



Beyond the Book[®]



Winning in a World Transformed by Social Technologies Interview with Josh Bernoff, author & analyst

Q: We're in Cambridge, home of the Internet and the very first e-mail, transmitted in 1971 at Bolt, Beranek and Newman. Welcome to Beyond the Book. Chris Kenneally your host here at the offices of Forrester Research with a conversation I'm looking forward to myself. And that's a look at social media and how authors and publishers can leverage the power of some of these tools to make the world more aware of their work and possibly advance their own professional causes. Joining me is Vice President for Idea Development at Forrester Research, Josh Bernoff. Josh, welcome to Beyond the Book.

A: Thanks Chris. It's great to be able to be part of this.

Q: Well it's great to have you. And you're the author – co-author – of a book that came out in 2008 with Charlene Li, your former colleague here at Forrester, called *Groundswell: Winning in a World Transformed by Social Technologies*. And social media is today a catchphrase for quite a lot of things, but reasonably well-understood by people because certainly the phenomenon of Twitter has become a household word, if you will – some of it to do with just the way that people began using it in their own lives, but certainly because of what went on in Iran in the past few weeks has brought everybody really up to speed on all of this.

But you were writing about social technologies and social media some years ago, and you had spotted some interesting trends, and I wonder if we can first ask you what your reaction is to the Twitter phenomenon today. Were you expecting it to explode the way that it did?

A: Well I guess to provide some context here, when we talk about the groundswell we're really pulling together all of the social technologies so that people can see that this is all part of a single trend. The groundswell is a social trend in which people get the things they need from each other, rather than from corporations. And they use these social technologies to do that. So when you look at things that way, then Facebook and YouTube and blogs and Twitter are really all part of that same trend. And Twitter's an interesting case. We have a test in chapter two of *Groundswell* where we say these new technologies are going to come up. You don't what they are. But here's a test to determine which ones are most likely to succeed. And we used Twitter as the test case – which, at the time we wrote the book, through 2007, it certainly wasn't clear what was going to happen with Twitter.



But based on that test we said it looks like this thing is set to be very successful, and it probably is something you'd be interested in, and sure enough now, two years later, it has certainly taken off.

Q: What were the questions you asked in that test and how did you determine that, yes, this was something that was going to take off?

A: The first thing that you need to look at is how easy is it for people to get started with this? And certainly with Twitter it's extremely easy to sign up and use. The second is does it have something for both the people who are creating content – a group that we call the creators in the *Groundswell* book – as well as the people who are just observing it, what we call spectators in the book. And certainly Twitter is capable of being successful for both of those groups of people. The third thing is for people who participate in it, do they get value out of the relationships that are created? Can they say after using this, this has been a new way for me to connect with people that's useful to me? And I think if you look at the way people use Twitter, from people keeping up with their friends to somebody like me reaching out to thousands of people who want to follow the things that I write about, to Ashton Kutcher with a million followers or people in Iran who are trying to get the message out, it certainly is valuable to the people participating in it and it does form new relationships.

Q: We're talking to an audience here of authors and publishers. And traditionally they've been kind of the laggards in the technology adoption space – at least that's the reputation they have. And many authors – you know, I used to have a friend who thought that his word processor was a number-two pencil. So he was very reluctant to get into technologies, and that's partly because of the craft and partly because of the personality that gets attracted to so much of this work. So when they look at social media, they need to evaluate. You just gave us some really, some very simple ways of doing it. But you're a writer, too, and you briefly alluded to how you're using Twitter or blogs and so forth. Go into that just a bit. How often are you Twittering during the day? I started a Twittering account with *Beyond the Book* and I can get to it once, maybe twice a day. I feel like I'm not doing enough. But am I doing enough? Should I feel like I should be tweeting more? What's a sufficient volume to really matter?

A: I think as we say in the book, you want to concentrate not on the tools but on your objectives – and then figure out which tools are best. Twitter may not be right for everybody. Let me talk about what we did with *Groundswell* to promote the book, which I think is certainly something that every author can get to. First of all, every author and book needs to have its own Web site, even if it's just a place for people



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to find out about you. In the case of *Groundswell*, one of the important things we did in launching the book was to reach out to bloggers that we knew or had formed relationships with and asked them to review it and then follow up with that. That was very successful in helping the book to get off the ground. By the way, here's a little hint that people don't think about – if somebody writes a review of your book on their blog and it's good, tell them to go to Amazon and put that same stuff in at Amazon because that's where people look.

