

An Interview With Angela Courtin, SVP Marketing Entertainment & Content For MySpace

Hello, my name is Lon Safko, co-author of *The Social Media Bible*, published by John Wiley & Sons, the most comprehensive book ever written on the subject of Social Media. Today we are here with Angela Courtin, the Senior Vice-President of Marketing, Entertainment, and Content for (get ready for this!) *MySpace*. We are going to be talking about MySpace, of course, and Social Networks, which in my opinion is pretty synonymous, and all things Social Media.

So, Angela, wow, it is great to have you here today!



AC: It's great to be here, Lon, thank you.

LS: Well, thank you. Let's get started.

Can we start out and can we tell our listeners a little bit about who you are, what you do at *MySpace*, what your background is?

AC: Absolutely, so I am, like you said, a Senior Vice-President of Marketing and Entertainment and Content. This means that at *MySpace* I get the privilege of managing the team that pulls together all of our partnerships, whether we are creating content, whether we're licensing content, or whether we are partnering to bring content onto our site. We also do the marketing on all of our product roll-off, as well as any sort of content partnerships, celebrities, athletes, T.V. shows, music, etc.

Then the team also encompasses the entertainment side; so all of our different entertainment channels. So unlike many social networking sites, *MySpace* is actually what we consider a Premier Social Portal. We take the best of Social Networking and we combine that with a gateway to content and create a really robust Social Portal experience for our user.



LS: And is that all on your business card? (Laughter)

AC: No, on my business card it says, "Everything begins with an idea."

LS: Oh, I like that. That summarizes it! (Laughter)

AC: That's right!

LS: That is such an incredible mouthful, and of course *The Social Media Bible* is all about Social Media. In my opinion, My Space is the epitome of what Social Media is and Social Networking is. Can you, for the listeners (if for some strange reason they don't have a *MySpace* account or they have never heard about you) tell us a little bit about what *MySpace* actually is?

AC: Yes. You know, I think the beautiful thing about *MySpace* is that it's different things to different people. You know, we consider ourselves a Premier Lifestyle Portal that connects friends discovering popular culture, and making a positive impact on the world. We really look at it through a different lens. It really is about the experience. It's your personal experience on the space.

You know, we also have a global community, so we are connecting people both domestically as well as internationally. We are in over 30 territories now, and again I go back to the idea that it is about the fabric of what Social Media is; the profile of blogging, instant messaging, emailing. And then you also get to stream music and watch videos. You get to upload your own photos. At *MySpace* you can go into classified listings. We've just created a new business for small businesses in order to advertise their own wares.

You can check out events in your neighborhood, or in the state, or in the country. You can also join groups. You can blog on forums and communities. You can [03:02.6] celebrities as well as bands, as well as T.V. shows, as well as just your high-school friends, you college friends, you "mommy" friends, in your network.

So it really is what you want it to be and what you make it.

LS: And that really is the thing that I always found amazing about *MySpace*, (ever since, believe it or not, my daughter got me involved in MySpace before I knew what Social Media was) is that you were one of the very first people ever to create a "drag-and-drop/build your own website" kind of interface, right?

AC: I mean, the wonderful thing about the profile experience is, (again, I think you just hit on it) you get to create whatever you want your profile to be, so you can throw a skin on it; think of it as your "virtual scrapbook."

If you want to color it up with a different skin of someone you like, or if you want to create your own; if you want to paint it, if you want to do a photo-slide viewer....you know there is just about anything that you can do in terms of personalizing your profile.

LS: See, and that's totally amazing! And by the way, are you participating in *OpenID*?

AC: Yes, we are participating in *OpenID*.

LS: See, and that's really cool, too. I love that.

What's your typical demographic? I present around the country and I had the opportunity to present to 800 Honeywell small and medium-sized companies last week, and I use *MySpace* as a large section of my presentation. I always love to start out with asking the audience who they think the typical demographic is, and then actually tell them what the typical demographic is; and they're shocked. Can you address that little bit?

AC: I would love to.

There's really no typical demographic on our site. Our user base is expanding every month, and I think it's a misconception (as you say) that this is a young person's site. We're more than 85% over the age of 18, in terms of our user base.

And there is 70 million users in the United States alone that have a profile. And if you think....one of my most favorite demographic nuggets to share with people is that 40% of all moms that are online are on *MySpace*.

LS: Really!

