

1

Content Nation: A World of Influential Publishers Declares its Citizenship

This is a story about you—one of billions of publishers in the world today.

Sent an email lately?

You're a publisher.

Posted a photo, a video, a comment, or a vote on a Web site?

You're a publisher.

Keyed in a text message to friends on your cell phone?

You're a publisher.

If you use technology to create information and experiences that can be shared with others, you're a publisher.

Some of your personal activities may seem to be too small in scope to put under the banner of a word like “publishing.” After all, not everything that we publish has a huge audience or seems to be very important, but if others find what you've published to be valuable, then you've achieved what every publisher in the world tries to achieve.

Publishing by individuals is nothing new, of course. Humans have been scratching down notes to one another on cave walls, scraps of broken pottery, paper, and many other types of media for thousands of years. With the advent of the Internet and other advanced communications networks, however, the scale of what one person can do with publishing tools has changed radically. Affordable computers, mobile phones, and many other types of devices connected to communications networks have enabled billions of people to share content with one another globally and locally as never before. Technology now allows any person on the planet to publish things to virtually any number of people in any place at any time at little or no personal cost—without them having to know in any great detail how it happens.

Worldwide publishing, once the pursuit of a handful of wealthy and powerful people, is now a tool in the hands of the world.

Most importantly, the everyday people who are using these tools are discovering what it's like to have an audience for their publishing. Writing an email to one or two friends or leaving a voicemail message is one thing; posting something on a Web site that can be viewed by millions of other people around the world or by anyone in your home town is quite another. When the audience talks back to you, it adds yet another new dimension to personal publishing. Students, farmers, business professionals, teachers, researchers, politicians, homemakers, and anyone else who can access our global communications networks are now engaging with other people who have similar interests and establishing appreciation for one another through their common publishing capabilities.

In the process of becoming publishers who can reach and interact with a potentially global audience whenever they need to or want to, something is changing in the way that everyday people look at themselves and their world. We are creating new and strengthened relationships and allegiances. We are beginning to look upon institutions that we used to rely on for providing us with cohesion and value in our lives as less valuable in the face of publishing technologies that allow us to organize ourselves and our lives more to our suiting. We are creating and participating in new markets for goods and services that do not require traditional suppliers and brokers. We are doing our jobs differently. We are living our lives differently.

As everyday people have been using today's ubiquitous publishing tools, many are looking upon their publishing not as an occasional activity but rather as an essential part of who they are. For these publishing enthusiasts their identity is changing; at first unconsciously, perhaps, but eventually in a conscious way. Their birth certificates haven't changed. Their passports haven't changed. Yet they are ready to change how they view themselves and participate in society as surely as people who have moved to a new country decide to become citizens of that nation when their need to be a part of its culture permanently becomes an overwhelming desire or necessity. There are now millions of people worldwide who are in effect ready to declare themselves citizens of a new global nation of people who have made influencing other people through their own publishing a central and permanent part of their culture and their lives.

You may be one of those people today. If so, I welcome you to Content Nation.

The Birth of Content Nation

I came up with the concept of Content Nation a few years ago, when the tools that enabled online global publishing for everyday people were just beginning to gain in popularity beyond a small pool of technology-oriented enthusiasts—people using weblogs, wikis, social bookmarking Web sites, and other new tools that enabled people to publish easily and conveniently. Content Nation was a useful handle to express that there was a large and significant movement of people using publishing tools to reach the world, but it was also a way to say that there was more than just scale at work: there was also a mindset. Some sports fans may talk about their allegiances to a baseball club, for example, and say that they're part of "Red Sox Nation." In doing so they acknowledge that they're part of something that's bigger than themselves and their own fandom. They're making a statement about their outlook on life, their commitments, their values. So it is with Content Nation. People involved with today's publishing tools seem to enjoy being a part of something that's about who they are and what they're a part of as much as what they do.

Key examples of the power of Content Nation were starting to surface fairly regularly even several years ago. One of the most prominent examples came out of nowhere from a teenager living in the suburbs of Montreal, Canada who became known as "Star Wars Kid." Ghyslain Raza was a high-school student in late 2002 when he decided to record some video footage of himself in his school's video laboratory, acting out some fight scenes from the movie *Star Wars* with an imaginary light saber. Little did he know that a few months later a couple of kids from his school would take his video and post it on Kazaa, an Internet file-sharing service. Within a couple of weeks Ghyslain's little private "shadow play" became an international Web hit as people shared his video with one another, wrote about it on weblogs, and created their own remixed videos of Ghyslain's antics. By mid-May of 2003, well over a million copies of the clip had been downloaded, interviews with Ghyslain had been published, and donations were solicited and sent to Ghyslain to compensate him for the trouble that his friends had brought him. By 19 May mainstream media outlets such as *The New York Times* and *Wired* magazine had started to pick up the scent, but by then the story was already old by the standards of the audience most involved in its unfolding. Today it's estimated that more than 15 million people have downloaded some version of Ghyslain's original video.

It was clear to me at the time that something fairly profound had happened with "Star Wars Kid." In a matter of a few days a worldwide publishing

sensation had been created, distributed, publicized, and monetized via donations with little or no help whatsoever from the world's established publishers. A social network of people who found it to be to their liking packaged it, recommended it to their peers, amplified its value, and placed it in contexts where others would find it to be similarly valuable—others who would in turn continue to amplify its value again and again. These were people who were publishing Ghyslain's original and remixed images very intentionally and bit by bit they were creating a phenomenon with enormous impact with very little effort by any individual.

There have been “sleeper” hits throughout the history of content publishing, but nothing before had illustrated so graphically just how powerful independent publishing can be through Web-enabled channels. The ultimate content itself was not terribly profound, but that fact in and of itself should indicate the importance of this event: if millions of copies of something as simple as Ghyslain's gyrations could make it around the world in record time to millions of people based on its passing amusement, what would be the impact of something far more valuable that could be created, adopted, amplified, and monetized by these networks?

