

Bright Ideas



Supporting Organizational
Excellence & Innovation

Social media

Time waster or valuable business tool

Social media is often seen as diminishing employee productivity. Blogging, tweeting, checking RSS feeds and social website pages have (almost) replaced visiting porn sites as the subject of policies on Internet use. However, social media can help organizations increase staff productivity, save money, build their customer/donor/volunteer base and meet strategic goals. So for Baby Boomer and Veteran managers who have not yet embraced social media, here is a brief primer on business applications and benefits of social media.

How Social Media Helps

Used correctly, certain forms of social media can

- Position your organization as the expert in the area
- Find answers that solve organizational problems
- Obtain feedback to guide decisions
- Document projects, procedures and meetings to painlessly produce reports, manuals and minutes
- Mobilize the community to take action, donate, buy your service, or register for events
- Help you stay current and reduce information overload.

Simply put, with all the potential benefits, what organization can afford *not* to harness the power of social media? And it is virtually free.

What is Social Media?

Social media is internet technology that supports users to create and communicate content interactively without having any particular computer programming skills.

Social media is all about interactivity, conversation and engagement.

Social media is all about interactivity, conversation and engagement. Like many things that are “so easy a child could do it,” the best guide to using social media is often a child—or more

accurately a teenager or young adult. Generation Yers are often enthusiastic users and eager to teach Boomers how to use various social media. What they don’t necessarily know is how to get the most from social media from a business perspective. That’s what we’ll focus on here.

Social Networking Sites. Facebook is the current most popular social networking site. Besides personal profiles, one can also create Facebook groups and business pages. Groups are good for sharing information about upcoming events or photos/video from past events,

mobilizing social or political action via notices to members, and sharing relevant statistics or links to websites through discussion threads. If your target audience for an event or issue includes Facebook users, establish a Facebook group and add the link to your other communications. As with groups, a Facebook business page lets you post photos and video, blog via discussion threads, advertise events and send your fans updates.

LinkedIn is a networking site for professionals and is a great tool for learning, teaching and image-building. Each LinkedIn member has a public profile, as well as a more detailed version accessible only to connections. The best thing about



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LinkedIn is that you can get answers and resource links from experts worldwide—absolutely free.

Blogs. Although most people still think of blogs as navel-gazing or rants by people who need to get a life, many blogs share professional expertise and “how-to” info. At their best, organizations use them to explain controversial decisions, tell their stories, and gather input. Blogs are Web 2.0’s answer to the newsletter, with better interactivity than “letters to the editor.”

Twitter. This is sometimes described as a blog for those with short attention spans. Each “tweet” is limited to 140 characters. Twitter can be used to advertise jobs and events (or changes to them), make important announcements, link to your website/blog/video, and leverage fundraising or partnerships.

RSS. An acronym for “really simple syndication,” RSS lets you get notified of new information by people whose writing you consider

worth following. Instead of having to check someone’s website (or blog) for anything new, you get a notice with the title and lead of the new listing. It’s a great way to avoid information overload, while not missing anything important to you.

On the flip side, RSS feeds on your blog or website let others follow you. Like getting a “best answer” label on *LinkedIn* or being “followed” on *Twitter*, having traffic to your communications helps establish you or your organization as the go-to guys in your area of expertise. Journalists also use social media to find compelling stories.

Wikis. Hawaiian for “quick,” a wiki is like an electronic document with multiple authors. The best known is *Wikipedia*. A community of interested parties creates a body of knowledge that is easily shared and updated, so no one works from outdated information. This knowledge could take the form of a procedural manual for uncom-

mon tasks, steps taken to mount an event/campaign, or project documentation. Instead of writing a final project report from scratch, the wiki forms the basis for the report or becomes the report. Unlike templates or “how-to” files on a server, a wiki lets you link related files and forms and do keyword searches.

Connecting the Dots

Your organization’s goals should drive your use of social media, *not* the other way around. And make sure you link your social media to your organization website and vice versa, in order to increase traffic to your sites and build strong relationships with those who can help you meet your business goals.

Check This Out

Six Steps to Social Media Savvy [http://
impactmax.wordpress.com/six-steps](http://impactmax.wordpress.com/six-steps)

Social Media Tools 101 [http://www.
interactiveinsightsgroup.com/blog1/
socialmediabeginnersguide/social-
media-tools-101/](http://www.interactiveinsightsgroup.com/blog1/socialmediabeginnersguide/social-media-tools-101/)

From Where I Sit



What was I thinking?

For years I thought of blogs and social websites like *Facebook* as a sign that some people just had too much time on their hands. There was already too much information out there on the Internet, so why would I want to add to a wiki? But as I delved into social media from a business and marketing perspective, I started to ask myself a different question—what was I thinking?

Yes, social media can suck time faster than a Dyson vacuum sucks dirt. But it can also give a pretty big bang for your buck. One of my *LinkedIn* groupmates polled her Webinar attendees and found that 45% learned about the session

through *Twitter*. Some soon-to-be-published data has *Facebook* as part of the PR strategy for 70% of American corporate social responsibility professionals. One utility company ditched its old website and used a blog platform for its site to enhance interactivity. Others, like the BC Government’s public services website, have taken a social media approach to tell their stories on a standard web platform.

There are definitely right ways to use social media and ways that don’t achieve the business aims that I’ve talked about in the lead article. You have to want to communicate. And by that I mean open give-and-take of information about what people care about—how it affects them. More conversational,

less jargon. The only way to control the on-line conversation about your organization is to be part of it. Call to find out how to make social media work for you.



K. K. Biersdorff Consulting supports organizational excellence and innovation through an array of planning, research, communication and training services that take projects seamlessly from start to finish.