AC: That's a huge number and they are not going there to spy on their kids, they are actually going there to engage in the tools that make social networking so powerful, as well as the discovery of content.

LS: See, isn't that....that's absolutely amazing! And you're right; they're not there to spy. I've got friends....I'm 53 and some of the people that I grew up with are grandparents, as am I, and they all have *MySpace* pages.

AC: Again, I think it really crosses the demographic spectrum.

LS: And that's what I love about it! It might have started out as a teenage thing, but when you see the robust functionality and the ease of use of *MySpace*, it really is meant for everybody.

AC: It is and I go back to this; you can personalize it the way you want. If you want to have a very robust page, you can. If you want to keep it simple, you can do that as well. If you want to build a playlist of your favorite music that you like to listen to, or you just want to have a single track, there's that capability to expand and contract. It's really up to the user.

LS: And it's easy to design and use!

AC: And it's very easy to design and use.

LS: I love that. That is so cool.

So the demographic, pretty much is everybody; so I know this next question is going to be probably impossible to answer, but maybe you can give me some examples. What do people typically use a *MySpace* page for? What is the purpose?

AC: First and foremost, I think it's all about connecting and communicating. So it is this regardless of whether you are communicating with your friends or community, or with your favorite band or your favorite celebrity; but it also takes the next step. So it's how we communicate through emailing and instant messaging; connecting with people of similar interests, uploading photographs, commenting on photographs, sharing your photographs. We make it very easy to stay in communication and connection with either your family or your community of friends. And so this goes back to the analogy of scrapbooking. but you can...it is a way to have a one-to-many conversation if you want to keep it that way....like if you want to upload your baby's photos and send those to your friends and family, you can do that with the touch of a button.

So you can blog and you can share on a daily basis what are your musings on everything from politics to music, to your favorite cupcake joint in the neighborhood; or just who you connected with. It may be an old high-school friend and you want to share that with your other high school friends.

And then, of course, we're now creating a portable experience. And now you can take that on-line experience in *MySpace* and take it directly to your mobile phone. So you can connect whenever you want to, wherever you are, as long as you have your mobile phone.

LS: See, I love that, too! I just did write the chapter, about 8,000 words, on mobile phone technology; and I did highlight you because I thought it was absolutely amazing that you can bring this incredibly robust set of tools (and as you said) and that the tools, when put together, create an experience. And now you can put this on the fourth screen or this little mobile screen and actually share that experience no matter where you go.

AC: Exactly, and you can update your status and how you are feeling. So if you are changing that anywhere from where you are you can then actually update that; which gives a “call out” to your friends and then they can comment on, “Why are you blue?” Or, “Why are you happy?” Or, “Great that you just got engaged.” Or, “Congratulations on the baby!”

It’s that instantaneous communication that we’re making so much easier and portable.

LS: And the reason that I associate Social Media and *MySpace* is because if you look at the definition of Social Media, it’s about socializing (which is a basic human need that we have been doing for tens of thousands of years), and media really is the high-tech stuff that’s available on the internet today. When you put them together, that list of all of that media, everything that you do is about providing socialization and communication with others.

AC: Exactly, and we’re allowing the user to create and expand a social class that used to be contained (I think the number used to be 150) in what we could manage in terms of our communication and our social graph. And now that is expanding to...I think the number is 250.

You know, we are really enabling people to make connections, whereas before there might be a level of work that needed to go into it, and therefore you would (kind of) limit yourself in terms of how much you needed to do to maintain your connections and communication.

Now you can expand that, because it’s a lot easier to communicate and stay connected through that social graph through social media tools.

LS: And that’s absolutely true, too. When I read the statistics several years ago about 150 people, I thought, “Wow, 150 people really seems like a lot,” but then when I sent out my most recent email (I have them in different categories) and for the first time in my career I actually have sent this email to 1,000 people that I know on a first-name basis and if I picked up the phone they would know who I was.

I thought to myself, “This is such an unusual circumstance where you can expand it from 150 (which I thought was large) all the way to 1,000 and still have that personal contact by using a tool like *MySpace*.”

AC: Right, and which is incredible for someone like you. It’s incredible for someone who is just an average user who is just connecting with their friends; but even extrapolating beyond that... for a brand (whether you’re signed or independent) the ability to be able to push out communication to 1,000, 14,000, 140,000, 1.4 million now became very acceptable.