The answers to this question are the foundation of Content Nation. Fun and frivolous things being published by everyday people have impact, to be sure, but some events that have surfaced prominently in popular culture have underscored that this new generation of publishing tools is enabling a growing array of people to influence our work and our lives in a wide variety of ways.

The Kryptonite Evolution 2000 U-Lock was considered to be an excellent product to keep your bicycle secure back in 2004 but in September of that year, posts on Internet user forums and weblogs noted that it was amazingly easy to open this particular lock with the tip of a simple ballpoint pen. A homemade video demonstrating how to do this was posted on BikeForums.com and from there it was picked up by the popular Engadget weblog. Within a few days of the original video being posted it was known widely to people around the world that this Kryptonite lock was not secure.

The company manufacturing Kryptonite locks was aware of the issue from the original forum postings almost immediately, but it took them several days to realize how quickly the awareness of the problem had spread from one person to another publishing the news on the Web and creating hyperlinks to the emerging news stories from mainstream media outlets. What they had assumed was an observation among a few bicycle enthusiasts on a fairly obscure user

forum had mushroomed into a major global business story. The result was a major and costly embarrassment to the company caused and severe damage to its reputation—and a radically heightened awareness among major corporations as to how broadly and rapidly the impact of Content Nation had grown.

In 2004, a major investigative news story on a U.S. presidential candidate from a widely respected television news source like *CBS News* was bound to be taken very seriously by the public and by other media outlets. When *CBS News*'s Dan Rather, a veteran reporter and news anchor with more than 30 years of experience, ran a story on candidate George W. Bush's military service record, Content Nation responded with a vengeance to question his authority.

The basis of Rather's claims of Bush's military records having been falsified to project a more favorable impression of his service was a memorandum produced by one of Bush's former commanding officers. The memorandum appeared to Rather's supporting staff to be very authentic, but within a few minutes of the report being broadcast on CBS Television outlets a forum posting on the FreeRepublic.com site had published a critique of several physical and stylistic details in the revealed memorandum that argued against its authenticity.

To: **Howlin**

Howlin, every single one of these memos to file is in a proportionally spaced font, probably Palatino or Times New Roman.

In 1972 people used typewriters for this sort of thing, and typewriters used monospaced fonts.

The use of proportionally spaced fonts did not come into common use for office memos until the introduction of laser printers, word processing software, and personal computers. They were not widespread until the mid to late 90's. Before then, you needed typesetting equipment, and that wasn't used for personal memos to file. Even the Wang systems that were dominant in the mid 80's used monospaced fonts.

I am saying these documents are forgeries, run through a copier for 15 generations to make them look old.

This should be pursued aggressively.

47 posted on 09/08/2004 8:59:43 PM PDT by **Buckhead**
[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 11](#) | [View Replies](#)]

6 Content Nation

Thousands of weblogs and millions of posted links, comments, and video remixes picked up on the initial posting and forced a reconsideration of the evidence by *CBS News*. Within a few weeks of the blog-driven controversy Dan Rather resigned in disgrace from *CBS News*. A pivotal media figure had been eliminated from a powerful position by the ability of Content Nation to create its own authority to match and to best the established media's authority.

If ever there were a figure in public life who was tightly monitored and managed by governments, it was Iraq's former president Saddam Hussein after his capture by U.S. troops in December 2003. Barely able to move out of his solitary-confinement cell for months, except to attend his public trial, Saddam Hussein was a puppet on a string in the hands of his Iraqi and U.S. captors.

This control was extremely important to the U.S. and Iraqi governments once Saddam Hussein had been sentenced to die by a hangman's noose. Neither government wanted Saddam Hussein's execution to be televised, because they feared that the image of his death would make him a martyr to be pitied by people who would otherwise remember the evidence revealed at his televised trial that led to his conviction and execution.

This tight control was thwarted when a person attending Saddam Hussein's execution in December 2006 recorded on his mobile phone, unnoticed by others, a video of Hussein's last words and his death by hanging. This video was posted on the Web within an hour of the event and picked up by weblogs, major news outlets, and video file sharing services around the world very rapidly. The efforts by the most powerful nation on earth and the nation that its military occupied to control the public message created by the death of the most important figure in modern Iraq had been thwarted by a person who had decided that it was time to join Content Nation.

Some of these events are doubtless familiar to you already: examples of how people communicating with other people through publishing tools without the intervention of established sources of power and authority can change radically the perception of what's interesting, important, and true on a wide basis. As important as these and other key events were in many people's lives, they were just the birth pangs of Content Nation, merely early and influential evidence that publishing by anyone and everyone was starting to influence our economy, our society, and the very way that people live their lives and think about their futures.

The growth of personal publishing from its early phases into a phenomenon that is now becoming the primary communications culture for millions of people worldwide is the real story of Content Nation. In a matter of a few years the publishing of text, Web page links, video, audio, and other materials by everyday people via today's electronic communications networks—what many refer to now as “social media”—has become the dominant focus of audiences using the Internet and related communications networks. According to the Alexa.com service that ranks Web sites based on Internet service provider traffic statistics, six of the global top ten most popular Web sites in February 2008 were sites focused on social media. The ability of these statistics to provide exact rankings may be debatable, but the general picture that they paint is clear: what was once an increasingly powerful but secondary form of communication is becoming a primary form of communication globally.

**ALEXA.COM GLOBAL WEB SITE TRAFFIC RANKINGS AS OF
FEBRUARY 24, 2008 (SOCIAL MEDIA SITES IN BOLD)**

1. Yahoo!
2. **YouTube**
3. Windows Live
4. Google
5. (MSN)
6. **Myspace**
7. **Facebook**
8. Hi5
9. **Wikipedia**
10. Orkut

It's not just that the world is becoming a nation of influential publishers. The time has come when the world is reading, listening to, and watching Content Nation as a source of authority and trusted insight. Content Nation has achieved scale. Content Nation has achieved depth. Increasingly, Content Nation is redefining what people consider to be quality sources of information, entertainment, and interaction. What's more, Content Nation is not just about what happens in major media markets or developed nations. Content Nation is also creating major changes in how small, medium, and global businesses manage their operations, well out of the sight of typical media outlets.

