



BUSINESS SOLUTIONS  
TECHNOLOGY  
OUTSOURCING

A photograph of a globe being held by several hands. The globe is partially obscured by a large, semi-transparent yellow shape that covers the bottom half of the image. The hands are positioned around the globe, suggesting a global or collaborative effort.

**BE HUMAN:**

**BUILDING AND MEASURING  
PROFITABLE B2B  
CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS  
THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA**

## BE HUMAN:

### Building and Measuring Profitable B2B Customer Relationships Through Social Media

April L Finnen

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*Getting involved in social media is no longer an option for businesses. It's a requirement. Companies that invest in these tools to enhance their client relationships — and build new ones — will be better-positioned for future growth in the new marketing environment. This paper refutes common arguments against engaging in social media, and provides guidelines for effectively planning, managing and measuring your social media presence in a business-to-business environment.*

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#### **It's a New Marketplace: Don't Be the Snake-Oil Salesman**

Social media has been likened to the water cooler of the modern workplace. The cocktail party that never ends. Even Agora<sup>i</sup>, the marketplace of Ancient Greece.<sup>1</sup> The common threads? People, and an exchange of ideas.

Wherever people gather, vendors aren't far behind. In Ancient Greece savvy market-goers surely learned to recognize the hucksters, and subsequently tune out their shrill claims about ever-more-miraculous products. In modern times, both personal and business users of social media have quickly adapted to do the same. Businesses that treat social media as just another communication platform, a bullhorn, are the snake-oil salesmen. They will never reap the core benefit of social media for business: having real conversations and building stronger relationships with customers.

#### **The Web is not a channel...**

"...and you're not a broadcaster."<sup>2</sup> Social media is best treated as a two-way communication tool, not a megaphone. Does anyone really want to talk to "that guy" at the cocktail party boasting loudly about "me, me, me"? Treating social media as a broadcast tool is the new media equivalent of that guy.

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<sup>i</sup> Authors Don Tapscott and Anthony D. Williams have taken the concept a step further, coining the term "Ideagoras" for places on the Internet where large numbers of people and/or businesses gather to exchange ideas, in their book *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything*.

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In *Marketing to the Social Web*, Larry Weber compares traditional marketing to the new framework supported by social media. The “old marketing” mindset was broadcasting one-sided communication. The new way: nurture dialogue and build relationships, and be more transparent to build credibility. While publicly traded companies must maintain a certain level of

transparency by law, the trend toward opening the curtains even wider is inevitable. Customers are beginning to expect unprecedented levels of transparency. What do businesses get in return? More honest and direct client relationships.

“Business transparency is mandatory” in a trusting business-to-consumer relationship and is an important Customer Relationship Management (CRM) building block.<sup>3</sup> Business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-government enterprises can also benefit from an increased level of transparency. Rather than waiting for clients to demand openness, innovative companies have sensed the shift in expectations and are breaking down barriers to build stronger client relationships. The shift to transparency—whether or not a company is involved in social media—just makes good business sense.

The author of *Wisdom 2.0*, Soren Gordhamer opines, “Possibly more important for businesses than getting a large number of followers”... is following through with the opportunity to forge more genuine and direct connections with their customers.”<sup>4</sup> Weber notes a shift in how companies segment customers, now targeting by interests, attitudes and behaviors versus demographics. Businesses that “choose not to adapt to the new culture will be at an increasing disadvantage, as their customers slowly build personal relationships with their competitors.”

### **No, you can’t control the message. Get over it.**

One of the biggest objections to social media adoption is that the company cannot control the message. But if Big Pharma is getting in the game—and they are—every industry should take note. Social media is not a passing fad; it is changing the way we share and receive information. More than 60% of Americans go to the Internet when they need health information, and half of those go to social networks—not their healthcare providers, but their peers.<sup>5</sup>

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) held public hearings in November 2009, and is expected to issue draft guidance on social media usage for drug companies in mid-2010.<sup>6</sup> Chief among the drug-makers’ concerns is what they can be reasonably expected to control. For example, clinical trial regulations require reporting all adverse events and serious adverse events, which are tracked through well-documented and standardized processes. But what if a patient seeks advice in a peer-to-peer forum regarding a reaction to a trial medication? Does the onus fall on the company to search for and report these cases? Another question is whether drug companies will be held responsible by the FDA for correcting erroneous or misleading information posted about their products by the end-users. These questions and many others are expected to be addressed in the FDA guidance.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>ii</sup> Social media terms used throughout this paper are defined in the glossary.

