

An Interview With Francine Hardaway, Founder Of Stealthmode Partners

Hello, my name is Lon Sakfo, 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 Francine Hardaway, Founder and CEO of *Stealthmode Partners* and we are going to be talking today about microblogging and other Social Media thoughts. So Francine, it is really great to have you here today.



FH: Thanks, it's great to be here.

LS: This is great. Let's get started. Can you tell our listeners a little bit about your background and how far we go back and the conferences and fast-track on some of things that you are currently doing.

FH: Well, I actually am an accelerator for early-stage technology companies and I work on something called *the Arizona Entrepreneurship Conferences*, where I raise money for disadvantaged kids who need entrepreneurship skills by providing a conference that gives value to every entrepreneurial company in Arizona, and for which they will pay into the charitable foundation that funds the programs. And I also provide entrepreneurship training courses and grants from the city of Tempe and Gilbert to aspiring entrepreneurs.

Lon and I go back to the 80's when I had the largest PR firm in Phoenix and he was my client, and he had just designed the first interface for the disabled to the personal computer, or rather for the Mac, or the Apple before the Mac, right Lon?



LS: Yes, the first one, actually. So yeah.

FH: So a long time! How are you buddy?

LS: The cool thing is that you and I have been riding the crest of this technology wave for our whole careers, and I think you were being a little modest, too, because you also are a liaison between the Valley of the Sun and the Valley of Silicon to help entrepreneurs share resources, as well.

FH: Yes, I really believe in eco-systems and so I am trying to develop an eco-system for Arizona entrepreneurship in Silicon Valley and an eco-system for Silicon Valley Entrepreneurs and financing sources in Arizona. And there are no real financing, or very few real financings sources in Arizona.

LS: And that leads over to your *Entrepreneurship Conference* that we do each year.

FH: Right and I have already talked about them a little bit. People probably don't care much about them unless they live in Arizona or are somehow interested in knowing what is happening in Arizona, but they are conferences in which local Arizonian successes blend together with Silicon Valley leaders and successes and we network and we have lots of fun and we share resources and we learn.

And as I said, the money goes to a Foundation that trains at risk people to have entrepreneurship skills, which by the way, I equate with survival skills.

LS: Good point!

FH: I do not think that every average kid is going to develop a technology that will change the world, but they certainly do need to be able to think on their feet and be responsible for their own economic self-sufficiency.

LS: Gee, that's terrific. And the reason I wanted you to talk more broadly about what you do is because we do go back quite a ways, and a couple of years ago I heard about this crazy term (I wasn't quite sure what it was) and, of course, anytime I do not understand something in technology I immediately go to you. And you explained what Social Media was to me for the first time. And right while we were sitting at the coffee shop you took your laptop, you set up a blog account for me, we created a password, username, and grabbed my photo and put it in. And then you said, "Go home and blog."

And that is how it all got started, thanks to you.

FH: Well that's awesome, but to be truthful I have done that for lots of other people over the years, too. I discovered Social Media a long time ago, and interestingly enough, I discovered it when my husband died; because I was alone at night in a 3,500 sq. ft. house and the only thing there with me was an internet connection. I was one of the early adopters of high-speed internet services and so I actually had broadband. So it was actually pleasant for me to be on the internet 10 years ago, which it wasn't for most people.

But I went to a site called WidowNet. And it is basically a chat room for other people that were widowed. And I basically got on, chatted, and traded messages with people in my same position all night long for a year, until I started to be able to sleep at night. And I was tremendously supported by WidowNet, which by the way, still exists. That has really taught me the power of Social Media. I think Social Media has the power to transform the world at its best.

On its least, it has the power to make friends and help people through difficult situations and spread knowledge.

LS: And that's also something exciting. We keep hearing on and on through the different interviews that we have been doing, is that Social Media seems like it's a brand new friend, but if you look at the word "social" it really gets back to human socializing with other humans, all the way back to the cave people times when we did cave drawings. But it is just the technology, the media part of Social Media.

FH: It is better tools, and free tools in most cases, and broader tools. I mean, we always has community, but we didn't necessarily...we weren't necessarily able to have communities in China and India, you know with people a time's day away, which we now do. And pretty close to real time, you know. We are trying to get as close to real time in conversations as we possibly can.

And every Social Media tool takes us closer to that.

LS: And it's global and it is in real time.

FH: Right.