LS: And expansive.....sooner or later we have to get around to it. What does it cost to actually utilize all this stuff that we have been talking about?

AC: Absolutely free.....

LS: Is that unbelievable, or what?

AC: It's, "Welcome to America!" (Laughter)

LS: That's absolutely true. And again, that's one of the great things about Social Media, but in particular again about *MySpace* (As you can probably tell, I'm an enthusiastic fan of you) is you have such an incredibly robust set of tools that are easy to use, they're very affective for business as well as personal, and really it's 100% free. You can't ask for anything better than that.

AC: Right. And we have taken it a step further and enabled small businesses to create their own ad campaign. So where you have this set of very.....you have a large, robust set of tools that are free, if you want to take it a step further and begin to...we call it, "My Ads" or "Self-Serve Ads Platform" for small individual businesses; if you want to create a campaign to hyper-target users who care about your product, we've now made that entry much easier. You can start at \$25 all the way up to \$10,000.

So you can create your own ads, you can decide where you want to send it and then you can actually track or measure its success rate. And then you can tweak all along the way. So we've taken this proprietary hyper-targeting technology that we use for Fortune 500 clients and enable any user who wants to spend \$25 to enter this "My Ads" to be able to do the same thing.

So whether you are a bar, whether you are a fan, or whether you are a brand, you have the ability to create your own ad campaign.

LS: Isn't that amazing. I mean, look at the numbers that we are talking about; \$25 to participate in the same type of tool base that a Fortune 500 company would participate in. That's one week at Starbucks!

AC: Exactly!

LS: (Laughter) I mean, that's amazing. Even the smallest entrepreneur all the way up to the Fortune 500 could take advantage of something like this.

AC: Absolutely, and we've proven time and time again that *MySpace* is a great place to advertise in. As a matter of fact, yesterday a study came out that said that *MySpace* is the #1 place for feature films, in terms of users over the age of 15 to identify where they get their information on the movies first; and it's *MySpace*

LS: Really!

AC: Yes, and we have actually shown that we can move the needle in terms of opening weekends.

LS: (Laughter) my gosh! You're turning into an icon. I mean, this is amazing. I would be so proud to part of this; this is great.

We kind of referred through this conversation to business. Can you give me any ideas; any kind of practical applications of what some business are actually using *MySpace* for?

AC: I'd actually love to do two different versions. One is when we talk about one of our larger brands and a really great partner that we have in Disney. They recently launched *High School Musical 3*. It was a fantastic success story. We ran an off-line competition for high school's to show their school spirit, similar to the.....you know, *High School Musical* is all about Wildcat pride, and so Disney and *MySpace* partnered together to create a very robust prize package that included a senior trip to either Disneyland or Disneyworld, and a pep rally with members of the cast and a performance by Natasha Beddingfield.

LS: Oh my gosh!

AC: What was great about it is that Disney really understood and that what we did was we took the elements of Social Networking (the things that are germane to what a user does every day), blogging, commenting, uploading, scanning, texting, etc., and we used all of those tools to create different types of tasks that you could do to accumulate points. You accumulated points as a high school; not as an individual user but as a high school. So you really had to get your entire high school involved in this competition.

LS: Team spirit!

AC: Imagine the scale that you can start to build when you are talking about high schools.

LS: Oh, wow.

AC: Over 4,000 schools entered across the country and we are going to be awarding our prize, I think, within the next week or so.

LS: Wow.

AC: You know, of course, *High School Musical 3* opened at \$40 million at the box office last weekend....so....

LS: Wow. And you influenced that!

AC: Well, and it goes back to the pinball affect. So what happens on line you can then affect the behavior off line, and then drive it back online to then monitor that behavior. So it really is courting the online/offline; offline/online.

LS: And that's another really good point. Where conventional marketing in the old days (all the way back to five years ago) where companies would just throw huge amounts of money at national campaigns...television, magazines, newspapers, radio ads...and basically kept their fingers crossed. And everybody sat around the phone, like a campfire, waiting for the phone to ring.

But now with campaigns like "My Ad" you can actually track on a moment-by-moment basis. You can shift the direction of how that campaign is moving. You can optimize it. Is this true?

AC: Yes it is, and as a matter of fact there is another great example that we can use around a smaller level, which is a company called *Bacon Salt*.

LS: Uhh!

