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MEDIA SOLUTIONS

The 12 Principles of New Media

By David Spark, Founder of Spark Media Solutions, LLC
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“I didn’t get the memo.”

Ever since you started using email, you’ve heard or said that phrase only with heavy sarcasm. Whenever something happens without you realizing it, you may be tempted to utter that phrase as a feeble excuse.

When new media tools began there was nothing to announce. Blogging, podcasting, mobile content, online video, and social networking were all launched in stealth mode as bottom-up, not top-down, forms of communication.

New media empowers consumers, offering improved media consumption choice and the opportunity to create content (a.k.a. “consumer-generated media” or “consumer created content”) with distribution potentially equal to major publishers.

Thanks to new media, we’ve collectively chosen to walk away from communal fixed-time media. No longer must we schedule our time around media and information in order to consume it. New tools allow us to easily produce, consume, and share information on our own timetable. Instead of someone we don’t know, like a newspaper editor or TV executive, directing our media consumption patterns, we have promoted ourselves to the title of Self-Directed Network Executive. Each one of us gets to determine for ourselves what we want to consume and when.

What continues in the next pages is my dissected view of the 12 principles of new media. This is my view today, early in 2007. It may change in a year. But for now, these principles are necessary elements you need to consider when embarking upon publishing in the new media space.

Accompanying each principle is a conversation video at sparkmediasolutions.com with experts offering their divergent opinions on each of these 12 theories. I’ll be releasing a new video every week until all 12 are posted. To watch, listen, or read the transcripts of these videos, please head to the Opinions section of sparkmediasolutions.com. Those interviewees include:

Brian Powley - iCrossing
Chris Heuer - Social Media Club
Chris Peterson - Chautauqua Communications
Chris Shipley - Guidewire Group
Colette Vogele - Vogele Law
Gary Bolles - Microcast
Greg Sterling - Sterling Market Intelligence
Samantha Muchmore - DRAFTFCB

While all the opinions you’ll hear and read are excellent, they’re not from the only experts. This is an open discussion for all. I’m eager to know how you, too, are developing and consuming new media.

Please read, watch, and respond.

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Principle #1: The economics of your time

There is one thing you, Bill Gates, and I have an equal amount of, and that's time. We each live and operate within the constraints of a 24-hour day. How we choose to portion that out in terms of sleep, work, and play is how we manage our lives.

Prior to VCRs, the Internet, iPods, and DVRs, we let executives decide when we would consume video and audio programming. We would orchestrate our lives around television shows. When I was a kid, I could rattle off the prime time lineup of all three major networks for every single day of the week. Six years ago I got TiVo and I have no idea what's on any network at any given time on any given night. Network scheduling no longer has any value or relevance to me. What's on my TiVo does.

The number of hours in the day hasn't changed. What's changed is we are no longer beholden to anyone else's schedule. The on-demand culture of new media has allowed us to reclaim our individual time by allowing us to completely program our sleep, work, and play as we choose. No need to make it home for the six o'clock news; CNN Headline News is on 24 hours a day plus they have an archive of hundreds of stories online. Just turn it on when you're ready to watch. Except for live events like sports, there's truly no need to know when anything is on anymore. Welcome to the world of time shifting.

Appointment programming is dwindling. Instead of rearranging our schedule to get home for Seinfeld at 8pm, we're putting in the time, money, and effort upfront by purchasing a DVR (digital video recorder) like TiVo. We take the time to install it, configure it, plus learn the device's interface and the remote. Once we've done all that, we program the show(s) we want to watch. It's worth it to us because we see its value in managing the time it takes to consume TV-based media.

To take advantage of the benefits of any new media, we have to spend some time upfront learning the tools. Every day more of us are willing

to expend that effort to take back more control of our 24 hours in the day.