LS: And the technology that I asked you to inform us about today I think meets that definition, probably better than any of the Social Media tools and that is micro-blogging. Can you tell us a little bit about how you interpret the term “micro-blogging?”

FH: Sure. You know what blogs are. Blogs started as weblogs. They were personal diaries of people who were on the web, in which they put up their thoughts and shared them with their friends. Well, that of course has completely mushroomed into something much bigger. And so now there are, oh my goodness, there are like 100’s of millions of bloggers, although not all those blogs are populated all the time, but there are a great many blogs and regular bloggers. And most of main-stream journalism has gone to blogging.

For instance, when I had my hip replaced I thought, “Well, you know, there is nothing our here on the internet about having hip replacements. Someone else may want to know this.” So I blogged the entire court, from when I checked into the hospital to a year after. So that people having hip replacements in the future would have that little piece of knowledge. Also, I was afraid I was going to die in the hospital from some staph infection, or some malpractice, so I wanted to make sure there was an [08:22.3], (that’s the funny part).

So that’s blogging. Okay, microblogging is talking to people in 140 characters. And the great thing about microblogging compared to blogging is that the platform (and it is called a platform rather than somebody having to go to my blog or my blog being delivered to someone else’s RSS feeder) we are all in the same place at the same time. And it’s really a constant mini-to-mini conversation.

LS: Okay, so micro-blogging is like a web blog but it is significantly smaller and it is real time. We are talking about 140 characters, is that correct?

FH: Very close to real time.

LS: Geez, okay, so we going to use....

FH: So it’s kind of like...the nearest thing I can compare it to is if there were such a thing as “mini-to-mini” IM.

LS: Ahh....that’s a good comparison. But you’re limited to how...

FH: The difference is that you can review all of the micro-blog platforms in many different ways. By you computer, through SMS, on a phone, you know it follows you more than a blog does.

LS: Well let’s talk about that restriction of 140 characters. As anybody who has read anything I’ve written, you can tell that I am very verbose, and if I had to restrict myself to 140 characters....what comes out of that? Is that good or bad?

FH: What comes out of it is important pieces of information linked to websites with more information. So for instance, recycle your plastics here. [HTTP:www.earth911.com](http://www.earth911.com). You know you can begin to tell people things that they can finish on a website. You can direct people to things through micro-blogging. It all started, though; because they wanted to do things like tell their friends where they were. So, you know, “I am in Central Phoenix and I want to have dinner.” And I can Tweet anyone around 24th Street and Camelback..." and I will be in Huston’s tonight". And then people can join you if they want to.

And that's really fun. Twitter really took off at the *South by Southwest Festival*, which is a big interactive music and film conference in Austin, Texas. And it took off at South-By because people were looking for each other. And so they would get on Twitter and they would Tweet, "I'm at the downtown Hilton" or "I'm in the microblogging exhibition", something like that, and then their friends could find them. Or, "I'll be at the XYZ Bar at 5:30, meet me for a drink."

LS: So it is about building, again, these trusted networks, these little communities where people can follow each other through the course of a day.

FH: They are called micro-communities and there are all kinds of them that come from Twitter. There are political micro-communities; there are technology micro-communities. There are some people that talk on Twitter only about things like HTML feeds and JavaScript. And there are other people who talk about cancer therapies and chemo side-effects, and each one of these is its own little micro-community and you find them by getting on Twitter and following someone and finding out who that person follows. So it is basically like you go through a maze of your own followers or people that you follow, leading you to other people. And you can make so many new connections that way.

A great example for me is I bought a house in Half Moon Bay and I have lived in Arizona for most of my career. And I thought to myself, "I've got to develop a network in Half Moon Bay, I only know two people...my daughters...and they'll get really tired of me real fast. So I just have been very active on Facebook, Twitter, and all the Social Media platforms and I have developed an entire second network, up there in the Bay area."

LS: And that's so exciting. Let's talk about Twitter just for a second. That seems to be the most common micro-blogging platform, and everybody comes up and asks you if you Tweet. What does that all mean?

FH: To Tweet, as opposed to micro-blogging platform in 140 characters.

LS: Okay. And Twitter is one of the most popular platforms out there.

FH: Twitter was one of the first micro-blogging platforms in the space, although very quick on Twitter was Jaiku, which was a European platform: Google now owns it. And Pownce, which was started by [13:56.3]. So Twitter was not alone for very long. And now there are just tons of them. And really, micro-blogging is interesting; you go where your friends are, or you go if you want to be heard, you go to where the most people are.

