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yi Luv Twtr, and #itsucks

Before this bird gets away, I want to mention what I've learned over the past week about social media, marketing, and Twitter.

I was first offended by Facebook's lack of content and the poor user interface. I am starting to understand I used the wrong metric. The right metric is its role in digital marketing. Disliking Facebook is like disliking a hog farm: it stinks, but that's not the point. The point is a hog farm provides pork, and Facebook provides users.

I have not made amends with Facebook, but have jumped into Twitter, which is "second generation" social media. Twitter is a chicken farm, and where pigs are smart, chickens are not. Twitter is to software as MacDonald's is to Julia Child. Consumers love Twitter the way they love fast food. It has no nutritional value, but it has expanded the digital marketplace.

I now understand the difference between sales and marketing, although the two are morphing together. They differed mostly because of the skills, tools, and people involved. Salesmanship is the key in both areas, but the audience, the commodity, and the mechanisms were different.

These differences are fading as both are being automated through similar software, the same internet, and the same customer databases. Now, more than ever, if you're in business you must learn sales and marketing. That means internet marketing.

The Bad Part

Along with the Apple OS in the 1980s came discipline and the design of an effective user interface. Books were written, designers employed, and there was progress in application design. This rested on design principles and a controlled user environment. Then came the internet. Good design, discipline, and control have been swept away. User interface design has plunged downhill.

A few days ago I attended a large software users group meeting where an inexperienced consultant wowed the audience of 20-somethings with the unheard-of notion—unheard-of to them—of good interface design. The presenter hardly understood the field, and the audience had never heard of such a thing. It was like Charlton Heston coming upon the Statue of Liberty buried in the sand at the end of the 1968 movie *The Planet of the Apes*, except that none of those in attendance recognized it. They didn't recognize user interface design as something that once existed and was since lost.



I developed software from 1980 to 2005. Our work involved designing the interface, managing the data, and training the users. Looking at Twitter as a database system, I notice that its interface stinks, the data is poorly managed, and there is no user training. This is what develops when opportunity exceeds ability: the weeds prevail, as in a clearing after a forest fire. It's the same story as civilization rushing to exploit resources using internal combustion, nuclear fission, and electrical energy. Of course it stinks! It stinks because everyone is falling all over themselves to be the first to exploit a new resource, and me too!

Regarding data management, the first thing to establish is how to create, modify, and delete data. The basic steps. Now, Twitter gives us a button to create a Tweet, but none to modify or delete it. At least not most of the time, and when they do, they're difficult to find, or disabled. Why are they disabled? What are the rules? What is the structure? There are no instructions.

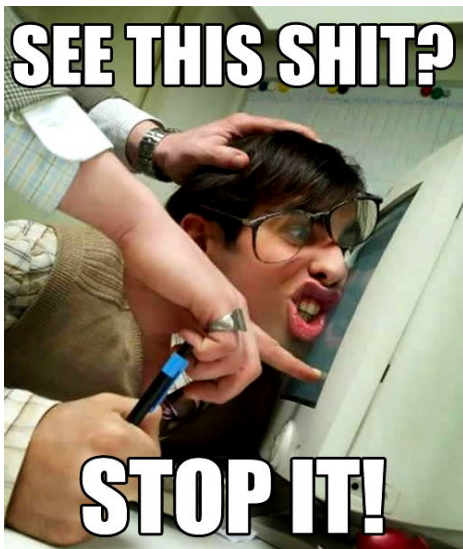
When we wrote software, we wrote four user manuals: a tutorial, a reference manual, a help system, and FAQs. Twitter has only the last two, which accrete organically and without structure.

After thrashing around, unable to modify or delete untweeted Tweets, I wrote tech support. They answered me thus:

“Thank you for writing in. We see you have a question on Campaign Targeting and Performance regarding your campaign not running... To save you time, many advertisers can get instant answers to questions on this topic through these articles in our Help Center... If this has not answered your question, please reply to this case with more detail and we will try to provide more specific guidance.”

I wrote back saying, no, that did not provide an answer, and I restated my question. I am a paying advertiser. I pay Twitter real money. Their assistance benefits them directly. Their answer?

“Thank you for following up. At this time we cannot provide custom support for your question.”



