, simply creating a profile on various networking sites will not in turn magic up inspiring connections and business opportunities. You need to engage, join in discussion forums, mix and mingle and put the time in to establish relationships.



GETTING STARTED – ONLINE NETWORKING ETIQUETTE

DO

- ❖ Strike up conversations
- ❖ Listen (the hardest)
- ❖ Open up and be transparent
- ❖ Be authentic and be yourself
- ❖ Be inclusive
- ❖ Be generous with your expertise
- ❖ Ask questions



DON'T

- ❖ Broadcast
- ❖ Shout (the loudest)
- ❖ Be shy and secretive
- ❖ Embellish or brag
- ❖ Be intrusive
- ❖ Be mean and competitive
- ❖ Just transmit



GETTING STARTED - STRATEGY

Although it shouldn't be forced or over-promotional, business networking does serve a very important commercial purpose, and it is ultimately about marketing. It should, therefore, be embarked upon in a strategic way and with a plan in mind. Often in Social Media, people dive in putting the Cart (activity) before the Horse (strategy). To avoid this, it is important to ask yourself some basic strategy questions before you dive in.

- ***WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT 'INFLUENCER' GROUPS I WANT TO NETWORK WITH ONLINE?***
- ***WHAT DO I WANT TO ACHIEVE (MY DESIRED RESPONSE FROM EACH OF THESE GROUPS)?***

GETTING STARTED - ESTABLISHING YOUR 'INFLUENCER' GROUPS

Establishing who your 'influencer' groups are, and what you ultimately would like from them, will help target your networking (and marketing efforts).

Who do I want to communicate with?

Customers – Existing

Customers – Potential

Heretics

Ambassadors

Industry

Employees

Stakeholders

Media

What is my desired response from them?

- Sales, Feedback, Referrals, Recommendations,
- Interest, Conversion, Dialogue, Sales
- Conversion, Understanding, Dialogue
- Referrals, Introductions, Endorsement
- Collaboration, Partnership, Kudos, Reputation
- Recruitment, Retention, Interest, Engagement
- Goodwill, Pride, Dialogue, Crisis Management
- Coverage, Product Review, Reputation, Awareness, Acknowledgement

GETTING STARTED - ESTABLISHING NICHE 'INFLUENCER' GROUPS

One of the great things about the online networking world is that once you have established these groups it is relatively easy to find them. And the more specific and niche they are, the better.

EXAMPLE – Hotel X/Potential Customers

INFLUENCER GROUP	SALES AREA	EXAMPLE NICHE GROUPS
Potential Customer	Bedrooms	Birdwatchers, ramblers, National Trust members, cookery enthusiasts
Potential Customer	Restaurant	Wine lovers, fine dining enthusiasts, ladies lunch groups, local societies
Potential Customer	Spa/Health Club	Yoga enthusiasts, spa lovers, complementary medicine followers, mum's networks
Potential Customer	Conference/Banqueting	Wedding planners, exhibition organisers, conference bookers, event organisers, incentive houses

GETTING STARTED - INFRASTRUCTURE

Once you have a plan of the people you wish to network with, it is important to ensure that all the appropriate infrastructure is in place to allow for whatever the various desired responses are.

For example:

YOUR WEBSITE:

- Is it exciting and dynamic enough to encourage people to explore once you get them there?
- If appropriate, do you have the functionality to accept bookings/product sales online?
- Do you have appropriate mechanisms to accept online payment?
- Does it encourage data capture appropriately?
- Does it track how your web customers heard about you?
- Are you tracking web traffic effectively (google analytics)?

