

CARLOS GIL

THE
END
OF
MARKETING

HUMANIZING YOUR BRAND IN
THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Second Edition

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WINNER: American Book Fest Best Book

Awards 2020 – Marketing and Advertising category

WINNER: NYC Big Book Award 2020 – Business: Small

Business and Entrepreneurship category

WINNER: BookAuthority Best New Book to Read

in 2020 – Social Media Marketing category

PRAISE FOR *THE END OF MARKETING*

Carlos Gil is a marketing visionary who I am proud to call a friend. His book is in a league of its own.

Jeff “Ja Rule” Atkins, rapper and entrepreneur

Is your marketing failing? Study this book. Carlos Gil reveals a strategy for developing a loyal community in an age where loyalty is hard to come by.

Michael Stelzner, Founder and CEO, Social Media Examiner

Carlos Gil’s illustrious career makes him expertly positioned to help readers navigate the ever-changing world of marketing technology. It’s exciting to find a book that provides both a strategic road map as well as detailed common-sense advice. It’s a must-read for both seasoned marketers and those who are just starting the journey to build a personal brand.

Bonin Bough, Founder and Chief Growth Officer, Bonin Ventures

Razor-sharp, insightful, and unafraid to say it like it is. Carlos Gil paves the way for a new era in marketing.

Gerard Adams, Co-founder, Elite Daily

Carlos Gil is one of the most brilliant marketers I’ve ever had the pleasure of working with and his insights and knowledge are critical to succeeding in business today. *The End of Marketing* is essential reading for entrepreneurs and marketers alike. The author is right: marketing is dead; human connection and emotions are what drive people and their actions.

Josh Machiz, Head of Client Engagement, Nasdaq

The End of Marketing

Humanizing your brand in the age of social media

Second Edition

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carlos Gil is an international keynote speaker and award-winning digital storyteller with over a decade of experience leading social media strategy for global brands including LinkedIn, Winn-Dixie, Save-A-Lot, and BMC Software. A first-generation Cuban-American, Gil's work has been featured by Social Media Examiner, *Inc.*, and *Entrepreneur*, in addition to dozens of trade publications. As a social media consultant, Gil has worked with notable Fortune 500 clients, including Hertz, DocuSign, Western Union, Fiverr, Kay Jewelers, and Green Dot Bank. As an influencer, Gil has been hired for campaigns in partnership with Nationwide Insurance, Facebook, Snapchat, MGM Resorts, Southwest Airlines, and WeWork.

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*I dedicate this book to my children, Carlos M.,
Gabriela, Genesis, Galileah, and Alexander. Daddy
loves you.*

01

Marketing is dead

For years, social media has shifted away from its social roots to become more of a branding marketplace. A place to sell. However, the COVID-19 pandemic swung the pendulum back in the social direction.

During these difficult times, more people came to appreciate the value of a real community, not just the number of likes on a post or what their favorite brand was selling.

Now, in this new age of business, brands need to adapt to the current environment, which often means building relationships—and ideally whole communities—rather than trying to go for the sale.

Consumers don't want to be sold to any more than you do; they want to be engaged through stories and dialogue, making them feel closer to you and your brand.

To understand marketing today is to know psychology, culture, and human behavior (i.e., know what people want to see, what's trending, and make your content look the most appealing to capture someone's attention and on a deeper, human level).

Marketing isn't a tactic; it's a science.

Marketing is also a numbers game that requires a considerable amount of time, patience, money, and understanding of what your customer desires to see in their newsfeed.

Marketing *is* manipulation.

And... marketing, as we know it, is dead.

Now, as you read this, you're probably saying to yourself: "Yeah

right, marketing isn't dead—it will never die.” But then, ask yourself a sincere question: when the entire world was on lockdown throughout most of 2020, did you care what your favorite brand had on sale, or did you rush to social media to feel connected to another human? When Black Lives Matter protests were happening worldwide, and people took to social media to show solidarity, at that moment, did it matter what your favorite designer was posting if it was unrelated to that moment in time?

We now live in an era where digital influence reigns supreme, not how big your marketing budget is or how many followers you have on a platform.

To be blunt, most of the time, when you post content on a social network, it goes unseen by 99 percent of your followers anyway.

Marketing *to someone* is highly ineffective, whereas marketing *through someone* is the opportunity.

