

# The rules of the Rave

Social media and marketing strategist, keynote speaker and bestselling author of *World Wide Rave* and *The New Rules of Marketing & PR*, David Meerman Scott was recently in Australia conducting his widely popular Social Media Masterclass. Interview by Jillian Kingsford Smith.



David Meerman Scott.

**D**avid Meerman Scott is the new evangelist in social media marketing. His worldwide journey to teach and inspire marketers and business people about social media practices in today's commercial environment comes after a long career in the electronic information industry.

Mr Scott is a self-described 'recovering VP of marketing' for two publicly traded technology companies and has also headed up marketing for the likes of Knight-Ridder in Asia and Thomson (formerly Thomson Reuters News Service).

As David Meerman Scott tells it, his last real job was with Thomson as VP of marketing. When Thomson acquired Reuters in 2002, he was grilled by the new management on his marketing techniques.

He enthused about the 'really cool stuff' he was doing with news releases,

the content-rich websites, the electronic newsletters and free content on web. Management was dumb-founded with his strategy.

"They decided that these whacky ideas had no place in their business and showed me the door," laughed Mr Scott. "But it really was the best thing in the world for me, because I made the leap to do my own thing."

These days, David Meerman Scott travels the world as a social media expert, demonstrating the benefits of social media and digital marketing.

**Jillian Kingsford Smith for Acumen:** So how did you end up as the social media evangelist that you are today?

**DMS:** I guess after I was booted out from Thomson in 2002, I started consulting to a variety of companies. It was then that I realised how powerful social media was, and essentially much more powerful than what I could help individual clients with. I wanted to write about it.

So I started by getting a contributing editor's gig at a magazine called *e-Content* and also started my own blog ([www.webinknow.com](http://www.webinknow.com)) in 2004. Over the next few years the blog started getting traction and that propelled me towards writing an e-book called *The New Rules of PR*. That e-book hit 50,000 downloads in the first month and it was then I thought to myself, 'I'm onto something here!'

Soon after I started writing a book called *The New Rules of Marketing and PR*, which was actually my third book, but the first book of mine that really took off.

**Acumen:** Why do you think this was the first book to see such success?

**DMS:** I think the title was really

descriptive for a start and the style of writing is extremely approachable. But mainly, I think because it came out in June 2007, just before the social media revolution, people were hungry for any information or guidance they could get their hands on.

**Acumen:** Do you find it amazing that we're talking about something that only happened a bit over two years ago?

**DMS:** Well back in 2002, Thomson thought I was a heretic. Then in 2007 there were a bunch of early adopters who liked my ideas, but social media still wasn't mainstream. It's absolutely fascinating that here we are in 2009 and social media is now mainstream.

There's a huge fear factor associated with social media practices because a lot of people simply don't understand it. This, coupled with the large amount of misinformation circulating out there. Let's take Twitter. I think Twitter is great, but it is one of the biggest misinformation mediums. Let me give you an example. If you've never used Twitter, then all you can think of is why in the heck would anyone want to know what I'm having for lunch? And the answer is that nobody cares what you're having for lunch. But then, that's not why and how you'd use Twitter anyway. It's a really difficult marketing resource to explain to people unless you've tried it, and I know when it's described to people, it just sounds stupid.

The term 'social media' also leads to fear. Many of the senior executives just don't see it as a requirement for business.

**Acumen:** What's the biggest risk for businesses that do open themselves up to social media?

**DMS:** The risk is if they don't open themselves up. People are talking about you already. All you have to do is go to Google Search or Twitter Search and type in your company's name or product and they're talking about you. If you're not a part of that or if you don't understand what they're saying or if you don't engage

with your audience, then you simply don't exist.

If you truly believe that people are going to gang up on you or say things about you online, if you truly have this irrational fear, then I would say that there's a good chance your product sucks.

For the most part, of all the companies I speak to, their products don't suck and people do business with them every day – quite happily so. So why would you automatically think everyone is going to 'gang up on you?'

If you do experience some bad comments, ultimately that's a good thing, because you can then address that issue.

