

Internet Famous

By Cameron Chapman

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Internet Famous: A Practical Guide to Becoming an Online Celebrity © 2009 by Cameron Chapman.

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About the Author

Cameron Chapman is a fulltime writer, blogger, and web designer. She's been writing about social media and Internet topics for more than two years for some of the most popular blogs in the world. She lives in northern New England but spends most of her time on Twitter (twitter.com/cameron_chapman) or Facebook.

Dedication

To my husband, Mike, who believed in this project from the start and has stood by me no matter what crazy ideas I come up with. Thank you.

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Social Media

What the heck is it, really?

According to Wikipedia, “social media is information content created by people using highly accessible and scalable publishing technologies.” Generally speaking, social media refers to Internet technologies that offer end-users the ability to interact and create content that is then shared with other users. Users can build an online identity that can (and often does) carry over from one platform to another.

The term “social media”—also referred to as “new media”—is broad-reaching and actually covers multiple kinds of online applications. They can be broken down into a number of different categories:

- Communications platforms such as blogging and social networking.
- Collaborative platforms like wikis and social news sites.
- Multimedia sites for sharing photos, videos, artwork, and more.
- Entertainment sites that include virtual worlds and online gaming communities.

- Review and opinion sites where you can offer advice or review products.

The biggest draw of social media sites is their ability to allow people to form personal and business relationships and have conversations with others who share common interests from around the world. There are communities in virtually every interest niche out there from arts and crafts to quantum physics. Sites allow users to share content and learn from each other, providing an invaluable resource for hobbyists and professionals alike.

A Brief History of Social Media

There were a few precursors to social media present throughout the 1980s and 1990s. One of these precursors was dating sites, which allowed users to display an online profile. Also included were ICQ and AIM, which allowed users to create lists of friends, and BBSs, which allowed users who were previously unknown to each other to connect online and discuss common interests.

The first recognizable social media site was the now-defunct SixDegrees.com. Founded in 1997, it was the first site that allowed users to create profiles and publicly list their friends. At one point the site boasted more than a million members. Though it closed in 2001, SixDegrees.com was an important forerunner to social networking sites still in operation today.

In 1999, LiveJournal was started as the first community blogging platform. LiveJournal users were and are still encouraged to network with other users. Connections with others are displayed on their profiles, creating a true social network in addition to the blogging platform. Also started that year was competing blog network, Blogger (Blogspot).

Friendster was founded in 2002 and quickly grew in popularity among three key groups: bloggers, Burning Man festival attendees,

and gay men. Before press coverage began in 2003, there were already more than 300,000 active users on the network.

2003 brought the launches of MySpace, LinkedIn, and Last.fm, all of which are still popular. MySpace grew rapidly on rumors that Friendster would become a fee-based service. Indie rock bands who were banned from Friendster for profile regulation violations were some of MySpace's earliest adopters and musicians (and their fans) continue to be some of its most active users. In 2004, MySpace started gaining popularity with teenagers and embraced the underage population (unlike most of their predecessors, who insisted users be 18 or older). When MySpace was purchased in 2005 by News Corporation for \$580 million, mainstream media coverage of the growing site was overwhelming and privacy and safety issues became a problem, particularly for users younger than 18.

In 2004, Facebook launched as a Harvard-only niche social networking site (users had to have a Harvard.edu email address to join). It soon began supporting other schools, but still required users to have a .edu email address. The following year they expanded to include high school students and then professionals within corporate networks. Eventually, Facebook became open to everyone and is now one of the most popular general social networking sites in existence.

Blog networks and platforms were also becoming popular in the early 2000s, with Movable Type starting in 2001 and WordPress starting in 2003. Other notable social media startups in the early 2000s were DeviantART (2000), an online community for artists working in a variety of media; Wikipedia (2001), an open source, user-edited encyclopedia; Meetup.com (2002), a site devoted to helping those with common interests connect and meet each other in the “real world”; and PBWiki (2003), a “wiki farm” where users can start their own topical wikis.

The mid-2000s brought the advent of online media sharing. Flickr, the photo-sharing network, got its start in 2004. YouTube,

Google Video, and blip.tv all came on the scene the following year. Twitter, the first microblogging platform, was launched in 2006. The mid-2000s also brought a wave of specialized social networks, including niche networks for farmers; Ning, a site that allows you to start your own niche social network; Stylefeeder, a social network devoted to fashion; and sisterwoman.com, a social network for feminists.