LS: Well, anything good has competition. And let's talk about that for just a second. I hear people say, "How many people are following you? How many people are you following? I have 6,000. I have 60."

What's all this "following" and "followers"?

FH: Well, Twitter is a river of news, and there has got to be some way to limit what comes across so that you can actually...there is something called a "Public Time-Line" and that is the post of everyone. It is like a fire hose, and it is the post of everyone who is on Twitter. Most people do not really want to know that someone in the Philippines is going out to lunch, because in America it is likely to be 2 a.m. So what you want to do is find your own friends and follow them and have them follow you; and that limits the drops of water (so to

Speak) that come through the fire hose; unless you are someone like me, a person who doesn't mind reading a whole bunch of stuff and wants to make new friends.

I follow something like 1,800 people and something like 2,400 people follow me.

LS: Oh my gosh!

FH: And the reason the 2,400 people follow me is because I just have been on there so long, and I post rather frequently. And some of the things I say are funny. (Laughter)

LS: Yes.

FH: And some of them are informative, so you know it is useful...I do not post things like where I am going to lunch. I post useful information; like, "I read this on this website about the election," or about some kind of piece of news, or medical information. I often post useful medical information; things I think people really might want to know about.

And sometimes I post things that are funny.

LS: (Laughter) Yeah!

FH: Last night I Tweeted "Bed. Sounds. Good. Crash."

LS: (Laughter)

FH: And I really thought that was extraordinarily funny!

LS: That's great! (Laughter) That's great! And I love when you go to conferences, too, because you are sitting and you are Tweeting all the time, and we are getting play-by-play updated information of the latest stuff.

FH: I give highlights of what the speaker is saying, so if you happen not to be there, you can join the conversation; and truthfully, in a lot of conferences now the speakers take feedback from Twitter while they are presenting. And they tune their presentation as they go. Sometime there is a big screen in the front of the room and it has the Twitter feed on it for the conference.

And if you post to the Twitter feed to the conference, it comes up on the big screen, and the presenter can answer your question, or give you the information.

LS: Isn't that amazing! Again, almost real time, right during the presentation your customers, your clients or prospects are asking you to give them what they want.

FH: Well, and that's not the coolest thing. The coolest thing is Twitter used for business, because there is a guy on Twitter whose name is Frank Eliason and he Tweets under the name "comcastcares". And every time there is a Comcast outage, you know, someone who is on Twitter...you can Tweet Frank Eliason and you

actually Tweet @comcastcares, and he picks those up and he Tweets back and he tries to help you. And he acts as a liaison between you and the Comcast technicians.

And it is unbelievable how many friends he has made and how much good he has done, and how he has improved the customer service profile of Comcast through doing that. And then the other person who does that really well is Liaming Chopra from Dell. Remember when the batteries were exploding in all the Dell Laptops? Somebody tweeted that all the Dell people who were on Twitter have these names like, Richard@Dell and Lionel@Dell. You can always find them and they really try to be found. So somebody asked, "What's with these exploding batteries?" and Lionel@Dell Tweeted back, "I don't know but we are looking into it." And everyone was just stunned, absolutely stunned because there were so surprised that anyone from Dell would answer them back.

And then Lionel kept putting on a constant stream of information.

LS: Really, he kept them up-to-date.

FH: Yeah, exactly, until the problem was solved.

LS: Isn't that amazing for a large corporation?

FH: Yes. And so corporation and brands: Southwest Airline's Tweet; [19:22.1] Tweet. A lot of brands Tweet now, you know, as a customer service tool. And it works very well.

LS: I love that!

FH: Because it's so "real-time".

LS: Did you hear about that recent article of someone who got arrested in a Third World country and grabbed his cellphone and Tweeted.....

FH: Totally, exactly! That's another use for it. It's a great emergency tool.

LS: Can you tell our listeners what that story was?

FH: Well, I can tell them that....I do not really know the details of that one, but I do know that when the earthquake happened in China, Twitter knew about it first; and Twitter was able to tell it to CNN. A lot of times, Twitter gets the breaking news first, and it is able to spread it to the news sources and the first responders.

LS: That's amazing. Now, we talked about all of the really cool things here, but I know that there is some kind of a drawback with Twitter and all of the other Social Media information that's being shot at you. Can you tell me just a little bit about the kind of drawbacks and how you manage it and what to watch out for?

