

## An Interview With Pete Cashmore, CEO Of Mashable

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 Peter Cashmore, CEO of *Mashable* and we're going to be speaking about *Mashable*, Social Networks and all things Social Media. And also one of the things that's cool is we're coming in live from Scotland. How cool is that!



So, Pete, it's awesome that you're here today, thank you so much.

**PC:** Thanks so much, glad to be here.

**LS:** Yeah, this is great. Scotland, how cool is that! All the way to the other side of the earth.

**PC:** Well, thank you. It's cold actually. I'm sitting here with a heater and no going outside because it's freezing cold and it's dark already.



**LS:** Ahhh...burrrr....

**PC:** In the afternoon it's pitch black, so it is very cool.

**LS:** That is cool. So let's get started. Can you tell out listeners a little bit about who you are, what you do, and why you are doing it?

**PC:** Sure thing. So I'm the Founder and CEO of *Mashable.com* and *Mashable* is one of the leading Social Media blogs. We cover Social Networks and Social Media sites, like Twitter and FaceBook and MySpace and Digg and YouShoot; and we essentially provide the latest news on their services, we review new companies that are launching internet space. We give our opinion on those [01:31.7] so to provide a resource list.

So say if you're a band, where are the top 20 sites you should be using to promote your band. So we have three pieces. We do resource lists of the best companies in the space. We do opinion on what's happening in a, kind of, Social Networking space, and we also do straight reviews of new Social Media, Social Networking sites.

**LS:** Well, that just opens it up to a ton of questions. That's a lot of different content. Just to get it into perspective first, who's your typical demographic? Who is the kind of people that will come and take value away from *Mashable*?

**PC:** Sure, well, I mean we have a number of different user-types on this site. We have visitors who are looking for informational net [02:21.8]. There'll be companies who are thinking about launching a company, and they are looking for information about the market and what a competitor might be doing.

So it's that kind of developer/executive kind of role. We also have just general web users; people who are passionate about the space. So people who are on, for instance, these Social Media sites already, people who

use Facebook, people who use Twitter. So there's that demographic, as well, where they just want to use new services and find interesting new sites to try out.

There's also some degree that can be investor groups; where people who are looking to get invested in new companies or are looking for what's the hot new thing, what's happening, what are the trends to look out for. And also, you know, just to spot something new before it goes big.

So I guess that would be the basic demographics. There is also, to some extent, bloggers and journalists, and eventually anyone who has following this whole Social Networking/Social Media trend.

**LS:** And when I look at *Mashable*...I mean, I've been watching you for quite awhile now...the thing that I love about this...about your website is that...first of all you're primarily news, which is great. You are getting all the latest content, all the newest stuff that's happening in the Social Media ecosphere, and you have such an incredibly wide range of news.

I mean, don't you have like 15 different categories just of news alone?

**PC:** Yeah, that's right. We do. We [03:57.5] Social Media, which is fairly broad anyway. We started off being Social Networking News, but what happened over the span in which we were around, which was three years so far, is that Social Networking essentially became the web; and Social Networking became ingrained as a feature in virtually every website. It became something that was expected rather than something that was remarkable and unusual. So as a result, obviously, coverage has broadened a little bit.

If it's Social, we cover it. A lot of stuff on the web these days is Social.

**LS:** Yes, it's a huge array. And the thing that I like about it is you have it categorized so easily; so whatever a person's specific interest is, you can go and just see news about that particular subject. Or you also have another section in your website where you can actually see news based on the major Social Media companies, like Yahoo and MySpace and Twitter. Is that correct?

**PC:** Right. Right now you can access that which are the most popular; drop down and dig into certain companies that you might be interested in so that you don't have to read the full span every single day.

Yeah, we break it down and we're increasingly trying to do that because, obviously, you might only be interested in one space or niche.

**LS:** Yeah, and I like the idea that when you use that pull-down menu, that you can pull up, let's say, Google, and all of the latest news right there is available. And there's a lot of really useful things in there, like tools and tips and techniques and downloads and plug-ins. So it seems to be just beyond just news, but helpful tips and even plug-ins, and things. Is that correct?