Social networks and social media have continued to grow and show no signs of slowing down. User numbers are up every day, with MySpace currently leading the way with more than 250,000,000 users and Facebook with more than 175,000,000. WordPress.com currently boasts almost 150,000 bloggers (not including those who have self-hosted WordPress on their own servers). LiveJournal has had more than 19.3 million journals and communities formed since they began in 1999.

Filling a Need

Successful social media sites fill the needs of a group of Internet users. Whether the need they seek to fulfill is shared by a large portion of those online or by a select few, they all meet the needs of someone.

Take Facebook, for example. At Harvard, each House had its own “face book” (like a yearbook) but there was no universal, campus-wide version. So Mark Zuckerberg started one on his own in February of 2004. It quickly grew from being a Harvard-only site to including students from Stanford, Columbia and Yale, and then eventually to all the Ivy League schools and those in the Boston area. But the initial need was a campus-wide directory of sorts, somewhere students could look up the photos of other students (or the names of students they’d seen around campus).

YouTube was started after its founders had difficulty sharing videos online with each other. YouTube has grown to be the largest video-sharing site online, based on basic need fulfillment.

No matter what social media site you look at, it's likely the founders identified a specific need that wasn't being filled (or wasn't being filled adequately) and then developed a way to fill it. In many cases these sites have evolved past their original need-fulfillment, but they wouldn't have existed in the first place if it hadn't been for that initial lack.

Similarities and Differences Between Social Media and Traditional Media

Traditional media, otherwise referred to as industrial media, are generally those things we traditionally think of as “The Media”—newspapers, magazines, television, and radio. CNN, NBC, Hearst, the *New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, Sirius, XM, CBS. They're also the local TV network affiliates, local newspapers, local magazines, local radio stations. These are the media outlets that have been around for as long as most of us can remember. They're part of our daily lives, either because we actively consume them or we see others doing so.

But social media is different. Instead of being strictly consumers, social media allows people to become *producers*. Social media provides tools for anyone with Internet access to distribute their own content to anyone who will listen. It changes the dynamic by removing many of the barriers to entry that traditional media have always had.

The main similarity between traditional media and social media is their ability to reach an audience spread all over the world. Traditional media primarily accomplishes this through a lot of money and established infrastructure systems (printing presses, television and radio broadcasting equipment, supply chains, and similar things). Social media, by comparison, is based largely on inexpensive technologies and an existing public infrastructure accessible to just about anyone.

Other major differences between social media and traditional media have to do with the control of information. Magazines, newspapers, and television and radio stations, along with other traditional media sources are expensive to operate and therefore limit who can own them. Social media, on the other hand, is inherently inexpensive and easy to use, allowing virtually anyone with an Internet connection to provide news, information, and opinion to anyone else with an Internet connection.

Social media technologies can be learned by almost anyone. Free tutorials exist for all aspects of computer and Internet usage, including blogging, social networking, digital photography, video creation, and more. Traditional media often requires much more specialized training, which usually requires a large investment in terms of both time and money.

In increasing numbers, breaking news is being released on social networking sites before being covered by traditional news outlets. Part of this stems from having active users all over the world; there's a good chance one of them will be an eyewitness to breaking news and report it on sites like Twitter, often linked with photos.

Major Social Media Players

There are leaders in each sector of the social media industry. From MySpace and Facebook in the social networking sphere to YouTube for video and Digg for social news, each kind of social media has its major players. Of course, there are plenty of niche sites with their own loyal followings and communities, too.

Blogs

WordPress. Blogger. Movable Type. TypePad. LiveJournal. Tumblr. There's a blogging platform out there suitable for just about anyone. Blogger, Tumblr, and LiveJournal are free blogging communities that host your blog for you. TypePad does the same

but is a paid service (and is built on the Movable Type platform). Movable Type is an open source platform with both free and paid licenses (depending on use) that you host on your own server. WordPress offers both hosted (WordPress.com) and self-hosted (WordPress.org) platforms. All of the above platforms can be extended through plugins and widgets.

Microblogging

Twitter is the leading microblogging platform. Ping.fm is another similar service, though they send out your messages to whichever social networking site you choose (including Twitter).