Content Nation is creating new and better ways for people in developing nations to communicate with one another and with the world, and is accelerating their ability to create economic and political change. Content Nation is establishing a global culture of publishing that is changing our work, our lives, and, inevitably, our futures. In doing so, Content Nation will change fundamentally how people survive and thrive in a rapidly changing world.

How rapidly? How fundamentally?

Read on.

The Scale of Content Nation: Truly a Nation in the Making

Although social media tools are increasingly prevalent, not everyone who makes serious use of them. A 2006 poll by the Pew Internet & American Life Project gathered an interesting picture as to what kinds of people are generating their own content online and why. The study found that the major reason most people (52 percent) use weblogs is to have a creative outlet, with only 7 percent citing making money as a major motivation. In other words, for most people just the joy of publishing is enough to motivate them to give it a try. We're creative beings by design, for the most part, destined to shape our thoughts and feelings into personal publishing artifacts for the world to discover.

The Pew study also shows that many people want to have a platform to influence others as well as to be a creative outlet. Twenty-nine percent of respondents cited motivating other people to action as a major reason for weblogging, with more than 61 percent saying that inciting people to action was either a major or minor reason. A similar 27 percent said the desire to influence other people's thinking was a major motivator. The Pew report played down this factor in saying that "just half say they are trying to influence the way other people think" to highlight the pervasiveness of less public uses. But wait. If, as the report says, there were about 12 million adult bloggers in the U.S. at the time, that means that there were more than 3 million webloggers in the U.S. alone who have tried to persuade the thinking of others on the Web as a prime motivator, including, but not limited to, the 57 million adult Americans who were reading weblogs.

Let's round this up to a global guesstimate for a moment. A survey at about the same time by comScore Networks gives us data showing that the U.S. had

only about 22 percent of the world's Internet users at the time. Using that figure as a corollary to scale the Pew data would give us more than 13.6 million adults in the world trying to influence other people via weblogs alone, much less other types of publishing. That's a pretty small group out of 6.5 billion people in the world, but it's significantly more than all of the professional publishers in the world put together. To put it in perspective from another angle using global population data, if this group of influencers were their own country they would be the 65th largest nation in the world in 2006. I updated my calculations from a couple of years ago based on more recent data from similar sources and saw that the community of serious bloggers alone had grown by 2008 to become the 50th largest nation in the world—more than 22.5 million people and growing quickly.

Beyond relatively well-tracked data on blogs there are millions of people using social networking portals like MySpace, Facebook, Orkut, Hi5, and other outlets to create a profile and publish information regularly. A study released by the Pew Internet & American Life Project this year indicates that about 64 million people in the United States, about 22 percent of the U.S. population, use social networking sites. Worldwide the estimate of people using major social networking sites is about 274 million people. Many of these people probably have a weblog as well, so we cannot really add these statistics to statistics on weblogs accurately. Taking just the data from social networking site estimates and applying the same rules on serious influencers from the earlier Pew study on weblogs, we'd wind up with about 73 million people globally who are trying to influence others seriously via Internet social-networking services. This would rank serious social media publishers at the 16th largest nation today—comfortably ahead of Iran's population and closing in on Egypt's.

Add in people who key in content from the billion-plus mobile phones and other networked mobile devices now in use, collaboratively edited reference services such as Wikipedia, online classified ad services such as Craigslist, product- and restaurant-review online services, user forums, email newsletters, professionally oriented social-media tools, and other key publishing capabilities, and before you know it you're likely in the hundreds of millions of people who take publishing seriously—perhaps pushing this group into a population that rivals the 10 most populous nations of the world.

There is truly a Content Nation out there, a growing body of opinion-makers who are influencing individuals and institutions as never before on a wide variety of issues.

This is not to downplay the wider and more playful nature of weblogs, social networking sites, and other outlets revealed in this data. It's very important to recognize that the creative content that entertains us is coming from a vast pool of people who are going to absorb our general attention more and more as people use the Web to find authentic views of the world. It's equally important to recognize that the pool of people who view weblogs and other personal media tools as ways in which they can have a say in all kinds of matters—our personal lives, politics, business, finance—reaches far beyond a handful of well-known bloggers.

Individually, the scope of influence that these publishers have is relatively insignificant—an audience of a couple dozen people at most would be typical for many and far less in many instances. Even if these bloggers averaged only about 24 unique individuals who experience their publishing with some regularity, in sum the nation of people potentially influenced by bloggers seeking influence would be the fourth largest nation in the world—comfortably ahead of the United States of America in population.

The enormous potential of this publishing medium in the hands of people who want to influence others on such a broad scale poses opportunities and challenges to both traditional publishers and society as a whole. For traditional publishers, the influence and attention gained by these millions of micro-audiences has the potential to dilute greatly both the attention and the influence that other sources of opinion and insight offer. Yet the data from the 2006 Pew study reinforces the view that major media outlets are probably benefiting significantly from the presence of bloggers: 72 percent of the polled bloggers look for information about politics online, significantly ahead of the 58 percent of Internet users who do so, according to Pew research. With influential bloggers large and small, media outlets have an opportunity to have their content—and advertisements—drawn into communities driven by the opinion-makers who consume them.

This poses a problem for corporations trying to reach audiences through advertising in media outlets: if people are listening to bloggers as a primary source of content, how much attention and influence is going to be left over to be harvested by traditional advertising in traditional media outlets? The influencing of opinion on many commercial, public, and personal levels is shifting far more rapidly than we may imagine as a result of personal publishing technologies such as weblogs. It requires both publishers and producers to be armed with content that's ready not only for a consuming audience, but for an influencing audience from its first appearance online. In spite of many

companies moving aggressively to use social media to reach their markets directly, many marketers and advertisers have not yet adapted to the scale of this challenge.

