

This is an edited transcript of the May 13, 2015 SmallBusinessTalent.com podcast interview titled [‘The Truth About Social Media Marketing: An Interview with Mark Schaefer’](#).

Announcer: Are you a hard-working, self-employed professional striving for small business success? There is help. Welcome to the SmallBusinessTalent.com podcast featuring candid conversations about successful self-employment.

Stephen Lahey: Welcome to the SmallBusinessTalent.com podcast. I’m Stephen Lahey, and I’ll be your host. My guest on the podcast, Mark Schaeffer, is among the world’s most recognized social media authorities. He’s been a keynote speaker at major conferences, such as Social Media Week London, South by Southwest, The National Economic Development Association, Word of Mouth Marketing Conference Tokyo, National Association of State CIOs, and The Institute for International and European Affairs. Mark has also lectured at Oxford University, Carnegie Mellon University, Princeton, and many other prestigious institutions.

Mark has advanced degrees in marketing and organizational development. He’s a faculty member of the Graduate Studies Program at Rutgers University, and is the author of four critically acclaimed marketing books, *Return on Influence*, *Born to Blog*, *The TAO of Twitter*, and [Social Media Explained, the bestselling book that he’ll be discussing on the podcast today](#).

Social media marketing is here to stay and using key social media tools and platforms effectively is important to remaining competitive in your marketplace long term. If you're looking for practical advice on how social media can enhance your marketing mix and strategy, then you don't want to miss this important episode. I hope you enjoy the interview.

Welcome to the podcast, Mark.

Mark Schaeffer: I am so delighted to be here.

Stephen Lahey: I’m delighted to have you here. And to kick things off, tell us about your life before you became self-employed and what made you pull the trigger and become an entrepreneur, Mark.

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Mark Schaeffer: Well, I worked mostly in large companies, really Fortune 500 companies—either worked with or for—and always was interested in starting my own company, but my fear was that I wouldn't know when to stop working, which, as it turns out, was a very true fear. I had a great career, and I'm not the kind of guy that says, oh, I could never work for the man. I mean, there are a lot of benefits to working for a large company. I had great experiences, made many great friends, got to travel all around the world.

But about seven, I guess it's been about seven years ago now, I had been leading a global eBusiness team and really was looking for a new opportunity; and my company wanted to move me to Europe and for some personal reasons I really couldn't do that. We went back and forth for about six months. You know what? This is good time in my life to try something else. The college educations had been paid for, I had been doing some consulting on the side so I knew I liked it, I knew I could do it, so I started my own business and also started to teach. I taught at a local college in Tennessee and then eventually ended up with Rutgers University in New Jersey. So I've been doing that for about seven years, and today I still do a lot of consulting, I am a speaker, I've written books, and still love to teach at Rutgers.

Stephen Lahey: You've written a number of well-known books, and recently you wrote [\*Social Media Explained: Untangling the Most Misunderstood Business Trend\*](#). What motivated you to write that, Mark?

Mark Schaeffer: I got a lot of weird looks from my colleagues when I wrote that book because it came out in 2014 and a lot of people think, well gosh, social media, isn't that kind of mature by now? Don't we really know enough to get going on that? Why would you write that book now? But the fact of the matter is, I work with businesses of all sizes all around the world, and no matter where I went, I found the same questions waiting for me, and people still are struggling with this. They're trying to figure out how does it work? How do I make money off this stuff? Where do I find the time to do it? And I said, you know, I'm just going to write a book that can help people through these questions.

So, the first half of the book covers what I call the five foundational principles. It doesn't make you a social media expert, but it will give you enough to know how social media works, why it works, and allows you to think about, oh yes, now I can see how this could apply

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to my business. The second half of the book answers the five big questions I get at every company. I thought, you know what, I'm just going to answer these once and for all and then every time people ask me those questions, I'll say go read the book.

And it really has worked great. I mean, it's become really a beloved book. It's helped so many people. Right before we started this podcast, I got a note from somebody on LinkedIn thanking me for writing the book. He said I've been so confused about social media, and I was kind of skeptical that you could really help me in such a short book, but you were up to the task. This was really a great book. I feel so much better about things. And that is so rewarding for me to hear things like that.

Stephen Lahey: Well, it's an excellent book. And, as I was telling you before we started recording, I think that's exactly where my listeners are at. I mean, their busy professional service providers, mostly solos, and a lot of their business is local or regional and they're not necessarily connecting with people all over the world on social media. I think for many of them, it really is kind of a mystery that they don't feel like they have the time to unravel as to how to use social media in a strategic way. Before we start talking about social media, I know that you believe that the first step in social media marketing isn't really about social media at all. Can you share your thoughts on that, Mark?

Mark Schaeffer: Yeah. There seems to kind of be this [mist] today, this almost like a frenzy to get into Facebook and get into Twitter and LinkedIn and all these different social channels, and make no mistake that almost every business can benefit from being in those places, but I think you have to look at things very rationally and figure out what priority should it be. And a lot of the young people coming up, of course, they've grown up with social media. They've grown up as digital natives, and so when they're starting to get into these jobs, the first place they look is, okay, well, we've got to be on Facebook.