**PC:** Yeah, I mean our basis is always "add-value." You know, what's the value of this story, or this article? You know, what you can take from it. And where we try to add value in every piece, even when we cover news, we don't cover it in a straight way, we cover it in a way that's also, and again, "What does this mean for the market? What does this mean for you if you're a developer? What does this mean for you if you're a web user?"

So even in the news items we are showing some “value-add,” and always there is a load of “value-add” in things like....so I’m looking at the front page and we have a list of tools for family travel, so....we also build these lists which are by their formats. Incredibly useful where you say, “What are the top sites in this category, in this particular niche?”

So even use-end lists and, of course, we do “how-to” posts as well. All of these are really about building value. I’m always focused on what’s the value of “beyond” just straight news.

**LS:** Yeah, and that’s the great thing about the articles that you do have in there; is that you have hyper-links to other resources based on that subject; other types of lists, other kinds of tools and techniques, and downloads. So, yeah, you simply cannot get that from most Social Media websites.

**PC:** Right, and I think it’s kind of a weakness of the blog format we are trying to increasingly overcome, is that we have this huge archive of content that is incredibly useful, and that we do let people know that exists and that it’s available to them, because a lot of the time with blogs you see the first 10 posts on the front page and you don’t realize that this blog might have 15,000 posts, of which 100’s of them might be on this topic. So, yeah, we also try and direct people to what’s useful from our archives and what’s kind of an interesting resource on that topic.

**LS:** Yeah, and that’s what’s good about the pull-down menus, because you are absolutely right....you go to a Social Media website and all you’re really seeing is the chronological order of the blogs. But in order to find really what you are looking for, what your level of interest is...is nearly impossible. So the way you have it organized is excellent!

**PC:** Yes, and we also go beyond the blog format to some degree, and we have a job section and we also have a Beta Invite-sharing Section where some of these new sites go into private base, which is to say you cannot get access unless you’ve been invited by someone who is already in...so we have this Patron-Invite Section. You’ll see that on the network on the site, where you can exchange invites to new sites, where you can say, “I have an invite for this site, does anyone else have?” It’s kind of a sharing thing where if you go and share invites with someone else you’re more likely to get an invite to a site that you want to access too.

We’ve gone a little bit beyond the blog format. We have a number of features for which we do events. Which, for instance, in somewhere of 2008 we did a U.S. tour where we went to seven cities and events for the tech community. I mean, that’s a whole other part of the business and that’s an interesting part that has certainly grown for us this year.

So we certainly go beyond simply writing content and creating content, and we’re more about community, more about, “Can we offer job listings, can we offer this exchange of patron-invites, and can we bring these communities together in real life with Mashable’s events.

**LS:** Yeah I like that. I noticed the events in there, as well. I visit that often. Now are these just *Mashable* events, or can other large Social Media events post in there?

**PC:** Sure, so we host our own events and these are typically during the summer of 2008, like I said. We did seven city tours and we did a networking event, we have various Mash Bashes, and other event types that we

host ourselves. But we also list events from others and people can write to us and we will add them to our listing.

So are now calling it the *Mashable Tech Events Guide* and doing it weekly. Essentially if you are organizing a tech event, you can write to us and seek inclusion in [10:18.8] an interesting event that our audience might like to hear about. Essentially what the Tech Events Section is about is we absolutely do promote other people's events and more so than our own, obviously, because there are many, many more events than there are stars.

**LS:** And again, that's a great resource; a kind of a "one-stop shop." Go to Mashable and get all things Social Media. And you have such a wide array of topics.

Also you had mentioned job postings, and I saw that in there. That's a pretty useful tool for people in Social Media. How do you find out about those?

**PC:** Well especially right now, so jobs can be...jobs are on the "jobs" tab at *Mashable*. You can post a job for \$100 for 30 days, and right now in the current economic climate that's obviously something that's an essential resource for anyone in the industry. If you do, unfortunately, happen to get laid off there are good resources for that. And *Mashable Jobs* is one of those.

**LS:** Yes, that's a really good resource you've got in there. I saw you had quite a bit of information in there. And that begs the next question. When I interviewed Jack Herrick who does WikiHow; I mean you're right in at 30-40,000 articles. That's a lot of content. You have a tremendous amount of really good content. Where does all that come from?