More ominously, it may in time lead to people taking a new look at why it is that they have been buying many products and services if the artificial demand created by traditional consumer-brand advertising begins to dissipate. The good news is that social media is turning out to be a great way for companies to have a conversation with their markets. The bad news for many companies is that people are free to have a conversation with anyone they'd like in social media. The nation-scaled influence of people in Content Nation is able to take on not only the influence of the world's great nations, but also the world's great corporations.

The nation-sized scale of influence-seeking social media enthusiasts does need to be taken in perspective: only a fraction of total audiences read them as of yet and a relatively small portion of people produce them with any degree of regularity or quality. The Pew data from 2006 suggested 80 percent of bloggers had started publishing only in the previous few years: Content Nation's influence was in its infancy then. As time has passed and the younger generations who have grown up with social media as a mainstay of their everyday lives become professionals, consumers, voters, and decision-makers, Content Nation has matured rapidly into the mainstay of personal and institutional communications.

Much of the power of this movement toward social media is something that doesn't really register with the average person: Content Nation is a nation of publishers whose citizens are only beginning to understand the importance of their role and its collective power.

To those who can understand the importance of their personal publishing, I say: Be a citizen. The time has come for you to accept that being one of those millions of people around the world committed to influencing a vast portion of the world's population means that you have become something new. You have journeyed through a doorway and have found yourself among people who may have been strangers at first but who are now your fellow citizens, united through influential publishing.

To those of you who are publishers and producers of content in the more traditional sense—the major media companies, the advertisers, the marketers, the journals, the newspapers, the television and radio stations, the music producers, the conference producers, the governments, the enterprises—I say as well: Be a citizen of Content Nation. Recognize that while your legacy of

professional content production entitles you to an important place in its ranks, you are going to find yourselves increasingly among the publishing citizens of Content Nation as peers.

This is a story about you—one of billions of publishers in the world today whose decision to be influential is changing the world as never before.

To those of you who still discount the influence of Content Nation's citizens: be prepared to have them change your mind. Social media is going to change our work, our lives, and our futures as never before.

A Brief History of Social Media: From Campfires to “Common Sense” to Craigslist

A cynic might look at this data on the growth of social media and shrug it off. After all, what's new about social communication? We've been doing it since the dawn of humankind. You could say that the first stories told around campfires passed along from tribe to tribe were the first forms of social media, allowing people to collaborate over time on tales of important events. Cave paintings from tens of thousands of years ago with shadows of people's hands daubed onto stone walls show that the earliest people liked to communicate with one another in lasting forms. Isn't social media just another way of saying that humans are by their very nature publishing beings?

Well, that's probably true. Perhaps the question might be asked a somewhat different way: did we get sidetracked from being natural publishers and are we just getting back to our roots? Did we have a few relatively brief millennia in which a few people controlled communications to masses of people, and are those of us in more developed nations just beginning to rediscover our natural abilities to create and share content without such a centralized authority? In other words, if what we're seeing with the emergence of Content Nation is not something new at all but rather a return to something very basic in human society—namely, the ability of people to communicate with groups of peers without highly centralized control of publishing technology being a major factor—then perhaps society itself is going to undergo major changes as the result of such capabilities.

If the diversity and decentralization of control found in social-media publishing reflects our natural desire and ability to publish in autonomous social

units, and such publishing is beginning to overwhelm centralized communications, then we must face the reality that something very profound and fundamental is shifting in our society—something that asks us to look at what we were doing prior to publishing’s centralization as much as it asks us what we are facing today and tomorrow.

Let’s trace the history of social media for a few moments. Where does the history of publishing begin?

Perhaps the answer to that question can be found in examining briefly our most fundamental human publishing “technology:” language.

Even though our bodies and minds are designed for speech, the ability to speak any particular language is not something innate. Language is, in essence, a communications program, a verbal coding technology invented for a purpose, one that must be “loaded” into each new person who wants to communicate using that language. Once loaded into a group of people’s minds and practiced with their bodies, a language can evolve very rapidly in given localities into a wide array of unique communication systems.

We have not only many languages, but dialects and accents that can vary quite a bit within several kilometers of a given location. According to the Census of India conducted in 2001, 29 languages are spoken there by more than a million native speakers, with 122 languages or distinct dialects spoken by 10,000 or more people. A similar study in 1993 of African languages found more than 800 distinct languages and dialects, with about 10 of them spoken by more than a million people and the remaining spoken by groups of 100,000 people or fewer, some including sign language and whistling as their format. Humans have always been inventive communicators and have flourished by communicating in ways unique to very specific societies. We like to “speak the same language”—literally and figuratively—with people who share our view of things.

In looking at current research into how languages evolved in the development of human society it appears language evolved first as a system that enabled tribes of people to communicate with one another in a form that was not easily understood by possible competitors for food and other resources. This encoding was something that people in a very local region could use to flesh out who was on their side and who wasn’t. You might think of language from this perspective as the first form of encrypted communications.

This use of language as a tool to identify sameness and otherness continued to be the case through history. In the biblical book of Judges the warriors from the ancient tribes of Gilead defeated warriors from Ephraim trying to escape

from them by testing to see whether they could pronounce the word “shibboleth” the way a Gileadite would: those who could not were put to death. Language was a technology for war as surely as a sword for these people.

In World War II the most successful encryption of military messages was maintained not by the technology of machinery but by U.S. soldiers from the Navajo tribe of Native Americans. Navajos who were in the U.S. military used their native language over battlefield telephone systems to communicate messages from officers to front-line troops. The opponents of the U.S. were never able to decipher these Navajo messages successfully. Language as a technology defeated all other advanced technologies of that era.

From these perspectives it's clear that language itself can be a very powerful “life or death” technology—perhaps the most powerful one in our command.

Okay, so language is powerful. It helped us to form into thousands of groups well-adapted to living independent of one another in countless unique environments. How does that get us to our current story of social media?