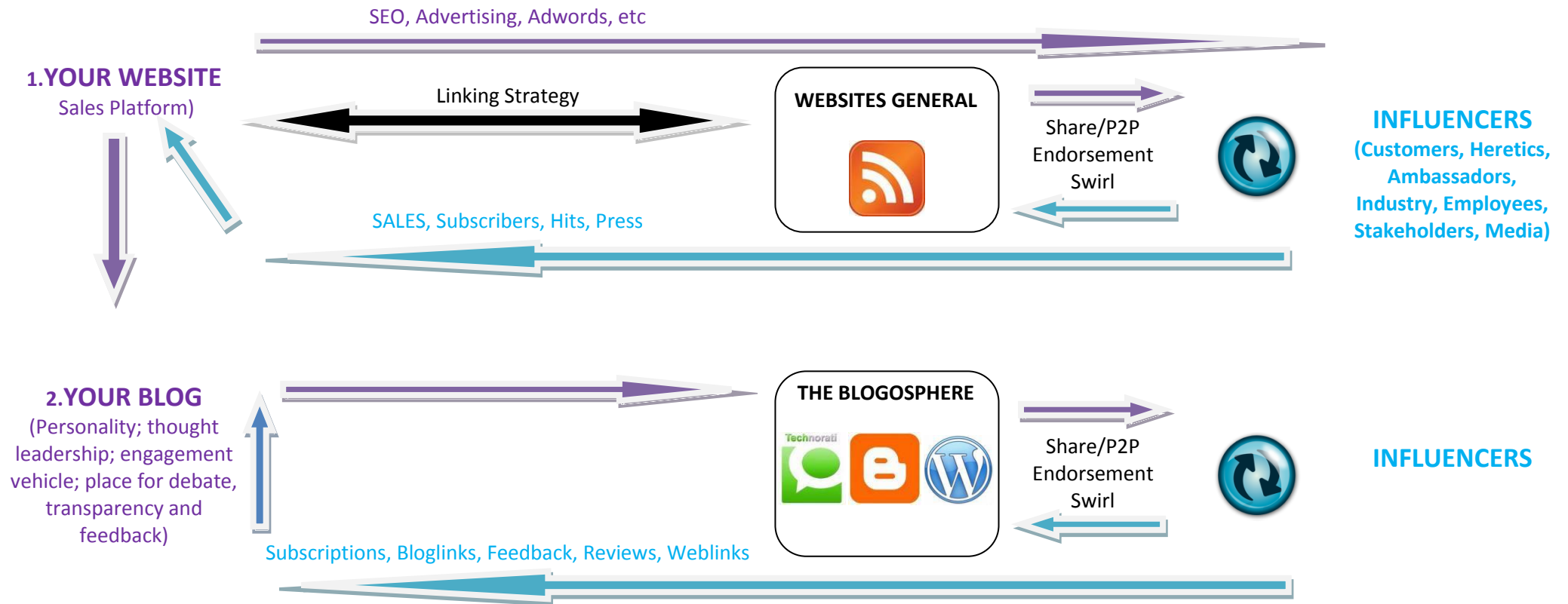
YOUR BLOG:

- If you have a blog, does it serve a specific purpose?
- Does it properly express your personality?
- Do you have an effective and trackable RSS feed embedded (ie Feedburner)?
- Are you sharing your blog with your online networks and micro-blog?

GETTING STARTED - INFRASTRUCTURE

Social Media networking and marketing is all about getting the buzz and the flow right. And it starts with your online infrastructure.

FOUNDATION



GETTING STARTED - BUILDING BLOCKS

Your social and business networks (i.e. Facebook and LinkedIn) and your micro-blog (Twitter) provide you with the opportunities to expand your network of influencers. They offer you powerful platforms to introduce yourself to your new 'influencer' groups, show your expertise, generosity and personality, and engage with people in a way which was previously impossible.

The key to successful online networking is to drive these new connections back to your Blog and your Website (your online infrastructure).

GETTING STARTED - INFRASTRUCTURE

FOUNDATION

1. YOUR WEBSITE
(Sales Platform)

WEBSITES GENERAL



INFLUENCERS
(Customers, Heretics,
Ambassadors, Industry,
Employees, Stakeholders,
Media)