**PC:** So we have a cool team of writers and they've been writing for, like three years, so we have a huge archive of posts. I don't actually know the number right now, but it will be, I think, somewhere in the range of definitely over 10,000, I think possibly around 20,000 articles. We have this cool team of writers who put out news everyday, who put out resources every day. We also have guest writers who join us and occasionally give some expertise on a certain topic. So we might not have the expertise to cover, say, a PR topic, but we have someone who's an expert in that field who can write with expertise and add value. So it's a combination of our cool team and guest authors who can come on board.

Essentially anyone can write to us and say they're interested and this is their expertise area, and we'll determine if we think that would be interesting to our audience.

**LS:** Excellent, and boy, that's a lot of work, too. I mean, not only creating the articles yourself but even just working with other writers and vetting those articles to make sure they are appropriate for you site; that's a lot of man-hours.

**PC:** Absolutely, and obviously when we do them with each person it is very different. So when you have a core-team of writers you know what their strengths are, what their weaknesses are. When you start bringing in guests it adds...it's complex where you have to learn that all over again with each person. Obviously they're different, they have different strengths, they have different weaknesses, but our editors are very, very good at dealing with them.

**LS:** That's great, wow. You mentioned that you're probably running close to 20,000 articles; is there any other statistics that you can talk about, about Mashable? I mean, how you grow over the last 36 months?

**PC:** Sure, well we can talk about...let me see. I mean we don't do any great revenue to a great degree, but if you talk, say in terms of...I'm trying to think of what would be a good stat...

**LS:** The number of unique visitors or repeat visitors?

**PC:** Unique's was, last check, 2.5 million per month, and it's been growing consistently over the past, pretty much over the past three years. We've had steady growth. Obviously growing is great because you keep adding new content every day...so you don't bleed the old content.

So essentially you're consistently building more and more content on top of what you already have. The team has grown. I think there are 10 of us now. Some of our writers are, obviously, contracted and on the full-time staff, and that's grown from when I founded it. About two years ago we brought on our first person beyond me. So I ran it for a year with just me, then we brought on our first person beyond me, in 2006...I started in 2005 and then since then up until now we've grown to about 10 of us full-time.

And the team keeps growing, the revenues keep growing, and extending beyond simply content into events has really helped with growing the company.

**LS:** That's considerable growth, congratulations. That's great.

**PC:** But I also think what's worth mentioning when you talk about growth of blogs and growth of revenues is that when we started this, many of the blogs started out and the people thought these wouldn't be able to get revenue and they wouldn't be able to convert at all. And now we're at a point where these blogs are a serious industry and to some degree there's a much narrower margin between what blogs are doing and what mainstream media is doing. We have these multiple works of blogs and many, many people put out 10, 20, 25 articles per day.

I think the line is blurring between what the media company and what the blog is.

**LS:** Good point. That's a really good point. You're absolutely right. If you look at 10, 15, or 20 years ago, a full-blown media company would be releasing press releases and updating corporate information similar to this. But it just seems that this is just so much more affective and efficient than anything that we've seen in the past.

**PC:** Yes, I think blogging is an interesting mechanism, but I do think that blogging to some degree has become a professional sport. And increasingly we are seeing things like, and I'm sure you'll be covering this in The Social Media Bible, we see increasingly micro-blogging is taking off, and we're seeing increasingly that people are socializing through FaceBook and through Twitter. And blogs to some degree have while they remain kind of a personal outlet; there are many, many more choices for having a personal outlet. One of those would be microblogging. And one of those would be a Social Networking profile on places like FaceBook and MySpace.

So it's interesting that there are a few key blogs that have really risen to the top, and then beyond that there's this wide mediascape which is distributed, and is between Twitter and FaceBook, and all the other various applications that are plugging into this Social Media graph.

**LS:** And did I notice a Social Media kind of component, Social Networking kind of component to Mashable, as well?

**PC:** Absolutely. So we have *MyMash*, which is a Social Networking piece that allows you to simply sign up for a profile and connect with readers on *Mashable*.