Until then, pharmaceutical companies are treading carefully, listening to what their customers are saying. While not having control of the message can be disconcerting, social media has created an excellent opportunity for businesses to really listen to our customers, and interact with them little by little to build stronger relationships. In a podcast on *The MedAd News*

Social media is not a passing fad; it is changing the way we share and receive information.

*Show*, host John Kamp said, “FDA now gets it. FDA understands the power of the Internet. ... I think we’re going to see an evolution. A revolution.” Kamp says it will take the FDA 12 to 18 months to issue a (draft) policy statement. However, “the big change is not going to come at the behest of the FDA” but within the companies themselves.<sup>8</sup> The ones who will thrive in this new communication environment are companies that understand and embrace the power of social media to transform business relationships.<sup>9</sup>

### **And those other excuses? They won’t work either.**

In addition to the lack of message control and regulatory issues discussed above, other objections to social media and transparency in business include legal, technical, competitive and financial.<sup>10</sup> While an in-depth discussion of these is beyond the scope of this paper, two examples to discredit common arguments are outlined briefly here.

#### **Argument 1: We’re too highly regulated.**

The book *Tactical Transparency: How Leaders Can Leverage Social Media to Maximize Value and Build Their Brand* highlights the powerful problem-solving engine social media can provide internally. A case study in the book translated productivity increases attributable to a company’s internal enterprise social media platform into satisfied customers’ purchases/referrals, and ultimately to dollars. Any potential lawsuit judgment value was dwarfed by the return the company had already achieved using the system; it would have been unprofitable to shut it down.

In the case of external communications, if Big Pharma can tweet, *anyone* can. Business doesn’t get much more regulated than the pharmaceutical industry. But while the pharmaceutical industry is one of the slower industries to adopt social media due to regulatory requirements, these concerns are eroding, as the balance of benefit versus risk of using these tools shifts. For example, Sanofi-Aventis offers a branded YouTube channel for GoInsulin.com, promoting its diabetes treatments indirectly, by providing a resource.



**Figure 1** Screen shot of Sanofi-Aventis GoInsulin YouTube channel

And the concern that employees will reveal too much? “If those sales and marketing representatives know enough to avoid making statements about unapproved indications at trade shows, why would anybody think they would forget that rule while writing a blog post?”

**Argument 2: Our competitors will know what we’re doing.**

Gartner research has shown that “proactive use of transparency demonstrates differentiation to customers.” In the book *How*, Dov Seidman notes that it’s not what businesses offer that differentiates them now, it’s how they do business. Competitors can copy any new service offering within weeks, so it is now more important than ever to focus on building trust and loyalty, including customer relationships, collaboration and even crowd-sourcing.<sup>11</sup> These activities are all supported by social media and are an increasingly expected part of the communication mix. Companies that use social media tools to build relationships—those who are engaging, not broadcasting—have an advantage over their competitors in providing a better overall client experience.

**Social Media in B2B: How to Do it Right**

We’ve established that using social media as a bullhorn is the wrong approach. So how do savvy companies in the business-to-business space use social media to achieve competitive advantage? They follow the generally accepted “social norms” of social media, and select tactics that support the core marketing messages and brand.

## Support core marketing and communication tactics; don't replace them.

“Social media isn't an opportunity to reinvent a new brand, but to widen your brand's reach,” says public relations and social media blogger Sarah Evans.<sup>12</sup> Numerous social media aficionados have proclaimed that effective users—including businesses—don't just create content, they create conversations. Among those is Joel Comm, author of *Twitter Power: How to Dominate Your Market One Tweet at a Time*. Comm calls Twitter “by far the most powerful microblogging service currently available,” but cautions that this platform [like other social media tools] is best used as a communication platform, not a sales tool.<sup>13</sup>

“What you share, post or tweet today should reinforce your brand tomorrow.”