While billion-dollar corporations blindly advertise to a digital abyss, there is a 16-year-old kid somewhere in the world making six figures per month with an Instagram meme account and a Shopify store while drop-shipping products like t-shirts and nutritional supplements without owning a single printing press or warehouse.

When was the last time that you saw an ad—whether it was on TV or online—and immediately pulled out your credit card and made a purchase solely based on impulse? If you can't remember, it's because the likelihood of a single ad influencing you to convert to becoming a customer hasn't happened—ever.

However, I'd be willing to bet that in recent times you've probably been influenced to do one of the following:

- You purchased bitcoin despite not knowing a single thing about cryptocurrency... because Elon Musk, along with other global elites, added \$BTC to their Twitter profiles, and you didn't want to feel left out.

- You invested your hard-earned money or possibly your stimulus check during the middle of a global pandemic on sports cards... because Gary Vee said, “it’s the next big thing.”
- You purchased stocks of failing brands GameStop and AMC movie theaters on Robinhood... because a unanimous account known as r/WallStreetBets posted “GME to the moon!” on Reddit, and you wanted to be part of this movement.
- You won an online raffle for a pair of new sneakers and immediately shared a screenshot of your purchase... because you want to be perceived by your internet friends as “cool.”
- You downloaded a song on iTunes or Spotify that someone you follow on Instagram shared onto their Instagram Stories... and suddenly it’s your favorite jam because everyone else is into it.
- You took a dream vacation to a popular destination because your go-to YouTube personality showed you what an amazing time they had at the resort where they stayed... and then you told anyone who would listen about the incredible experience you had.
- You likely participated in the “10 Year Challenge,” “In My Feelings Challenge,” “Ice Bucket Challenge,” “Mannequin Challenge,” or the “All-In Challenge” of 2020... because notable celebrities like Drake and Arianna Grande were part of it.
- You asked around your network for an invitation to join Clubhouse after seeing countless screenshots on Instagram Stories... because you didn’t want to feel left out of the party.
- Last but not least... you may have been one of the unlucky individuals to spend thousands of dollars on a ticket to the now-infamous Fyre Festival because an orange tile on an Instagram account sold you on the experience of a lifetime.

If you answered “yes” to any of the above, you are the consumer that the company you work for is desperately trying to engage but

fails miserably to do so in the process. This isn't marketing anymore—it is psychology used as a tool to sell and monetize. And it works.

Call it “fear of missing out” (otherwise known as “FOMO”), but today's consumer wants to be part of something bigger than their everyday life.

If you don't believe me, look no further than the failed Fyre Festival as an example of the impact that influencer marketing can have on a brand, along with the effect on the lives of everyday consumers.

While the festival's back-end operations led to its demise, the marketing execution through social media on the front end created excitement for the festival as an exclusive, once-in-a-lifetime experience to rub elbows on a remote island with celebrities, models, and influencers.

One of those models was Kendall Jenner, who was compensated \$250,000 to endorse the music festival through an Instagram post, which has since been deleted along with 400 other influencers referred to as “Fyre Starters,” who also promoted the festival to their millions of followers. Kendall cited “So hyped to announce my G.O.O.D Music Family as the first headliners for @fyrefestival,” in the now deleted post (Voytko, 2020).

From Bella Hadid to Hailey Baldwin, the disruptive method of posting an orange tile simultaneously on Instagram was done by design to capture the attention of those scrolling through their newsfeed and it worked.

As a result, millions of dollars in ticket sales were generated almost instantly. Sadly, the festival itself never occurred, and those who bought into the influencer hype later realized they fell for a strategically executed marketing campaign.

While one can make a case that Fyre Festival represents everything that can go wrong on social media, from a marketing standpoint, you cannot deny that it showcased the power of

influencer marketing and, in the process, created a framework for brands everywhere.

In the aftermath of 2019's Netflix and Hulu documentaries, I spoke with hip-hop artist Ja Rule at a conference in Cleveland, Ohio, about the fallout from the festival, to which he shed light on the origins of the orange tile, saying it was "ridiculous" (Gil, 2019) to pay \$250,000 for an Instagram post. He also said, "people want to be cool," (ibid) which ultimately drove consumers to buy into being part of the festival.

Spotlighted in the 2020 Netflix documentary *The Social Dilemma*, social media has become an addictive drug of sorts. However, to put it briefly, for many, their life is more exciting online and pretty boring offline.