And we also, Charlene and me, and now it's just met at Forrester, continue to publish updates on the *Groundswell* blog which is at groundswell.forrester.com. And then Twitter is really an extension of that. It's my way not only of reacting to people who might be interested in contacting me, but also taking people and telling them when new stuff is appearing on the blog and other stuff that we want to promote. So this means I have a relationship with our readers that goes well beyond the fact that they bought the book. And I also can listen in and see what they're saying. That's one of the best things about Twitter is to do a search on your name or the name of the book and see what people are saying, and you really get a feel for what's going on and who might be influential that you want to contact that's talking about your book.

Q: Listening – there's actually a chapter, I think, in the book about listening to the groundswell and there are also strategies for tapping the groundswell and talking to it. But you made a point recently that was, I think, really insightful. And that regards marketing. Marketers, whether they're publishers or whether they're Coca-Cola, are accustomed to talking to people. But they're not so very accustomed to listening, and they certainly don't know about the two-way dialogue. Talk about that.

A: Well it's interesting that marketers – whether we're talking about book marketers or any other kind – are good at getting messages out, but it's mostly shouting. Hey we've got a new laundry detergent. Hey I have a new book out. And if you treat these social channels the same way, you can certainly use blogs or YouTube or whatever to get your message out. The challenge is to listen at the same time, because you may find that people are reacting to what you're saying. You may be able to develop deeper relationships. You may find out that somebody important or with a big following is interested in what you're doing. But you won't find that out unless you listen and have more of a conversational element.

I will just let you know that authors in general have become better and better at this. Publishers in general stink at this.

Q: Spoken like a real author.



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- A: Well it's just that – I mean if you look at our publisher, Harvard Business Press, they actually have a very active site that includes blogs on it. They've done a reasonably good job. But in the end, your responsibility as an author is to do this mostly yourself and I'll never forget when we were out pitching *Groundswell*, one publisher said to us, oh yeah well we're really adept at using social technologies to promote books. So we said we're actually the experts on this. What do you actually do? And in listening to their answer, what they basically said was one of our authors started a blog and we cheered them from the sidelines. And I thought that's typical of a publisher. This isn't really a skill they've got. It's a skill that the author had that they're learning from.
- Q: And your point there I guess is really an admonition to any author to be prepared, probably before they walk into the publisher's office, with their own tools and a strategy for how they're going to market themselves.
- A: You're going to be the one lining up the speeches. You're going to be the one who's got the blog. And I'll also tell you that during the process of creating and pitching the book, you want to be engaged in this activity already. First of all it's very valuable for research purposes – not so much for fiction but for nonfiction, you can find cases and people through a blog. You want to develop that following. You can't start the minute the book is published and say here I am. It's like no it takes a while to build this stuff up. And you'll also be more valuable to the publisher if you have a plan like that in place. They look at that in your proposal and they say these guys really know how to promote, and therefore this book will be worth more.
- Q: So that's what you mean by tapping the groundswell. You've really got to be very proactive. The groundswell does not come to you.
- A: Well most likely it isn't. And if it's there and you're not listening, you won't even notice. We went to people like David Berkowitz, who writes a book called – a blog called *Inside the Marketer's Studio*, to David Armano, people like that who we persuaded to have a look at the book, to write about the book. They were the prominent people in our space, so you've got to find out who are the prominent people in your space and reach out to them, form those relationships. And then later, when they want you to promote their book, that's a valuable connection to have made also.
- Q: And again, it is something I'm hearing over and over, that from the marketing for books, the publishers really do expect the authors to take on the responsibility. There's an interesting bonus to this, I guess, in that while your book was published



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in May of 2008, we're still talking about it. I'm sure you're still talking about it in some respects, right? You've got other work to do, you've got your own research here, you've got other projects. But there's a way to extend the life of a book far beyond its time in the particular publisher's catalogue.

- A: Well *Groundswell* fortunately, for us, for something that's so trend-oriented, continues to sell well. And that's because there are, for every company that's been successful with social technologies and marketing, there are 20 other companies that are just getting started on it. So we're continuing to hear from people about the book. And last I checked, it's still between 500 and 1,000 on an Amazon list, which is a pretty good place for a book that's been out for about 14 months. It's not the long tail but it's still pretty good. So this is part of the deal is that when you're writing a trend book to try and set it up in such a way that it continues to have relevance in a long-term way. And the blog and the Twitter and all of that really helps to extend that value by giving people something to connect with even after they've read it.
- Q: Right. So again just to reemphasize for people who are trying to follow along and take notes about all of this, the platform – does it need to be a Web site? Can it be a blog? Can it be an account with something like this new FiledBy? What is an absolute ground-floor requirement?
- A: Well you need a space that's your space online. But most of the blog platforms now basically allow you to create pages which would be the equivalent of a Web site. So if you can't afford or aren't comfortable with creating your own Web site, then just set up a blog and that becomes your site and a way to connect with people. I think any author that doesn't have a blog doesn't exist. You're basically – why would anybody listen to you about anything that you want to talk about if you're not continually updating the kind of insights that you've got? To extend out from that with Twitter is a good idea, a Facebook page is a good idea. If you're in other countries, places like XING may be a better place for you to set up.
- Q: I'm not sure I know what XING is.
- A: XING is basically similar to LinkedIn but more popular in Europe. But you need a place for people to connect with you and if you haven't provided that then you basically send the book out there and you say here it is. Hope you enjoy it. Bye-bye. And that's a lot less powerful.
- Q: How do you feel about video, podcasting, YouTube, those kinds of sites where it's more than just the printed word? Again we're talking about authors who are



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comfortable tapping away at a keyboard, but may not be so comfortable with a conversation like we're having or a video, for example.

