Jab, Jab, Jab, Right Hook
How to Tell Your Story in a Noisy Social World

By Gary Vaynerchuk
Many people have tried to use Facebook or Twitter to supplement a marketing campaign for the small business they own, or the organization they work for. And chances are that the entire social media effort centered on trying to land a “killer right hook” that would immediately convert Web traffic into sales. After all, what’s the point of spending valuable time on social media if it’s not going to turn into sales, right?

It’s only natural that we’d want to see a quick ROI from the time we’ve invested. It’s tempting to try to land that one earth-shattering blow that will knock your customers’ socks off and send them scurrying for their wallets. According to entrepreneur and social media guru Gary Vaynerchuk, if this has been your approach, you’ve been going about it all wrong.

In his new book, *Jab, Jab, Jab, Right Hook*, Vaynerchuk shares his insights on how to use
social media to connect with customers and beat the competition.

The choice of title for Vaynerchuk’s book stems from his obvious fondness for boxing. “Critics will often dismiss the sport of boxing as mindlessly barbaric,” he writes. “But where critics see only the blood and violence, those of us who understand and respect it see its strategy.” In fact, boxing is often compared to chess for the amount of strategic thinking it requires. And as Vaynerchuk explains, while the one big right hook usually gets all the credit for the win, it’s actually the subtle ring movements and well-planned jabs that come before it that set a fighter up for success.

*Jab, Jab, Jab, Right Hook* is a distillation of everything Vaynerchuk has learned about successful social media marketing through the work he’s done with dozens of start-ups, Fortune
500 companies, and even a few celebrities, like Ashton Kutcher. Vaynerchuk also draws heavily on his own personal experience as an entrepreneur, selling thousands of bottles of wine online every year through his popular site Winelibrary.com.

Just like a great heavyweight title match, Vaynerchuk’s book is broken into a series of action-packed rounds. The first round is called “the set-up,” and it shows us how social media is changing our lives in ways that probably wouldn’t have seemed possible even a few short years ago. The next round is about “the characteristics of great content,” and teaches readers how to “jab” in subtle but powerful ways to engage their intended audiences. The third round is focused on how to leverage platforms like Facebook, to tell stories that harness the nuances and idiosyncrasies of those platforms.
The penultimate round is about finding opportunities in emerging networks by becoming an early adopter on emerging platforms. Then, in the final round comes the knockout punch. Bam! So get ready to be knocked out … but not right away! First we’ll look at the importance of jabbing, and jabbing, and more jabbing.

Round One: The Set-Up

“Social media has fundamentally changed the way society lives and communicates,” writes Vaynerchuk. “It’s no longer just young people who are hooked. Over seventy percent of people in the United States are on Facebook, and more than a half billion globally are on Twitter.”

Yet, as much as the power and reach of social media is exploding, far too many marketing executives are failing to harness its full potential to tell compelling stories, and connect with new
customers.

For a long time, marketers could rely on a stable and predictable triumvirate of platforms - television, radio, and print - to effectively tell their stories. But as the Internet burst onto the scene, and consumers began spending less time on TV and more time online, marketers evolved just slightly by doing things like sending mass e-mails, and putting flashy banner ads on Web sites. But the attention-grabbing power of these tired techniques is weakening fast. For 2014 and beyond, blanket e-mails and banner ads just won’t cut it.

If you ask Vaynerchuk, it’s a good thing that online marketing is evolving away from mass e-mail campaigns and annoying banner ads. Because these sorts of ham-fisted approaches were never all that effective to begin with - particularly when it comes to telling stories.
“No matter who you are or what kind of company or organization you work for, your number-one job is to tell your story to the consumer wherever they are,” argues Vaynerchuk. And because more and more people are on social media every day – at home, at work, and increasingly on their smart phones - that’s where you need to go to tell your stories.

Now, granted, not everyone needs to be convinced that social media can be a useful marketing tool. There are fewer and fewer holdouts left who would argue that social media is unimportant for businesses; especially when one in four people say they use social media sites to inform their purchasing decisions. In the early going, many businesses and organizations may have been dragged kicking and screaming to social media. But by now, most understand that having at least a rudimentary Facebook page and Twitter account is critical for brand visibility and credibility.
So congratulations: your business is on social media, and you recognize that it’s important. That’s a good start. You can’t win a fight unless you lace-up your boxing gloves and step into the ring. Now, Gary Vaynerchuk is going to show you how to throw your first punch.

