

## Social Media: Does It Have You Twittering in Your Boots?

As Bob Dillon so famously proclaimed, “the times they are a changin’”. That is certainly true for the way we communicate. Two decades ago, marketing strategies consisted primarily of sending out direct mail, handing out calendars with a company logo on them, and maybe a tradeshow or two. If you’re still doing those things, don’t worry, we’re not saying that they shouldn’t be part of your marketing efforts, but technology has evolved. It has birthed a new genre of marketing opportunities. No doubt your email box is plumb full of examples. Email marketing can be a powerful tool when used correctly. But beyond the email landscape, the era of social media has arrived.

The term “social media” has been floating around for the past couple years, but yet to many it’s an ambiguous term. Just what IS social media? Wikipedia says:

**“Social media** is information content created by people using highly accessible and scalable publishing technologies. At its most basic sense, social media is a shift in how people discover, read and share news, information and content. It's a fusion of sociology and technology, transforming monologue (one to many) into dialog (many to many) and is the democratization of information, transforming people from content readers into publishers.”

To make that easier to understand, if email was akin to walking around a room full of people and telling each one of them what your company sells, social media would be like standing in the middle of that room full of people and telling them all simultaneously, in short messages over the course of time, not just what your business sells, but why and how and then inviting comments and reactions. It creates dialogue.

The term “social media” includes things like web logs (blogs), on-line media sharing sites (You Tube), wikis (Wikipedia), and instant messaging. The form of social media getting the most attention is social networking, which includes sites like Linked-In, Facebook and Twitter.

Linked-In is a site that allows you set up a professional profile telling people who you are and what you do. It allows you to network with other professionals by inviting them to “connect” with you. The more people you connect with directly, the greater your networking potential. It opens business connections by virtually “knowing someone who knows someone.” It also provides a way to keep your name in front of your network through the use of status updates. You type in short 1-2 sentence descriptions of what you’re currently doing or what you’ve just completed. Over the course of time, you paint a picture of your professional life through these on-going updates.

Facebook is generally regarded as a more personal social networking site. Like LinkedIn, you set up a profile page to tell people about yourself and then you invite people to befriend you. Again, regular, short status updates tell people what you’re up to or what’s got your interest. The updates on Facebook tend to be of a more informal and personal, however, many businesses and groups use Facebook as well.

Of all the social networking sites, Twitter has probably gotten the most attention recently. Twitter is less focused on a profile page or home page and more focused on short, 140-character updates called tweets. Its more streamlined format works well for posting updates via your cell phone or other mobile device. The idea is to build your league of “followers” and be able to update them instantly on what you are doing from wherever you might be.

Most social networking sites are free to use and you control how much information you display and distribute. From a business standpoint, however, social networking is not without cost completely. The cost comes in the form of the amount of time you or your staff put into them. The more time you spend and the more active and engaging content you provide, the greater the potential for creating dialogue, community, and awareness; all of which can result in more business.

If you’d like to know more about social media or social networking and how it might benefit your business, contact us via phone, email or on-line.

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