Johnson & Johnson Does New Media

Lessons from a 123 year old, $64 Billion New Media Innovator

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Introduction

New Media publishing platforms such as blogs, podcasts, online video and social networking applications like Facebook and Twitter create opportunities for companies to tell their own stories. No longer relegated to purchasing column inches, squeezing broadcast messages into thirty-second spots, or hoping that a pitched journalist actually gets the story right, companies now have a third option—to become their own publishers.

Unfortunately, many companies pass on this option, succumbing to a long list of excuses that stem from perceived competitive, legal, or regulatory risks. In a litigious society, where our corporate communications decisions are driven by attorneys rather than our customers, conventional wisdom frequently dictates that it is safer for a corporation to shut-up than to speak up.

As a specialist in B2B uses of New Media, I’ve heard all the excuses. And although I can counter many of the objections, I’ve always wanted to find a company that had plenty of reasons not to use New/Social Media, yet still flourished with it.

That's when I came upon the JNJHealth YouTube Channel produced by Johnson & Johnson. I marveled at how an international healthcare company had found success on a website famous for hosting videos of skateboarding dogs and people getting hit in the crotch. Had that been the only successful New Media channel that I had found, I would have been satisfied. But as I dug deeper, I found other J&J New Media successes. The company also wrote blogs and used services like Facebook and Twitter. By the time I finished my research and analysis, I’d pieced together a roadmap that ANY organization could use to create its Social Media strategy.

This case study provides an analysis of Johnson & Johnson’s journey into the world of New and Social Media. It discusses the risks and rewards of using various New Media channels, and finally concludes with ten points that your company should consider before introducing these new technologies into its communications mix.

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An Unlikely Example

If you think that your company is too big, too set in its ways, or has too many restrictions to adopt New Media communications tools, consider a 123 year old, $64B holding company, responsible for 250 operating companies that collectively employ over 118,000 employees. Add the fact that the company sells products related to human health and well-being and one has a solid argument for locking down all forms of corporate communications.

But instead of focusing on the reasons to avoid New Media channels, Johnson & Johnson has relied on its rich history in public health education to build its online strategy. The company, founded in 1886 to advance the state of health and medicine, first set its sights on the problem of infection. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, our understanding of proper sterilization practices was limited and although doctors were trained in the art of surgery, they didn’t understand how sterilizing wounds and surgical instruments could reduce the frequency of deadly post-operative infections. Johnson & Johnson accepted a dual role of developing antiseptic products and educating the public about the importance of their use.

The Johnson & Johnson family of companies sells three categories of products:

- **Consumer and over-the-counter**: Products with familiar sounding names such as (LISTERINE®, NEUTROGENA®, TYLENOL®, MOTRIN®, and SUDAFED®).
- **Pharmaceutical**: Products that provide therapy for those who suffer from afflictions such as Crohn’s Disease, epilepsy, or chronic pain.
- **Medical Devices and Diagnostics**: Products that are sold to wholesalers, hospitals and retailers.
But in the late part of the nineteenth century, Johnson & Johnson wasn't the only company selling medical products. Hucksters slithered from town-to-town, selling elixirs in glass bottles that claimed to cure everything from the common cold to rheumatism. With no oversight on product claims, such “medicines” posed a danger to the public welfare, such that the Federal Government passed the **Biologics Control Act 1902**. Since then, the Federal government has assumed the role of public protector, by forming the **Food and Drug Administration (FDA)**.

Today, companies that sell medical products do so under the watchful eye of the FDA, which limits what companies can claim with regards to their products. With the addition of New/Social Media channels, where those messages, claims, and results can be retransmitted around the world with the click of a mouse button, companies must use caution when communicating publicly. But that caution hasn't stopped Johnson & Johnson from using innovative ways to communicate with its customers.
A New Media Beginning

Johnson & Johnson existed for 110 years before entering the world of online communications by launching its first website in 1996. Located on a coveted, three-letter URL (jnj.com) the no-frills, Web 1.0 style website presented a simple online brochure for the company's products.

Since its modest beginnings, this simple website has grown both in size and design to become a wellspring of public information that contains over 7,600 indexed pages and is visited by approximately 126,000 American visitors per month.

