Why 3D Network Modeling is the future of Smart Social Media

I reckon that most businesses understand the need for them to use social media as part of their marketing arsenal; many don't use it still, but they understand its importance. Some companies have woven it into their marketing, and are able to track and monitor leads and measure success. Some, such as O2 are particularly good at using social channels to engage and manage crises. But, as far as I've seen, this is as far as it goes.

Even the best companies seem to struggle to change their use of social media from passive to active. They treat social media as if it were a form of search marketing…they let the prospects come to them, they fish rather than farm. They are not in control of the process and often they assume such things as quality of content or attractiveness of design are the determining factors of campaign success…clearly they're not as some good campaigns die and some shockingly bad ones fly!

The problem with existing social media marketing techniques is that their resultant success is totally outside the business's control. They launch a campaign and then sit back and wait to see if it works. A bit alike an electronic (or even a printed) direct mail. Yes, they might split test and they might monitor in real time, but essentially this is still a passive process rather than an active one.

But there is a better way.

I'm working to ensure that over the next couple of years, we see the emergence of a new kind of "social farming." A proactive way of "driving" social spread rather than just launching campaigns and hoping that they "go viral" or "spread."

This will involve modeling a network; understanding how any idea propagates through a network and then using that information to ensure that the key nodes within the network are stimulated to maximize ROI.



***Adam Gray** is one of the top UK social media experts. He works as a speaker talking to corporate audiences and societies, he works as a consultant adviser with companies helping them to plan and implement social media strategies and he works as an author writing about social media and its impact on business and society. Unsurprisingly, you can find him on most of the social platforms by searching "Adam Gray social media" or at his website www.grayuk.com and you can find his latest book "Brilliant Social Media" published by Pearson on Amazon at http://amzn.to/199uQdP*

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These modeling techniques are not in themselves new. For many years scientists have been modeling the spread of contagious diseases through populations of cities and countries. They have investigated why sometimes diseases become epidemics (like avian flu) and sometimes they simply disappear. Political researchers have also modeled why some ideas spread…and others, no matter how good, don't.

But, currently there are very few of us in the social media space that are applying the same science to model (and manage) the spread of social campaigns. Understanding how we can identify key people (or nodes) within a network or community and trying to determine how many of the key nodes need to be "infected" with an idea to ensure maximum penetration and spread of that idea, is going to change the marketer's role from a passive "test and measure" one to an altogether more strategic and planned one.

Using tools such as Gephi, it's possible to map your own Facebook network for fun and see how some of your connections are "clustered" and others not so, to see who's well connected and who isn't. For a business, understanding this will be a crucial competitive advantage. It will enable marketers to quickly identify who the key influencers are - the people who must be won-over for a successful campaign and those that are less important.

It will enable businesses to focus their marketing efforts on the people that offer the most potential benefit to the business - the person with 1000 engaged friends is likely to be a much more useful advocate for a business than a misanthrope with only one friend…no matter how much they "love" the business's brand.

The companies that get there first will have a huge advantage over those that ignore this new science. Increased efficiency, lower costs, faster uptake, better PR, greater insight, lower crisis risks…the list of benefits is enormous.

For an example of the power of this predictive analysis in action have a look at Nicholas Christakis' TED talk entitled "How social networks predict epidemics"…the interesting thing is that so far no business has harnessed this scientific analysis in reverse to stimulate a "promotional epidemic" of their product or services. I am, however, working hard to be the first!