People's willingness to expend the energy necessary to purchase a new device and/or learn a new interface is often proportional to the time saved compared with a previously used alternative means. For example, prior to podcasts and iPods there was still a way to listen to audio programming on a portable device like a CD player. But the process of going to a website, navigating the site to find a program, downloading the program to your computer, burning it to a CD, labeling the CD, putting it in your CD player, and then managing all that physical media was far too time consuming. And as a result, very few people took advantage of this kind of portable on-demand audio. Given that there was such a limited audience for this type of audio content, very little was produced.

Some things just can't be improved

To this day I still keep a paper "to-do" list because I'm so overwhelmed that I need to look down at a piece of paper to tell me what to do next. Yet, I'm such a massive geek that I did spend time looking into the multitude of online to-do list programs like Ta-da List (www.tadalist.com).

And after spending hours playing with all of these tools I realized that no program could beat the convenience of that notepad. It's always there. There's no instruction manual. And I don't have to boot up my computer or have an Internet connection to use it.

The introduction of podcasts eliminated many of these manual layers once necessary to consume portable on-demand audio. The reason podcasting took off is because users saw the "effort to controlling your time" ratio improving in their favor.

New media gives us the tools. It's up to us to determine if it's worth the effort to learn to program it. We're constantly weighing the financial and time costs to determine whether it's in our best interest to adopt a new tool. It is for this reason every easy-to-use and cost-efficient innovation that shifts control to the user becomes successful (e.g., iPods and podcasts, RSS technology, TiVo).

We have stopped focusing on just the eight-hour work day. New media causes us to think about all 24 hours in the day. It's blurred the line between work and play. I watch funny YouTube videos in the office (don't tell anyone; they already know). I listen to informative podcasts during my commute. I play games on my mobile phone while sitting on

the john (I confess). I troll for news stories and write emails while people are late for meetings.

We not only have more choice of content, but we have more choice in terms of how and when we can consume and share information.

Our time is equally valuable. With the rash of new tools designed to filter information, consumers try to choose their content wisely. In turn, producers must do so as well. When people do choose to consume your content, be appreciative of it. They chose to give you their time and attention—two very valuable commodities. Thank them by giving them a reason to come back.

Principle #2: We don't need more choice. We need more TV Guides.

Walk into a room of 1,000 people in which you know no one but know that there are some key people out there, somewhere. Where do you start? How do you start? Do you talk to anyone? With a crowd that large you may become so overwhelmed trying to locate the right folks that you'd leave talking to no one. Conversely, walk into a room of two people—it's a lot less threatening, easier to choose, and far easier to engage. In fact, no matter what type of person you are (extroverted or introverted), you'd probably have no problem introducing yourself to those two people and engaging in a conversation.

We live in a world with plenty of options; lack of options is not the issue. The problem is we don't know where to begin, what to look at, or who to talk to. We all need some guidance.

Now those two people in the room you just met may not be your ideal match. But if you talk to them for a while, they may know someone (or know someone who knows someone) who can better take you to the information you need.

We've all heard the line "Content is king." Well, what we're all watching is content. Creating more of it is not the issue. There's plenty of great content out there. We just haven't had a chance to discover it. And for that, we need some help.

Much of the discovery has been focused through developing recommendation tools like those supplied by Netflix or Amazon. It's the holy grail of personalized technology. Who can find the perfect computer-based algorithm that can facilitate accurate recommendations for the multitude of different customers and their varied tastes?

That solution can work, but people often become attached to personalities, real people who offer recommendations. This relationship works in reverse where the masses get to know an individual. You can never create an algorithm strong enough to match the influential power of an Oprah book recommendation. Oprah doesn't know about all her viewers' intrinsic likes and dislikes, but her viewers know Oprah and they want to hear her opinions.

We're also directed to the wisdom of crowds where a mass of like-minded readers act as peer editors offering recommendations to each other. News recommendation service Digg operates in this way.

Another editorial technique is content analysis where tools or editors improve the classification of information. A perfect example is Pandora, a music recommendation service. Pandora employs musical analysts to look into the architecture of a song and classifies it on many attributes.