Notes:
1. Yahoo Site Explorer
2. quantcast.com
Kilmer House content is anything but dreary, FDA-approved chemo-babble. Its posts are entertaining, fun, and frequently teach something. Take the advertisements for Listerine®, for example. Although Listerine didn't become a member of the Johnson & Johnson product family until the acquisition of Pfizer in 2006, the product has deep roots within the company. The product was named after Sir Joseph Lister, an English surgeon who believed that infections came from invisible germs, the same concept that inspired the Johnson brothers to manufacture the world's first sterile surgical dressings.

The Kilmer House blog is the perfect way for a company in a regulated industry to enter the Web 2.0 era. Its topic is interesting and harmless. How could the FDA have any issues with a company that is describing its place in history? What legal ramifications can come from content that is derived from documents and photographs that the company has collected over the course of the past century? All are questions that any company should consider when contemplating a first-time dip into the New Media Pool.
Marketng Lessons from the Past

The story of Listerine is one that every marketng professional should study. Originally created in 1879, six-years before the founding of J&J, Listerine was marketed to physicians and dentists as a surgical and oral antiseptic. That's when it was also discovered that the product could fight bad breath. Seeing an opportunity to expand its market to consumers, the product saw lackluster sales until the word, “halitosis” (a scientific-sounding word for “bad breath”) was introduced into its marketing campaign.

In a series of fun ads with the following tagline: "Halitosis Makes You Unpopular," Listerine was offered as an aid for social situations. If halitosis makes you unpopular and Listerine can eliminate it, then the natural conclusion was that Listerine can make you popular. Consumer sales increased steadily afterward, to the point where Listerine is still in production today, more than 130 years later.

Halitosis makes
you unpopular

It is unexcusable . . . can be instantly remedied.

No matter how charming you may be or how fond of you your friends are, you cannot expect them to put up with halitosis (ungainly breath) forever. They may be nice to you—but it is an effort.

Don’t fool yourself that you never have halitosis as do so many self-satisfied people who constantly offend this way.

Read the facts in the lower right-hand corner and you will see that your chance of escape is slight. Nor should you continue being able to detect this ailment in yourself. Halitosis doesn’t announce itself. You are seldom aware you have it.

Recognizing these truths, wise people end any chance of offending by systematically rinsing the mouth with Listerine. Every morning. Every night. And between times when necessary, especially before meeting others.

Keep a bottle handy at home and office for this purpose.

Listerine ends halitosis instantly. Being antiseptic, it strikes at its common cause—fermentation in the oral cavity. Then, being a powerful deodorant, it destroys the odors themselves.

If you have any doubt of Listerine’s powerful deodorant properties, make this test: Rub a slice of onion on your hand. Then apply Listerine. Immediately, every trace of onion odor is gone, even the strong odor of fish yields to it. Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis, Mo., U.S.A.

READ THE FACTS

½ had halitosis

@Halitosis makes you unpopular, and Listerner can eliminate it, then the natural conclusion was that Listerner can make you popular. Consumer sales increased steadily afterward, to the point where Listerner is still in production today, more than 130 years later.
The Corporate Blog: JNJ BTW

The company launched its second blog, JNJ BTW: a three dimensional view of Johnson & Johnson in 2007. Through its lighthearted description, the blog promises to be a voice for the company. "...Everyone else is talking about our company, so why can't we?"

JNJ BTW is edited by former Bloomberg Business News reporter Marc Monseau. Marc does most of the writing, but periodically lends the publication to others called "Contributing Authors." The topics covered by the blog vary, spanning from the human side of acquisitions, corporate philanthropy, to employee activities. For example, Annette Russo, Manager, Communications and Training, Worldwide Environment, Health and Safety wrote an article about the company’s green/sustainability initiatives. In her article entitled Making Sustainability Personal, she describes how an employee's suggestion to turn off the lights in the company’s soft drink machines saves over one million dollars per year in electricity.