--Sarah Evans,  
PR/social media blogger

“What you share, post or tweet today should reinforce your brand tomorrow.” Twitter can be used effectively to promote other (original) content, such as blogs or videos. To acquire and keep a social media audience, good content is a must. And no, just tweeting links to press releases does not qualify as good content. Social media users expect companies to provide useful information not only about the company, but about their area of interest, such as industry news and events. Companies that post only self-promotional messages with no

attempt at personal interaction quickly find themselves quite lonely in the social media realm or, worse, upheld as an example of what *not* to do.

## Be human.

New media journalist Leah Betancourt advises companies to “be personable” by asking for feedback and responding to comments.<sup>14</sup> It's perfectly acceptable—encouraged, in fact—to illustrate that you're human from time to time, even while tweeting or posting from a company account. This is why choosing the right people to represent the company “voice” via social media outlets is critical. No company would put an intern in charge of branding, but relegating<sup>iii</sup> social media efforts to interns can have the same effect. The people speaking on behalf of the company are the voice of the brand, and the best ones will know intuitively where to draw the line with their “human” comments. When in doubt keep it positive. Congratulate a follower for an achievement he or she has broadcasted, talk about a charity event in which your office-mates are participating, or simply wish your followers or fans a good weekend/holiday from time to time.<sup>iv</sup>

In social media, reciprocity is expected. Follow back, unless you have a compelling reason not to.<sup>v,15</sup> “Social media for business is about return on engagement. Connect with people, build

<sup>iii</sup> According to Merriam-Webster Online, *relegate* is defined as “to assign to a place of insignificance or of oblivion.” This term is used purposely here, instead of *delegate*. If social media efforts are assigned to interns, the term “oblivion” (and its derivative, *oblivious*) is applicable.

<sup>iv</sup> Appreciation of Fridays is a strong human bond, and is quite evident on social media sites. Twitter users acknowledge worthy accounts with “Follow Friday” each week, posting reasons other users may want to follow certain accounts.

<sup>v</sup> It is generally accepted practice that following or “friending” a company or individual on a social media platform does not necessarily imply endorsement.

opportunities through dialogue which would not have otherwise occurred, then connect them with your business,” advises Evans.

A key benefit of Twitter as a communication platform is its speed. Twitter is a culture of immediacy; users expect near real-time responses. Daily monitoring (and, in the case of Twitter, at least three times per day) is a requirement.<sup>16</sup> Successful business users of social media understand the feel of urgency, and regularly check their social media messages and replies, responding to as many as practicable.<sup>vi</sup> Twitter can also be used to quickly disseminate key messages during a crisis, or point followers to a website dedicated to the crisis topic. The conversation about the company *will* be happening in such cases, so providing accurate information and a company statement rapidly are key to dispelling rumors or other misinformation before it spreads.

Successful business users of social media ... regularly check their social media messages and replies, responding to as many as practicable.

### Look (and listen) before you leap.

In *Trust Agents: Using the Web to Build Influence, Improve Reputation and Earn Trust*, authors Chris Brogan and Julien Smith advise companies (or anyone new to social media) to listen before they dive in and stumble “over all kinds of social norms.” Again, you don’t want to be “that guy” at the party.<sup>vii</sup>

Perform searches to find companies, customers, media and others who are talking online about your areas of interest. Then follow them, listen and engage.<sup>17</sup>

**Ben Parr, co-editor of Mashable, a popular social media guide, suggests ways to engage:**

- **Seek out blogs and publications in your industry and subscribe via RSS**
- **Network with relevant experts, including those who may only be partially related**
- **Follow the insights of business leaders on Twitter**
- **Connect with commenters on your own blog**
- **Make yourself very easy to find on the web**
- **Keep an open mind**

*Source: Parr, Ben. “HOW TO: Use Social Media for Enterprise Business.” Mashable*

**Figure 2** Suggestions for social media engagement

<sup>vi</sup> This process doesn’t have to be time-consuming or difficult. A variety of free tools such as HootSuite and TweetDeck are available to help users manage replies and track a variety of metrics.

<sup>vii</sup> Unless, of course, that is your brand. Then, by all means, put a virtual lamp shade on your head.