Social Networking

Facebook and MySpace are the leading general social networks. LinkedIn is the leading social network for business. There are hundreds of other niche social networks out there for everyone from farmers to feminists. And building new social networks is becoming easier every day. Sites like Ning set up everything for you and host your network with both free and paid packages. Open source software is also available, including the Buddy Press plugin set for WordPress MU (a multi-user version of WordPress). Social networks are a major part of any campaign to become Internet famous.

Social Network Aggregation

With so many social networks available, efforts have been made to integrate the information you may include on one site with every other site you're actively involved with. Applications like Gravatar offer a unified avatar (profile photo) across platforms, linked to your email address. FriendFeed collects your activities across more than forty different sites, including Flickr and YouTube, and makes them available on your other profiles (like Facebook).

Social Bookmarking

Tracking interesting information you find online and sharing it with others is another useful way to make yourself known. It's also a great way to promote your own content to others. Sites like Del.icio.us and StumbleUpon are useful for not only keeping track of things you find interesting, but also for promoting your own articles, videos, and other content.

Social News

Social news sites like Digg and Reddit are another way of getting your content out to the masses. Making the front page of Digg can send tens of thousands of visitors to your site in a single day and, if you make it there often enough, bring you from Internet oblivion to Internet stardom.

Photo Sharing

Flickr is the most socially-active photo sharing site out there. There are groups and photo pools for just about every imaginable topic (even topics you probably wouldn't think of as particularly photogenic). Photos can be released on the site under a variety of Creative Commons licensing options (or with regular Copyright protections), making it a valuable resource not only for promoting and distributing your own photos, but also for finding photos to use on your blog or website.

Video Sharing

YouTube is the most popular video-sharing site out there. Users can create channels to promote their own videos. It's a valuable platform for getting your message out and can bring tons of traffic to your website, blog, and anywhere else you may choose if used in the right manner. Other major players in the video sharing sphere are Revver and Google Video.

Podcasting and Vlogging

Podcasting is basically audio blogging. Vlogging is video blogging. Any video sharing site can be used for vlogging, including YouTube. iTunes is popular for distributing podcasts, as is odea, which has an imbeddable MP3 player you can use for distributing your podcast through your blog.

Lifecasting

Lifecasting is similar to video sharing, but done live. Sites like Justin.tv, Ustream.tv, and BlogTV offer platforms for doing live video sessions and video chats. Skype is also sometimes used for lifecasting.

Wikis

Wikis provide opportunities for disseminating information. Because wikis are generally moderated by large groups of users, the information contained on them is usually accurate (though newly added information may be suspect). Wikipedia is the most well-known wiki but there are other niche wikis out there for almost any subject. And there are platforms like WetPaint and PBWiki that let you easily create your own topical wiki.

What You Need to Know

- Spend some time researching the different social media offerings available.
- Brainstorm about ways you could use each social media technology outlined above.
- Keep reading for more information about each of the technologies outlined here.
- Stay on the lookout for new social media technologies, as new ones are constantly being developed.

Internet Famous

Better than real-life famous!

Internet famous means just what it says: being well-known online. Whether it's in a single niche community or across the web in general, the Internet famous have a certain amount of name recognition online. Sometimes this translates into becoming well-known in the “real world”—the world of the mainstream media.

Types of Internet Famous

Some people are Internet famous just for being themselves (kind of like Paris Hilton became famous just for being Paris Hilton), or at least a version of themselves (like Julia Allison or iJustine). Others are famous for a product they're associated with, either online or off (like Pete Cashmore of the blog Mashable or Tim Ferriss, author of the book *The 4-Hour Workweek*). Each type of Internet fame has its own advantages and drawbacks.

If your main goal is to become Internet famous to promote a product you're selling, you'll need to take a slightly different approach than if you just want to be famous for fame's sake. If

your goal is Internet fame to push yourself for some professional aspiration, that also requires a different set of techniques. If all you want is to be recognized, your options are somewhat more open, as you don't have as much to worry about in terms of negative publicity carrying over to your professional sphere (feel free to live by the phrase "any publicity is good publicity"). Just be aware that employers often keep tabs on what their employees are doing online, even when it's unrelated to their work, and are sometimes firing or reprimanding employees based on their online behavior.

Famous for Being Yourself (or Some Version of Yourself)

Gaining fame for being yourself is probably the more difficult of the two methods for becoming Internet famous. You need to come up with an angle for yourself, something that sets you apart from your peers. Maintaining a consistent persona can also be a problem, depending on how far from your true personality you stray. To some extent, you'll need to focus on creating a caricature of your real self. Figuring out an angle and following through with it is the best way to propel yourself to the forefront of Internet fame.