2. YOUR BLOG

THE BLOGOSPHERE



INFLUENCERS

NETWORKING

3. SOCIAL & BIZ
NETWORKS

SOCIAL & BUSINESS
NETWORKS



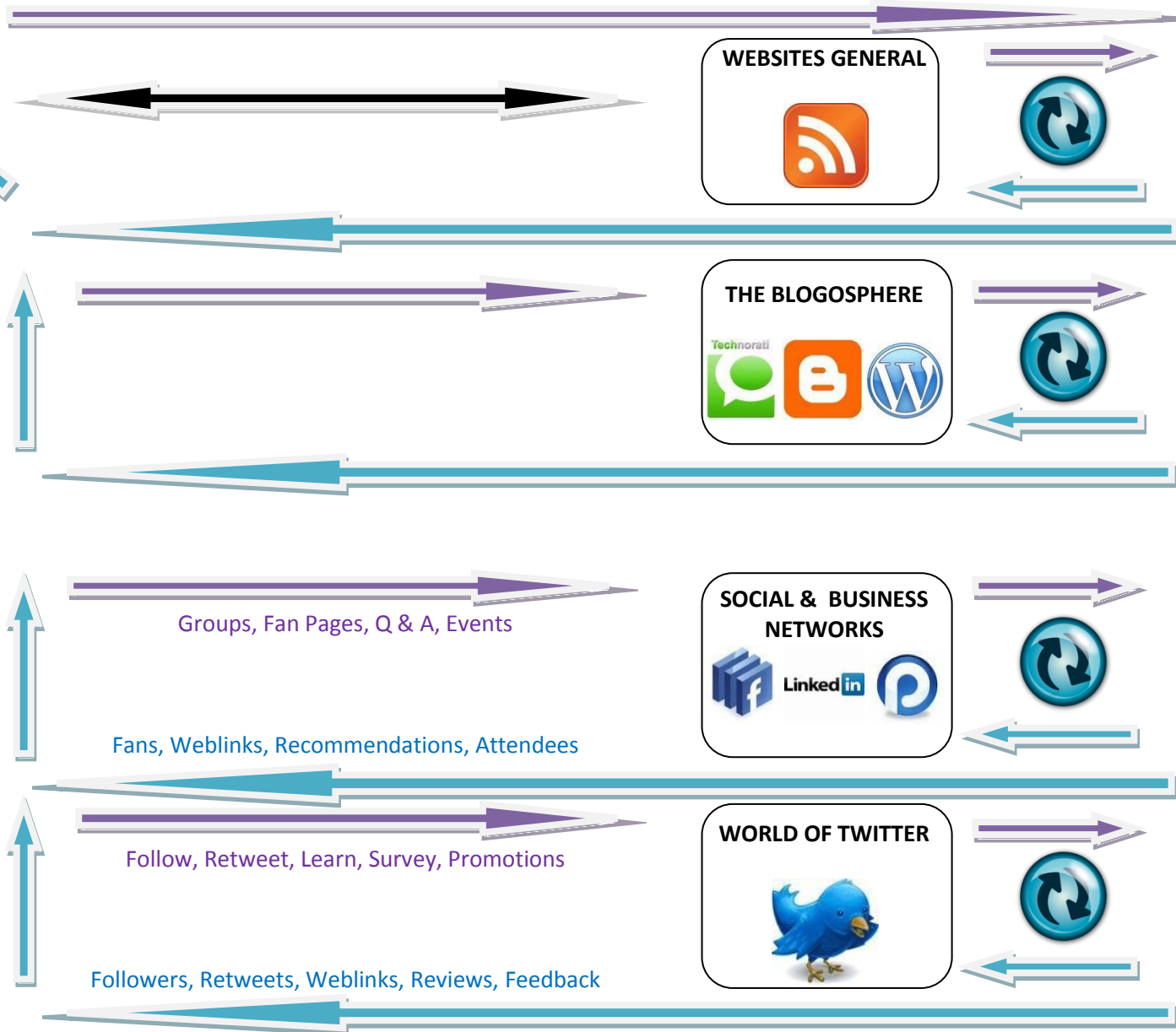
INFLUENCERS

4. YOUR
MICROBLOG
(Twitter)

WORLD OF TWITTER



INFLUENCERS



There are many social and business networking and even micro-blog sites, but for the purpose of this booklet we are focusing on the current leaders in the UK.



LinkedIn is a business network with over 30 million users. It grew in total users by 153% in 2008, with monthly UK visitors increasing by 269% in 2009. The average age of a LinkedIn member is 44.



Twitter is a micro-blog that allows short update messages of no more than 140 characters. Twitter grew 752% in 2008, with a 1784% increase in monthly UK visitors in 2009. The average age of a Tweeter is 39.



Facebook is a social network with over 300 million users. It grew over 85% in 2008, and in 2009 had an average of 11.86 million UK visitors a day. The average age of a Facebook member is 38.



- Set out your goals (see Strategy Questions)
- Complete your profile in as much detail as possible
- Include a photo
- Use LinkedIn to network with and re-contact old work colleagues
- Ask for recommendations
- Search for and find interesting potential ‘influencer’ groups – join and start engaging in their debates and conversations
- Use the Question and Answer area to showcase your expertise
- Feed in your Blog stream
- Feed in your Twitter stream
- Start up your own group/s (i.e. interest based, fan based or ex-employee based)
- The more groups you join, the more access to new people you have
- Investigate upgrade possibilities (which for a monthly fee allow you the opportunity of sending set numbers of unsolicited ‘Inmail’ messages).



- Set out your goals (see Strategy Questions)
- Start by simply following people you find interesting (celebrities, industry leaders, prolific Tweeters) and get a feel for what's being shared
- Think about your Bio and make sure it is instantly understandable and interesting
- It is perfectly acceptable to set up a Twitter account under a company name (with your logo as your photo), but do consider giving it a personal touch by introducing the names of the individuals Tweeting in the Bio field (or by customising your home page)
- When you have established the people you find interesting (or appropriate for your potential influencers) check out their followers and follow them – many will then choose to follow you back and your network will start to expand
- Retweet often – it is the joy of Twitter that so many great articles and so much interesting news can be shared so easily with so many
- Vary your tweets – share your own articles, share breaking news, Retweet others, give the odd personal update, offer great promotions (if appropriate)
- Twitter is a giant Q&A machine and this is also a great way for people to connect
- Keep in mind that Twitter is now one of the main sources for many journalists, so it's good to connect with them
- Take time understanding Twitter: how to use @links, Retweets(RTs) and #hashtags



- Set out your goals (see Strategy Questions)
- Facebook is a social network, and some businesses may choose not to include it in their Social Media networking/marketing strategy
- Where it can work well, however, is if you wish to network directly with consumer groups
- Take time to investigate which companies and brands are featured online
- Businesses can set up 'pages' including graphic/logo, company description and a Wall where users can post comments
- Additional elements can then be added such as Photos/Videos, Discussion Boards, Review, Notes and Events
- Users can then associate themselves with your company/brand by becoming 'Fans'
- Pages are also promotable within the network via Facebook Ads
- Groups can also set up on Facebook, but these are often closed as they can be set to 'private'

For Social Media advice, consultancy and training workshops, contact:

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