**LS:** See, you've got to love that!

**PC:** Yeah, it's a value-add for us. It certainly is something that you can find valuable if you don't quite know about many people in this space, or if you want to know who reads *Mashable*, how do I connect with them. So I think it's a good value-add to have if you want to have Social Media/Social Networking blog. You probably will want to have a Social Network in there.

**LS:** And that's what I like about the One-Stop Shop, is that you can get your news, you can get jobs, you can get events; but you are also Social Networking through *MyMash*, as well.

And the other thing that I thought was interesting was that because you are, you do have your own Social Network, you're not really seeing the others as competition because you can go into pull-down menus for MySpace and FaceBook and many of the other more popular. So it seems like your approach is more complimenting and not competing. Is that right?

**PC:** Absolutely, I mean on the Social Networking piece, our Social Network is essentially a way of aggregating information for other profiles anywhere. I mean we are far more interested in pulling in content from, say, your Twitter feed, than we are interested in creating content specifically for your Mashable profile. So we're really just offering a service and in a way we are pushing people back to the Social Networks where their friends might belong. It's more of an aggregation feature for finding out, "Hmm, is this *Mashable* reader on any other Social Networks?"

It's really not about us generating space-time on our own Social Network.

**LS:** So within your Social Networks you also have tools where you can pull in Flickr photos and you can pull in....

**PC:** Absolutely! Yes, that's right.

**LS:** So you have all the most popular tools in there, so your network itself is a valuable tool.

**PC:** Correct, and I think we have around 250,000 members on the Social Network, so it's grown organically. We haven't even promoted it heavily on the blog. It's just been a steady growth, so it's done very well.

**LS:** That is...those are impressive numbers, especially for basically being around for only 36 months or so.

**PC:** Sure.

**LS:** Business model; a lot of the...that's the question that comes up continuously. Because believe it or not, a lot of Social Media companies, large ones, still have not figured out how to monetize. Most of them have gone to this "freemium" model where you get a certain level of service (which are pretty robust) for free. Then if you want additional services then you pay incremental costs, and even those are very reasonable.

So you had mentioned you grew this team, so you obviously have overhead to cover. So do you make it through sponsorships or banner advertising? How do you generate revenue?

**PC:** So the way most blogs work is that they rely on sponsorship and they either have an ad partner who reaches out to very large companies and sells across all the large blogs, or they sell direct which is to say they have their own sales team who reach out to these companies and sell sites by advertising; banner advertising. We do both. We have our own direct sales team that sells ads on the site. We also have an ad partner, and between them they do very, very well for us and we are able to, obviously, hire these people without having taken funding, without any investment. So really it's all bootstrapped.

**LS:** And of course, that's impressive. If you look at some of the companies that are in this field right now, you're looking at sometimes as much as 10, 15, maybe even 20 million dollars in start up funding.

**PC:** Right, that's true. I think there's a case to be made for where it really depends on where you business is at the time. We certainly not considering taking funding.

**LS:** Well, yeah, I think that's a great move because if you are able to bootstrap it and you can sustain continued growth, there's no reason to lose equity or control. That's a great idea!

Do you own banner advertising? Do you use something like AdSense?

**PC:** We do use AdSense to some degree, but we also sell on a CPM basis. So AdSense is essentially used as remnant, as fallback, but it's not our core income. I think AdSense is very difficult to monetize a blog to any great degree. It's good when you're starting out, and obviously we recommend it when you are starting out blogging. But to get a full time wages/income where nothing comes [22:35.5] multiple writers is doubtful with AdSense, I would say. You really need to go into these specialized niche advertisers and start selling banners or sponsorships slots.

**LS:** Yeah. That makes a lot of sense. And speaking of business, most people think that Social Networking and the whole Social Media genre really is just for teenagers. But more and more of the Fortune 500, Fortune 2000 companies are starting to realize that this genre really is about business. It's communicating with your customers.

Do you have any businesses or any people-stories that you can mention, about businesses actually coming to *Mashable*, what they use it for, how they participate?

