

Bright Ideas



Supporting Organizational
Excellence & Innovation

Making the most of social media

In the two years since I first wrote about social media, the question has gone from “How do I use social media in my business?” to “How do I get the best bang for my buck with social media?” To some extent, the answer must depend on your goal; some social media tools are better suited to certain uses than others. There are also some general principles—such as not ticking off others. But how?

Business goals of social media

I like to think that there are three main uses for social media in business: community building, collaboration and reputation building.

Community building creates a social network of people who share a common interest or experience. Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn are the obvious tools. In addition to Facebook personal profiles viewable by your friends, organizations can have a *Page* and invite others to “Like” them, or form a *Group* around a social cause. Both can advertise events and invite those who “Like” them to RSVP. Don’t underestimate the power of the “Like.” It shows up in the Liker’s personal profile and their Wall, which is linked to their friends’ Walls. People who see that their friends

like something will often follow the link and “Like” it, too. Before you know it, you have a community. You can poll them about possible changes to your product or services that you are considering, or

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social actions you would want support on. The advantage of using your Facebook community as a focus group is that they are already interested in what you do.

LinkedIn is the professional’s version of Facebook. The *Groups* you join are your communities. Group members ask each other questions, discuss topics, provide business leads and share notices of upcoming training or other events of mutual interest. A group may be the social media wing of your professional organization, or be tied to your work interests. You can also create a *Group*—for instance, people who took your workshop.

Twitter builds communities of followers based on tags you associate with your Twitter feed. Within your 140 characters, you can promote events, ask for action, share insights, ask questions and link to interesting information found elsewhere (e.g., your own or others’ websites/blogs/videos.) It’s important to balance self-promotion with

promotion of others’ content in order to be seen as a trustworthy source. People will re-tweet things they see as helpful to their network.

What is most critical is to provide useful information from your followers’ point of view. The only person who cares that you are on the way to your dentist is your dentist. If you must tweet about your dentist visit, set up a separate Twitter name for personal tweets.

A recent Twitter poll found that about 41% of non-profits tweet 1-2 times a day, and 40% tweet 3-5 times a day. While it is annoying to repeat a tweet exactly, it is OK to tweet about a different aspect of the same event or blog post than before. What wasn’t interesting to a follower before may capture their attention with a different angle.



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Up and coming on the community-building scene is YouTube. Besides commenting on others' videos, I've seen video conversations, including some within the deaf community using sign language.

Collaboration is made much easier by social media. Wikis can be used to train new staff by creating a reference library, or build documentation for a project. You can now store documents in the cloud for colleagues (and yourself) to access whenever and wherever they are needed. Both Dropbox and Google Docs track and timestamp versions of your documents. Google Shared Spaces and Central Desktop add project management features, such as tasks, timelines, due dates and responsible party. Some support online meetings.

Reputation building is the function that most attracts organizations to social media, but is one of the trickiest to achieve, largely because of the baggage they bring. Corporate-speak goes down like a rock. And anything that comes across like marketing is immediately suspect. To build a reputation as a trustworthy source, you have to be genuinely helpful. Blogs, Twitter, podcasts, YouTube, Slideshare (for PowerPoints) and social bookmarking sites (e.g., Delicious) are common tools. It's sometimes challenging to find useful resources among

the tens of thousands of hits from a Google search. With Delicious, you can enter your keywords and see what web pages other Delicious users found helpful. And by posting your own favourite resources on a topic, others benefit from your work. So always add meaningful keywords to your posts in any social medium.

LinkedIn can also help build your reputation as an expert. LinkedIn lets you search members' questions in your subject area and answer them. If the member thinks you gave the best answer, you are flagged as having expertise in that area. Another LinkedIn strategy that makes marketing sense is to join groups composed of potential clients (or donors), rather than just peers. Participate in discussions and share information that helps group members achieve their goals.

Social media communicators talk a lot about *influence*. Becoming an influencer takes time. Search blog hosts using keywords related to your interests to find current influencers. Who is posting a lot? Are others commenting? Do they comment on others' posts? These are the social media influencers. Join their conversations and add thoughtful insights or missing information. You will get noticed (and Googled). As you add your own content, the influencers will start

engaging on your sites and their followers may come, too. You and your organization become a go-to source for facts and informed opinions on the issues. And it's not just regular folks who pay attention to influencers; the media do, as well.

Who has the time?

You don't have to give up your day job to make the most of social media, but you get out of it what you put into it. So manage your social media efficiently. First, start with just one social media tool that fits your organization's business goals. Let people know so that they can join the conversation. Ask what they want to hear about. Respond to comments candidly.

Set aside time at the start or end of the day to monitor the conversation, update your organization's "status" or engage in social media discussions. Hootsuite makes it easy to track conversations, schedule and integrate your updates, measure your click-throughs and more.

Get in the game

If your organization is hesitating about establishing a social media presence, or wants to revamp (or set up) its website, now is the time to incorporate social media effectively into your strategic plan.

Check This Out

[How to Implement a Social Media Business Strategy](#)

From Where I Sit



On staying connected

Some people assume that because I work out of an office at home that I'm out of touch with what's happening in [insert subject here]. And while it's true that I'm wearing house slippers as I write this, I stay in touch with a lot of people in a lot of areas. And

not just online, but face-to-face.

Social media is best when it feels like face-to-face. From a very early age I have been drawn to story tellers, not that I am a particularly good story teller myself. I love to listen and learn, not just from what they say, but how they say it. I see, and I understand, and my work is better because of it.



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.