Social media tools are useful for customer research and tracking industry trends. Take some time to research available social media tools, and note what industry peers are doing before establishing or expanding your company's social media presence. Set some goals for social media efforts that support the larger business strategy. For example, you may want to position the company as an expert in certain field, or enhance your college recruiting efforts. A Twitter account set up specifically to showcase expertise in a vertical niche may be the best fit for the former, whereas a Facebook or YouTube page may work more effectively to reach a college audience. Regardless of the tool(s) you select, initial research and planning is invaluable.

### **Nuts and bolts: create a plan.**

First, be realistic. A B2B enterprise will never have as many fans or followers as a popular consumer product. But that “doesn't change the fact that it will affect the decisions of your customers.”<sup>17</sup> Companies of all stripes are enjoying the benefits of deeper customer relationships and more “top-of-mind” awareness via social media channels. The more a potential customer sees your company name in conjunction with your expertise, the more likely that person is to think of you first when he or she has a need for that product or service.

Creating multiple social media channels appealing to various areas of expertise/interest will attract more potential customers, and those deeper in vertical markets, than simply having one corporate account, particularly in large businesses. Target audience members quickly lose patience filtering through the “noise” that isn't applicable to them, and will tune out or un-follow accounts that offer little in their area of interest. Instead of a one-account-fits-all approach, the new marketing mindset favors targeting customers by what's important to them.<sup>2</sup> This strategy will also allow the company's experts in those particular verticals to interact directly with potential clients, and contribute first-hand information on industry trends and research, solidifying the company's credibility in that field.



Of course, social media policies and guidelines should be clearly established and communicated to all employees, providing guidance for both personal and professional use of social media. These guidelines should detail forbidden topics, including forward-looking statements, financial disclosures and other non-public or client-specific information.<sup>18</sup> In its new social media guidelines issued in February 2010, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) gives permission to personnel to use social media tools for communication purposes, but emphasizes that, when used in a personal context, opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the DoD.<sup>viii, 19</sup>

Just as important as knowing what you can't talk about is what you can. “Make a short list of what you *will* talk about via social media” and stick with it, advises Evans. Even companies in the most highly regulated industries can find things to post about. White papers, conferences/events, industry trends, research and employment opportunities are all excellent topics. Tidbits about the company culture can also support certain goals (workplace award

<sup>viii</sup> As expected, mission safety, security and success is also stressed in the DoD policy, to remind enlisted social media users of their responsibilities in these areas.

nominations and recruiting, for instance). It may also be helpful to set targets for interactions. For example, set a goal of interacting with one new follower or fan per week. Many social media users in vertical industries follow the same people; by interacting with just one, the interactions are visible to many others, illustrating that your account is managed by a real person, and that you are engaged and willing to help them solve business problems.

### Is it working? Here's how to tell.

How will you know if your social media efforts are successful? The key metrics depend on what you are trying to accomplish.<sup>20</sup> According to Kevin Kruse, Principal of Krū Research, most marketing-related social media goals fall into one of four categories: market insights, brand building, customer service or sales.

Social media measurement tools can include:

- **Tracking web traffic to shortened links.** A number of free URL shortening services offer tracking capabilities. Bit.ly is one example. The advantage of tracking traffic through these services, rather than your site's web analytics alone is that you can also track links you post to other sites, such as industry news or research. Tracking the popularity of all links helps you better understand what your audience finds useful. (And to be successful in social media, you should be posting links to a variety of content, not just the company site.)
- **Number of followers or fans.** While the sheer number is not that important, trends in your numbers are. If your follower count is rising, you're probably doing something right. These numbers and the trends can also help you determine what content resonates most with your audience. For example, if you gain a lot of followers after another user re-tweets your post, it may be wise to focus more content in that area.
- **Tracking conversations.** Using a variety of search tools, such as Twitter and web searches, track what people are saying about the company online. In addition to tracking the company name, searching for target keywords can identify other people/companies you should follow and engage with. Over time, the company should become a key part of conversations around target topics, helping establish company personnel as trusted experts. Comparisons with competitors ("share of conversation") may also be helpful.
- **Examining inquiries.** Track contacts that come in through social media or the company website. Look at how they were referred to the site and what pages they viewed before filling out the contact form. Log these inquiries over time, and track the ultimate outcome. Did they become a customer or vendor? Refer other business? Post positive comments about the company in a public forum? While it can be difficult to track long-term outcomes in practice, even one new client can provide a positive return on engagement.
- **Metrics dashboards.** The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) makes its CDC eHealth Metrics Dashboard public.<sup>ix</sup> CDC tracks various social media metrics at this site, providing a wealth of ideas for any company interested in tracking business results of these tools. Simply customize the dashboard based on business goals, and the tools you choose to support them.