Millions of people gravitate to social media every waking moment not because they are natural extroverts and enjoy interacting with strangers. Instead, it is to escape the realities of the ordinary lives we all live, stuck in between a 9-to-5 job, kids, spouses, and hobbies.

However, who we are on social media is *not* real life. Our digital avatar is a curated snapshot of what we want others to know us for.

We watch reality television for the same reason we subscribe and opt in to follow digital influencers and celebrities—to escape reality. Social media doesn't just connect us to people; it connects us all to a parallel universe where we are suddenly more popular, have more friends, and have voices that travel outside of our communities and cities.

As of January 2021, 59.5 percent of the world's population has internet access—that's an estimated 4.6 billion people who have access to a digital world that primarily exists on a cell phone or computer (Statista, 2021).

With this online community's size, today's internet isn't just a place to shop or research. Unlike other forms of mass media like television, radio, and newspapers, where the communication

primarily flows from one to many, the internet—and social media in particular—naturally facilitates multiway communication, providing an interactive place to chat about celebrity gossip and politics, rant and rave about our favorite sporting events and awards shows, or react to brand campaigns and social movements like Black Lives Matter.

Because of how social media facilitates multiple communication forms, including one-to-one and many-to-many, consumers today instinctively only care about your latest ad campaign if their friends are also speaking about it. These conversations might start online and then flow to offline communication, fueling more online conversations.

Since communication has shifted, marketing must too.

Some marketing professionals are still pessimistic about social media because you can't advertise and sell to consumers the same way you would historically have run a print or TV ad.

In the “old days,” pre-social media, iconic brands like Nike, Coca-Cola, and others didn't have to do much to convince the masses to buy from them. They either showed up on your TV or in a magazine with their globally recognized logo, a celebrity figurehead endorsing them (i.e., like Fyre Festival did), a catchy slogan that an advertising agency came up with, and you had lightning in a bottle.

Today, marketing and advertising require a new way of thinking and an understanding that the digital landscape is built on genuine communication instead of mass communication—especially post-COVID, whereby consumers' expectations of the brands they follow should be to engage with empathy first.

Nobody wants to be sold to, and if you use social mediums to be overly promotional, you're going to be quickly filtered out. Do you personally look forward to seeing an advertisement on social media from your favorite brands? Probably not.

To that point, consumers today want to be a part of a movement,

not a marketing campaign. For example, the “All in Challenge,” which as of 2021 has raised over \$59 million to provide food to those in need, such as children, the elderly, and frontline heroes, leverages celebrities as the faces of the charitable initiative ([Fanatic.com](https://www.fanatic.com), 2021). The challenge is a virtual fundraiser where celebrities offer up experiences in an auction or giveaway. Donors have a chance to star alongside Kevin Hart in an upcoming movie or receive a personalized performance by Justin Bieber for as little as \$10.

Your challenge isn’t how to market to your target consumer; instead, your objective should be how to engage your target demographic to become an advocate for your brand and, in return, have them convince their friends to join—similar to how the “All in Challenge” has built up a roster of celebrity advocates.

The good news is that this form of scaling your message shouldn’t be entirely new to marketers: it’s similar in principle to messaging in the 1980s and 1990s, such as teenagers showing off their latest clothes and sneakers to friends at the mall, thereby encouraging a broader group to buy more.

Brand awareness alone in the form of an iconic logo doesn’t equal business success anymore; just ask every corporation that has gone out of business since 2020. Thanks to technology, those days are behind us. The shopping mall arcade and food court aren’t the cool, hip places to hang out anymore. Instead, it’s a group discussion on Twitter spaces, TikTok, or Clubhouse.

For Generation Z, it’s a *Fortnite* group online party whereby teenage kids like my son are using mom and dad’s credit card to ensure that their character is perceivably cooler than their friends’. According to its developer Epic Games, *Fortnite* grew to over 125 million players from 2017 to 2018 (The Fortnite Team, 2018). Yet when you run a quick search on Twitter for “Fortnite” there’s a noticeable lack of companies interjecting their brand into a

conversation among a community of gamers that attracts over 40 million players per month.