**PC:** Businesses coming to Mashable and getting interested in Social Networking and Social Media? Where do we start?

**LS:** (Laughter)

**PC:** I think this definitely turned back the demographic piece [23:32.2]. It's certainly not the case that only teenagers are using Social Networking and Social Media. It's become broader and it's become broader because of the way that Social Networking has become a core feature of the web. This is to say, I'm sure if you study the demographic of FaceBook, that they're trending a little older. If you study the demographic of something like Twitter, you'll see that there is this tech crowd but there is also kind of a Mom/Female demographic. There is a lot of PR people. There's actually a huge range of people in these Social Networks beyond teenagers.

I think it began as a teen phenomenon, as new trends often do on MySpace, but then it widened a little bit; and as the older demographic became involved I think it's really the entire web as a Social Network to some degree. And it's certainly is not the case that there is only hubs of teenagers networking.

To answer the question regarding companies that are getting into Social Networking...umm...I'm trying to think of some specifics. Unfortunately a lot of the stories that we cover with companies trying to get into Social Networking is that they're not doing so well at it. I remember one of our biggest stories was maybe a year ago; it might even be longer...where Wal-Mart tried to launch a Social Network and it was....

**LS:** ...a disaster....

**PC:** ...not a good idea at all. I think what is interesting in terms of companies getting involved is that we're seeing these Social Networking tools move into the enterprise, and we're seeing tools like, for instance, microblogging becoming Yammer and the Yammer is this internal tool that companies use to communicate in short-messaging between all their staff. And that's becoming very popular.

So I think what we're seeing is a lot of these Social Networks and Social Media tools actually going into the enterprise and being used in a way that maybe isn't the same social, public communications tool; but it's more of a private internet-type of service.

**LS:** True. Yeah, and the thing about Wal-Mart. That was kind of funny. You've got to give them credit for being one of the first ones out there and giving it a try. And like all the technologies, enterprise is always going to get involved in it and I think all of us are really still trying to figure out what Social Media is, how do you best use it, how do you best communicate with your customers.

I think some of the companies are getting it. I mean, you hear about companies like Dell, for example, when the exploding batteries were taking place. One of the top Vice-Presidents opened up a Twitter account and gave everybody up to the minute, hour-by-hour updates of what to do. That was, I thought, a great application of micro-blogging and Social Media. And then if you look at some of the more successful blogs, such as Southwest Airlines with the half-million unique visitors every thirty days; and J. W. Marriot. I think we're all still kind of trying to figure it out.

One of the things that you mentioned that is true is that when MySpace....I got to interview Angela Courtin, Senior Vice-President of MySpace....when it first came out it was 14-year-old teenagers. But the average demographic now is actually skewing it about at 34-years-old. And more than 1/3 of all of the members are between 34 and 55-years-old.

So, yeah, I agree. I think as Social Media grows we're going to learn more and more how to use it for business purposes and I think a lot of people, like Wal-Mart, were going to make mistakes along the way.

**LC:** Sure, and I think a lot of this stuff we cover is, essentially, "how do you utilize these tools." We talk about creating pages in FaceBook and building networks out. I think the key is that it comes back to this Wal-Mart question. It comes back to many of the attempts only to about a year ago where companies were trying to set up their own Social Networks and thinking, "I can build a Social Network around my brand." Whereas I think they're increasingly realizing that you go where the communities already are. You can set up a FaceBook page, you can start a Twitter feed, you can plug in to these existing communities, essentially, rather than having to do it all yourself, which is really a high-risk proposition. If the audience is already built in to these existing Social Networks, then you might as well build into those.

**LS:** Yeah, and that's one of the things that I heard time and time through these interviews, especially from Robert Scoble and Chris Heuer. It is that their advice is as an enterprise is to go first to listen, find where the people are talking about your type of products, services, or what you have interest in; and listen. And then when you understand what the conversation is, then the second most important thing is to begin participating. Don't try to create your own network and rule, because that defies the logic of "trusted network."

**PC:** Absolutely, it's a question of listening to your customer rather than trying to speak down to them. And rather than trying to get them on to your patch, your land, you essentially go where they are already. I'm sure Robert would have spoken about things like, "FriendFeed," or about conversations breaking out companies; obviously about Twitter where a lot of conversations are happening. There are many, many tools where you can enter your company name and essentially track what the buzz is.