New media enables these three basic approaches—trusted advisor, wisdom of crowds, and content analysis—to flourish. It doesn't advocate one approach over the other, but it does allow them to

work in conjunction. For example, Netflix combines all three: content analysis (analyzing metafile of a movie), wisdom of crowds (personal ratings vs. community ratings), and trusted advisor (top recommendations from film critics, plus links to friends' recommendations).

Trusted advisors require their audience to view them as such. This is the core of what makes a successful blogger. Over time, blog readers must develop a personal opinion of that blogger's knowledge of the channel through reading and responding. At the same time, algorithms can get to know us, introduce us to trusted advisors, or to like-minded people. Ultimately, we're looking to rely on someone or something to help direct us.

Principle #3: Video: The new core competency

In computing, each generation has its own new core competency. For the PC generation it was the VisiCalc spreadsheet, which most of us know by its later incarnations as Lotus 1-2-3 and Excel. The next computing generation had Web browsers and self-publishing through HTML. And for the current young generation of computer users (ages 15-25), the new upcoming core competency is video production.

While video production is not as ubiquitous as Excel or Internet Explorer where practically everyone knows how to use those tools, the barriers to produce video have almost completely fallen, opening the door for anyone to use this form of communication.

Many factors have come together to make it possible. The price and size of video cameras have decreased considerably. Both Windows PCs and Macs come pre-packaged with free built-in video editing applications. But low-cost cameras and free to cheap video editing tools have been around for a while. The reason video is really taking off is because finally it's easy to post, share, and view video online.

It's this ultimate culmination of cheap and readily available video production tools combined with video sharing networks like YouTube that's made video the new rising core competency. YouTube is not the first site to allow users to post video. It's just that before it was so darn difficult; hence, it was often not worth the trouble. Pioneering video sites like iFilm and AtomFilms required filmmakers to mail in physical media that in some cases had to clear an editorial review before it was published.

The elimination of many of the gatekeepers has given rise to a world of video voyeurism fueled mostly by a sub-25 aged audience. That's because that audience is the one that thinks to pull out their camera phone and shoot a 30-second video of their friends acting foolish. And their friends play to the camera. They're not afraid of it.

Most people over the age of 30 wouldn't even think to record any such event. Not only that, but if you stick a camera in the face of someone over the age of 30 they don't just continue what they're doing allowing you to record the event, but rather they become self-conscious of the camera and all of a sudden stop whatever they were doing.

They become either silent or ask you why are you recording. Either way, the moment is over and the action of pulling out the camera has defeated the goal of recording an event in the moment. If you've tried to do this once and had this experience, the chances of you doing it again are slim.

Online video sites (sharing or not) have given rise to four types of videos:

1. Voyeuristic "in the moment" videos – Usually plays only to a closed audience, but if the event is truly fantastic then it can appeal to a larger audience that doesn't personally know the participants.
2. Missed opportunities – Repurposed videos from TV. YouTube owes much of its success as being the go-to place when someone says, "Hey, did you see the video of...?" Almost inevitably, that video will be available on YouTube.
3. Showcasing new talent – New quality filmmakers looking for a free distribution channel will find an audience if the content is compelling and good enough.
4. How to's and demo videos – Video descriptions can be far more compelling and can explain a lot more than what can be learned by reading an instruction manual.

For the younger audience that has become successful recording these "in the moment" videos, often the quality is subpar. But that doesn't deter from the video's draw to a very particular audience. For those people in the video, their family, their friends, and anyone else who knows them, the video is of great interest. Its success can be equated to that of an inside joke. While you may have no interest nor understand the content, there is a finite and heavily interested audience. That potential audience size is determined by

how many people know the people in the video. Interested viewers will often forgive quality and professionalism if the provided videos are the only ones available on a particular subject with the given participants.

I liken the newfound popularity of subpar online video to my experience learning how to edit video. When I began playing around with Adobe Premiere, I wanted to create videos that would be of some interest to someone. I knew my first videos weren't going to be that good, yet I still wanted an audience. So I chose my 4-year-old nephew to be the subject matter of my videos. I knew that my entire family would love the videos regardless of the quality of the editing or the production value. To quote my nephew's reaction to one of my videos, "This is the best video ever." It wasn't, but to that audience, my family, it sure was.

