

# On the Mark

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## This CU Knows Social Media ThatsSoNorthwest.com

**N**orthwest Community Credit Union knows social media. Its blog – [ThatsSoNorthwest.com](http://ThatsSoNorthwest.com) – is arguably one of the best credit union blogs in the country. That’s no accident, either. Northwest Community didn’t just put a blog together for the sake of having one. Its blog emerged from a strategy to rally the staff around a unified vision and identity. Northwest Community has branches throughout Oregon, but many of them are 300 miles apart. The blog was a tool to bring them together virtually.

“The blog started as an exercise in staff development. Our staff is spread all over the state, and we needed a way to pull them together,” said Matt Purvis, vice president of marketing for Northwest Community Credit Union.

The consumer blog followed a year and half later after Northwest conducted focus groups around the state. Those focus groups revealed that people who were already members of a credit union were positive about them. However, bank customers knew nothing about credit unions. Northwest developed an entirely new brand identity and the tag line *Northwest of Banking*.

“We believe that when you start talking traditional credit union language in your advertising to people who don’t know credit unions, they think you’re talking to someone else. Credit union people know who we are, and our members do, but other people – which is 60 percent of our state’s population - need some reference to banking, because banking is what they know,” Purvis said.

### Building and Managing a Blog

Northwest started by creating a brand for its blog that was separate from the credit union brand, to reach new people it might not otherwise reach. Six employees were selected to make regular blog contributions. Their charge was to focus on Northwest events, and aspects of the community like food, places and activities.

“We asked them to build a brand and culture around those things, and we would figure out how to bridge that community to the Northwest community,” said Purvis. “As the blog evolves, these contributors have things in their personal lives happen that people outside the credit union can relate to.”

For example, one blog contributor wrote a post on turning 30 years old. She shared her concerns and finances and saving for the future. This post wasn’t scripted. It was authentic, and it had obvious connections to Northwest Community Credit Union. Content on the blog runs the gamut, and it’s not just writing. There’s also photos, slideshows, videos and music.

The blog targets the 20 to 30 year age range, and each of the contributing bloggers falls into that age range.

### **Investing in Social Media**

Northwest has quite a bit invested in social media, because it is a major element of the credit union’s brand strategy. As with anything else, there are design and set-up costs. There’s also maintenance costs and people costs.

Northwest has a full-time blog manager who is a member of the marketing team. She manages all of the credit union’s social media efforts – e-mail, blog, Twitter, Facebook – to ensure the right content, brand consistency and timing so each social media outlet can support the others. Facebook posts are often linked to content in the electronic newsletter, as well as blog content. In fact, most of the blog’s traffic comes through Facebook.

“That gives us a lot more opportunities to connect with people,” Purvis said.

The six blog contributors each have a reloadable gift card, which gets loaded with \$10 for every blog post they submit. Blog contributors also get subsidized for Internet capable cell phones. Blogging is built into their job description, no matter what their full-time job is at the credit union, their 40-hour week includes two to three hours of blogging time.

“These are people who are really motivated to do this and are motivated by their jobs at the credit union,” said Purvis.

### **Return on Investment**

Those people are the return on Northwest’s social media investment, which Purvis says is really an investment in the credit union’s people. In fact, Northwest doesn’t treat it as a technology investment at all. Because social media is part of the credit union’s strategy and brand identity, return is measured by experience standards and how the credit union’s personality is leveraged.

“How do you get an ROI on training staff to really like people? Staff development was the major impetus for social media. What we’re going to get now is the staff getting excited about the brand and living it. Then, we can focus on people coming to us with their money,” said Purvis. “People are going to choose us because we’re more fun. We’ll win because people will appreciate the efforts we make with these tools and in the community.”

## Tips for Credit Unions Starting a Blog

Purvis offers the following advice for credit unions wanting to start blogs:

- Decide your strategy first. Who are you targeting and what kind of behaviors are you trying to elicit?
- Try an internal blog first. Focus on the strategic challenges facing your organization. “For us it was really meaningful to think of it as an internal tool before it became a public tool,” he said.
- Don’t obsess about the nature and details of finance in your blog posts. Think outside of that to build community.
- Focus on engaging people and making deeper connections with them.
- Be authentic. Don’t have a 40-year old writing a blog for a 20-something audience.

When executed correctly, social media provides an effective opportunity to connect with people. Don't just start a blog for the sake of having one. Create an environment that engages your staff and members and makes them excited about your credit union.

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### Blog Updates

**F**ollow Mark's blogs for frequent and timely information on topics like marketing, branding, generations, leadership, Think Huge and more. Blog posts are updated weekly. Here are links and summaries from some recent posts.

#### [How One Credit Union Keeps Membership Age Low](#)

Mark has worked with Linn Area Credit Union (Iowa, \$250 million) on their strategic planning sessions for two consecutive years. The credit union is a top performer in many areas, including average member age. Find out how Linn Area CU maintains an average membership age that is 10 years below the national average.

#### [Checking Decisions Credit Unions Need to Address](#)

Should your credit union continue offering free checking? It's definitely a question worth debating. Some financial institutions have already pulled the product; others are moving to a relationship approach; some are making the strategic decision to use free checking as a loss leader product. Hear what Raddon Financial Group believes are the issues every credit union needs to address.

#### [Think Huge During a Bad Day](#)

We all have a bad day from time to time. It just happens. Things don't go as planned, bad things happen to good people and you wish you could go back to bed and start the day over. So what do you do when you have a bad day. How do you continue to think huge when circumstances making it difficult? Read this blog post to find out.

## Online Buzz

### Comments and Ideas from Mark's Blog Readers

#### Checking Decisions CUs Need to Address

In its list, Raddon forgot to include "build-your-own" checking accounts, where the consumer chooses what options they want. Some options have fees, some don't."

-Jeffry Pilcher

#### Think Huge During a Bad Day

"Everyone has these days due to bad experiences. If, however, we look at those experiences as learning opportunities, those "bad" days aren't so bad after all!"

- Sean McDonald

Thank you for this perspective, Mark. To expand on point 4, let me add that bad weeks, bad months, bad quarters, recessions, etc. eventually end as well.

- Matt Davis

" 'Nicheing' seems scary to most financial institutions--and it's easy to understand why--but it is truly the key if you are going to ever create an experience that truly resonates with anyone... Creating a niche financial institution around demographic characteristics (such as age, race, economic status, region, etc.) will not create nearly as engaging of a brand as one that is built around psychographic characteristics (values, beliefs, motivations, worldviews, etc.)"

- Niche Banking -

***We want to hear from you. If you have used an idea or learned something of value from one of Mark's blog posts, be sure to leave a comment on the blog so others can benefit from your experiences, as well.***

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