I think what you're referring to is a blog post that I wrote recently about this young guy who was working actually for like a door company in the Midwest, and he said I want to start this social media program and I don't know where to start. I said, well, have you been out to talk to your customers? Uh, well, no. And he had been on the job for like four or five months, and I said, well, I said really that's where marketing begins. I mean, our job in marketing is to acquire

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customers for the business. And there are lots of ways to do that. It could be through a new product, or through an innovation in service, a new approach to pricing, new methods of distribution. I mean, marketing is a big job. It's a broad job. It's much more than just Facebook.

So I said, well, here's what you need to do. Go into your boss tomorrow and tell him you're going to spend the next week on the delivery truck, and you need to visit every customer and talk to your customers, have lunch with them, look at what your competitors are doing. You need to go out and learn, and you need to discover the unmet or underserved needs of your customers and figure out how do we help them? How do we serve them? How do we become indispensable? And that will lead you to a marketing strategy—a more effective marketing strategy than just starting a Facebook page.

Stephen Lahey: Oh, without a doubt. And, by the way, I loved that blog post.

Mark Schaeffer: Oh, thanks.

Stephen Lahey: It's one of those little things that kind of renews my faith. When I hear social media consultant or social media marketing, so few people, Mark, are actually focused on real strategy. But you are. You're clearly the real deal. But I think, as you know, in the space there's a lot of talk about Facebook—

Mark Schaeffer: A lot of hype.

Stephen Lahey: —yay, it's going to save your business. I'm like, well, hold on. Wait a second. But I love what you just said.

Now, in *Social Media Explained*, your book, you cover the five foundational principles of social media, so let's lay them out. What are the five principles that we need to understand?

Mark Schaeffer: Well, I start the book off by talking about how human buys from humans. Now, that may seem like a really weird way to start off a social media book, but what I'm trying to do in this section is to emphasize that social media is really an extension of ourselves. Somehow when we get into this digital space, we forget that there are real people behind that picture or that avatar, and we may treat them differently than we would treat them in real life. But the same desires, the same way we like to buy and sell from people, go all the

way back to the first medieval marketplaces and we need to remember those values.

The second thing I talk about is where social media really fits in the marketing mix. We can't have the opportunity to visit our customers every week, every month, maybe even every year, depending on your business, but through social media we can provide these provocations through our content to help them know that we're still there. That we're listening, that we're creating something new, that we're solving their problems. And I show, in this chapter, how we build relationships with companies just like we build relationships with other people, and that over time not only can social media connections lead to awareness, they can lead to loyalty.

The third part of the book might be the most important part of the book because it's what most businesses overlook, and that's this idea of the social media mindset. One of the problems we have, whenever we get a new technology introduced to us, we tend to treat it like the old technology. So, I was around when we started websites. The first websites were nothing more than a brochure because that's what we knew. And today, a lot of businesses treat social media like advertising and if you do that, people will not walk away, they'll run away, so you need to adopt a new mindset that's customer-focused, that's content-focused, and, above all, is authentically helpful. We have to move our mindset away from sell, sell, sell to help, help, help, and I know how difficult that can be.

The fourth aspect, the fourth foundational strategy is this idea I call the information ecosystem. It talks about the new role of the website and how we need to go out and it's almost like fishing. Like on the social web, we create this content, we create these provocations to connect with these customers, we build these relationships, but we still need to bring them in. We still need to lead them to our website. The website is still where the business gets done. That's where we have our call to action. That's where we have our products, our services, and our prices, and our contact information. So it talks about this relationship between your content, social media, and your website.

Then the final one is all about content and content as the catalyst that makes things work. The content, and the importance of content, is kind of the theme that runs through the whole book; but it's so important, I decided it really needed to be called out on its own. I

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talk in this chapter about the different types of content and how you need to think about the types of content that are the most important for your business. Is it written? Is it video? Is it something like a podcast? I also talk about that not all content is created equal. You need to have something that I call a rich content. If you want to have the opportunity for vast exposure, vast awareness, you need to do something more than just a Facebook post or a Twitter update. So that's a quick overview of the five foundational strategies.

Stephen Lahey:

I didn't plan on asking this question, but I'm really interested in what you just said about content. Here's where this comes from. Years ago—this must have been 2005—I went to a conference on marketing, and one of the people there was talking, at that time, about how video is the future. You need to focus on video. That was ten years ago. Still, at this time, they're talking, well, video is the future. This is the deal. Now, I look at some very well-known people who post informational videos, which are very, very good, and they have gigantic lists, I mean, huge, tens of thousands of people following them on every platform, huge email lists, and within the first week their video gets 25 downloads. I think to myself, really? And so, my question is, other than just testing, how do we think about what content might be right? Because I'm big on testing, but is there's something we can do to frame it so we can think ahead of time and say, all right, well, here's a good place to start?