Sadly, because of the easy availability of video production tools, we've begun operating under this fallacy that everyone can and will be a video journalist. Current TV bought into this concept and is, in turn, trying to sell the public on a 24 hours news channel made up of user-generated citizen journalism.

When I was working at ZDTV which later became TechTV, we had a half-hour show that we produced once a week called "You Made It." And when we launched it we believed that we were going to get flooded with all this great video from viewers. We assumed that the public was clamoring for fame. We expected to get videos of people talking to their webcams or producing interesting video packages. The truth of the matter is we were producing a show for a general audience and we weren't interested in those videos that only had appeal to a finite audience. As a result the programming department had a really difficult time filling 22 minutes (the duration of the show minus commercials) of user-generated video once a week.

The reality is we've been bred on high-quality network television that has high production standards. Your average Joe with a video camera and some editing software hasn't been trained on

how to create a TV-ready video package. Once they do get trained, they're going to want to make some money at it instead of working for free as a citizen journalist.

Video is a core competency when producing for your finite audience (you can actually count the interested parties). Similar to when you send a holiday letter to your friends and relatives, it doesn't have to be great prose, because the information within it is of great value to the audience.

Video for consumption by a non-finite audience (can be small or large, you just can't actually count them) requires training. It's no different than producing any other content. For example, just because you give someone a word processor, it doesn't make them a great writer; they need to be schooled.

Current TV ran into a somewhat similar problem as ZDTV did with "You Made It." They don't get great high-quality finished packages from viewers. What they get are packages that have some merit but are not good enough for airing. Still, they spot the

rough talent and then take the time to groom them so that they can produce network-quality news segments.

The key to a successful video is to know your audience. Are they finite or non-finite? For finite audiences, they'll often sacrifice quality for content. Given that non-finite audiences have been groomed on high-quality TV production, they demand higher standards. These are generally the rules, but with every set rule someone has broken it and become very successful. Look at poor-quality viral videos that attract a mass non-finite audience. Those viral videos succeed through the same finite audience's willingness to sacrifice quality for content.

If you want to be the one telling your story through video, you must produce it at a quality level that your audience expects. The good news is your story is not limited by many of the constraints of traditional television. There are no thirty-second time limits for your message. Be descriptive. Show as much or as little as you want to show. Use video to better explain or comment on an issue that's of value to you.

Principle #4: Ego grows the Internet

The Internet owes much of its growth to our ego-driven desires. Every online application that's helped grow the Internet has supported, enhanced, and offered numerical comparisons of our popularity.

Home pages, blogs, podcasts, and social networks allow for expression of self—a means to grow our ego. But more importantly these tools let us know if anyone is listening and responding. Hit counters, page views, friends on MySpace, views of videos, and comments to our blog posts are all examples of ego-based measurements.

Think about your own behavior. What did you do after you made your very first post to a discussion group? You didn't just post and walk away. You waited a while and then looked back—maybe multiple times in a single day. You wanted someone

to validate your worth. Did anyone care about what you wrote? A lack of validation of our significance is why so many blogs die. Why write anything if nobody's going to read it? But with continued validation touch points, like blog comments and increased traffic numbers, we're eager to still produce content for no money. For many, online validation is the only ego-supporting currency we need.

Established media institutions like TV networks and newspapers were not the first to recognize the value of new media. They didn't need it. They already had promotion and distribution channels in place. But individuals didn't, and in minutes, with little to no cash outlay, new media afforded the average individual the means of having a distribution channel just to promote themselves.

Principle #5: Be truthful or be exposed

I've worked with many clients who want to engage in new media, yet they endlessly discuss and debate what level of truth they should reveal. It often becomes an issue of what do we want to say to the public. While they may say, "Yes, we want to be truthful," it always becomes a discussion of how truthful.

The reason for the debate is there's a feeling that information still needs to be controlled by corporate communications. That would be great if corporations could still control it, but they can't. With everyone having a voice online, no one individual or institution has a monopoly on information or the truth.