**Round Two: Jabbing with Great Content**

As you approach a new social networking site with your marketer’s hat on, you need to remember why people use social media in the first place - because it’s fun.

“Social networking lights up people’s dopamine pathways and the pleasure centers of their brains,” writes Vaynerchuk. As a marketer, your content must aim to do the same. And it will do exactly that if it looks the same, and provides the same value and emotional benefits people are seeking.
when they come to the platform in the first place. To this end, your first set of jabs should be “lightweight pieces of content that benefit your customers by making them laugh, snicker, ponder, play a game, feel appreciated, or escape.” This is not the time to throw right hooks (i.e. do not lead with overt sales messages). It’s just like when you’re telling a good story, explains Vaynerchuk: “The punch line or climax has no power without the exposition and action that come before it. There is no sale without the story; no knockout without the set-up.”

Counterintuitively, the most effective jabs are actually the gentlest. If your execution is good, jabbing with this kind of content won’t look or feel like the set-up for that ultimate sales pitch, even though it is. A key point to remember when you’re jabbing, is never to interrupt your customers’ entertainment. It needs to be subtly woven-in.
People have no patience for interruptions anymore. This is evidenced by the speed with which millions of consumers jumped on the chance to by-pass advertising altogether with the advent of DVRs and other commercial-skipping devices. “If we want to talk to people while they consume their entertainment, we have to actually be their entertainment, melding seamlessly into the whole experience,” he writes.

No way is a consumer going to want to engage with you if you ambush her with a screaming message that overtakes the content she’s reading. The only thing she’ll feel is irritation as she frantically hunts for the little “block” button that will make you go away.

Getting the pace and cadence of your jabs right will require some trial and error. It’s about finding that elegant mix of both quality and quantity that works for your brand. Some brands can get away
with just a few jabs here and there. Others need to jab all the time.

Yet, even if you don’t jab every single day, you must always watch for those special opportunities where you can take advantage of breaking news to showcase your brand. Like when the power suddenly went out during the second half of the Super Bowl between the San Francisco 49ers and the Baltimore Ravens, and Nabisco – maker of the Oreo cookie – was ready to capitalize. As soon as the lights went off, Nabisco’s opportunistic social media team jumped on the moment, quickly producing and Tweeting out an ad that read “Power Out? No problem” with a starkly-lit image of a solitary Oreo cookie and the cheeky caption: “You can still dunk in the dark.”

Nabisco’s message caught on almost immediately, getting nearly 15,000 retweets and more than 20,000 likes on Facebook - pretty impressive
numbers. But none of this happened by accident. The company had a 15-person social media team at the ready to talk about whatever happened at the Super Bowl - whether it was a mind-blowing touchdown or the stadium lights shutting off.

You may be wondering what particular kinds of stories you should tell for maximum impact. It’s a fair question to ask, but sadly, there’s no one right answer. “Marketers are constantly asking me for a fixed storytelling blueprint, something that delineates the optimal number of jabs before it’s appropriate to throw a right hook,” he writes. “Unfortunately, that blueprint doesn’t exist. Social media storytelling is as sweet a science as boxing, requiring constant experimentation and hours of observation.”

The main thing to remember is that when you jab, you’re not overtly selling anything. You’re not asking your consumer for a commitment. You’re
just sharing a small moment together. “Something funny, ridiculous, clever, dramatic, informative, or heartwarming,” writes Vaynerchuk. “Maybe something featuring cats. Anything really, except a sales pitch.”

Remember, while it may seem like a lot of work in the early going, the emotional connection you build through jabbing pays off in spades on the day you decide to throw the right hook.

**Round Three: Jabbing in the Right Language**

Just as different magazines have different personalities - *Rolling Stone* and *The New Yorker* both carry excellent articles, but they look-and-feel completely different - every social media platform has its own language. Yet most marketers don’t take the time to learn them. They’re worse than an “ignorant tourist fumbling around Oslo who
hasn’t bothered to study a word of Norwegian.” Realistically, how can you expect anyone to care what you have to say if you don’t use their language?

