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**Online community.
Real-world impact.**

Reflected glory marketing: building brand with Web 2.0

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Web marketing 1.0 taught companies one simple principle: brand big. Make your brand visible and consistent by spreading your logo and brand message across your site (ideally with a few demonstrations of your web team's Flash prowess) and throughout the Internet (through the awesome power of banner ads).

That approach worked great – or at least ok – in the era of content push. But while a great Web 1.0 site was as good as the marketing and web team behind it, *a good Web 2.0 site is only as good as the people who contribute to it.* And that makes all the difference.

You can have the best web developers in the city and the smartest marketers in the country, but if your customers don't want to play – if they don't want to put their words, profiles, voices, photos or videos on your site – you're going to have a hard time creating a Web 2.0 community.

The trick is creating a site where people *want* to play. For a few lucky brands – like media companies, Nike or Apple – customers care enough about the product or brand that they're happy to come and talk about your products. For everybody else, the best way to tap the power of Web 2.0 is to create an online community that has intrinsic value, and let the activities of that community reflect positively on the parent company's brand.

We call this approach "reflected glory marketing." A site creates reflected glory for its parent brand when it convenes a conversation about something that customers care passionately about, and nurtures the conversation first and the brand second.

You can see RGM at work in:

- **Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty.** Unilever created the campaign because it recognized that women wanted to challenge media images of beauty, and the conversation that ensued has been gold for the Dove brand.

- **ChangeEverything.ca**, the site we created for Canada's largest credit union, Vancity. By giving people a place to write publicly about changes they wanted to make in their own lives, their communities, or the world, Vancity gave birth to a lively community that has earned the company a flood of positive media coverage, all of it aligned with their brand.

If your company wants to create an online community, reflected glory marketing may be the best way to ensure that your community finds its audience – by creating a community that actively engages your customers, and trusting that community to reflect well on your brand.

When you create an online community you are becoming a web application provider: in a sense, you're in the same business as YouTube, Flickr or Facebook. Just like those companies, you're offering your customers a chance to find great content or meet new people. Just like those companies, you're trying to get your customers to create their own content or participate actively on your site. And just like those companies, you need to offer customers a compelling reason to engage.

That compelling reason is your site's core concept: the problem you're offering to solve, the specific conversation you're convening, or the kinds of people customers can meet on your site. Any great RGM community rests on a great concept: something that defines the bounds of the community and makes it different from – and in some way, more valuable than -- the YouTubes or Facebooks of the world.

> **Reflected glory sites nurture the conversation first and the brand second.**

The great challenge in creating an RGM community is identifying the killer concept that will capture your customers' imagination and make them genuinely excited about participating in a conversation that's associated with your brand.

Here are five questions that can help you capture the benefits of reflected glory marketing:

- **Do your customers care passionately about your brand?** If your customers pay for the privilege of wearing your logo, or create independent fan sites to talk about your products, you don't need RGM. Your customers will be happy (thrilled!) to participate in a brand-centric conversation, so give them that opportunity instead.

> **People will discover and return to your site if it offers tangible value – whether that's content, tools or relationships.**

- **What do your customers (or potential customers) have in common?** Are your customers mostly drawn from a single demographic? A single region or town? Do they share a common set of values or a particular problem that brings them to your (virtual) door? That commonality defines the space in which you can create your online community.

- **What do your customers love to talk about?** Your community needs to generate significant enthusiasm – and active contribution – if it's going to thrive. So focus on a topic or question that your customers are already talking about. If you don't know what they're talking about, use a blog search tool like Technorati to find people who have written about your brand (or about your general type of product or service) and then browse through their blogs to identify the topics they care (and write) about most.

- **Which of your customers' values and interests resonate with your brand or marketing message?** Maybe most of your customers are young men, and maybe young men love talking about action movies. Sure, you could create a great site for uploading film clips and talking about different movies – but if your product is deodorant, there's not a lot of resonance between the site concept and your brand. Unless…your site focuses on really *stinky* action movies. Now you're moving in the right direction.

- **What can you offer your customers: content, relationships, or a tool?** People will discover and return to your site if it offers tangible value. The most frequent kind of value you can offer is content that either educates or entertains. An alternate approach is to give customers a tool that they need on a daily or weekly basis, like a way of organizing online photos or storing their favourite web sites on a particular topic. A third option is to foster relationships that will draw people back to the site – but you still need either great content or useful tools to get them there in the first place.

Once you've identified the niche that will bring your customers together in a passionate, consistently growing conversation, you're ready to start building your site. Here are three rules to bear in mind:

- **Brand as lightly as possible.** People will be much more likely to participate in a community that feels like an end in itself – or a way of accomplishing something that is personally or socially valuable – than one that feels like one big ad. You definitely want a visible logo, but try to keep it relatively unobtrusive, and skip the massive banner ads promoting your latest product or intiative.

- **Separate church and state.** Your RGM site is where your customers connect, create and collaborate, while your organization's primary web site is where your customers find out about (and perhaps buy) your products and services. Since nobody likes to share their feelings in the middle of a shopping mall, you'll want to keep these sites separate. Don't push products on your RGM site (though it's fine to have a link to your main site or a products page) and make it clear that user profiles created on your RGM site will not be shared with your marketing department.

- **Explain your motives.** Your site needs an "about" page that explains why you're sponsoring this site. Make it clear you share your customers' interest in the topic or conversation that is the site's focus. Be honest about your hope that the site will reflect well on your brand and help you connect with customers. And be clear that you plan to keep sales and marketing efforts in one corner of the site, or off the site altogether.

Every business dreams about having customers who care passionately about their brand. Reflected glory marketing helps to generate that passion: you're the custodian of a community that has entered your customers' lives and become home to their social relationships, heartfelt beliefs or creative enthusiasms.

The value of that passion isn't just realized in clickthroughs or online purchases. It's realized in every good word those customers say about you – not just on your own site, but across the blogging world and in their real-world communities.

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