And while time and time again we see examples of truthful campaigns working very well, and at the same time there have been examples of campaigns built on lies falling apart, it is still very difficult to get sign-off from a client to build a fully truthful campaign.

This is becoming less and less of an issue today because the need to be truthful is being hammered as the number one commandment of online communications.

The failure of not being 100% transparent in your associations and dealings is being exposed as a fraud. According to the online digerati, fraud and lying online is the ultimate digital sin. And while online critics often don't have legal recourse to

fight back, they do have ridicule and the largest, fastest, decentralized communications network (the Internet) at their disposal.

What should be of greater concern to a company that chooses not to be transparent or truthful (two debatable approaches) is the fact that the online community loves to seek out and reveal impostors. That's because an online publisher's street credibility rises sharply when they do expose a fraud. For this reason companies need to be wary. If you do choose to be fraudulent, you need to realize that everyone online is eagerly looking to expose you.

Even worse, not only will you be exposed, but your exposure will live online endlessly and people will talk about it forever using you as the poster child mistake never to repeat. Companies with major fraudulent failures are unfortunately now eternally living examples of how not to communicate online.

You can lie and get away with it

Nobody likes to be duped...unless they know that's the premise. For example, we like magicians, but we don't like con men. A fake site can work if you make sure everyone is in on the joke. In that way you're still being transparent and true to your nature.

Principle #6: Believe your gut, not the statistics

Every single day I see another research report talking about statistics of listeners or viewers of a piece of new media. And for every meeting I attend, marketers and clients demand PowerPoint presentations loaded with these numbers. I've never witnessed anyone question the validity of

these numbers, what they represent, or how they were generated. It's not like they're all coming from one well-known standard source like Nielsen.

These measurements become the lynchpin decision factor on whether to buy into a campaign. If

they are shown that X numbers of people are watching Y, then the client will feel comfortable about investing. The problem is new media is an emerging technology with undefined structures. Understanding the media and the atmosphere they operate under is far more important than the constantly changing numbers they produce. Each set of statistics is based on a different methodology. While numbers are helpful, they can't be the only tool for decision making.

The problem is the advertising industry has been ingrained in making decisions based on CPMs (cost per thousands). CPMs are used to answer the key question of "How much is it going to cost me to reach my audience?" Advertisers and media professionals are trained to only make media planning decisions based on this value. It's the metric they know, understand, and negotiate on.

Unfortunately, new media does not operate like a mass market media. It's a hyper-targeted media. And the audience for it is not as passive. They're

often influencers. They're a more valued audience. Unfortunately, we have no tools yet to measure how much more valued these influencers are.

If you're an advertiser buying a television commercial, you don't need to understand the technologies and distribution structure of television. That's because for decades the structure, pricing, and architecture of advertising on television has been set and agreed upon. Conversely, with new media, nothing is set in stone. There are loose architectures that we've rallied behind, like podcast sponsorships. But everything in terms of design of content creation and promotion is still very much open for each individual to determine.

At this time, new media production decisions must be done predominantly on gut and done quickly. Spend time understanding the media rather than waiting for new pricing and qualification structures to present themselves. If you wait for numbers to validate your decision, you'll miss out on opportunities to be the one to create the numbers.

Principle #7: Interest and then engage

"We want something viral."

It's the call of the client to the marketer.

Here's the problem when a client requests something viral. You can't "buy" a viral campaign. When you purchase a commercial on TV, the network has complete control of distribution and therefore they can deliver to you an audience based on the audience they've measured that's coming to consume the network's content. Since you're purchasing an audience upfront, the quality of your creative has no bearing on the size of your viewing audience. Your audience is based on how much you're willing to pay a TV station or network to get access to their audience.

When you purchase an ad in a magazine or on a TV network, there's little feedback on how compelling

the content really is. Conversely, in the online world, content is the factor that determines your audience and the feedback is often immediately available. That content's quality will be determined by a community of word-of-mouth users who decide whether your information will or will not get an audience.