**Acumen:** When a business first embarks on a social media strategy, what are some of biggest mistakes they make?

**DMS:** That's a great question. The biggest mistake I see is that they're too egotistical. They talk instead of listen. I see so many companies who use social media as another tool for talking about their stupid products, which nobody cares about. If you're doing TV and magazine commercials, direct mail, billboards, radio ads and the rest, well, that's all product advertising. Social media is not about product advertising, but the biggest mistake I see is when a person who is very skilled at product advertising starts doing social media without working out that advertising and social media are two very different beasts. Social media is not a channel to hype your product and it won't be successful if that's how you approach it.

**Acumen:** The C Suite demands that traditional marketers show a return on investment. How do social media marketers show an ROI?

**DMS:** What the CEO, CFO or chief whatever expects as a return on their investment is a complete manifestation of fear. Why? Because do any of the C Suite insist on measuring the ROI on the billboard that's on the side of the road? Of course not. How about those television ads? Again, of course not, because you can't accurately measure it anyway. But with social media, all of a sudden they insist on ROI.

The second thing is that those executives rarely insist on a return on other parts of the business. I often go into these big companies, with beautiful offices and \$2000 lounge chairs for people to sit in, artwork on the walls

and let's not forget the beautiful ex-model answering the phone at reception ... so ... what's the return on investment of those things? That's never calculated. All of a sudden, social media is held to a different standard than the rest of the organisation.

Having said all that, there are some things you can measure. You can measure where your company appears on the search engine rankings. If you're not appearing at the top of the rankings for important phrases in your industry, social media can help you get there. A well-written blog, an e-book or YouTube video can help you rank near the top.

You can also measure what bloggers are saying about you. If they're not saying anything about you, then that's usually not good. The reach of blogs and bloggers has become enormous in the past 12 months and blog outreach is fundamental in company promotion.

You can measure how many people are exposed to your ideas by measuring how many people downloaded your YouTube video or commented on your blog post or downloaded your e-book. And ultimately all this can lead to sales. A good example from Australia is Queensland's own *Best Job in the World* campaign. It was an inexpensive social media campaign and the Minister for Tourism says that flight bookings have gone up some 34 percent as a result of the campaign. So to those fearful CEOs who ask the ROI... how about a 34 percent increase in sales from a single campaign?

**Acumen:** It seems we're talking about some fundamental shifts in how we execute a marketing strategy now and the perceived return on it.

**DMS:** Absolutely. Let me give you another example. In my view, there are four ways to generate attention. One way to generate attention is to buy it. We know this as advertising. You can buy a billboard or a TV ad, whatever takes your fancy. And advertising agencies are really good at buying advertising.

The second way is to beg for attention. That's what PR firms are good at. At this point I'd like to say that I'm well aware of the people I may be offending! Nevertheless, PR agencies are really good at media relations and writing pitches to the media that convince them to write about an organisation.

The third way to generate attention

is one person at a time – or direct sales. You can have a salesperson calling consumers on the phone trying to sell a product, or perhaps they're on a street corner handing out flyers. Or more commonly, you might have a storefront, with sales people there, selling your product directly.

Prior to the web, those three techniques were the only way to generate attention. Now with the web, we have a fourth way – and that's to earn attention.

By participating in social media channels and providing great content on the web, such as blogging, Twittering or posting a YouTube video, you can earn the attention by publishing something meaningful.

So what's happening now is a land grab from the advertisers, PR agencies and salespeople to use social media but with their same old techniques. Advertisers buy ads on Facebook, which is not wrong, but it's not really social media. There's some savvy PR firms out there doing great stuff on the web, but largely, because their expertise is media relations, the PR flacks send the generic media release to every blogger they can find and hope the story will get published it on their blog.

Well, bloggers tend to become good bloggers because they define their point of view to one field, and thus, get a following around that topic. So why would a media release on a new cosmetic surgery procedure interest a business or motivational blogger? Let's not forget the traditional salespeople who try to send a direct message to people, one at a time, about their product.

**Acumen:** So what's the future of social media?

**DMS:** You've only got to look at my schedule over the past few months have to see the sorts of businesses and organisations getting on board. I've met and consulted to Ford here in Australia. Last month it was one of the largest ski resorts in North America, Microsoft and also the United States Air Force. Before that, I was invited to the Dominican Republic to meet with the President to talk about social media in politics.

What's happening now is so real. I really believe we're in the midst of a revolution and you can't underestimate how important social media is.

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