JNJ BTW has also been used to tackle more urgent communications problems. In response to a marketing effort gone bad, Kathy Widmer, Vice President of Marketing, McNeil Consumer Healthcare, used the blog to apologize to those offended by a tongue-in-cheek marketing effort called Motrin Moms. Widmer’s blog post addressed the problem head on, made no excuses, and detailed a step-by-step plan for how the company would rectify the situation.

JNJ BTW has become what it set out to be, a place where the company can join the online conversation about a subject that it knows lots about...Johnson & Johnson.
JNJ BTW also contains a blogroll—links to other, mostly non-Johnson & Johnson sites. At first, the choice seems curious, especially if the goal of the blog is to talk about itself. But a casual glance at the list reveals that Johnson & Johnson is just taking a page out of its history of public education by linking to other blogs that also share information about health and human welfare.

Take the blog, Diabetes Mine, for example. Written by Amy Tenderich, a San Francisco based woman who was diagnosed with diabetes five years ago. Amy started her blog to "...connect with others, to offset the feeling of isolation with diabetes, and to sort out and share some of what I was learning."

J&J is simply repeating what it has been doing for years...offering public education in the area of healthcare.

Blogroll Policy for The Kilmer House and JNJ BTW:

"Inclusion of a blog on the JNJBTW blogroll does not indicate an endorsement of that blog’s content or that all the posts or content included in that blog have been reviewed and are considered accurate or complete.”
The JNJHealth Channel on YouTube

Through its first three New Media communications channels, J&J learned how to produce good content for its customers without crossing regulatory lines. That experience was then used to build a fourth channel on the popular video-hosting site, YouTube. The JNJHealth Channel is designed to host "Videos to promote a better understanding of health, from the Johnson & Johnson Family of Companies." To date, the channel has 146 videos that have been viewed collectively over 700,000 times.

But where did these videos come from? What are the criteria for them? Robert Halper, Director, Video Communication, explains that "...new material (is) produced either by Corporate or the operating companies, to enhance our reputation as a trusted source of health care information, as well as create awareness of some of the disease states for which we have products."

The focal point of this statement is the “create awareness of the disease states” as opposed to creating videos that push products. Halper continues:

The site was conceived to publish "unbranded" content. Johnson & Johnson is actually a "Family of Companies," including those in the well-known consumer areas, selling products like TYLENOL® and JOHNSON’s® Baby Powder, but also in Medical Devices & Diagnostics and pharmaceuticals. Centocor, Inc. is one of our companies and the marketer of REMICADE®, which is a medication used to treat Crohn's Disease. So, while the site doesn't have "branded" (by that I mean PRODUCT specific) videos, it does link to informational sites related to disease states in which we have products.

Rather than starting from scratch, Halper’s team took a page out of the Kilmer House blog and drew from a supply of pre-recorded videos that were hosted by then employee Dr. Nancy Snyderman.
The company soft-launched two JNJHealth test videos in May, 2008. The first, “Ask Dr. Nancy - Prostate Cancer,” features Dr. Snyderman, wearing a white lab coat, looking into the camera and encouraging wives to convince their husbands to get a prostate exam. At the end, she even chides them to take the car keys and drive their unwilling husbands to a prearranged appointment! At no time during the presentation does she mention Johnson & Johnson. Instead, she’s just a physician offering women advice on how to get their big baby husbands to get prostate check-ups. In twelve months, the video has been seen 1903 times.

The second video is called “Obesity and Gastric Bypass Options.” Described as a "Testimonial about obesity and surgical treatment that led to a 140-pound weight loss,” the video possesses more production value than the first one. It consists of cuts between an interview with Gastric Bypass surgery patient Renee Vieira and scenes of people walking, preparing food, and looking through old family photos. Titling has been added and the whole story is pulled-together with a Dr. Snyderman voiceover. So far the second test video has been successful, having been viewed 6575 times.
After the initial two test videos, the site was officially launched on June 30, 2008 with the release of three videos containing a teenage girl’s journey to gastric bypass surgery. In the videos, patient Chelsey Lewis answers questions about why she chose to have the surgery and what it was like afterward.

While reading through the comments, it’s easy to see the emotional connection between the viewers and the subject. Independent of which side of the argument those comments fall on, the majority wish the best for Chelsey. Several request follow-up stories so that they can learn what happened to her.