Every marketer wants something viral because they see what it can do. With every successful viral campaign someone got a much larger audience than they paid for. Of course a marketer wants that. It's called, "Give me something for free." And that's what they think when they request a viral campaign.

A request for viral content is asking a marketer to control a distribution channel for which they have no control.

Instead of putting the cart before the horse by requesting a viral campaign, think first about what content it is you and your clients want to create. And then think about how you can make it as entertaining, informative, and accessible to your audience as possible. If you focus on those three elements, your content will find its audience.

Ultimately, you have to interest people. You have to find that core nerve that gets them so excited that

they click through. That requires simple copywriting skills like knowing how to write a good headline and understanding what are, as marketers tell you, your audience's pain points.

If you're skilled enough to incite interest, don't leave them hanging. Engage. That means reach out. Make it easy for them to contact you, the author, or other like-minded people.

New media dies in debate

Large corporations are not equipped to handle a viral campaign. All viral content requires risk. And the larger and more public the company, the less risk they're often willing to take.

Personally, every time I pitch a new media campaign I get locked in endless debate as to what will happen if we let this information get out. I spend a lot of time explaining and convincing. As I talk each person wants to discuss, meet, and get sign-off from twenty-three departments before anything happens. And the reason nothing's happening is because these three people have meetings this day, and this person is on vacation until next week,

and ultimately you need to keep pitching and re-pitching ideas to people over and over, explaining concepts and new media to people who have never experienced what you're trying to explain. So naturally they're a little hesitant to give you thousands of dollars for something they don't understand.

And during all this delay, some kid in the Midwest creates a silly video of him jumping up and down (e.g. the Numa Numa video) and gets the audience that the marketers were endlessly debating about hoping they could get.

Principle #8: Reduce the layers for engagement

I want to abolish the opening words "There needs to be..." from every single new media conference panel about audience engagement. They're the words you'll hear just before a lazy answer that puts the solution to the problem of audience engagement on some unnamed faceless person or company. Yes, there are many "how to engage" issues with regard to new media. But by beginning a sentence with those words the person is asking someone else to solve the problem so that he or she can capitalize on it.

I'm active with many conferences about new media. And every person in the panel prophesizes on what the future will be in new media. All the examples they offer are from the same New York Times article that everyone in the room has already read. Don't tell me what "there needs to be." Give me a suggestion of what you've done to get people to engage.

And the simple answer is successful engagement requires reducing layers to consume, produce, and

share. I'm kind of amazed how everyone missed the biggest story behind MySpace, podcasting, and YouTube. The reason all of these new technologies took off is because they simply made it easy to consume, produce, and share. They weren't the first to introduce social networking, audio, or video to the Internet. But they were all the first to make it easy to consume, produce, and share content. That's it. That's the big, simplistic headline that everyone missed.

Look for tools that reduce engagement layers, and if you're going to create engagement, reduce the layers yourself. Every time you put up a layer like

a registration, you're creating a barrier to engage. Consumers will go through some barriers if they see a positive value exchange for themselves. For example, they might give you an email address for access to a library of content, but they might not if you ask for their mailing address and their phone number.

Think about what you need most. Do you need qualified email addresses, or do you simply need more people to see your content? Whatever your minimal needs are, shoot for them by reducing the barriers to engage. Engagement should be your number one priority.

Principle #9: Mobile phones, the ultimate direct response device

I went to two conferences recently and everyone was surprised by what they thought was an alarming statistic about mobile video usage. They were shocked and confused that half of mobile video usage came from inside the home. They laughed and thought, "How weird. Don't they have better screens to watch in the house?" Nobody raised their hand and admitted that they used their phone on the toilet.

Like your keys and your wallet, your mobile phone is with you all the time—even in the bathroom. But unlike your keys and wallet, the mobile phone can send and receive communications anywhere in the world. Given the mobile phone's carry-anywhere ubiquity, it has the potential to be the ultimate direct response device. It's also a very personal device that's often customized. And the phone's owner wants complete control over information that comes in and out of it. Unlike junk mail and spam—which we all have no problem throwing away—an unwanted message to a cell phone might as well be poison in the user's pocket. You don't want a message from your company arriving uninvited. It will have a detrimental affect.