It’s important to understand that every social media platform is unique, and requires a unique formula. “What works on Facebook won’t necessarily work on Twitter,” explains Vaynerchuk. Similarly, stories told through pictures on Instagram don’t resonate the same way when told in an identical manner on Pinterest. “Posting the same content on Tumblr as on Google+ is the equivalent of the tourist deciding that since he can’t speak Norwegian he’ll just speak Icelandic and it will do. That’s just stupid,” he writes.

Getting people to hear your story on social media, and then act on it, requires using a platform’s native language, paying attention to context, understanding the subtle nuances that make each
platform unique, and adapting your content to match. This also means ensuring that whatever content you develop is equally well-suited for mobile, as well as desktop devices. (Too many marketers seem to somehow miss the rather obvious point that most smart phones have a much smaller screen than a desktop computer, and fail to customize their mobile content accordingly.)

To the untrained eye, all social media platforms may look pretty similar. And perhaps in many ways they are. Just about every social media platform offers some form of photo-sharing, for example. But though the functions of these platforms may in some ways overlap, each one cultivates a unique sensibility and style. Some encourage more text-heavy content, whereas others are better suited for richly designed visuals. Some sites allow hyperlinks; others don’t. These differences are not minor - putting the wrong kind
of content on a platform will doom your marketing efforts.

“Content is king, but context is God,” writes the author. “You can put out good content, but if it ignores the context of the platform on which it appears, it can easily fall flat.”

**Targeting and Frequency**

Once you’ve mastered the subtleties and nuances of a particular platform, you’ll be able to become more targeted and selective with your social media jabs.

For example, there may be occasions that you don’t necessarily want *all* of your customers to see the same information. On some platforms, where your posts are entirely public, every jab hits every one of your customers in the face. But on Facebook, for instance, you can be more selective, customizing your jabs and targeting
subsets of your fan base.

“Want to target a post for thirty-two to forty-five-year-old married women with college degrees who speak French and live in California, and post it on New Year’s Eve?” asks Vaynerchuk jokingly. “When you know how to use Facebook properly, you can do that.”

It’s easy to create a private list of your current customers on Facebook using the “Ad Create: Custom Audiences” feature. But did you also know that you can use a “lookalike audiences” tool to find similar people? This way you can target many more potential customers who already like – or have a connection to – other things on Facebook that are related to the products or services you’re offering.

Round Four: Jabbing on Next Generation Platforms
Clearly, no online marketer worth his salt would ignore the two most popular social media platforms: Facebook and Twitter. Because that’s where the majority of the eyeballs are (today), it makes perfect sense to invest most of your jabbing resources on those two sites. But avoid putting all your eggs in one basket. You must also lay foundations for the future by experimenting with the next generation of platforms.

Why would you waste valuable time and resources on a platform that’s still small, and perhaps even unproven, you might ask? A new platform may have only a few million members before it catches fire (or flames out). Still, a few million customers is nothing to sneeze at.

“I can’t believe how many marketers will dismiss the media habits of a few million people,” laments Vaynerchuk. “These are often customers that no one else is reaching.”
Yes, certain platforms may be a bit crude or silly, and it may be tempting to dismiss them out of hand. But it’s important we don’t let “the snob factor” get in the way of our judgment as a marketer. “Just because your teenage daughter and her friends are excited about a new platform does not mean that that platform is irrelevant for grown-ups,” writes Vaynerchuk. “You may not see any value in sharing your thoughts on nail polish, or posting a picture every time you get a new tattoo … but when millions of other people are doing just that, you need to do something with that information.”

Ignoring platforms that are rapidly gaining critical mass is a great way to look slow and out-of-touch. In this section, Vaynerchuk also offers a quick look at a few fast-growing platforms which should most definitely be on your radar:
“I predict that in the next twenty-four months, checking in to LinkedIn will be like checking in to Facebook,” writes Vaynerchuk. It will be interesting to see whether Vaynerchuk’s prediction comes true. Most of the features that LinkedIn offers can already be done on Facebook, and LinkedIn still has a long way to go to match that platform’s scale. Just imagine the spending power of the LinkedIn audience. Senior executives from every single one of the Fortune 500 companies are members. LinkedIn’s relevance hasn’t yet
reached a level where you need to post content at the same pace as you might on Facebook and Twitter, but it might be wise to start focusing a bit more of your time there.