In order to gain Internet fame just for being yourself, you'll need to be willing to put yourself out there. Share the good and the bad in your life. And be honest with your readership. Dishonesty and lies are very easily revealed online, especially as your fame grows. As you become more well-known, it's almost a given that you'll have detractors hunting for things to use against you. Don't give them any extra ammo if you can help it.

Justine Ezarik, better known as iJustine, is a lifecaster who shares her entire life online through videos on Justin.tv. She's best known for an online video she produced discussing her 300-page iPhone bill in August of 2007 that quickly went viral, gaining more

than 3 million views in just 10 days. Largely due to that video, AT&T changed their iPhone billing policies.

But that video wasn't the beginning of Justine's push for online celebrity. She'd already been lifecasting on Justin.tv since May 29, 2007 and was the first person on the site to have her own lifecasting channel (other than founder Justin Kan).

Famous for a Product

Becoming famous for a product is a bit more clear-cut than becoming famous just for being you. You'll still need to portray a consistent persona but you don't necessarily need to reveal as much about yourself and your life when you're pushing a product. You will need to look for ways to branch out and you'll likely need to give something away in order to get maximum publicity.

Giving away content is one of the best ways to gain publicity, especially if you make it feel like an exclusive offer. This is why an ebook will sometimes be more successful than a simple blog. Putting up barriers to entry, even if they're arbitrary or not really difficult, make people feel like they're part of an elite group.

Offering unique information on your site is another way to spur interest. Spreading your content over multiple channels (your blog, social networks, microblogging, etc.) is another good way to increase interest and get your fans more involved.

Timothy Ferriss, author of *The 4-Hour Work Week*, used the blogosphere to launch his book and quickly push it to number one on the New York Times Bestseller list. By contacting and conversing with bloggers, he gained free publicity for his book and became an Internet celebrity before quickly gaining mainstream media attention. According to his website, he's been featured by more than a hundred media outlets, including *Time*, *Forbes*, the *New York Times*, *The Economist* and more. He continues to maintain his Internet presence through his own blog, Twitter, the *Huffington Post*, and *Wired* magazine.

The Internet Infamous

If fame is your only goal, the Internet is a great place to get it. Doing something crazy, unexpected, or stupid is much more likely to go viral and get widespread attention. Posting a video on YouTube and then linking to it wherever you can is one way to get publicity. If your video is crazy enough or unique enough, your friends and acquaintances are more likely to pass it on. Remember, too, that one of the best ways to get people to share your link or content is simply to ask.

The same thing can happen when something you were doing with the intention of getting positive publicity (or even no publicity) backfires. This could be blogging about your employer and then getting fired for it, or posting things about your family and dealing with the backlash from it. It could be a video you thought was completely serious that everyone else takes as a joke (or vice versa). Make sure when embarking on a campaign to become Internet famous that you're willing to make the most of whatever comes your way, and make sure you have a thick skin.

Pioneers of Being Internet Famous

We've already mentioned Justine Ezarik, one of the pioneers of lifecasting (more about that in Chapter 11). One of the most famous bloggers out there is Robert Scoble, whose blog, Scobleizer, came into the limelight while he was an evangelist for Microsoft. In 2005, Scoble became the first person to be called a "spokesblogger" because of his positive coverage of Microsoft (even though he often criticized the company and praised its competitors, including Apple). In 2007, Scoble joined Fast Company where he still works.

Pete Cashmore is another Internet celeb who gained fame because of his blog, Mashable, The Social Media Blog. Mashable was started from his bedroom in Scotland in 2005 as a way to keep track of new social media startups and quickly became a startup in itself, growing to be one of the most popular blogs on the Internet

and the most popular one devoted to social media. He's been featured in *Business Week* and as one of the Forbes Top 25 Internet Celebrities of 2007. Because of the focus of Mashable, it's not surprising that Cashmore has accounts on virtually every major social media site out there, (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Flickr, MySpace, and FriendFeed for starters) though many of them are listed under "Mashable" instead of his name.

Julia Allison is probably one of the best-known Internet celebs out there. She took a slightly different approach to gaining Internet fame by associating herself with celebrities and public figures and making sure photos of herself with them were distributed far and wide online. She also maintains at least three blogs, a video blog, Twitter account, and Facebook fan page among other social media accounts.