The answer comes from how people adapted to changing technologies that favored more centralized communications.

The key turning point in the rise of people as publishers came with the rise of early human civilizations in the wake of the receding glaciers of the last great Ice Age about 15,000–20,000 years ago. In his book *Before the Dawn*, author Nicholas Wade argues that the rise of more permanent human settlements, used at first more for the convenience of a still-nomadic hunting society and by about 10,000 years ago for the storage of domesticated grains and livestock, created opportunities for individuals and communities to own food, buildings, and, eventually, land. Ownership created opportunities for trading of surpluses of crops, materials, and hand-crafted goods with other groups and cultures.

With ownership came counting and records. With ownership also came wealth and power, and the ability and the desire to have what others did not have. Put these two together and a new encoding of language was born: the written word. Written language enabled owners and traders to communicate far more effectively over long distances and to large audiences. All of a sudden someone rich and powerful could have their words spread anywhere—if they could afford to pay people to deliver their messages to other people. The richest and most powerful people could afford to communicate their desires and expectations via messengers and stone tablets and monuments to countless people in their own regions and far away. The media had been born—and it worked for the kings, the pharaohs, and the merchants who needed control.

Social media was still an important part of human existence even after the rise of large-scale civilizations. Folk music, ancient stories, travelers with news, and the ability to read what the rulers had written on their monuments and to adapt those languages to their own purposes enabled people to carry on tribe-like communications. As the languages of the powerful kept on driving much of what was published, there were few who had the influence to have their communications shared with many others beyond a small family, local community, or trading partners. There was, if you will, the media of the people and the media of the privileged, living side by side.

As trading grew, though, publishing technologies became out of necessity more widespread and more affordable, and enabled more easily reproduced publications. Writing on clay and stone tablets was replaced by writing on papyrus scrolls, and, eventually, paper. Studying written paper texts was easier and became more common. Anonymous folk stories, religious codes, and other oral traditions could be collected and transmitted further and to more places on paper. Still, the times that people took pen to parchment were fairly few and far between in most instances and it took a fair amount of influence to get your story retold in written form far and wide.

In the age of the Roman Empire the prosperous and powerful people who did business in the Forum at the center of Rome would retreat oftentimes into their villas upon the surrounding hills and have their servants in the city center write to them about the events of the day. These written news accounts, called *diurnae*, or journals, were perhaps the beginning of both regular news publishing and the beginning of the written language as everyday social media. They were more than just personal accounts shared with close family and friends or with trading partners. They were accounts of daily life written for a paying audience who wanted to witness events that were far away—and to respond to those events as they chose. They started out as private communications, but they were shared with others and discussed. The first “newsgroups” had been born, if only for the elites.

Media of all kinds stagnated in their form and influence for many centuries until the invention of the printing press in the 15th century. At first very expensive and experimental, the original books and proclamations coming out of early printing presses were to no surprise tightly under the control of the rich and powerful. But printing technology spread rapidly, scaling down to smaller and more affordable equipment. Printing was the first publishing technology that enabled entrepreneurial efforts to reach mass audiences. By

the 18th century local presses were beginning to blanket many nations with newspapers, journals, books, and pamphlets. Pamphlets are especially important to our story, because they were used oftentimes by people who wanted to publish their own opinions on the issues of the day.

One of the most famous pamphleteers of the mid-18th century was an English immigrant to that era's American colonies named Thomas Paine. His 1776 pamphlet *Common Sense* could be called rightfully one of the first hits of social media. An anonymously authored pamphlet, Paine's *Common Sense* laid out the case for American independence and a proposed charter for a new continent-wide government. Paine had thousands of copies of *Common Sense* printed initially at his own expense and donated its copyright to the new American states after independence had been won. It was a publication meant not for building his own power but for building the influence of a powerful idea.

As influential as *Common Sense* was in the hands of people who purchased it, its influence was increased many times over by the people who brought it to the local coffee houses and taverns that were the social and business centers of that era. In discussions across the colonies at these gathering places, *Common Sense* became a publication that was shared and read via open distribution and discussion until it was known well by most people in the colonies. It played, by many accounts, a pivotal role in emboldening the leaders of a fledgling and uncertain rebellion against the greatest global power of their age to reject its governance of them altogether. An anonymous and inexpensively reproduced publication, produced by a person of no great standing or reputation and shared by hundreds of thousands of everyday people in a relatively short period of time, became one of the most influential communications in all of human history.

Paine noted in *Common Sense* a great irony that arose when a people who communicate openly and widely with one another ultimately have more and better insight than those who rule them: "There is something exceedingly ridiculous in the composition of monarchy; it first excludes a man from the means of information, yet empowers him to act in cases where the highest judgment is required." It is an insight that rings loudly through history into our current era. If, as social-media author Barry Libert has coined, "We are smarter than me," what does it mean when the "me" is the head of a great nation? Was publishing really the tool of the powerful and wealthy or was it enabling new structures for delivering power and wealth through more democratic communications?

COMMON SENSE

Common Sense exposed not only the ability of everyday people empowered with publishing to influence one another into becoming a political and military force; it also exposed several concepts that are at the heart of social media:

- Leveling communications technologies tend to level power structures. The forces of armies, state, and wealth ultimately proved to be no match for an idea whose time had come that could be spread and built rapidly into a consensus by affordable publishing tools.
- Level power structures in social media tend to enable the formation of new social identities and alliances. The British colonists in America thought of themselves first as citizens of Britain and then of their own colonies: their identity as a nation was ambiguous at best when *Common Sense* was first published in January 1776. Reading and discussing *Common Sense* in public places provided a common literary and social experience that was instrumental in forging a new sense of national identity.
- Although specific authors may gain influence through social media, ultimately the author is less important than the message. Anonymity, when used to conceal the identity of an individual, can enable people to concentrate on the message instead of the person. Who you are isn't as important as what you say and what people think about it.
- Altruism matters. Concentrating less on revenues from the rights to copy a publication and more on maximizing its influence for a greater good can provide enormous payoffs for those who benefit from it and, ultimately, the person who created it.
- Sharing inexpensive or free publications widely and quickly enables the rapid formation of a widespread outlook and, consequently, influence. That influence and its ability to spur widespread action is more valuable oftentimes than the publication itself.
- Don't be afraid to publish diamonds in the rough. A lot of *Common Sense* proved to be not that valuable and insightful, but the parts that were good proved to be exceedingly good. Get it out there. See what people think.