FH: Well, what you have to watch out for is getting overwhelmed by information, and that's really a personal issue, you know. There are very few spammers on the Social Networks, (the micro-blogging Social Networks) because they're very easy to spot and they get self-policed. If some guy, you know, is following 3,000 people

and does not have any followers. (Laughter) And he is just sending out messages all the time that say, “Buy my product, buy my products”, the system is going to find him out very quickly and deal with him.

LS: And that’s one of the things that I love about Social Media.

FH: Spam is not an issue like it is with email.

LS: I love that with Social Media; it is self-policing, really, across the entire board.

FH: Right. Right. Social Media is much more self-policing than many....and you know what, Lon? That may not always be true, it may just be because it’s newer and the community is still relatively smaller. And the spammers, or let’s call them...let’s be nice and call them “The Marketers”, figured out a way that the mass-marketers still have not figured out the right way to use it.

LS: Yeah.

FH: So right now it’s pretty pure; and if you are overwhelmed by information, it is because you chose to follow a lot of people. It can be....well let’s see, what’s the opposite of “overwhelmed”....you can be “underwhelmed” pretty quick by only following five people, then if each one of those five people post three times a day, then you are only getting 15 Tweets a day. Whereas I get, you know, 6-7,000.

LS: That is absolutely amazing!

FH: But I don’t see them all! I don’t see them all. You know, they come on to my desktop and if I happen to be....if I have a Twitter client and I happen to be looking at it, I see them; and if I don’t, I see only the ones that are actually addressed to me. They are called the “Our-Replies”

LS: That’s a good thing to have!

FH: And I read those once a day just to make sure that I have answered people.

LS: Yeah. Again, like a real time email, but more efficient.

FH: Yeah, and it’s really many fewer “our replies” because many things do not need to be answered.

LS: It is just FYI.

FH: Yes, it is just FYI and it is part of the river of news, so to speak. Like CNN,...you know I follow CNN Breaking News and I follow Rick Sanchez CNN, and I follow a lot of people like that; but I don’t necessarily read everything they say.

LS: Yeah, it’s kind of like a cell phone text message, but on a larger scale.

FH: Exactly!

LS: Of all of the companies that you have mentioned before, such as Twitter and Pownce and all of the different competitors, a lot of people might think that we might be heading for another Social Media.bomb.

FH: Oh we definitely are! There are too many micro-blogs and platforms out there and some of them will get to a point where they cannot pay the bills; and so there will be a consolidation. I could never predict which ones. Jaiku, for instance, is now owned by Google. So it's probably not going anywhere. And Pownce is probably not going anywhere either, because it has defined a little niche. If Pownce was to do something that Twitter does not (which is sending what is called, in technical jargon, a payload; meaning you can attach a file. If you want to send somebody a file and about 140 characters, Pownce is the way to do it. You can send pictures, you can share music. There is a lot of stuff you can do on Pownce that is not as easy to do on Twitter.

LS: That is an excellent niche. It gives you a lot of extra capability.

FH: Right, and Google has Jaiku which is a big....and then Google just announced another one, launched another one called "Regle" which I do not understand why, but I'll just wait and see. Twitter is the one with the first-mover advantage and the most people on it.

I heard there were something like 2.6 million people on Twitter.

LS: Wow.

FH: And it is getting bigger every day. I could be really wrong, even by the time you publish this.

LS: Yeah, and good point. That is a question that keeps coming up. I we going to be able to get the book out fast enough so that the information is current. (Laughter)

FH: Yeah! Well, the information will not be current; a lot of these people will be acquired. But see, I think that Twitter, for the enterprise and for anybody, is a very, very valuable tool. Micro-blogging is a very valuable tool. So somebody is going to buy this smaller platform. There is also, by the way, one called Yammer, which is specifically for the enterprise, and just launched. And then there is another one I saw yesterday; "T-L-E-N.ty" and that is another Social micro-blogging platform that launch and it is just supposed to be for the enterprise. So, "just for the enterprise" means you can only get on it if you are in the company. It is supposed to be much more secure.

LS: So they are finding their vertical niches.

FH: They are finding their niches, that's right! I believe that Social Media platforms and micro-blogging platforms especially, are going to all end up being inter-operable and being like email. You know, like you are on Yahoo email and I am on Gmail and somebody else is on AOL, but we can all email each other. Pretty soon we will all be able to microblog each other. So you can be in your little community (which could be the people on Plurk or the people on Twitter or the people on Jaiki) and still "speak" to, when you want to, the other people in the other communities.