And when someone complains about your company or your services, they're almost surprised when they get a response directly from the company. I've seen many, many companies following on, for instance, Twitter; places like Starbucks where they'll actually respond when you talk about them. That's, kind of, very rewarding as a customer and it can mend a lot of issues. You know, you put out a complaint and you get a response directly from the company, and you're suddenly quite enamored with that company.

**LS:** And that's true! That's human nature. Ten years ago before Social Media really took foothold, if you wanted to communicate with a company there really was no way to do it. It was a faceless organization. And the exciting thing about Social Media is, yes, a lot of companies are participating and giving a response from a higher level, too. A lot of the people that are participating are on the executive level, the Vice-President level. And if I send something out to the blogosphere and I get a relatively immediate response, I am very impressed and that shows to me that that company cares. Just the fact that they are participating is impressive to me.

**PC:** The challenge, of course, will be scaling that. Right now the tools like FriendFeed are relatively small. I think something like Twitter is likely to break out into the mainstream over the next year or so. And then what will happen? What will happen when, for instance, I think that Barak Obama has no idea how many followers he has; over 100,000 or 130,000 at this point. If your brand suddenly has 100's of 1,000's of people trying to talk directly to you, then you hit the scaling issue that big companies always hit. They have too many customers, essentially, to talk to them all directly as human beings.

So we may, unfortunately, be in kind of a honeymoon phase here with Social Media; where the community is small enough that they have the ability to respond directly to actually every inquiry. It will be interesting to see

what happens if these companies scale up, and suddenly every FaceBook page, where companies have 100,000's of members, every Twitter feed for these big companies who have 100,000's of subscribers; suddenly that's a scaling issue and suddenly you might get the same issues that big companies always hit with customer service, which is there are too many customers to serve them individually.

**LS:** That's a great observation and I totally agree. What would happen to Barak Obama is all 260 million U.S. residents Twittered him at the same time?

**PC:** I don't think there's an easy solution, unfortunately. That's always been the nature of customer service, that at a point you get so many customers that you almost have to treat them as a demographic rather than individuals. This is where the pain point in all of consumer-society comes from, that you no longer have a personal relationship with that brand.

**LS:** That's true. And the exciting thing about Social Media is I am sure once we reach that point, somebody's going to figure out another Social Media tool to help supplement that.

**PC:** I hope so, I really do.

**LS:** I'm optimistic. Is there anything else that you would like to tell our listeners about *Mashable*? Do you have anything coming down the road, any kind of news, reasons to use it and get out there and sign up, take a look at it?

**PC:** We're hush-hush on what we're launching next year, although we do have a lot of stuff in the pipeline. What I would do is two things: check out, if you use RSS feed, grab out RSS feed. And then you will get constant updates, and also you can go to our Twitter feed, which is at [Twitter.com/Mashable](https://twitter.com/Mashable). And we constantly update with headlines and news that's perhaps related to Social Networking and Social Media, but doesn't make it to the blog.

So [www.twitter.com/mashable](https://www.twitter.com/mashable) is a really good place to go if you want headlines and to get the feed from Mashable.

**LS:** That's a really good tip. And if you just want to go to Mashable, your URL is....

**PC:** [www.mashable.com](https://www.mashable.com). M-a-s-h-a-b-l-e.com.

**LS:** That's easy enough to remember, that's awesome. Well, I would really like to thank Pete Cashmore, the CEO of *Mashable*, for being with us here today, live from Scotland, and talking about *Mashable* and Social Media.

So Pete, really, honestly thank you.

**PC:** No problem at all and best of luck with *The Social Media Bible*. I'm really looking forward to it.

**LS:** Thank you, sir. This is great.

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This has been Lon Safko, the co-author of *The Social Media Bible*. Please 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](http://www.TheSocialMediaBible.com), and for more information about me, Lon Safko, please by all means head over to my webpage at [www.LonSafko.com](http://www.LonSafko.com).

And Peter, again, truly thank you for coming to us live from Scotland!

**PC:** Thanks, Lon. Great to talk to you.