Every company contemplating allowing comments fears profanity and links to erectile dysfunction websites, however, those risks are minor compared with the regulatory requirements on the pharmaceutical and medical device segments of the company’s business. Because of these concerns, the JNJHealth Channel has chosen to moderate its comments, a job that falls to Halper who describes his process.

"For comments I find particularly interesting, I forward to both my supervisor, and if applicable, to the company or corporate entity to which the comment applies. Most are extremely positive and some are negative or controversial. I try not to censor the negative ones, unless they are offensive or obscene (and many are!). Either way, it’s great learning."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Views</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gastric Bypass Surgery Q&amp;A's</td>
<td>43,531</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teenage Obesity and Weight Loss Treatments</td>
<td>140,794</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teenage Gastric Bypass Surgery</td>
<td>15,238</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above shows the power of New Media. To date, these three videos have been seen almost 200,000 times and have drawn 390 comments. Because the story is so controversial (a teenager having surgery to address a weight problem), the opinions contained within those comments vary wildly, from “obesity is a choice,” to personal stories from those who have gone through the surgery themselves.
WTF is so hard about loosing weight?! I used to be fat and I still am a little, little chubby I’m on the edge between muscular and chubby muscular and I achieved that by going to school with my bike instead of the bus and go running 3 times a week and swimming once a week and playing tennis and basketball once a week and I ate more healthy not less just more healthy for example I didn’t eat white bread anymore I didn’t drink coke but lightcoke isntead etc etc it’s the little things that matter.

I am going to be going through the surgery hopefully in the next couple of months and this video help me feel a little better about it.

True...I used to weigh 270 lbs...no I am down to 230 lbs...and I am supposed to be at 150lbs at my height... Its hard and I am still working on it but it’s possible...Those who have always been thin don’t know the struggle...because its not the dieting that I hate...its the waiting for results...
**But What’s the ROI?**

Companies, both large and small, are in the business of investing their resources in order to get a return on them. Since New Media requires an investment of resources, one of the first questions that management asks is: “What’s the ROI?” Halper answers:

*There is certainly a subjective ROI in terms of our reputation. Look at some of the comments on our Nursing videos...Management that I report to is extremely positive about the channel, particularly the large amount of views (over 700,000) and cost (essentially $0).*

The distribution of the videos may not cost anything through a service like YouTube, but there are other costs to consider, such as the money it takes to create the videos and the time it takes to oversee all aspects of the channel. Halper spends approximately 50% of his time devoted to the JNJHealth Channel.

One of the responsibilities of his role is to let upper management know how the channel is performing.

*Youtube provides excellent metrics, including views over time, trends, most popular videos, even viewer retention rates. I provide this data to senior management in my department, and sometimes to the operating companies, when applicable.*

*At the Johnson & Johnson Family of Companies, we embrace research and science - bringing innovative ideas, products and services to advance the health and well-being of people throughout the world.*

*From the JNJHealth Channel on YouTube.*
The Strategy is Starting to Change
With any new endeavor, lessons are to be learned. Although the
JNJHealth Channel was originally designed to create “unbranded
videos,” the company is reconsidering its mission. Halper
explains.

Actually, there is now an exception to that “unbranded” rule. I just
posted a video about an acne treatment product developed by
Neutrogena Corporation. We might start introducing some branded
consumer content, but we probably will shy away from prescription
products and Medical Devices...There is certainly less of a
regulatory barrier for consumer products than there is for
pharmaceutical or medical devices, which is why we would shy
away from putting up videos about products in those segments. As
the landscape changes though, and social media becomes more
prevalent and accepted, maybe that will change.

Looking Toward the Future
J&J has learned much about Social Media through its website, two
blogs and now a YouTube Channel, but the company isn’t stopping
there. Halper explains how J&J is still moving forward.

