

Customer Crossroads

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Top five social media suggestions

Social media has not changed what people WANT to do. It has added to our ways of doing what we want. It's hard to imagine living without the internet as a way to get information. We will soon feel that way about social media. Many likely already do.

Social media tools are very easy

Happy New Year!

A challenging economy prompts us to rethink some of our approaches. If you're tired of hearing gurus rant about Web 2.0, we have something refreshing for you -- an interview with a real business person in a traditional industry using social media to connect with retailers and consumers. The industry: carpeting. I hope you find it interesting, and I welcome your feedback.

Social media is still about the message and the experience

A carpet manufacturer reaches out to retailers and consumers.

A lot of businesses still struggle with how to use social media effectively to communicate with their end consumers. They don't see their company or their industry as high tech, or sexy, or particularly cutting edge - in short, they just don't see the fit of social media for their situation. Manufacturers and wholesalers of consumer durables might well consider themselves in this situation. Take carpeting for instance. I can't remember when I have seen this industry featured in a marketing magazine.

This is why I have been fascinated with the success Christine Whittemore, pictured above, director of In-Store Innovation for Solutia (think Wear-Dated carpet) has had with her personal business blog, [Flooring the Consumer](#).

There are now two business blogs as well as a Twitter feed, and a Facebook group. The blogs each have a distinct audience. [Flooring the Consumer](#) is targeted to the trade, and addresses topics such as marketing to women, the retail experience and consumers in general.



to use. So focus first on objectives and content.

[1] **Repurpose existing content to give it fresh life.** All those checklists and tip sheets you have developed for your customers? It might be buried deep within your website, on an intranet, or in a brochure. Get it working harder for you.

[2] **Leverage the media-savvy people inside your company.** In my world, at least one bank economist gives an interview just about every day. These are senior people, well schooled in the ways of talking for publication, and the best ones are interesting, smart and full of personality. I'm baffled that so few have a blog. Instead their content is e-mailed as a PDF on an 8½ x 11 page. It's not designed for on-screen reading and there's no potential for interaction.

[\[Top\]](#)

[3] **Run promotions that bring online and offline together.** I read about a campus promotion where pictures were taken of students and their friends during the first week back at school. Students could pick up the images online, send them to friends, and so on. Brilliant, fun, simple, engaging.

[4] **Rethink your sponsorships.** I recently conducted a study on sponsorship best practices and concluded that it can be hugely effective marketing. A good sponsorship today provides many ways of interacting, some of them online. This is a great place for any organization to start into social media.

[5] **Run a social media bootcamp for your leaders.** I am surprised by how many executives in some industries have limited understanding and experience with social media. It's hard to think strategically about things you don't understand.

[Back to Top](#)

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[Carpetology](#), launched in December 2007, is a consumer blog about all things carpet.

The trade blog was born out of Ms. Whittemore's frustrations with the traditional tools she had been using to reach retailers. The consumer blog is a relatively recent addition, and she uses separate metrics to evaluate it.

Here were the key messages I took away from our discussion:

- **Many metrics are available -- use the ones that tie into your business objectives.** For example, Ms. Whittemore looks at how much traffic goes to the Wear-Dated web site from the Carpetology blog, and how qualified that traffic is. For Flooring, she looks at readership and subscribers.
- **Focus on value for your customer/consumer.** Ms. Whittemore says, "You will NOT see sustainable radical day to day changes across any of these measures. For improvement, you will need to show up day after day and produce authentic, relevant and valuable content. So, don't fixate on the measures; better to focus on your audience and how to create value for them." [\[Top\]](#)
- **Consistent and patient effort pays off.** Flooring the Consumer was launched in June 2006, and is now ranked as #108 on the Ad Age top marketing blogs, and has over 800 subscribers. These are seriously good statistics for a blog of this type.
- **Bridge online and offline.** This is the challenge Ms. Whittemore is now addressing. "It's up to us as marketers to figure out how to engage those offline conversations ... and make it part of the rich online discussion. Otherwise, we're just talking amongst ourselves."
- **Social media projects take time.** Building and nurturing a community requires personal relationships with people, not static content. This takes real time. "Before you know it, the social media project has snowballed and taken on a life of its own." However, the richness of communication far outweighs what is possible in one-way messaging. The social media becomes part of the brand experience.

times a year.

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A fuller version of this interview is on the Customer Crossroads blog:

1. [Using social media in a traditional industry: Flooring the Consumer blog](#)
2. [Using social media: Focus on the message, bridge old and new](#)
3. [The social media paradox: you can put carpet on YouTube but it will keep you busy](#)

Ms. Whittemore asked me for my top five recommendations on social media, which I put in the sidebar. [What are your top five?](#)

[Back to Top](#)



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