Just hearing the term "mobile advertising" makes people cringe. That's because the public equates

the term with unwanted phone calls, messages, and advertisements appearing on their phone. Most people in the industry have wisely begun referring to information on a mobile phone with the more palatable term, "mobile content." Still, there exist true forms of mobile advertising, like banner ads on mobile applications, which consumers do accept.

Like almost all new media, communications on a mobile phone must be initiated by the user. You need consent. Users are the ones who choose to download and install an application or they're the ones who choose to participate in a short code campaign (special numbers shorter than telephone numbers used specifically for sending text messages, also known as SMS). By using traditional media, like billboards or magazines, you can entice a user to participate by displaying a short code. But participation will only happen if they see a worthwhile value exchange. It must be relevant.

What consumers want is highly pertinent information sent to them at the right time and at the right location, which can be made possible thanks to E911 technology—a mandate that requires mobile phone manufacturers to create phones that can be physically located through cell tower or GPS triangulation.

All phones on the market today are capable of sending and receiving text messages. Video is a growing market, but SMS is still the standard among all phones garnering about 75% of the mobile content market. For those phones that are WAP-enabled, an SMS with an URL can lead to additional Web-based information.

Companies can engage with consumers through short code campaigns. Any mobile phone user can enter a text message to the short code, which can initiate an application. These short codes along with the text used to start the dialogue are often printed

in traditional media like billboards or magazines. The point of printing the short codes along with the resultant campaign is to engage the customer long after they've seen the advertisement.

A successful short code application delivers content to the individual when they need it. It can be a simple reminder (e.g., "Take your medicine"), which can result in a very valuable touch point in that person's day. All that the user needs to know is that your business delivered that service to them at the moment they needed it (e.g., "This reminder brought to you by Rite Aid").

Principle #10: Be the connector

We live in such a hyper-competitive world. Even so, the one thing I always notice is everyone is very eager to make introductions. And the people who take the extra time and effort to introduce people we look at as connectors.

Introductions and meeting people are the core of new media's success and proliferation. Connecting people is an innate desire in many of us.

I note people like the hosts of the podcast KenRadio, Ken Rutkowski and Andy Abramson, as being true connectors. They both truly go out of their way to make introductions between like-minded people. These introductions are thoughtful in that they take into account each person, what they know, and what they want. They don't see the introduction as just another person to add to their Friendster, MySpace, or LinkedIn profile.

When you're a comedian like Dane Cook, who currently has more than 1.7 million friends on MySpace, and all you want to do is make as many personal connections as possible so that you can book your shows, then the Friendster-guy style (see sidebar) of connecting can be effective. In this case, quantity is more important than quality. Cook simply makes as many personal connections as possible so that he can sell CDs, DVDs, and show tickets.

That Friendster Guy

A couple years ago I briefly met Jonathan Abrams, the guy who started Friendster. He didn't introduce himself that way. Instead he forced introductions. It was strange, but he brashly made introductions to everyone around him.

If you just watched it for a few minutes, you quickly realized that it was his "thing" and it was obviously a branding strategy. When he walked away he clearly wanted people to say, "Oh, he's the guy who started Friendster." The problem is he didn't care if he knew me or anyone else, nor did he put any value to the introductions. He just repeated people's names and simply made introductions. Being that he did it so automatically and rote, it came off more as self-serving rather than his being truly interested in the people he was meeting and the benefit they would get from meeting each other.

I found it rather annoying.

Attend a party and often people will ask, "How do you know so-and-so?" After a few rounds of these "How do you know" questions you and your new friends quickly realize that there's one person responsible for many of these connections. What comes from these positive experiences with these new people you meet is a newfound respect and admiration for your connector. You begin to look

up to that person as being an influential person in the community.