The success of *Common Sense* was replicated in varying degrees by other pamphlets and treatises in the 18th and 19th centuries that led to political change and scientific advances. As the 20th century dawned, the time of the pamphlet as a powerful form of social media was waning. Motion pictures, radio, news-wire services, telephones, and phonographs were new technologies for publishing not only text, but sounds and sights that were easy for average people to absorb and appreciate. An explosion of metropolitan newspapers enabled everyday and influential people to get some opinions out to local communities on a regular basis instead of through occasional pamphlet publishing.

Unlike pamphlets, which were produced oftentimes by hand-operated presses and relied on distribution from one person to another for broad awareness, these newer forms of publishing were based on the scale of production and distribution possible through mass manufacturing. Newspapers, radios, televisions, phonographs, and other mass-produced items enabled these newer forms of media to moderate, filter, and package content that used to be mostly in the hands of their creators and their audience to distribute and share as they pleased.

This powerful centralization of commercial publishing distribution led to controls to prevent competitive outlets from arising. The concept of copyright, used at first to ensure the economic survival of the emerging printing business, became focused more on expanding the wealth of well-established publishers than on ensuring outlets for new information and ideas. Radio broadcasting, initially a free-for-all that enabled amateurs to have as much audience as professional broadcasters, was regulated to keep citizen radio communications limited and segregated from commercial communications. New scientific ideas seeking acceptance were published in expensive journals only by major publishers and universities and only after rigorous and lengthy review.

After a brief hiatus from influential publishing being almost exclusively in the hands of the powerful, the post-Ice Age norm of centralizing the control and ownership of publishing had reasserted itself.

The rise of mass media might have brought the story of widely influential social media to an end were it not for the Cold War.

After World War II the United States was investing heavily in research to develop advanced computers and communications networks for managing its command and control of the nation's global military forces. In 1963 J.C.R. Licklider was chosen to head the U.S. Department of Defense's Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA). Licklider foresaw in those early days of computer technology many of the developments in the computer industry that would unfold in the decades ahead.

One of Licklider's futuristic visions was a universal "intergalactic network" of computers in which any one computer could communicate with any other computer without requiring a separate electronic circuit connecting directly to each other computer or to a central computer that could act as a control point for accessing all other computers. Instead segments of an electronic message could be routed to and from a destination computer through any other computers on the network as conditions allowed—like relay racers passing their batons from one group of runners to another—and then reassembled at the destination computer in complete form.

In October 1969 Licklider's vision of an "intergalactic network" of computers first came to life as the Department of Defense's ARPANET. The communications methods pioneered by the ARPANET eventually became worldwide standards and were improved upon to make it easier for computers to transmit electronic messages to any other computer over a wider variety of computer networks and to improve message routing. On January 1, 1983 the ARPANET was retired and the first computer network using the communications methods employed by today's Internet was born.

This little sideline into computer network architecture underscores one unique aspect of the architecture of the Internet that is very important to social media. By its nature the Internet is a computer network in which any computer can communicate with any other computer in the world that's connected to it, without needing to pass messages through a central control point. But the Internet also allows any number of computers to communicate simultaneously without central control.

This was a first in the history of human communications technologies. A single voice could shout only so far. A newspaper, book, radio station, or any other media relying on mass production had relied on some central publishing authority to distribute its content. A telephone could allow anyone to communicate worldwide, but only to one person or to at most a handful of end points at a time. The Internet enabled one communication to be published and received by any number of people in the world simultaneously—and could allow them all to respond simultaneously as they pleased. The storytelling campfires of the Ice Age could now be extended in a global circle of communications.

This new communications capability was an innovation that was in many ways as crucial a tool for human communications as language itself. Communications to and from any number of people could be self-organizing on potentially any scale instead of being organized via hierarchies such as

governments, religions, tribes, or businesses. It was as if the topography of what was possible for humans to do together through common communications had been wiped as clean as much of the earth's surface was when the world's great glaciers retreated at the end of the last Ice Age. New ways for society to survive and to thrive were inevitable back then as a radically different environment took form; new ways for society to survive and thrive were certainly inevitable as the Internet enabled a new global environment for human communications to take form.

The huge potential of the Internet to transform human communications might have taken many decades to evolve to the point of worldwide influence through social media were it not for two key developments: the emergence of affordable personal computers (PCs) and the birth of the World Wide Web, today referred to commonly as the Web. Affordable personal computers evolved rapidly in the early 1980s and became reasonably powerful and widespread devices by the early 1990s. By that time the Internet was certainly worldwide but confined mostly to government, university, and business research facilities and major businesses that used it for limited forms of publishing, such as email. But with the introduction of the Web, the marriage of widely available PCs and global publishing via the rapidly expanding Internet began to accelerate the development of social media on the Internet.

The beginnings of today's social media can be found in the very first Web site developed by Tim Berners-Lee at the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) in 1992. Though Web sites contain information created in many different human languages and in many different forms, they all use the same common "language" of programming standards for formatting and accessing information. It is this capability that offers the real common language of the Web. Anyone can build a program to access a Web site and to display information available on it in an easily readable format by following these standards. Many programs built to operate and access Web sites using Web standards were made available for free use, a move that helped not only to encourage the use of the Web but also the sharing of other technologies for advanced Web functionality. No longer was access to information reliant on generally expensive and proprietary special software produced for special purposes. The potential of the Internet to enable anyone, anywhere to publish and read information from anyone else could now be realized in full.