And there's a lot of conversation going on around opensource and the ability to do that.

LS: Yes, I did have the honor of interviewing Kevin Marks from Google OpenSocial....

FH: Wow!

LS: ...and absolutely fascinating that all of these so-called or perceived “competition/competitors” are actually all coming together with the same idea. And that is being able to share information across all these different platforms.

FH: Exactly, because there are large numbers of users on these platforms that cannot really be moved. You know, they are not going to be moved. There’s the certain point at which I stopped signing up for new services. I mean, I am probably the last person (because I am an imbedded early adopter) and I can stand a lot of noise in my signal and I don’t mind spending a lot of time figuring all this stuff out. But your average person who has a 9-to-5 job is going to pick a platform and stick to it. And so the “job” of the platform developer is going to be to make these platforms as close to real time and as interoperable as possible.

LS: To bring this back around to the user, is the technology difficult to sign up for or to get going on?

FH: It is the simplest technology on the planet to use. That’s why Twitter took off so fast.

LS: Really!

FH: I mean all you do is sign you name and pick a password and it’s free!

LS: It’s free?

FH: So there is really no (hardly any) barrier. They maybe an age barrier, I cannot remember because whatever it is I sure have not seen it in 50 years.

LS: (Laughter) Yes, there is some apprehension for some of the older technology users, which I am finding as I do the research for the book; but they are as interested as anybody else, they’re just a little bit more intimidated because they have not grown up on the technology.

FH: Ah ha, exactly! I will guarantee you that I definitely did not, myself, grow up with this technology.

LS: Nor did I.

FH: I’ve learned it all.

LS: You just got it! Like the sport shoe slogan, you’ve just got to “Do it!”

FH: That’s exactly right.

LS: Is there anything else that you would like to add about micro-blogging, or to summarize your experiences.

FH: My experience has been incredible because I now really understand a lot of the technology behind it and where the developers are going with it and that is what is really interesting. They are going to, what they call, Federated, which means” no single point of failure”.

One of the biggest problems with Twitter is as it grew it began to fail. And they had this absolutely great little symbol that they put up when the website was not working. It was a whale, and it has a bunch of birds trying to lift the whale up off the beach..... (Laughter)

LS: Good metaphor!

FH: And it was like a beached whale and it became very famous. So everybody became concerned that when Twitter was down, people who had grown to rely on it like police departments and other first-responders, that they needed some other place to go. And so everyone decided that Twitter was too important to be something with a single point of failure. And so that's why they want to go toward open source in a Federated model, where something will always be working.

LS: And that's also a really good point. I had the opportunity of speaking with....

FH: ...well, how do you feel when your email is down?

LS: I'm lost!

FH: Exactly, and that is how a lot of people feel about Twitter now.

LS: And that gets back to what Google's interview was about with Google Docs and Google Enterprise, and that is with the new Cloud computing there is always that fear also; that you cannot get access to your software or to your data.

FH: Right and a Federated model means that the micro-blogging will not only be on one set of servers, or even in one country or in one city; so it cannot just all go down at once.

LS: Yeah, this is really the whole idea of the internet; that is how it started.

FH: Well, right! The internet was founded never to go down. It was really founded for national security!

LS: Well, can you tell our listeners where they can find out more information about you and Stealthmode and some of the projects that you are currently supporting and working on.

FH: Well, for me I'm at www.stealthmode.com and I write a blog that you can find through Stealthmode.com, and my calendar is there and links to just about everything else I do. The Arizona Entrepreneurship Conference is at www.aventrepreneurship.com. And the Phoenix Social Media Club, which I also founded, is at www.smcphoenix.com.

LS: So, you have a lot of spare time to read Twitters? (Laughter)

FH: You know I read Twitters constantly; it's in my Gmail, I read it by what's known as "SMTP Feed", which means I get a feed through my IM clients...

LS: Wow!

FH:yeah, it's just there. Whenever I am sitting at the computer, it's just there running in the background.

LS: That is so cool. Well, I would really like to thank Francine Hardaway, Founder and CEO of Stealthmode Partners, for being here talking with us today about micro-blogging, Social Media, and all things cool.

So, Francine, thank you so much for being here today.

FH: It was a pleasure, it's always a pleasure.