Being a true connector does take effort. Connectors are admired for maintaining relationships and making introductions. Being one or supporting one is important. New media is based on connections, and it's allowed the connector in many of us to come out.

Principle #11: Give options for engagement

Your morning routine may be to read the New York Times, check your email, and read a couple of blogs. Would you still consume the New York Times if it were only distributed as a four-hour videocast? The answer to that depends on how much you want that information and whether it can fit into your daily routine. And that's the core decision every individual needs to make as to whether they do or don't choose to consume a piece of media. The information may be of interest, but the way it's delivered does not fit in with their lifestyle or the way they want to consume media.

That's why I've offered this article as a series of individual mini-articles on the Web (read any of the 12 that you're interested in or print them out) or as a full PDF document that you can download to your desktop to read or print out. Have further interest in this subject? I conducted a series of interviews with experts in the field and compiled short edited conversation videos on each principle. Watch the videos, read the transcripts, or download audio files to your iPod.

I've given options for engagement. I know people are interested in the subject of new media, but I also know people have different levels of interest and time. That's why I make the content available to support as many levels of interest and time commitments as possible.

Everybody operates in different ways. Digg and del.icio.us offer similar social bookmarking services. But I like del.icio.us better. That's why I'd tag a story

with del.icio.us and wouldn't bother to post it to Digg if that were the only option left to me. But I'm sure there are people who prefer Digg so I make both sharing options available on my blog, www.sparkminute.com.

Spreading the word

Make it easy for people to share your content. That means providing links to social news and bookmarking tools like Digg and del.icio.us or offering a "forward to a friend" link. Plus, go out of your way to personally contact sites that you think would have interest in your content. It's best first to read and understand that site's content before you make a plea for your own information. For example, refer to something you saw on their site. Let them know you enjoyed such and such aspect (everyone loves to get their ego stroked) and then offer up your content that you think would be of interest to them. A personal connection is a form of engagement that has a higher potential for interest and, therefore, response.

In addition, individuals change. For example, I used to work full-time at an ad agency. And my job required me to walk, take a bus, take a train, and then walk again to get to work. The entire experience took me 45 minutes each way. To pass

the time I would consume podcasts. Today, I don't commute, but I still need and want to consume that same content. So I've turned to blogs and news sites. Problem is many of the podcasts I tuned into don't have compatible blogs. And as a result, they've lost me as a consumer solely because my lifestyle changed.

Keep your audience by offering options for engagement. Yes, it does take effort to do all these things. But when you take the effort to do it the first time, you'll have created the structure. And if you want to repeat it again, it will be much easier. The trick is you have to begin by doing it once.

Principle #12: You need to participate

P&G's bold move

I believe the most significant corporate new media move was by P&G, who created a series of humorous videos about male menopause. Two years ago if you asked P&G to create such videos, it wouldn't have made it out of the brainstorming phase. The reason they're doing it now is they realize that comedy has the potential to go viral online. But tepid P&G comedy won't get passed along. An irreverent comedy piece like a video about male menopause has potential. It's a surprising move that such a conservative company would take such a creatively risky chance, but it's very telling of what needs to be done to get recognized online no matter who you are.

Don't be a wallflower. You need to get involved in new media as a consumer first before you can produce new media. That means at the lowest level, start reading blogs that interest you. Download some podcasts and listen on your way to work. Digg a story. Search for a photo on Flickr. You can't appreciate the true value of these various new mediums unless you try them yourself. For example, you can't convince someone to produce and sell a TV commercial if they've never watched TV.

The problem is companies and traditional media institutions that want to get involved in this area are late to the game. They weren't the ones who created it in the first place, so they feel a little superseded.

These industry mainstays were the first ones that created TV and radio commercials, but they were not the first ones to create new media. In fact, it's been out for years and many are still not getting involved. Just now we're starting to see some movement, but it's being done with trepidation. And the reason they're moving is they have no choice. Their advertising dollars are drying up.

Don't wait. Try it now. You'll appreciate new media yourself once you participate.

- David Spark
www.sparkmediasolutions.com