The other critical feature found in Tim Berners-Lee's first Web site was a simple news page—a listing of recent events and announcements relating to early Web development. New items would be added to the top of the page and

older items pushed down onto archive pages of earlier items. Items were typically very brief, written in an informal tone that would be easily understood by others who knew the general context of the information being discussed—in other words, a news page written by and for peers in the language of peers.

This was in some ways the first prototypical weblog, a page with small snippets of plain text as well as hyperlinks that enabled quick navigation to related information with a click of a mouse on the colored and underlined hyperlink text. No longer was it necessary to get on a mailing list or acquire a special login to get information from other people on a computer network; anyone could access such a page easily and be informed about current events and new Web content by peers. Anyone could access related information via hyperlinks without having to know arcane Web addresses or to have a special index of related sources. These features are still at the heart of most of today's social-media publishing. But this was still a one-way communication and still required a fair amount of expertise to be able to publish the page—however it wasn't far from the traditional publishing model in spite of the potential of its technical underpinnings.

World-Wide Web News November 1992

(As usual, this is distributed in plain text form, but the original hypertext contains lots of links and meta software yet, telnet to info.cern.ch (128.141.201.74), and select information about the WorldWideWeb.)

Client software

Three developments on the clients side. Tony Johnson of Boston University, developer of the [Midas](mailto:midas@info.cern.ch) (<ftp://info.cern.ch/pub/www/src> or ftp://freehep.scri.fsu.edu/freehep/networking_news_email/midas)

Here at CERN, Nicola Pellow is back until the end of the year, and has picked up the [Mac Browser](#)

The full-screen client (using curses) has been released by Jim Whitescarver of NJIT, see [release notes](#)

The NeXTStep client has been revised. The 0.13 version generated bad SGML at times, so anyone can get the new one (ftp://info.cern.ch/pub/www/bin/next/WorldWideWeb_0.14.app.tar.Z)

More and more hypertext on line

New W3 servers have appeared at [KVI](#) ad [CWI](#) both in the Netherlands, [IN2P3](#) in France, and elsewhere, as well as various other goodies.

CWI has a hypertext version of the Gnu documentation and of a guide to [Audio formats](#), and NCSS produces online hypertext documentation recently are [ADAMO](#) and [RD13](#).

Meanwhile, [Cornell Law school](#) have a server with hypertext of US Copyright Law... as law tends to change.

Browse the WAIS servers

It's sometimes been a bit difficult browsing through what there is in the WAIS world. Now, looking by name of "source" and by internet domain. These lists are generated automatically at CERN from databases on 88 hosts accessible.

(Previous issue was [September 1992](#))

Tim BL

Another early form of social media on the Web was the newsgroup, a facility that enabled people to post messages and to post replies to those messages. This basic form of community discussion remains in many of today's social-media services. Some newsgroups were open for anyone to read and post information, whereas others restricted access for posting or reading information. Newsgroups were the first example of a social-media community on the Web, enabling people to share expertise and common ideas and to define topics for discussion.

These early but primitive forms of social media on the Web attracted many specialized enthusiasts from academic and technology communities, but in general the limitations in the design of their basic features didn't allow social media to reach a broad audience for several years. It took three additional developments in technology before social media really began to explode in its scope and impact for typical people using the Web.

The first technology change was the development of software that made it far easier for anyone to publish and read content without a detailed understanding of the technology that makes it possible. Although key technology components such as better browsers and computer networks that could transfer large quantities of data more quickly were important in a shift to more accessible Web information, in general two forms of software were key to the evolution of social media on the Web, in particular wikis and weblogs.

Wikis (a name derived from the Hawaiian word "wiki," meaning "fast") were a new kind of publishing tool that started surfacing in 1995. Unlike previous Web publishing software, wikis enabled anyone to publish entire Web sites with almost no technical knowledge and to allow other people to edit them as well right from the same software they used to view Web site pages. Many people could collaborate on a common Web site pages or a series of pages using freely available wiki software. This was a huge move forward in enabling communities to share their expertise and to build knowledge collectively and collaboratively. Information no longer had to be "perfect" before it was exposed to other people: in fact, by exposing it to other people it could evolve and take on new depth and form over time. This in effect turned the traditional editorial process for publishing inside-out: now anyone could write and edit content together to be viewed and enhanced by global audiences. It was in a sense a return to the Ice Age tradition of stories and histories being developed collaboratively by many people over time.

Weblogs were another important publishing tool that helped to accelerate social media into a global publishing phenomenon. A handful of technology specialists had maintained personal online diaries since the early days of the Web, using specialized publishing tools to maintain their content. But in 1998 the Open Diary service made its debut on the Web. Open Diary enabled anyone to start their own online diary with almost no technical knowledge required and, most importantly, no need to set up their own Web site to start publishing. A budding online journalist could configure a new personal diary in a matter of seconds, start typing text into a simple online form, click their mouse on a form button, and have their content appear in an online journal format for the world to read.

Thousands of people began to use Open Diary and other similar services, such as Blogger.com, which soon added the ability for people reading these diaries to publish their own comments on a diary entry, enabling discussions like the ones newsgroups had provided earlier but with the journal writer acting as the focus for discussions and an overseeing editorial control. The Roman *diurnae*, personal news journals for specific audiences, and the pamphlets of Thomas Paine's era had been reborn through a tool that let anybody be a source of news and discussion for anyone in the world.

The second key technology development that enabled the rapid explosion of social media was the Web search engine. Search engines look at where content comes from without inherent bias as to the source of who has produced it: if a search engine determined that a personal weblog or a wiki page was a very relevant source of information that matched someone's search-engine query, it would have just as much chance of being chosen as a highly relevant page by a search engine would as a page produced by a professional publisher. Search engines enabled the perceived authority of social media to be escalated in the eyes of readers on the Web—a factor that helped to grow audiences for its content more rapidly.