Obviously, an awareness of gastric bypass surgery might have a
positive effect on the businesses involved in making products for
that procedure, but that is not measured, nor is it regarded as the
main priority of the channel. The other important attribute of the
channel is the opportunity it gives us to engage with our consumer
public and put a human face on the corporation. Finally, I think
that the experience of being in social media environments,
including YouTube, blogs, Twitter and Facebook, will only enhance
our ability to communicate and engage going forward.
Real Time Media: Twitter

J&J launched its Twitter Channel (@jnjComm) in March 2009. The channel is monitored and updated by Marc Monseau, the editor of the JNJ BTW blog. During its first few months, the channel has been used to interact with other Twitter users, report live on executive statements to analysts, point to articles in the press, and help others tap into the information stored within the company’s rich online properties.

Not only does Monseau use Twitter to point people to Kilmer House, JNJHealth Channel, and JNJ BTW, but he also directs followers to other J&J-sponsored web properties such as Safe Kids USA and baby.com.

The JNJComm Twitter channel has grown its audience to almost 1400 followers. A subject analysis reveals that almost 50% of its “tweets” have something to do child safety, referring to stories on safe biking, wearing helmets, and child passenger safety. In an age where companies change messaging quarterly, it's impressive to see one that has been consistent for over a decade. Checkout the bottom of the 1996 jnj.com website on page 5 of this report to see how they were promoting Safe Kids USA back then!

Marc is using the @jnjComm Twitter channel like a quarterback, directing his followers to useful information that is spread across multiple Johnson & Johnson channels.
Facebook
The company’s newest Social Media site is its Facebook Group\(^1\) which was created in April 2009. So far, the page contains biographical information about the company, it has 502 members, 12 photos, 3 videos and a modest level of chatter. It’s obvious that the company is experimenting with how to use it.

J&J and its operating companies are also involved in other Facebook pages, notably, the Safe Kids Fan Page. Although it has a fairly active “Wall” and 350 fans, it too is a little thin on content (discussions, photos, videos, etc...)

The fact that not much content exists on these sites shows that J&J is doing what it has done successfully in the past--establishing a presence in a new area and adapting to the specific uses of each medium. It’ll be interesting to see how these New Media properties unfold over the next few years.

Notes:
1. So far, J&J only has a Group as opposed to a Fan Page.
Timeline of Johnson & Johnson’s Online Activities

1996: Johnson & Johnson launches its first website.

**July 2006**: J&J launches its first blog called Kilmer House. Named after the company’s first scientific director, the blog highlights the company’s rich history. Margaret Gurowitz, a member of the Corporate Communication department, writes the blog and claims to be “…living proof that, yes, you CAN do something with a master’s degree in history!”

**June 2007**: J&J launches its second blog called JNJ BTW. The blog, intended to cover corporate topics, is edited by former Bloomberg Business News reporter Marc Monseau. Marc does most of the writing, but is accompanied periodically by guest writers.

**March 2009**: J&J launches its first Twitter channel, @JNJComm. It is written by Marc Monseau, the editor of the JNJ BTW blog. The Twitter channel covers many topics, including responding to customers who mention the company by name.

**April 2009**: J&J launches its Facebook Group Page. The page is headed up by Robert Halper, Director Video Communication and the head of the JNJHealth YouTube Channel.

**July 2008**: J&J launches its online video channel called JNJHealth. The channel is designed to tie into its historical roots of Public Health Education. Rather than releasing it on a J&J owned property, as with the previous three, J&J decides to built its JNJHealth channel on the popular video hosting site, YouTube.
Johnson & Johnson has created multiple New Media channels that serve different aspects of its mission. In doing so, the company has inadvertently offered a roadmap for any company considering the adoption of New Media technologies into its communications strategy. Here are ten lessons that companies should consider while developing their Social Media strategies.

1) There will always be excuses
When faced with change, it’s easier to say “no” than to say “yes,” and members of your company will unleash a laundry list of excuses as to why it shouldn't adopt New Media technologies. Whether they consider your company too big, too small, too skittish or too poor, none of those excuses are strong enough to ignore the fact that your customers are already talking about your company online and that you must develop a strategy to join the conversation.

2) Write about your history
If your company is too skittish with regards to writing a contemporary corporate blog, consider looking backwards for your inspiration. Every company has a mission, a purpose, and has learned lessons along the way. Such lessons are valuable and thus can be shared. Remember, nobody can be accused of forward-looking statements when writing about history.