If you're McDonald's, PepsiCo, or a brand that appeals to teenagers or young adults, tapping into this audience is as easy as creating an account on Twitch, branded by your company and inviting micro-influencers, in this case the gamers, to play on your account. You could then cross-promote on your Facebook page, Instagram account, Twitter channel, and email list.

It's that easy, but so far, it's not being done.

What is disappointing about this is the lack of awareness that comes from the C-level at many companies, which seem to choose to think of social media as a secondary or even tertiary medium for marketing and advertising. Most major corporations employ dozens of highly educated, annual six-figure earners to work in their marketing departments, yet by not tapping into the potential of social media, they're not getting the most out of their employees. That disconnect is because we often fail to separate who we are as consumers from who we are as professionals.

What we want as consumers often doesn't align with what we expect as marketers from our customers.

While marketing as we know it is dead, clearly consumerism is very much alive and well. People will always need goods, products, and services. Even when cars become autonomous, we will always need vehicles and transportation, no differently from how we will still need clothing to wear, places to visit, and people to see. Because we are not robots—we are humans.

And as humans, we all feel a need to be acknowledged, wanted, and loved. As such, brands need to do a better job of making their customers feel valued, and that requires understanding who your target customers are and where to connect with them.

Whether you are a service provider, a talent who is hungry for work, or a brand, social media makes it easy to find and directly

connect with customers.

Imagine being able to go to Google right now and type “Find customers who are looking to buy XX” and seeing real-time search results. It already exists. By tapping into Twitter or Instagram as search engines, you can run searches to find your ideal audience.

But before you start implementing these strategies and use social media to its fullest potential, it’s important to first understand the ethos behind why it can work so effectively.

It’s a challenging notion, and one that can be difficult to implement. And this is the notion I want to convey to you: we are living in a new era whereby people have the power to influence the masses from an iPhone anywhere in the world. The game of marketing is no longer played exclusively by billion-dollar corporations.

[Everyone is an influencer, and everyone is a competitor](#)

However, if you want to win the game, you need to make people—not your logo—the face of your brand.

The reason I have dedicated over a decade to educating professionals about the power of social media is that I believe in its immense ability to transform lives, careers, and businesses as a result of what social media has meant to me, both personally and professionally.

In 2008, I was laid off from the banking industry due to the United States’ financial crisis. Despite my layoff, social media was a catalyst in helping me rebuild my career and build up a network of invaluable connections. Through those connections and investing countless hours devoted to studying “the game” of social media marketing, I built a following for myself. I also founded my first business at the age of 25. Despite not having any formal education

in this field, I figured out that eventually, a few of those connections will convert into paying customers if enough people know that you exist. Ultimately, companies started to pay me to teach them what I knew about the space, which was relatively new at the time. I went to work for corporations, including LinkedIn, where I was responsible for leading social media teams. Fast forward a few years, the personal brand that I started grooming over a decade ago was critical to helping me become a bestselling author in under 24 hours when *The End of Marketing* first hit Amazon for pre-ordering. Then, in 2020 when the pandemic put my momentum on pause temporarily, it was social media, the connections formed, and my personal brand that helped me quickly pivot into e-commerce by launching Outlaw Masks seamlessly because I already had built up a following with genuine connections.

Throughout my career in this industry, both as an employee and consultant, I've encountered numerous C-level executives who don't fully buy into social media. The best way to sell an executive on the value social media provides is to show them how easy it is to find real customers with a quick search on Instagram or show them what their customers are saying about their company through a Twitter search. Then, sell them on the point that their employees can engage in real time with those users and turn them into customers.

For example, suppose I want to find people who like business or marketing books to get them to buy *The End of Marketing*. In that case, all I need to do is go to Twitter and run a search for "best business book," which will reveal hundreds of tweets from users who at some point recently tweeted out with the phrase "best business book" somewhere in their tweet. From there, I have a qualified list of users to whom I can directly tweet and introduce them to my book. It's that easy.

Whether in person at a conference or privately through LinkedIn,

I am approached frequently by professionals who are still trying to make sense of tools that aren't new but are constantly evolving. My answer to them is always to understand the fundamental ethos: less selling, more listening and engaging.

I believe wholeheartedly that, as Baby Boomers and Generation X become supplanted by Millennials and Generation Z as the primary economic drivers of global consumerism, if brands want to survive—and thrive—through the next industrial revolution, being AI, they need to find a way to personify who they are and step from behind the digital curtain.

