**The Power of Online Community**

Recently I've been learning more about online
communities and how entrepreneurs can harness this
medium of communication to grow their brand
awareness. Online communities can make or break
your online marketing strategy, and are a powerful
tool of communication.

Think about the last time you did a Google search for a
new service, product or business – you likely read comments and reviews posted by consumers that had
visited the business or used the product; think about how influenced you were by this. Are you likely to
buy something that has a lot of negative reviews online? Probably not. Does seeing positive feedback
and reviews on a product or brand give you a sense of trust or assurance in making a purchase or
selecting a particular business for the services you're seeking? Probably yes. This is the power of online
community.

Mitch Joel discusses online community in his book, *Six Pixels of Separation* and details various strategies
for engaging online communities and building trust and support around your
brand. I've found this reading to be extremely helpful in looking at this
component on online marketing and digital communications. In his book Joel
notes that plugging yourself in to other peoples' networks and needs is a good
way to develop this foundation of trust. This must be done in the spirit of
sincerity, offering help and advice when others are discussing a topic or asking
questions. Over time this will help you to become a valued member of the
online community. Posting comments and joining conversations online around
the topics and industries you are trying to engage is another way to make
yourself known to the online communities you seek to be a part of. Commenting
on others' content helps them to notice your content too. [1]
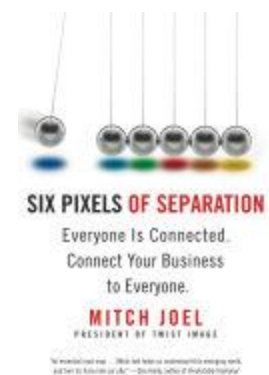
I tested this theory just last night, when I was looking for dog grooming services in an area that I will be
visiting over the holidays. I did a Google search for 'dog spa' and 'Whistler BC' and found that there was
one business in Whistler that provides this service. Whistler is a small mountain community, so there is
essentially no competition with this one service provider, so naturally I wanted to see what people were
saying about the business and check out their customer reviews. The business's website was down,
which was an immediate turn off. However in my Google search I was also displayed a link to the
business's Facebook page, so I visited the page in search of the information I was seeking. Here I found a
great example of online community supporting a business. The page had several positive reviews and 5
star ratings from previous clients. There was one negative review that reflected quite badly on the
business owner. When I looked at this negative post, I noticed that several customers had commented
on this post downplaying the negative feedback and supporting the business. The business didn't even
need to comment on this negative feedback, because the online community had done it for them.

I could go on with further examples, but you get the point I'm sure. As Joel points out in his book, "The
web is built on reciprocity". [2]

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[1] *Six Pixels of Separation*. Mitch Joel. Hachette Book Group, 2009 pp. 164-170.
[2] *Six Pixels of Separation*. Mitch Joel. Hachette Book Group, 2009 p. 168.