As a more business-oriented site, LinkedIn provides a natural platform for B2B marketers, who often don’t bother with Facebook. That’s why you might want to have both an individual account on LinkedIn (to keep tabs on your professional network), as well as a standalone account for your business or organization. “If you’re an office supply company, or a lawyer, LinkedIn can be an interesting place to tell your story,” says Vaynerchuk.
The future of Google+ as a viable marketing platform is one big question mark,” writes Vaynerchuk. If you look closely, you’ll see that a large percentage of the 500 million Google+ accounts are currently dormant. Most users log onto Google+ only to access other popular applications, like YouTube. People just aren’t that interested in using Google+ as a stand-alone product, because it offers little that they can’t already get through Facebook.

*But* there is still one more shoe to drop…

As you’ve no doubt heard, Google has invented wearable eyeglasses (called Google Glass) that allows users to access the internet in a completely mobile and hands-free way. It’s too early to say whether this sort of wearable technology will (A) work properly, and (B) actually catch-on with consumers. But, as Vaynerchuk writes: “If Google Glass takes off in the way I think it will
over the next half decade, Google+ will have a shot at rivaling Facebook for consumers’ hearts because Google Glass could conceivably replace other types of mobile devices.” All of a sudden, if you want to make a phone call, you won’t be reaching for your iPhone or BlackBerry. Instead, you’ll be logging into your Google+ account and asking your eye glasses to find Aunt Betty’s phone number and connect the call.

**Snapchat**

Launched: September 2011

60 million “snaps” (mostly photos) are sent per day as of February 2013.

Snapchat is an innovative service that allows users to send photos and videos that self-destruct in a matter of seconds. Upon its launch, Snapchat was immediately derided as a “sexting platform.”
But when you look under the hood, you might be surprised to discover that it’s actually used much more for circulating visual gags and wry observations than dirty pictures. Because it’s not well understood, this new platform is generally considered by most online marketers to be of low value. Yet, someone is clearly finding value in the platform when more than 400 million images are being sent around on a daily basis.

Will Vaynerchuk be right about LinkedIn, Google+ and Snapchat? Only time will tell. The rate at which consumers’ social media tastes and preferences change is extremely high. It’s anybody’s guess what the dominant platforms will be in two or three years’ time. But, change is a constant in this business, and most companies are slower to adapt than they should be. These two facts works in your favor. “It means that you will have a significant business advantage if you choose to be part of the small fraction of marketers
who take the time to fully excavate these platforms’ secrets.”

**The Knockout Punch**

“Remember when you were a kid, and you’d go to your mom and ask her to take you out for an ice-cream cone?” asks Vaynerchuk. “Most of the time she’d say no. But every now and then – totally out of the blue - she would say yes. Why? Because earlier that day you probably did something to make her feel happy, or proud. Whether it was coming home with a good report card or simply being nice to your younger sibling for a change, you unwittingly gave your mom something she valued. And so when you asked for ice cream, she was emotionally primed to say yes.”

As a marketer, when you have the sense that you may have actually delivered something of real value to one or more of your prospective
customers, that’s when it’s time to throw the right hook - i.e. to close the deal. Through your carefully orchestrated jabs, you’ve already done so much to build goodwill. At that point, your target audience would almost find it rude to refuse to do business with you.

Think of it this way:

Jab, jab, jab, jab, jab … right hook!

Or, if you prefer:

Give, give, give, give, give … ask!

And that’s all there is to it.

**Conclusion**

As we’ve seen, it requires a lot of effort to figure out how to use social media to its full potential. There will be some trial-and-error involved, for sure. But, if you do nothing else but adhere to Gary Vaynerchuk’s simple blueprint of engaging
with your customers instead of talking at them, then you’ll be off to a good start. Then, with practice, once you’ve found that right combination of jabs and hooks that works for your business, you’ll be able to apply that knowledge to any new platform that crops up in the future.

Now, take your corner and let the match begin.