In the future, Coca-Cola will need to be a person I can relate to—a real face that personifies the brand and convinces me to buy Coke instead of Pepsi. Nike will need to be a team of athletes that I and others should aspire to be like and teach me how to work out. Whole Foods will need to be a series of people who teach me how to make better choices in how I eat. American Airlines will need to be a group of travel influencers who show me the world through their camera lens.

The fact is, for every fitness influencer, for every beauty blogger, for every travel influencer that exists, that is one more person who is taking market share away from your company. You are competing for digital reach with the same influencers you are temporarily hiring to endorse your brand. And this model doesn't work. This is a new world order... of business. You only have to look as far as AOL and MySpace to see what happens when your audience grows up and you don't grow up with it.

Thanks to technology, consumers are the media. Today, with an iPhone and an Instagram account, every person is an influencer. This is part of the reason why brands, and the marketers behind them, don't buy into social media: because the brand is no longer superior to the consumer in the eyes of the consumer. It's about control—but it shouldn't be. Of course, you can't control what

people say about you—but you can steer the conversation in the direction that you desire, should you choose to engage and be a part of it. That’s the key—brands should be aiming to be a part of the movement and avoid falling into the trap of trying to be the movement itself.

To a certain extent, control has been relinquished not to the entity that has the most marketing budget to spend but rather to the people whose message goes the furthest.

Brands shouldn’t view these platforms as their biggest enemy. They are also your biggest ally, and today, one that you cannot live without.

Facebook is one of the most—if not the most—powerful corporations on the planet. Mark Zuckerberg and company have transformed the way that we communicate, consume news, and enjoy entertainment. The online social world is becoming more a part of our day-to-day lives and allows us to keep up with how individuals are living their lives, rather than only relying on mass communication media like TV and radio to get a glimpse of what’s going on in the world. That leads us to the good news—what’s old is new again. Since the beginning of time, relationships have been at the forefront of everything we do.

Building relationships isn’t done through Facebook ads or brand campaigns exclusively; they’re formed individually one by one. Social media gives you the power to identify consumers who are speaking about your brand and your competition as well as the ability to engage them directly. But these relationships need to be carefully fostered. Importantly, the relationship that you form with your customer needs to be a two-way dialogue, otherwise you’re pushing out content for the sake of creating noise.

There are a few things to keep in mind for engaging digitally connected customers. Here’s the formula:

Know your audience—who are they and what channels are they on?

If you're trying to engage younger consumers, you're more likely to find them on Instagram, Snapchat, Twitch, and TikTok. Whereas if you're trying to sell to a working-class Millennial or older, it's most likely going to be on Facebook where you can reach them. You should spend your time on the platforms where your customers live.

What value do you bring to your intended audience?

Do you have a product or service that solves a problem? If so, find people who are openly speaking about that problem and hook them directly. As a consumer, if I complain about a company and their competitor immediately swoops in to help me, I am more likely to take my business to that company or brand. Every company and product or service has a target customer who has needs; your job is to connect those needs by listening and engaging directly.

Who are your references?

If you own an apparel brand and are selling t-shirts on Shopify, who is buying them? Seriously ask yourself: who are these people, and do they have any influence whatsoever digitally? Going forward, start keeping track of your customers digitally to see who they're connected to and form a dialogue with them in an attempt to leverage their influence within their circles. If someone buys from you and has a good experience, they're immediately a reference.

Who has perceived influence among your target consumers and how can you align with them?

Who are the influencers that exist right now within your industry? These don't have to be international celebrities but can instead be thought leaders in your industry or local figures who have important influence within their communities. For example, when younger consumers think of "Yeezys," they aren't proudly representing Adidas but rather Kanye West. Speaking of Kanye West and influencers, pay close attention to how the music industry is benefiting from the shift of brands being corporations to people being brands. Songs go viral too. Today, whenever a new album drops, people are taking to Instagram to share a screenshot of a hot new song playing on their iPhone from iTunes or Spotify, or TikTok, where they create a short video featuring the new music. For the launch of West's album titled *Ye*, a private listening party was held in Wyoming, which included several notable influencers. The exclusive experience was one that could only be accessed digitally through social media, and it made the album an overnight success. Again, as documented earlier (i.e., Fyre Festival and the "All in Challenge"), movements and experiences are what people crave to be a part of—something bigger than themselves.