Mark Schaeffer:

Well, there are a couple of different ways to approach it. But, for me, I'm a very practical person, and if I'm a small business trying to get into this and trying to start something, I think it basically gets down to this. There are more or less three different types of rich content you have to choose from. Written content, which could be like a blog; video content, like you mentioned; or audio content, which we call a podcast, which is like just an on-demand radio show on the internet.

So, most businesses, most small businesses, the content that's probably easiest to get into is blogging because a lot of their sales material might already be in printed form. Maybe they have FAQs, maybe they have case studies and other things that they can start to turn into content. Written content also seems to have the advantage as far as attracting new visitors to your site because Google can look at this written content and help people decide is this the right website for them. Google still can't sort through podcasts, they can't really

sort through video content very well, but it can sort through written content.

I think some businesses might end up with video, especially if you're in a business that has a lot of information about like how to, how to use our product, how to use our product more efficiently, more effectively, then that might lead itself to videos. But I think you need to look at what is your competition doing. Are the already blogging? Well, maybe that niche is filled now. Do your customers, do they like podcasts? It's kind of a growing medium, especially if you have a younger clientele. They may love podcasts. If none of your competitors have podcasts, that could be a fantastic opportunity.

So, I think there's a number of factors that can go into it, but for a small business, I think the first question is what is going to be easiest for us to do so we can just start getting into it? We can just start making our mark and adjust and learn as we go.

Stephen Lahey: That's great advice. I'm actually hearing a few things. One is, harkening back to what you said previously when you were telling that young marketer who was asking your advice, hey, get out and talk to customers. Well, yeah. Ask them. Do you listen to podcasts? Which one? What are some of the blogs that you read? All these different things that can help shape what we do, but it has to fit in with our strategy. And I think part of what you're saying overall with maybe all of your books, and I haven't read them all, but it's to focus on strategy—to focus on strategy and connection and relationship. And so you really have to look at it from the standpoint of your particular audience, not sort of in the abstract, what do people like out there? Facebook is popular. Well, I have to say, very, very few of my clients spend much time on Facebook.

Mark Schaeffer: Right.

Stephen Lahey: And that may be true of many people who are in the business-to-business space. So, I guess we just have to kind of take the temperature of our clients and use it as an opportunity to engage with them is, I think, what you're saying. Right?

Mark Schaeffer: Well, I think you're making very good points. And I think the part of the book that I really love the most, and the part that I think can really help people the most, I have one part that talks about the six questions that lead you to a social media strategy. And you're

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absolutely right. It starts with strategy, of having a very firm idea of what makes you different to know why your customers buy from you instead of somebody else. Why do customers love you? Why do they keep coming back? Why do your competitors fear you? You have to walk through that.

I suggest the first question every business needs to ask is can you finish this sentence, only we, or if you're an individual, only I. What is it about you that makes you different? And, you know what, that is really hard work. That is really hard to figure that out, and it may even shift over time. But you have to put in the upfront work to really explore these questions because it will save you time in the long run. If you can answer these questions, your strategy kind of unveils itself because now you're certain, I know what I need to say, I know who I need to say it to, and I know where I need to say it, but it all starts with working on that fundamental strategy.

Stephen Lahey: I love what you're saying. And as you and I talked about prior to recording this, there's so much silliness, I think, in the social media space—and that's not limited to social media. Wherever there's a black box, you know what I'm saying, there's going to be a lot of people sort of taking advantage of the fact that it's hard for people to figure out. You don't, and I love how you focus on the fundamentals and strategy. Now, I'm sure a lot of listeners would like to connect with you online, Mark, and buy your book, so what is the easiest way for them to do that?

Mark Schaeffer: Well, nobody can spell Schaeffer, so I knew I couldn't call my website anything that had to do with Schaeffer. As you know, there's so many ways to spell that name. [My website is called BusinessesGrow.com](#). And on Businesses Grow, you can find lots of great resources. You can find my blog. I also have a podcast there called [The Marketing Companion](#). You can find my books, and lots of other resources for businesses of every size.

Stephen Lahey: And by the way, I just want to say to the listeners, you have to listen to Mark's podcast. With Tom Webster too—right?

Mark Schaeffer: Yes, that's right.

Stephen Lahey: Just so entertaining and funny, but also delivering some great, useful information. Well, thanks again for joining me on the podcast, Mark. It was really an honor to have you.



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Mark Schaeffer: Oh, well, it's wonderful, and thank you for your great questions today. It's been fun.

Stephen Lahey: And to our listeners, thank you for spending some time with us today. If you like what you heard, I encourage you to visit SmallBusinessTalent.com now and subscribe to the podcast by email. When you do, you'll be alerted whenever I post fresh podcast content, of course, but you'll also receive special resources for email subscribers only, including my new LinkedIn Guide to Social Selling, and much more. Thanks again for listening today and best wishes for your success.

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