I still have not found an answer. I suspect they don't know what they're doing. I'm going to read their whole, disorganized FAQ document and then, I suspect, I'll see how their service sort of works.

Twitter is disorganized. They're writing and deploying software faster than they can support it. They've off-shored tech support to teenagers in Asia whose training is probably limited to MMORPGs (Massively Multi-player Online Role Playing Games). There are other examples of their design and support failures, but I won't bore you with them.

Internet marketing is developing like sandcastles in a storm. Twitter will get revised, taken over, replaced, or washed away by the next wave of technology, all before it ever grows up in the first place.

The Good Part

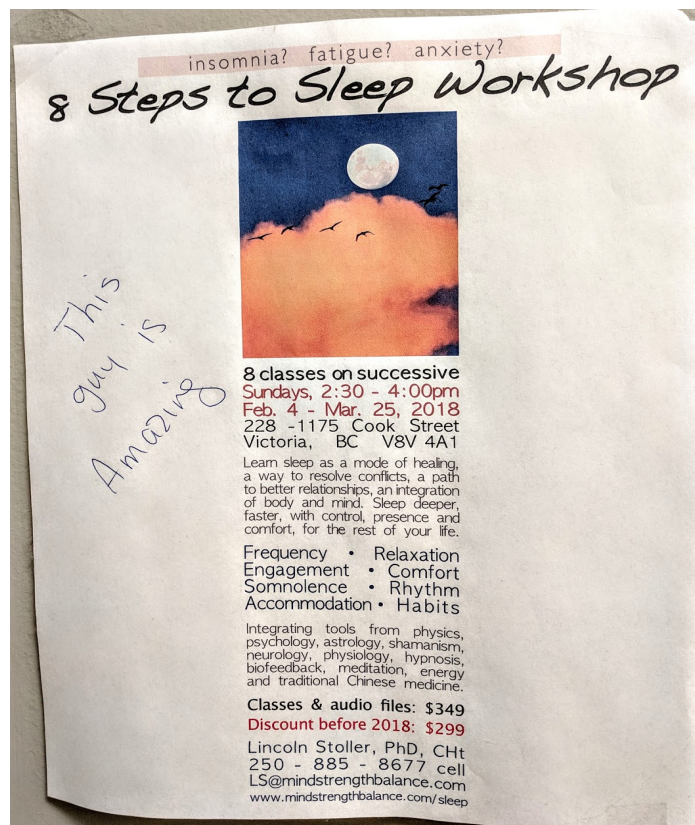
Having gotten my feet wet in the shifting sands of social media, I can see why it's important. Before the internet, before servers and databases, before social media, there was the interstate highway system, the railroad, and the open seas. There was the printing press.

In all cases, the consumer/producer cycle relied on large, supply-side institutions. These included The Hudson Bay Company, Standard Oil, The American Medical Association, and everything in between. The big institutions set standards, invested in infrastructure, and limited innovation to what they could exploit... although it periodically got away from them.

Marketing and sales play a crucial role as the glue that connects the big structures to the small consumers. Marketing and sales is the mucosal lining of civilization's intestines. Now something huge is happening: the mucus lining is "going rogue" and taking on a life of its own. With the internet, mass marketing is escaping the Animal Farm of corporate capitalism.

Look at health care. Doctors—foot soldiers of the chemical industry, urbanization, agribusiness, and the psychologically dysfunctional mind—cannot advertise, diversify, involve themselves with, or educate their clientele outside of their legally, professionally, and institutionally limited domain. We relied upon them as purveyors of knowledge we could get nowhere else. But traditional doctors don't provide health care, they provide sick care. They will go the way of brick-and-mortar because sickness is avoidable if you can get outside of the institutionally polluted, urban, mind, and food structures.

The key is getting access to information and services, and that is what Twitter's raucous chicken farm might provide... if it ever gets its chicken-shit together. And so I was heart-warmed this afternoon at the Taste Coffee Shop, on the corner of Fort Street and Foul Bay, in the bathroom of which they post community event notices. There, taped to the wall, was my own flier announcing the sleep class I held 9 months ago. On this notice some caffeinated customer had scrawled, "This guy is amazing."



I'm going to take their comment and post it to Facebook, and Tweet about it, too. I'll promote my Tweet for an additional \$10, and 4,000 people around the world will see it. Now, that's social media at work!

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