In early 2020 at the start of the pandemic, while in quarantine, my brother-in-law and I started Outlaw Masks to offer consumers a stylish alternative to paper masks. Like any startup, creating awareness and attracting our first customers was a challenge. As fate would have it, the NBA resumed its season nearby in Orlando, Florida, labeled "The Bubble." Looking for a way to get our brand known, we sent every player a mask. We viewed the guerilla marketing tactic as the equivalent of a Facebook ad buy. If a single player was seen on social media wearing our mask, the return on investment (ROI) of that post would outweigh the investment of giving away products. Before sending off our masks, we personally directly messaged every player letting them know that our masks were on the way. Many players replied, much to our delight, and as

the masks arrived, our brand was seen on the faces of several high-profile athletes and the social media accounts of the teams.

Whoever is influential to your brand, you should be finding ways every day to form relationships with them; social media provides you with the opportunity to directly connect with and catch the attention of these individuals, rather than having to connect via a third party such as an agent.

Create your own influence

The power of influencers extends beyond the music industry or sports into all sorts of other businesses, and brands have a prime opportunity not only to connect with the largest influencers but also harness the power of smaller influencers, such as employees and customers. Everyone has influence within their own circles and tapping into these networks can help grow your reach exponentially.

Yet consider the travel industry, where a quick YouTube search for “Best places to vacation” doesn’t reveal a single video from Marriott, Hilton, Expedia, or even an airline, but rather videos with millions of views from creators—who are hired by brands—to show consumers how a trip to a place like Bora Bora will change their lives, improve their marriage, or make them happier. This kind of escape from reality is the dream that influencers are selling to the masses. Every brand can do this, and they should. In fact, having an employee or customer share their best vacation stories could be even more relatable and therefore powerful.

These examples are real-life instances that demonstrate the point I introduced earlier in the chapter: that today’s brands aren’t limited to billion-dollar corporations, but everyday people steering other people down the path of purchase.

The beauty of social media is that it gives power to all. However,

what an entity does with that power is another story.

In 2016, Donald Trump became the President of the United States of America. In the lead-up to the election, his social media presence included a heavy dose of Facebook and YouTube ads. With a massive campaign budget, Trump was able to ensure that more people were mentioning his name—good or bad—than his adversary Hillary Clinton, in addition to seeing his campaign content. This was a demonstration of the power of social media at its finest. Meaning, with the right mix of charisma, a large following, and content that those loyal followers and ad budget amplify, anyone in the future might have the formula to enhance their campaign for political office via social media. Pretty scary, huh? However, in 2020 Donald Trump failed to become re-elected due to public criticism on social media around how he handled the COVID-19 crisis and his use of Twitter, which eventually led to Trump becoming permanently banned from the platform. Once again, the users of the platforms hold the power.

What is even more eye-opening than Trump's social-media-assisted election victory, and later on his re-election loss, is that the world's largest brands based on revenue are less influential (digitally) than the likes of hip-hop star DJ Khaled, Kim Kardashian West, Kylie Jenner, and... an egg.

In 2019, an unknown group of social media influencers banded together to create a social experiment on how quickly you can manipulate human behavior. An Instagram account labeled "World_Record_Egg" set out to see if they could get the most engagement on an Instagram post, ever—a world record previously held by Kylie Jenner. It worked. Not only did the post gain over 50 million "likes," but the account itself received over 9 million followers. So yes, you could extrapolate this to conclude that a dull, brandless egg today is more engageable than your average consumer packaged goods (CPG) or consumer brand.

To that point, the most followed Instagram accounts as of April 2019, outside of Instagram itself, were owned by Cristiano Ronaldo (163 million), Ariana Grande (152 million), Selena Gomez (149 million), The Rock (140 million), Kim Kardashian West (136 million), Kylie Jenner (133 million), Beyoncé (127 million), Taylor Swift (116 million), and Lionel Messi (115 million) (Trackalytics, 2019). The only brands that even come close in follower size on Instagram are National Geographic (108 million) and Nike (87 million). On Facebook, some brands have built up similar-sized followings, such as Samsung (159 million) and Coca-Cola (107 million), yet these two brands only have a combined total of 6 million Instagram followers. It's safe to say that people gravitate to platforms like Instagram to follow celebrities, influencers, and their friends.