- A: Well there are authors who communicate that way. Shel Holtz is a local author here in Boston – he's also got a base out in San Francisco – who does a regular podcast. That's how he likes to keep in touch with people. And as far as video goes, a little bit can go a long way. You've got to make it interesting. We did some videos in conjunction with Harvard Business Press that were pretty nice, had nice production values. But one of the values of video is that not only can you put it on your own blog easily, but by uploading it to YouTube, other people can put it there. So you find your talking head now is in some other place where people are saying hey, you should see what Josh Bernoff has to say about this. Here's the video. It's a way to have your promotion spread out beyond your own little space.
- Q: They can blog about your blog, so to speak.
- A: Right. And they can cite your videos. One of the points we make in *Groundswell* is that different types of consumers have different behaviors online. So some people will listen to podcasts. Some won't. Some people will watch a video – some aren't as interested in that. Some people like text, some people like Twitter. And you really need to think a little bit about the generation of people you're trying to reach and what they'd be most comfortable with. By the way, as people go to groundswell.forrester.com, we have a little tool there on that site that lets you look at people in different countries by age and gender and actually see their level of participation, which can be helpful to people.
- Q: That's very insightful because I was thinking when you were mentioning XING that one has to remember that the Internet is by definition a global medium and so you can't just be aware of what's happening in Cambridge or in Silicon Valley. You really need to know what's happening in South Africa and Australia and wherever.
- A: We tried to put as many international examples into *Groundswell* as we could, and I recently met up with Web 2.0-type people in Spain, in Italy. I'm going in September to Japan and Korea and these are places where there's just as much interest and the local publishers, I think, are quite interested in your coming by and participating that way.
- Q: In fact I was just about to ask as a way to wrap us up – we've been talking with Josh Bernoff at Forrester Research about social media. His book, coauthored with Charlene Li, *Groundswell*. And your research is a kind of prognostication. You get the chance to do something we all wish we could do, and that is see into the



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future. Are you able to talk about anything that's just around the corner here? You fellows saw social computing, social media years before the rest of us did. What's coming in the next 12 to 18 months, and has the fall in Internet advertising had an impact at all as far as development of new applications or adoption of them?

- A: We are as busy as we can possibly be here working with companies around social technologies so the fall in Internet advertising has not put a dent at all in peoples' desire to use social, which is less expensive and more powerful than a lot of the other ways that you can do marketing. As far as looking into the future, we actually just published a report called *The Future of the Social Web* that looks at that question exactly. And what I think you're going to see in the future is that your identity and your friend relationships, which are right now locked up in sites like Facebook, will start to become part of every online experience. So when you go to a Web site now and you see a button that says send us an e-mail and you click on it and it pops up your e-mail, nobody thinks that's shocking. It's like that's just built into the fabric of the Internet. You can e-mail from any site.

Well imagine if at any site it would recognize your identity and it would allow you to see what your friends thought of that site. That's the world of the future. And we've got a perspective on how, over the next five years, we will go from information locked up in sites like Facebook to basically having it woven right into the fabric of the Internet.

- Q: That's interesting. And you had already mentioned that an author who doesn't have an online presence essentially doesn't have an identity, so if this is what's coming and you want to meet that train at the station, you really need to be creating that identity now and making sure that you are prepared. And it's the identity that you want to have.
- A: Yeah. I mean if you look at your sources of identity, you've got your blog. You have a potential to have a Twitter identity. And you have a page in Facebook or LinkedIn. And certainly if you don't have any of those things, you should get one. But you also should be thinking of those identities as ways to make connections and promote yourself and find out who can help you out. These are things you've got to line up both while you're working on the book and then after it's been published. And you'll be more valuable to publishers and you'll sell more if you do that.
- Q: Well some very helpful insights from Josh Bernoff, vice president of Forrester Research. It's been great to chat with you here in Cambridge. Josh thanks for joining us at Beyond the Book.



A: Thank you.

Q: And this is Chris Kenneally, the host of Beyond the Book, wishing you well and hoping you'll be back soon. Thank you.

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