AC: It's salt that tastes like bacon. (Laughter)

LS: Okay. (Laughter)

AC: And they ran a campaign just recently and they're using *MySpace MyAds*. They increased their traffic to their site by 200% and they just reported back to us that the product is selling off the shelves. So again, just a couple of guys who decided to create a product and have used *My Space* to leverage. They are reaching the scale and have seen a tremendous amount of success in a short period of time.

LS: Now isn't that amazing! I'll throw this out to the listeners.

Of all the listeners out there that either participate or own or are responsible for a company, how would you like to increase your revenues by 200%; especially in the current economy that we're in?

I mean, that's amazing!

AC: Go to www.myspace.com/baconsalt and you can see exactly what they've been doing.

LS: (Laughter) That's great! I love it. Bacon salt! It's not the first Fortune 500 Company that would come to mind. I mean, it's kind of obscure but a 200% increase just really proves what you are going is really affective.

AC: Yes, again, for small businesses this is exactly the type of results we like hearing about.

LS: That is so cool. There is another thing, that when I introduce *MySpace* in my conferences I ask the audience where Senator John McCain announced his candidacy for President. And of course, hands go up throughout the entire audience and the answer is consistently always the same, "The Jay Leno Show." And then I have to correct everybody, but I get a kick out of it.

Where did he actually announce it?

AC: Well, we believe he actually did announce the information on Letterman, but we know and we believe we were the first online outlet of Social Networking that he used to announce his candidacy.

LS: Now isn't that cool! A presidential candidate of the United States, especially one that was over 50 (by the way) actually used the *MySpace* tool to announce his running for the most impressive office, the most impressive job on the planet.

AC: Yes and what is even more impressive is that both candidates have *MySpace* pages, as well as their VP candidates. Their "friend" counts are huge and they are sending out blogs and bulletins on a daily basis to users who are potential voters. And that shapes their campaign and *MySpace* also, in terms of how we were involved in politics this year.

We partnered with the Presidential Debate Commission and we were their online partner, actually doing the online/offline experience again, between the debates and then going online to see more about the debates; to actually look at certain issues.

We partnered with MSNBC, Declare Yourself, and MTV; and then we also did voter registration, and now we have a polling locator device on Impact. So any user can go online, put in their zip code, and find where their local polling station is. So we understand the impact that 75 million people can have and we want to do everything that we can to really drive that number in terms of that number, in terms of engagement.

LS: And that's really cool, too. You are providing this kind of a service to both Presidential candidates. First of all, you are providing the service. Secondly, that it's affective and thirdly, and equally astonishing, that they (even though their demographic doesn't sound like it lends itself to this) are even embracing it; and you are affectively, really changing the very first Presidential campaign ever in this country...significantly.

AC: Yes, it has been a pretty remarkable place to be. And it speaks to the power of Social Networking. It speaks to the power of MySpace.

LS: Absolutely! Let's hear it for Social Media!

Is there any kind of statistics that you can share with our audience? I mean, I just heard the number 75 million. Can you give me some numbers to put this in perspective?

AC: Absolutely! So, we have over 70 million U.S. and over 120 million worldwide-users. We have 30 countries, including France, U.K., Germany, Japan, and Australia. Our users spend about four hours on the site each month.

LS: Wow.

AC: We saw over 51 million video streams in *MySpace* from our player alone, and this was just in August.

LS: Wow.

AC: Over 80,000 videos are uploaded to *MySpace Video* every 24 hours.

LS: Oh my gosh.

AC: To go back to my "Mom's" statistic; almost 40% of all moms who are online are on *MySpace*. And they actually index higher in terms of their time on site.

LS: Isn't that amazing. Well, they want to socialize. They have second or third level families, grandkids, photographs, ideas to share. A lot of the older audience has, frankly, a little bit more time on their hands and they are the ones who are working around the clock. That seems to make a lot of sense.

I don't know even what to say at this point with those numbers. They are just absolutely amazing. If somebody asked you how to get started using *MySpace*, what do they do? What's the process?

AC: Incredibly simple. Anyone 14 and over can go to *MySpace* and simply hit “Sign Up and it takes about 5 minutes to get your profile ready to go, and then you can share it with whomever you want. You can keep it private; we allow you to determine what filter you want to put on it. It’s a totally flexible platform and empowers the user to connect with others as much as they want. And I go back to, “It’s free!”