So, is brand marketing a lost cause on social media? Not at all. Many companies have still found success, and the majority of consumers have made a purchase through a social media channel (Avionos, 2018).

It's no secret that social media offers a competitive advantage to corporate brands who are willing to invest time, money, and people in building a community. However, if companies want to thrive in this new era, they must change their approach and be less a brand and more human.

Social media is just a tool—it's not the strategy, and it's not perfect.

Still, social media marketing can be challenging, and as such, many marketers try to justify their lack of success. The following common phrases, uttered around workplaces everywhere, are just some of the challenges the modern marketer faces every day:

"The platforms are constantly evolving."

"Nobody knows how the algorithms work."

“What worked last year doesn’t work this year.”

“I have thousands of followers but low engagement.”

“It’s not free.”

Struggling with these challenges is understandable—it is tricky new territory to be navigated. Social networks are a big business whereby we, the consumers, are trying to transact on rented land. Think of Facebook like you would a casino—nobody knows the house rules better than the house. Nobody can beat the house at its own game. However, like poker, you can play by the house rules and still come out victorious over those who aren’t as skilled or knowledgeable about how the game is played.

It took me the better part of a couple of years in the early 2000s to figure out that building a personal brand was an asset that could lead me to gain press and notoriety for my then startup. With an own brand came connections and awareness, through connections came cash and opportunities.

If you’re still reading, there’s a high likelihood that you are using social media in your business already. I applaud you. But I also implore you to consider carefully exactly *what* you are doing with it. With the rise of social media, digital advertising, brand building, and social media influencers, the business of growing businesses is not linear. There may be stops and starts along the way, and the role of a marketer is far from easy, but it helps when you know the formula and the systems. Where do your customers go to consume information? Go there with them. Be a part of their life. Speak to them in the manner that they are being spoken to by their friends. Chances are their Facebook buddy isn’t saying, “Hey Steve, want to know what the secret is to losing weight? Click on the link below to download my five-step program!”

Just as consumers have become accustomed to flipping the

channel any time a commercial airs, we now swipe or scroll past a brand that we perceive to be advertising to us. As such, it's more important than ever to speak like a human rather than a brand that is selling something.

The most effective marketers that I have encountered personally over the last several years are entrepreneurs who follow me across various platforms: they know what I do for fun, they know what my habits and hobbies are, and they wait for that right moment—for me to say something along the lines of... “Need to lose a few pounds, any recommendations?”—before they slide into my DMs to offer me a free 15-minute coaching call before upselling me to join their virtual fitness boot camp. That's not sales. That's not marketing. That's being present in someone's life. And guess what? It isn't something that you can automate.

Most brand marketers that I meet want to have the biggest Instagram account in their industry. They think that if they don't have a Facebook page with millions of “likes” they're not hitting critical mass, but they're wrong. You don't need thousands or millions to succeed in this game. But you do need people who care enough about your company to tell their friends about you. It's no different from network marketing or multi-level marketing.

Several months ago, I had a conversation with a chief marketing officer (CMO) who told me that she was looking for an agency who could help her brand engage with their 30 million Facebook page followers. My immediate answer to her wasn't in the form of a plan to engage 30 million followers, because I know for a fact that would be impossible. Instead, it was to educate her on why engagement is low, in several points:

- Facebook reach is 1 percent or less organically—that's 29.7 million people gone.
- Even then, these remaining 300,000 people, on average, are

not “seeing” the brand’s content much less engaging with it because the brand is always in hyper-sales mode.

- As a brand, they would have to spend massive amounts of cash to reclaim the desired reach she was seeking.
- I suggested that she should utilize my company, to focus on engaging 0.1 percent of their total community to identify who is of influence and who cares about the brand.

To be candid, my agency didn’t land the account, probably because I was too blunt and didn’t over-promise on something that I know isn’t realistic, whereas another agency may have offered that CMO the answer she was looking for.

The 0.1 percent represents an audience of 30,000 Facebook users, which of course is far smaller than their 30 million followers and even the 300,000 who might organically see their posts. But even with that smaller group, only about 1 percent can realistically be expected to not just see the content but actively engage with it. That’s 300 people, not 30 million.

Now, we are talking about a micro-fraction of a brand’s audience—which is laughable to most executives—but let me break this down for you even further. If I were to put 300 people in a room right now, you wouldn’t be able to speak to 300 people in an hour and carry meaningful dialogue. It’s just not possible. It’s a lot of people in “real life.”