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<sup>ix</sup> <<http://www.cdc.gov/metrics/socialmedia/index.html>>

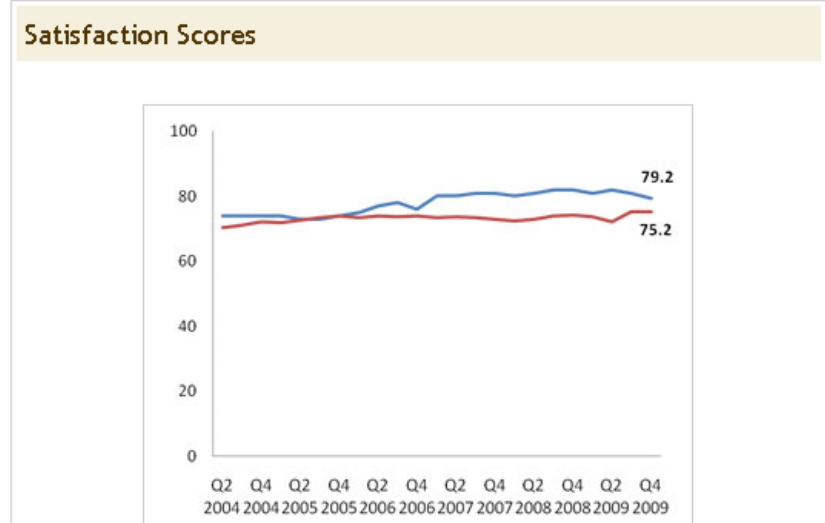
## CDC eHealth Metrics Dashboard

### Annual Summary (2009)

- **800,331,892 page views** to CDC.gov overall
- **30,378,330 page views** to the CDC Homepage
- **70.1%** of visitors spent *0-5 minutes* on CDC.gov overall
- **More**

#### Web Campaigns included:

- H1N1 and Seasonal Flu
  - Web sites: **248.5 million page views**
  - Content Syndication: **585,126 views** of syndicated content on partner sites
  - Buttons and Badges: over **2.5 million clickthroughs**
  - Email Updates sent: **4.04 million**
  - **More**



### Social Media

- Buttons and Badges
- CDC Mobile
- Content Syndication
- eCards
- Micro-blogs (Twitter)
- Online Video
- Podcasts and RSS
- Social Networking Sites
- Widgets

**Figure 3** Screenshot of CDC eHealth Metrics Dashboard

Ultimately, how you measure success depends upon your social media goals, and what business strategies you are supporting. If your goal is reaching college students for internships and new graduate recruiting, an increase in the number of applications received for such positions would be a good metric. If establishing company expertise in a vertical market is key, keyword searches and conversation tracking may be more useful.

However you track it, getting involved in social media is no longer an option for businesses. It's a requirement. Companies that invest in these tools to enhance their client relationships—and build new ones—will be better-positioned for future growth in the new marketing environment.

## Glossary

*Note that this glossary is not intended as a comprehensive guide to social media terms. Terms selected for inclusion are referenced elsewhere in this paper.*