SEARCH ENGINES

Search-engine software examines information on Web sites and creates a searchable index of each and every word found in computer files that it can access. This enables people to look for content based not only on specific predefined categories or human-built keyword indexes, but on any term that might appear in a document.

The third key technology that enabled the growth of social media from a niche phenomenon to a global phenomenon was peer-to-peer social networking services. Instead of relying on central computers to store and distribute content, early peer-to-peer services took advantage of the inherent peer-to-peer architecture of the Internet and provided software that made it easier for people to connect directly to other people's computers on the Web, in effect turning any computer into a Web site that could share information with others.

Napster and other peer-to-peer file-sharing services enabled people to share digital music stored on other people's computers, and messaging services such as ICQ enabled people to send text messages directly from one person to another on the Web to enable chat-like communications. Though newer styles of social-networking services have supplanted many of these earlier services with Web sites that no longer rely on peer-to-peer software, the earlier services established the value of connecting millions of people around the world with valuable content and discussions provided by like-minded people.

The availability of peer-to-peer networks that could connect like-minded people eventually inspired other types of peer-oriented social-networking services. Newer services include Craigslist.org, which enables anyone to post free online advertisements for goods and services, personal ads, and events; eBay, which matches peer-to-peer buyers and sellers; and newer types of social-networking services, such as MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, Digg, and LinkedIn, are all direct descendants of early peer-to-peer services that encouraged people to provide just a little content to connect with a lot of people.

Here we are in the world of today's social media. We've come a long way since those early cave paintings and campfire stories, but in many ways we have indeed come full circle back to the beginning of our social media history, technology uniting groups of people through mutual communication capabilities, people connecting with people the way that they like to connect with them. Collaborative storytelling and knowledge generation. Voices shouting into the air and being heard as far as they can carry—which now, thanks to the Web, can travel to the ends of the earth and beyond. And through the scale, influence, and power of Content Nation, social media is becoming one of the most transformative forces in human history.

Why Social Media Matters to Our Work, Our Lives, and Our Futures

What does the emergence of Content Nation, a nation of influential publishers, really mean to our everyday lives? It means first and foremost that the patterns of our lives that we've taken for granted for centuries, perhaps even millennia, have the potential to shift as never before. It will be a shift that affects not only what entertains us but also how we survive and thrive in our work, our lives, and our futures. Already social media tools are helping large and small businesses alike to become more productive and to change the way that they do business with their customers and how they organize themselves. Already people are using social media to change how they manage the most fundamental questions in their lives—How will I find people who really enrich my life? Who should I support in politics? How will I find my next job or customer?—and in the process they're changing our everyday decisions in profound ways.

Already we can begin to see the potential outlines of how social media may impact our future. Will it be a future dominated by large organizations trying to create mass-produced goods for mass markets using mass-marketing techniques? Or has social media begun to introduce elements of a new way to organize local and global economies that will change the fundamental patterns that have dominated human commerce since the dawn of civilization? In a world in which human economics are running up against potential limits of sustainable human consumption on a planet with limited resources, will social media point to new ways to create rewarding lifestyles in an era of modern technologies?

Perhaps most profoundly, as social media introduces changes to some of these fundamental ways in which people manage their lives, will social media change some of the fundamental ways in which we organize human society? When there is possibly more potential for ensuring humans surviving and thriving on a global scale in a system that enables loose confederations of people to solve problems and share solutions, is it likely that institutions such as governments, local communities, and even families will begin to change?

Where Social Media Is Taking Us: How Something So Simple Can Change So Much

The preceding questions may seem to be way too broad in scope for a book on something as contemporary as social media. Yet as you work through the chapters of this book that focus on the more here-and-now aspects of social media, I think that you'll begin to see the outlines of where social media is already pointing toward some of these potentially profound shifts in human society. We're already well past the infancy of this phenomenon, past the "oohs" and "aahs" of a new technology as a rudimentary plaything, past the initial glimpses of how it can improve productivity, and influence markets and human relationships.

In the 2000 book *The Cluetrain Manifesto* the phrase "markets are conversations" captured the idea that the Web was bringing us back to our roots as a society that learns from one another directly our needs and how best to fulfill them. Those direct online conversations are now more than a decade old, yielding rich insights into not only how existing markets will unfold anew with social media, but also how new markets are forming that will take us far beyond industrial-era marketing paradigms and toward new and revived interchanges that add value to our human experience.

Like that key phrase from *The Cluetrain Manifesto*, the impact of social media's influence can be deceptively simple depending on the scale that you use to apply it, just like the changes that a piece of ice can make may be deceptively simple based on scale. Let a small cube of ice melt on a table, and something simple is changed: put a mile of ice over a continent, and life is changed forever. So it will be with the scale and depth of Content Nation's influential impact as it begins to reach into the lives of every person on the planet. When the fundamental power of any one person to exert an influence over almost any other person on the planet changes, a tool with great scalability emerges that will exert a change on the future of what makes us human as surely as language itself changed our humanness.

This book's mission is not to tell you yet again that social media is important, but rather to help you get a better understanding of how today's global influence from social media is setting the stage for things far greater than we may be able to imagine easily today. The pieces for a new kind of future are falling into place rapidly—so rapidly that many people really aren't capturing

just how different that future will look when it's complete. We see the changes in our everyday lives already, but what is it about Content Nation that will amaze us beyond even today's far-reaching visions?

In the process of detailing how Content Nation is emerging and transforming our lives, we'll take a look at the "what" of social media, the "secret sauce" of what makes it work and where it works best; the "who" of social media, the people who use it for themselves, for their enterprises, and for enhancing existing media outlets; the "how" of social media, looking at specific arenas in which social media is having its greatest impact; and the "where" of social media, a look into where these profound changes are likely to take us in the not-too-distant future and the distant future. This book is just the beginning of our own conversation on social media, of course: if you've made your own decision to be an influential publisher, ContentNation.com will stage additional insights into how social media is changing our work, our lives, and our futures.