LS: You’ve got to love that! When you can end every single one of these sentences with, “It’s free” you know you’ve got something. And basically you generate revenue...of all the interviews that I do it keeps coming back to “freemium.” It is that there is an incredible set of tools that you can have for free, but if you want to customize and you want your own URL, then there is small, incremental associated costs. Is that how you make money, or is it the advertising model? How do you keep the doors open?

AC: We keep the doors open by an advertising model only. So everything that a user wants to do is free. When you sign up for *MySpace* you actually get your own URL. So it’s www.myspace.com/...and; you actually get to choose what you want your “forward slash” to be. It doesn’t have to be your name, it can be something that you care about, or your favorite stuffed animal, whatever that might be; you get to name it and it’s completely free.

LS: It’s completely free; you’ve got to love that, again.

And I heard something else that you had mentioned. I was doing my research on *MySpace* and you take security, especially child security, really seriously. You have to be 14-years-old to actually get your own profile and you have ways of reporting if anybody thinks that there’s been any kind of suspicious behavior. Can you tell me about how you take that so seriously?

AC: I will say that we take it very seriously. I would say all, in terms of Social Media in and of itself; security is a very important priority. And we continue to make it a safe place. This is why I think going back to just regular demographics; it is not just 14-year-olds online. Eighty-five percent of all our users are over the age of 18.

LS: And that’s excellent because a lot of parents...unfortunately a lot of parents are older and not as technically savvy as their kids, and they have a lot of misconceptions. This is because we hear a lot of crazy stories about every piece of Social Media out there. Originally it was just the internet, but now it’s getting a little bit more specific.

They really do not understand how much work and consideration goes into protecting kids and making sure that that is a safe environment.

AC: Absolutely!

LS: That’s important. Now one of the other things I also heard, too, is...and I always forget to look at this perspective...is that you’re talking worldwide! You said 120 million people in over 30 different countries; when I talk to most Social Media people I seem to get that there is this tendency that we are all U.S.-Centric. We forget to look outside of our own country. But you are making a tremendous impact globally.

AC: Yes, again the numbers speak for themselves. We understand that what we try to do is create a local connection within each territory. So we are not just replicating the site, we are actually making very local and very relevant to our users, wherever they might be.

LS: That's amazing. How do you actually do the translations for all those different countries?

AC: I'll tell you, Lon, if you go to MySpace.com, at the very bottom you'll see a list of all the different countries, and you can click on and explore and see how it is actually done.

LS: Isn't that amazing. Wow.

AC: (Laughter).

LS: (Laughter) I mean, I'm an interviewer, but you've got me speechless here! This is great!

AC: Thank you, we appreciate that, Lon.

LS: Can you...okay so we obviously have everybody convinced that this is a great place, so again, how do they get started, what's the URL and how do you set up a profile, and what's involved in a profile? Is it fairly simple?

AC: Yep, it's myspace.com. Just hit "Sign Up" and five minutes later you'll have your own classic profile and you are ready to go.

LS: That's as easy as it possibly can be. Is there anything else that you would like to share with the listeners, anything coming down the pike or any ideas or thoughts? How would you like to summarize what MySpace is?

AC: Yes, again it's exactly what you want it to be. So whether you're there to discover music or whether you want to discover video, fashion, action, sports, comedy, comic book, film, movies...to name a few...you can really discover content as well as share your own content. I mean, I think the gorgeous thing about Social Media is the consulant of user-generated content and professional, or partnered content coming together in that discovery, share/communicate/connect with all of your friends.

And it just continues to scale up and up and up.

LS: Well, this has been a heck of a lot of fun. I really appreciate this. I would really like to thank Angela Courtin, the Senior Vice-President of Marketing and Entertainment and Content for *MySpace*, for being with us here today and for sharing all those incredible insights on *MySpace* and Social Media.

Angela, truly, thank you so much for being here.

AC: Lon, thank you and thanks for being such an advocate. We love it.

LS: (Laughter) yeah, well I love you guys, I really do.

This has been Lon Safko, the co-author of *The Social Media Bible*. Be sure to check out our other valuable Social Media tactics, tools, and strategies that can be found in *The Social Media Bible* book and its companion website, www.thesocialmediabible.com.

For more information about me, Lon Safko, please by all means, visit my *MySpace* page as well as my own webpage at www.lonsafko.com.

And again, Angela, thank you so very much!

AC: Thank you, Lon, you have a great day!