Let’s say out of those 300 Facebook users who care about this brand, you are now able to form a relationship with 10 percent of them—that’s 30 people who are your “super fans.” We just went from your company having 30 million worthless Facebook page followers to 30 people in this world who personify your brand each day. If I went to any CMO and brought them 30 advocates, I don’t know of a single one that would say “no.” But this is a weird space that we’re in.

Every decade there is a change of the guard in technology, there is a new medium by which we grow and scale and monetize and reach masses. To profit and benefit you need to be aware of where the current is headed.

For every person who is upset because Facebook is making it harder to reach critical mass, go back and re-read the formula that I just broke down for you. The only numbers game that is in play here is who is a qualified follower versus another random vanity metric. I like it when my colleagues doubt the power of social media because they aren't getting the engagement that they want on social media. It means there's more market share waiting to be consumed by those who do get it.

If I, a high-school dropout who didn't go to college to get an MBA in marketing, can figure out how to make sense of social media to grow a startup before social media was "a thing" for most businesses, so can you. It's not hard, and it's not rocket science, but there is a science behind it, which is what I'm here to teach you. Everything is easy if you understand the systems and where the current is headed.

While there are plenty of business books and resources that will teach you the basic principles of internet marketing and personal brand building, I'm not here to repeat what's already been said; I'm here to give you the guide that's going to keep you in business or a job.

This book's purpose isn't to make you a better marketer but rather to make you a better businessperson and teach you how to leap your competition by building relationships at scale while using technology as your rocket ship. It's all about embracing new-school tools with old-school rules. Historically, relationships were formed over drinks and golf. Today, Facebook is the hotel lobby bar and Twitter is the golf course. Marketing, as we know it, is dead.

The only choice you have is to evolve or die, and if you choose to

change, you must learn the playbook that is actively being used by every successful influencer and agency around.

Until then you are just swimming in a giant digital ocean hoping to find your way.

Before you turn the page to [Chapter 2](#), a critical next step is to conduct a social media audit, so below, I have listed out the framework that I use whenever I work with clients.

Write this down:

1. Why am I on social media?
2. What do I want to accomplish (i.e., brand awareness, leads, etc.)?
3. What platforms are my customers on?
4. What is my competition doing well versus what I am doing well?
5. What do I want to see as a consumer from the brands I follow?
6. What value can my brand give my audience?
7. What purpose does my content serve?
8. What are my key performance indicators (KPIs) (i.e., website clicks, views, new followers, etc.)?
9. What is my current advertising spend?
10. Who is influential to my brand?

As you will quickly discover, the purpose of an audit is to gather insight that you can then apply in developing your new strategy, which I hope you will implement at this book's conclusion. For now, hang onto these answers and revisit them as you proceed through the book.

Remember, social media is a business strategy that should align with your overall goals and objectives.

You don't have to be on every social platform to be successful, but you need to have a plan and be strategic—otherwise, social media can be a big waste of time and money.

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02

Stranded in a digital ocean

One of my favorite movies of all-time is *Cast Away*, starring Tom Hanks. In the film, Tom Hanks's character is involved in a plane crash over the Pacific Ocean during a storm. As the sole survivor of the flight, Hanks's character washes ashore on a deserted island where he's left for dead as he has no contact with anyone. Although Hanks's character learns how to survive on the island where he remains for years, he becomes lonely as he doesn't have anyone to engage with besides an imaginary character named "Wilson" portrayed by a volleyball.

Unless you're crushing it on social media, your brand is like Tom Hanks's character in the movie *Cast Away*. From an awareness standpoint, you are isolated and speaking aloud in a "noisy digital ocean," where hardly anyone is paying attention.

Today most brands are speaking to themselves whenever they post content. Few people are genuinely paying attention, hence why engagement numbers appear to be significantly disproportionate to the number of followers a brand seems to have.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the internet was already a noisy place. Now, post-pandemic, it's louder and thus more challenging to capture the attention of a consumer who is quickly scrolling through their newsfeed in between Zoom meetings.

The COVID-19 pandemic put into overdrive our civilization's dependency on the internet. From virtual conferences and office work to remote learning, more aspects of people's daily social and professional lives have permanently moved online. Now, as we