Term	Definition	Web Link / Notes
<b>bit.ly</b>	A simple URL shortener. Copy a long link, go to <a href="http://bit.ly/">http://bit.ly/</a> , paste the long link and click Shorten. Use the new, shorter URL to post. Particularly useful for Twitter. With a free account set-up, automatically tracks click-through stats on shortened URLs.	<a href="http://bit.ly/">http://bit.ly/</a>
<b>Facebook</b>	Facebook is the most popular social networking site in the world. <sup>a</sup> Businesses, particularly those with consumer products, have found Facebook fan pages useful for marketing and promotions.	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/">http://www.facebook.com/</a>
<b>fan</b>	Social media users can become fans of products, services or organizations they like or support; most commonly used in the context of Facebook.	CSC has a <a href="#">Facebook page</a> for recruiting.
<b>Follow Friday (#FF)</b>	A widely used hashtag on Twitter. Users recommend other helpful or interesting users each Friday; the idea is to help people with similar interests find one another. <sup>b</sup>	This <a href="#">Mashable article</a> offers more detail on the history of this trend.
<b>follower</b>	Users of social media platforms can “follow” one another online. When you follow a user (or “friend” on Facebook), you will see updates from that person or company. They will not see your updates unless they follow you back.	Some users expect people/companies they follow to follow back. Companies should be prepared to follow back, or risk losing followers.
<b>hashtag</b>	A Twitter convention for adding additional context and metadata to tweets (posts). Added next to tweets by prefixing a word with a hash symbol (or number sign). Commonly used at conferences, so attendees and interested parties can follow all conference-related tweets. (example: #bio2010)	<a href="http://wthashtag.com/">http://wthashtag.com/</a> is a useful resource for determining what various hashtags mean, or defining them for your audience, if you create a conference or chat hashtag. (It is basically a wiki for hashtags.)
<b>HootSuite</b>	HootSuite is a third-party Twitter platform that allows multiple users to tweet from one account, and offers built-in URL shortening and statistics tracking. It also allows users to schedule tweets in advance, and integrates with other social media platforms, including Facebook and LinkedIn. HootSuite is a leading choice for corporate Twitter account management.	<a href="http://hootsuite.com/">http://hootsuite.com/</a>

## Glossary (continued)

*Note that this glossary is not intended as a comprehensive guide to social media terms. Terms selected for inclusion are referenced elsewhere in this paper.*

<b>re-tweet (RT)</b>	Twitter users who wish to share content or links originally posted by others “re-tweet” the information, and indicate the source by including RT in the tweet, along with the username of the content originator.	Re-tweeting content without attributing it is the Twitter equivalent of plagiarism. To make your tweets more “re-tweetable,” cap them at 120 characters maximum.
<b>RSS</b>	Really Simple Syndication - Enables readers to stay current with favorite blogs, news or other web content without having to browse to various sites. <sup>a</sup>	This <a href="#">Wikipedia article</a> offers more detail.
<b>social media</b>	Any online technology that lets people publish, converse and share content on the Internet. <sup>a</sup>	The definition of social media has been hotly debated. This <a href="#">Mashable article</a> offers further thoughts on its definition.
<b>Twitter</b>	A popular micro-blogging platform, where users post updates, or “tweets” of no more than 140 characters to answer the question, “What’s happening?”	<a href="http://twitter.com/">http://twitter.com/</a> - Twitter offers this <a href="#">Twitter 101</a> guide for business users
<b>TweetDeck</b>	A popular third-party Twitter platform, offering columns, groups, saved searches and automatic updates. It also integrates with other social media platforms, including Facebook and LinkedIn.	<a href="http://www.tweetdeck.com/">http://www.tweetdeck.com/</a>
<b>URL</b>	Uniform Resource Locator – website address <sup>c</sup> (example: <a href="http://www.csc.com/">http://www.csc.com/</a> )	This PC Magazine <a href="#">encyclopedia entry</a> offers more on the anatomy of a URL.
<b>wiki</b>	A collaborative website or directory that can be edited by any user with access to it. <sup>a</sup>	The <a href="#">CSC Wiki</a> is available to all employees on the CSC Portal.
<b>YouTube</b>	The most popular video hosting site on the Internet. <sup>a</sup> Any user can upload/view video content on this free site.	<a href="http://www.youtube.com/">http://www.youtube.com/</a>

<sup>a</sup> <<http://www.socialbrite.org/sharing-center/glossary/>>

<sup>b</sup> <<http://mashable.com/2009/03/06/twitter-followfriday/>>

<sup>c</sup> <[http://www.pcmag.com/encyclopedia\\_term/0,2542,t=URL&i=53516,00.asp](http://www.pcmag.com/encyclopedia_term/0,2542,t=URL&i=53516,00.asp)>

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The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of CSC.

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