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# Social Media Bolsters Big Brands

Viral video. Selective tweets. Consumer reviews. How a few corporate marketers are getting a leg up online.

Social networks can breathe new life into old brands by enabling companies to build collaborative relationships with consumers like never before. But what's a corporate giant to do when no one wants to follow it on Twitter or be its friend on Facebook?

Many firms struggle to answer that question. Yet turning even mundane products like toothpaste or tampons into talking points doesn't have to be difficult. The trick, a few innovators have found, is to let consumers lead the

conversation. Rather than strip a brand of its valuable identity, relinquishing control of messaging to the masses can have a rejuvenating effect.

Here's how a few established companies, from Ford to CBS, have used new media to their advantage.

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**TAKE ACTION** *Designing for social media*

1.

### *Go where the people are.*

Don't try to build a community out of thin air. Tap in to existing communities, compliment, and contribute. If you are not a customer magnet, identify nodes in the network where people are—and draw them toward you.

2.

### *Let individuals take center stage.*

Focus on people over brand or offerings. Empower both your employees and the public to speak their minds, without dictating how.

3.

### *Have a legitimate purpose.*

Anchor your brand to your core values and character, while allowing it to be multidimensional and dynamic. Connect to causes and phenomena that truly resonate with your organization and its culture.

4.

### *Be real.*

Relationships are two-way. You must listen and respond to people—and acknowledge the good, the bad, and the ugly. Don't just celebrate your successes. Embrace failures and resolve them in public.

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## Ford ‘Earned Cred’ Online

Detroit automakers didn’t top anyone’s “favorite brand” list during the recession. Of the Big Three, Ford has done the best job at using social media to regain ground with consumers. Since 1981, the carmaker has garnered respect in Europe with its Fiesta line and wanted to bring the brand’s reputation back to North America when it reintroduced the model there in 2010.

Ford gave 100 indie “agents” a free Fiesta for publicly “lifecasting” their experiences with the car. Recipients included bloggers, filmmakers, and social networkers who were already documenting and sharing their lives. Their stories built an authentic and compelling narrative, published online at [FiestaMovement.com](http://FiestaMovement.com).

Alexis Morrell drove her Fiesta across the country twice in six months. “It changed my mind about Ford cars,” she says. Meanwhile, a huge plus for Craig Benzine was that Ford didn’t lead the discussion. “They made sure we could do or say what we wanted about the car, even if we hated it.”

For \$5 million, Ford achieved with social media what has traditionally cost auto marketers millions. Fiesta had 60 percent name recognition before it hit US lots. Jim Farley, VP of global marketing, said: “I want customers to tell our story. That’s what digital has shown us—how to earn cred among consumers.”

## TV Network’s Turnaround

A few years ago, CBS was known as a “silver network”—one with old, boring shows. In the cherished Thursday night block, CBS was losing ratings to NBC. In 2007, CBS tried to gain ground by introducing *The Big Bang Theory*, a sitcom about computer geeks directed at younger viewers. But the network still needed to get 20-somethings’ to watch it.

Genevieve first noticed the show in 2008 at the pop-culture conference Comic-Con. “I started following the producer Bill Prady and some of the actors from the show on Twitter,” she says. “Prady’s feed gave us an insider’s view ... he’d show [things like] the inside of the characters’ fridge. He’d even crowd-source old computer props for the show.” Prady & Co. pinpointed their target audience and built on fans’ passions.

In 2010 at Comic-Con, *The Big Bang Theory* cast and crew took over an auditorium. The show rose from a Nielsen rating of 59 in 2008 to 12 in 2010. CBS now aims to win Thursday night by creating a comedy block anchored by *The Big Bang Theory*.

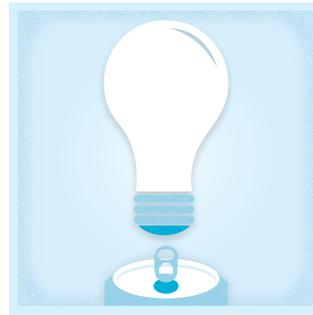


## A Refreshing Approach

The Pepsi Refresh Project is less about beverages and more about ideas. It uses social media to shift brand focus from buying sodas to funding causes for social good. Anyone can post—and vote—for

ideas that “save something, create something, or change something” at [Refresheverything.com](http://Refresheverything.com). Grant seekers leverage their networks on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and MySpace to spread the word and encourage participation.

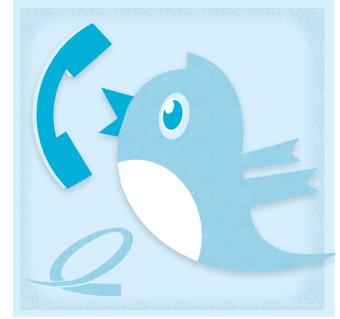
Created by GOOD Projects, PepsiCo, and TBWA/Chiat/Day, the project gave \$20 million in grants in 2010. After six months in service, 39 million votes had been cast online. PepsiCo expects to receive another 70 million by early 2011.



## Retailer Skips the Script

Only 8 percent of CEOs are active on Twitter. Brian Dunn, CEO of Best Buy, is one of them. Dunn, who’s been tweeting since 2008, sees social media as core to Best Buy’s strategy: “When people buy a device, they often ‘crowdsource’ advice... [something we’re] best positioned to give consumers.”

Best Buy has long held an “open social strategy.” The retailer took it public in 2009 with the launch of Twelpforce, a Twitter program in which employees offer advice to people who tweet questions about electronics. With nearly 3,000 active employees tweeting, Best Buy is realizing its vision of becoming more than an electronics chain. The company sees a future where customers rely on Best Buy as a trusted source with a “human search engine.” Best Buy is also launching an experiment to help people share knowledge with fellow shoppers at [BByfeed.com](http://BByfeed.com).



## Viral Video Rejuvenates Old Brand

With Wieden + Kennedy in 2006, Procter & Gamble reinvigorated the Old Spice brand by putting more emphasis on innovation through marketing strategy than product development. By tethering the brand to its “manly man” equity, P&G made Old Spice relevant to a new generation. Nothing demonstrates this better than 2010’s real-time social media blitz. The Old Spice team posted 186 personal video responses to queries from fans featuring ex-football player Isaiah Mustafa in nothing more than a towel holding an Old Spice Body Wash (<http://bit.ly/gDkVQq>).

The live production process made marketing history. Even more impressive was the seeding strategy: Days before the blitz, Mustafa recorded messages to influencers, including a “get well” video for Digg founder Kevin Rose who was home sick. Engaging with those who influence the technorati set the stage for success when the videos hit YouTube. By treating social media as a place to have a conversation with fans, P&G saw Body Wash sales climb 107 percent (versus the prior year), got tens of thousands of people to post questions, and made Old Spice the top-viewed branded channel on YouTube ever.

PATTERNS is a collection of shared thoughts, insights, and observations gathered from our work and the world around us. We invite you to join the conversation, so we can raise the bar and collectively develop richer design-thinking experiences.

**Be a pattern spotter:** Now that you’ve been exposed to a few different examples, don’t be surprised if you start seeing *Social Media Bolsters Big Brands* patterns all around you. Keep your eyes open and let us know what you find, especially if it’s the next new pattern.

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