3) Learn from the experience
There are hundreds of New/Social Media channels to choose from and not all are appropriate for your company. Rather than becoming overwhelmed with the choices, it's important to put a stake in the ground and start someplace. Start with a blog. Get experience and learn from it. That experience will then be used as a foundation to build upon into the future.

10 Lessons
4) Build your home first
J&J built its first three online properties upon corporate-owned cyber-real estate. Then, with a solid “home base” formed, the company started migrating its content onto third-party sites such as Youtube, Twitter and Facebook.

This is an important point that few companies consider: own the foundation that you build your online content strategy upon. This isn’t a knock against Twitter, YouTube, or Facebook, but those companies can change their terms of service, go out of business, or be sold to someone else, without the courtesy of consulting with you first. If your company has built its entire content strategy around online properties that suddenly disappear, your company’s communications strategy may be left up the proverbial creek without a paddle. Build on your own property first--then build outposts that link back home. If one of your outposts goes away, your audience will still have breadcrumbs to find their way back to you.

5) Talk about the problems that you solve.
Corporate Marketing and Public Relations people are predisposed to talk obsequiously about their products and services. Leave that content to the old media channels. In the New Media channels, become the expert that people seek to solve their problems. If you are in the health care industry, like J&J, tell stories from the perspective of the person coping with the disease state as opposed to the chemicals that they ingest. If these special storytelling skillsets don’t reside within your corporate walls, consider hiring someone like Margaret Gurowitz or Marc Monseau to help you. Or, if bringing on full-time staff doesn’t fit within this year’s budget, look outside for help—perhaps to an agency, a consultant, or even your own customers!

6) Don't be afraid to experiment
New Media technologies are new and therefore, nobody knows where they will ultimately lead. That’s why it’s important to experiment--to try things that may succeed or fail, but no matter what the outcome, at the end of the experiment, your company will be smarter than when it started. Don’t be afraid to start something just because you can’t connect all the dots first.
7) Measure everything
New Media is by far the most measurable of all your media choices. We can measure audiences, RSS subscribers, unique visitors, referrals to other sites, the number of comments, and the number of times your videos have been viewed. But measurement is only valuable if you are actively analyzing the data. Most companies don’t put the time and effort into measuring their online activities and drawing meaning from the data. Remember, it’s hard to tell if you are winning if you aren’t keeping score.

8) Adapt Your plan
Have a flexible plan. The JNJHealth Channel was founded on the principle of “unbranded” content. After eleven months, however, the company is revisiting that assumption with its over-the-counter products like Neutragena. Perhaps this new strategy will work. Perhaps it won’t. But either way, the company will learn something that it can use to create even better future content.

9) Cross-pollinate
J&J is producing audience-specific content throughout its various New Media channels. But each audience/channel combination isn’t mutually exclusive, therefore, it’s important for them to cross-pollinate. The JNJComm Twitter channel (@jnjcomm) is a great example of this. By using the channel as a conversation piece, the time-dependent nature of Twitter lends Marc Monseau the ability to direct people to fresh content, either on the company’s two blogs, the JNJHealth Channel, or other properties such as livingwithuc.com, safekids.org, or baby.com. Don’t build New Media islands.

10) Keep moving
The New Media landscape is constantly changing and as more channel options arise, companies must take advantage of them. Continue seeking for better ways to tell your stories. Remain true to your mission, continue building on your foundation, but don’t become stagnant. Keep innovating. Keep communicating.
Acknowledgements

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About the Author

During his 25 years in the high tech electronics industry, Ron Ploof became fascinated with the relationship between people and their communications technologies. In 2005, he joined a community of independent content creators who wrote blogs, recorded podcasts, and produced online video. The community led him to social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Convinced that these new technologies would change traditional business communications forever, he founded OC New Media, LLC, a consulting firm dedicated to helping companies develop strategies for incorporating these channels into their corporate communications practices.

Ron is a sought-after speaker, having the privilege of speaking before audiences such as The Public Relations Society of America, Ragan Communications Social Media for Communicators, Fortune 50 companies, San Diego Social Media Club, and The Orange County Executive Network.

You can read his blog RonAmok! Or follow @ronploof on Twitter.