

## The Can't-Miss Social Media Trends For 2013

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Ryan Holmes, CEO of Hootsuite, crystal balls the future of social so you're not stuck with--gasp--Twitter 101-level skills.



Will Facebook continue its reign atop the social hierarchy? Will businesses get better returns on their social media investment? Will your CEO finally learn to tweet? Here's a look at the biggest social media trends set to unfold in the year ahead.

**Mobile social media usage continues to soar:** In September, Facebook made a monumental--if little noted--revelation in a [quarterly SEC filing](#): "[We] anticipate that the rate of growth in mobile usage will exceed the growth in usage through personal computers for the foreseeable future." Mobile Internet users are [set to overtake wired](#) Internet users by 2015 in the U.S., but this shift is happening far faster on social platforms.

What does this mean for the future of social media? Networks that make engagement on the go easy--especially visual platforms like Instagram--are at a significant advantage (Instagram, in fact, already has [more mobile users than Twitter](#)). Meanwhile, traditional networks must work to better differentiate their desktop and mobile experiences--ensuring

that mobile interfaces are [streamlined and fast-loading](#), while also taking full advantage of GPS, near field communication (exchanging information by touching smartphones) and perhaps even [ambient location](#) functionality.

At the same time, developing viable advertising options for mobile platforms is more critical than ever. Finding ways to squeeze ads onto tiny mobile screens has thus far [proved a serious Achilles heel](#).

**Social advertising grows and evolves:** To solve the mobile revenue puzzle, social networks will push ahead next year with new social ad models. Traditional banner and interruption ads will decline, replaced by innovative offerings like Promoted Tweets and Sponsored Stories. What makes these so-called [native ads](#) unique is that they don't look like ads at all, apart from small disclaimers. They appear in-stream and read exactly like another piece of user-generated content.

While some users resent this intrusion into their home streams, natives ads potentially enable brands to reach clients on their own turf and on their own terms. Behind it all is the concept of [convergence](#)--the idea that ads and content can be interchangeable. Companies, for instance, are already sending out Tweets to followers on their social media channels. Using analytical tools to identify which are most read, they can selectively amplify the best of the bunch as Promoted Tweets, turning content into ads and reaching an even larger audience.

**International and niche social networks experience dramatic growth:** Total social media users are [forecast to grow](#) by just 4.1 percent in North America in 2013. Compare that with growth rates of 21.1 percent in Asia-Pacific (including China, India, and Indonesia), 12.6 percent in Latin America, and 23.3 percent in the Middle East and Africa.

The major networks will continue to make impressive inroads internationally: [Facebook users grew by 47 percent](#) in Latin America alone last year. But localized social networks--especially those geared for mobile users--are also experiencing dramatic growth. China's Twitter-like Sina Weibo microblogging platform recently [surpassed 400 million users](#) (nearly doubling its user base in one year), while two-year-old competing upstart WeChat already has 200 million users.

Meanwhile, niche networks, which offer deeper, more focused functionalities overlooked by the bigger players, will continue to experience truly explosive growth both in North America and internationally. Riding the wave of its acquisition by Facebook, Instagram saw its share of social media traffic [grow by 17,319 percent this year](#), while Pinterest grew by 5,124 percent. What does this all mean for brands and businesses? To maximize reach, it's critical to keep up with an expanding array of social networks both in North America and abroad. Anticipate increased demand in 2013 for social media management systems that streamline monitoring and posting across multiple networks.

**Social media moves beyond the marketing department:** In the year ahead, expect enterprises to embrace social media tools--including internal networks, real-time chats and wikis--for uses that go way beyond the familiar applications for marketing and community building. At

stake is a potentially enormous boost to the bottom line: Last year, [McKinsey published an eye-opening report](#) that pegged the [untapped business value of social technologies at \\$1.3 trillion](#)-- and most of that comes from improved office productivity.

We're already seeing HR departments applying social media to streamline application processes, sales teams cultivating leads and monitoring the sales funnel via social channels, and operations and distributions teams tracking supply chains at a granular level. Deeper still, internal networking tools like [HootSuite Conversations](#) are enabling companies to free up expertise trapped in departmental silos. (Conversations is sold by my company.) At the same time, the way social media is rolled out at large companies is fundamentally changing. Until now, adoption has been fueled from the bottom-up, by front-line social media and community managers. But increasingly CIOs, CEOs, and CMOs who have seen the business value of social media are taking the reins. As the C-suite formalizes top-down social media strategy, expect to see social media management systems become as commonplace as office productivity suites and customer relations management software.

**Big data grows but gets more manageable:** Social media has given companies access to unprecedented volumes of information about their clients and buying trends on an aggregate level. The challenge, which confronts everyone from data giants like Facebook to small businesses active on social media, is how to process all of this and turn it into actionable policy. Case in point: [93 percent of North American executives](#) surveyed by Oracle believe they're losing revenue by not leveraging available data.

"We need to build robust systems for analyzing the huge amounts of data flowing in from social media and how they then link to all the other touch points consumers have with the brand," explains digital analyst [Marita Scarfi](#).

The coming year will see the emergence of new software and tools to do just that. Using new-wave [social media command centers](#) capable of tracking multiple social stats in real-time, from tweets and Likes to customer sentiment, companies will be able to radically improve customer service and predict future buying patterns, not to mention streamline internal communication and increase productivity. This kind of social data is [already being harnessed](#) by Nestle to boost customer sentiment, GE to speed up repairs to the electrical grid, and Wall Street to forecast stock prices.

**Social media education gets formalized:** A [recent Harvard Business review survey](#) showed that only 12 percent of companies using social media feel they use it effectively. Given the expanded business applications of social media, maximizing impact increasingly requires specialized training. Just knowing how to send a Tweet or friend someone on Facebook is not enough. In 2013, expect to see [more social media coursework at universities](#), as well as dedicated social media MBA programs, as schools rise to the challenge (Syracuse, NYU, Columbia, Harvard Business School, and dozens of other higher ed institutions are already leading the pack here).

At the same time, companies will begin to double down on [social media education for their existing employees](#) as the entire workforce gains an added level of social sophistication,

similar to the Internet 1.0 skillset that was on-boarded a decade ago. Social media skills will join email as part of basic business literacy in the digital age. Perhaps most critical of all will be [social media compliance training](#) to ensure that workers in sensitive industries from finance to healthcare uphold regulatory standards while taking advantage of social media's benefits. This year has been widely regarded as the year social media made the jump from dorm room to boardroom. In 2013, expect to see companies who have taken the plunge begin to reap expanded returns from their social investments, with help from improved social technologies, innovative ad models, and an expanded user base around the globe.

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