Reasons to be Internet Famous

Internet fame has definite advantages. If you love being the center of attention, Internet fame can keep you there 24/7. If you have a product to sell or a service to offer, becoming widely known online can convert into serious sales figures. Coverage from bloggers was a huge factor in catapulting Tim Ferriss' book, *The 4-Hour Workweek*, to the top of the *New York Times* bestseller list. Internet fame can often translate into real-life fame. Plenty of talk shows and news programs are looking for experts on various topics and they're turning to the Internet more and more often to find them. You could be one of those experts. And sometimes you can get mainstream media coverage just because of the sheer size of your Internet success

One of the biggest advantages of Internet fame compared to traditional fame is how easy it is for your fans and followers to take action. Whether you're selling a product or just yourself, the Internet makes it easy for people to do what you ask. When something is featured in the mainstream media, instant action isn't always possible. Asking someone to go to a website when they're

reading a magazine is less likely to get results. Unless they're sitting right at their computer, there's a good chance by the time they are it will be forgotten. Even with the advent of handheld devices capable of browsing the Internet, there's still a slim chance they'll interrupt what they're doing and go to the website mentioned immediately. But when all you're asking is to click a link, it makes action that much easier. And that translates into more people doing what you're asking of them.

Converting Internet Fame into Real Life Fame

Once you've built up a following for yourself, be on the lookout for traditional media opportunities. Television shows and magazines often put out an editorial calendar days, weeks, or even months prior to covering a specific topic. If there's something coming up that fits your area of expertise, pitch yourself as a good article or interview candidate. Cold-calling media outlets to pitch yourself or your story is also an option. Don't underestimate local media, either. Journalists often scan local papers for stories that might be appropriate for larger news audiences, whether in print or on TV or radio shows.

Open Up Opportunities for Yourself

Opportunities for product endorsements, book deals, and other paid gigs can open up based on your Internet fame. Once you're a celebrity in your niche, you're more likely to have offers coming your way. But there's no reason you can't seek them out on your own. Pitch a book to an agent or publishing house. Pitch an article or series of articles to a national magazine in your niche. Put up notices on your website that you're looking for joint promotional opportunities. Seek interviews on television and radio shows to get your name out there to a wider audience. If you're funny enough or have a strong enough personality, it may lead to a more regular radio or television gig.

Sell a Product or Draw Attention to Your Business or Organization

If your goal is to sell a product, make sure you mention that product wherever you can. Seek out attention from media outlets whose readers, viewers, or listeners are members of your target market. Using search engine optimization (SEO) and connecting within niche communities that appeal to your idea customer are key to selling your product. Developing connections and trust within those communities prior to pitching your product are also key to making a bigger impact. If you just come in pitching a product, you're less likely to get a welcoming response. In fact, many communities can be downright hostile to new members who start right out pitching a product or service.

Pitching yourself to bloggers and other online influencers is another valuable way of getting publicity. Guest-blogging or syndicating articles is another great way to get your name out there and helps to establish you as an expert (and including a link to your website or blog brings you more traffic).

Draw Attention to a Cause

Maybe it's not attention for yourself that you're after. If there's a cause you're passionate about, whether it's endangered species or women's rights or anything in-between, gaining Internet fame can lead to raising awareness for your cause. If you're passionate about stopping global warming, start an environmental blog. If you're passionate about women's rights in third-world countries, start a blog covering charities that help them or, if you're an avid traveler, showcasing your first-hand experiences in those countries (a photoblog would work really well for the latter).

Don't be afraid to make a fool of yourself in support of your cause. Sometimes doing something a bit off-the-wall can lead to more traffic and more awareness. Just keep in mind that the things you do online reflect on your cause. Don't do anything that could

be construed as negative or offensive, or you risk harming the charities you're trying to help.

What You Need to Know

- Internet fame can be just as powerful as fame in traditional media outlets, and sometimes even more so.
- There are many reasons for seeking Internet fame, from wanting to promote a product to wanting to promote a cause to just wanting to promote yourself.
- Different social media platforms are more or less suited to different kinds of fame.
- Internet fame has some definite advantages over traditional, mainstream media fame.

Want Internet Famous in its entirety?

Internet Famous: A Practical Guide to
Becoming an Online Celebrity is available in
a variety of ebook formats through
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will be released in
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in October!