

Social Media: Finding Its Way into Your Business Strategy and Culture

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Linkage
Unleash your full potential.

This article is directed at C-Suite leadership including Human Resources leaders engaged in formulating or managing your company's social media strategy.

Social media is explained in only moderate technical depth with greater emphasis placed upon the design and implementation of a social media game plan within your company. Considerable attention is placed upon ethical conduct and statutory compliance by employees using social media.

The Historical Roots of Social Media

Arguably, the roots of social media trace back to 1979 with the introduction of Tim and Nina Zagats' New York City Restaurant Guide. The Zagats changed the game in assessing restaurants' quality, cost, service and décor--- they invited actual patrons to critique rather than paid experts, aggregated patrons' unvarnished assessments of the City's restaurants and published their Guide book. Patrons eagerly contributed, listened and seemingly trusted other patrons. As a result, an active, special interest community of foodies was formed---social networking was unknowingly born and other user-driven communities gained attention. With the application of Web 2.0 technology, social media in many forms now has a prominent place in connecting and networking our lives and businesses.

The attributes that engaged the NYC foodie community in 1979 serve as the foundation of social media's current captivation and its growing viral power and influence in social and corporate settings. These attributes are:

- ◆ *Authenticity.* Social media allows (in fact, demands) real people talk to real people in unfiltered, genuine ways. This contemporary expectation for business communications is far removed from scripts and campaigns prepared by PR, Corporate Communications and Marketing departments.
- ◆ *Transparency.* Social media lays open facts, truths, non-truths and often strong opinions that corporations can choose to listen, explain, but are rue to ignore. Noteworthy, the SEC approved in August, 2008 the posting of some types of corporate financial information on company websites deeming these channels as appropriate outlets for material information about a company.
- ◆ *Immediacy.* Social media is a viral conduit for immediate, late-breaking news. Photos, streaming videos, commentary are available on breaking news stories and these reports stream through blog aggregators and to twitter followers. Having US Airways crash victims' stream video from a sinking aircraft wing floating in the Hudson River whilst these social networkers awaited rescue illustrates social media's real time differentiation versus traditional media.
- ◆ *Community.* Social media provides users with a trusted community to seek and share experiences, opinions and information. It's engaging and interactive. And, corporations are learning that the terms tell and sell have become archaic in these new channels. Corporations are learning to listen, first; learn from their customers; and then engage via a growing array of social media channels.

What is Social Media?

Social media is online content created by people using highly accessible and scalable publishing technologies. Importantly, it seems to represent a shift in how people discover, read and share news, information and content. There are hundreds of social media channels operating around the world today with the current big three being LinkedIn, Face Book and Twitter.

The first online social networking site, Classmates.com, emerged in 1995; blogs and podcasts followed shortly thereafter. Recently, the social media landscape has dramatically changed with the introduction of the Web 2.0 platform. The revolutionary impact of this technology has ushered in simpler design and development requirements for website creation and operation as well as much easier techniques for interconnectivity with so-called rich media (video). Consequently, website creation, publishing and interactive communication has become relatively easy and exceedingly more powerful compared to HTML authoring requirements that web techies have used during the preceding decade.

Online sites were originally offered to organize personal interest communities. However, businesses have become astute users of social media to introduce their brand, products and services to customers, gather information about their reputation and that of competitors as well as engage real time with all stakeholders and local communities.

The social media landscape can be organized into seven categories:

Social Networks

Online communities that allow members to build personalized websites populated with wide ranging personal and professional information and made broadly available to the community's membership. Popular networks include LinkedIn, MySpace and FaceBook.

Blogs

The term originated with the combination of the terms web + log. Blogs are online diaries or personal journal entries contributed by participating community members and published for all members of the community to read and respond. Modern blogs are also designed to offer interactive features (commenting). Blogs fall into three categories: personal messaging, corporate messaging or niche topics such as sports teams, race car, fan clubs, and political activists and parties with Organizing for America being notable.

Wikis

These function as community data bases (electronic encyclopedias, textbooks and reference libraries) which organize information around designated topics. The technology allows for properly authorized community visitors to add or edit content. Popular in this space are Wikipedia, Investopedia and Bizwiki.

Podcasts

Online audio and video broadcasts most frequently available via paid subscription and distributed via web syndication technology. This space is dominated by iTunes.

Online Forums

Also known as World Wide Web forums are virtual communities---online places to drop in and hang out for a while----- just like a corner coffee shop, pub or club. Communities are formed and provide registered members online information and group discussion most often focused on specific topics and subjects. Forums also are used to transact business. Chat rooms and instant messaging are considered early forms of online forums but forums have now differentiated themselves---- unlike chat and instant messaging, forum members do not need to be actively online to exchange information.....this feature is technically called asynchronous conferencing. In the U.S., there are hundreds of thousands of online forums initiated by individuals as well as corporate-operated forums each with its own unique mission and audience profile. Forums operate with rules and disciplinary procedures to prevent and address various abuses.

Content Sharing Communities

Online community members produce, organize and share content. Most frequent are specialized communities that come together to share photos (flickr), videos (YouTube, Blip.TV) and documented/benchmarked content (Digg, StumbleUpon, Del.icio.us)

Microblogging

Social media online broadcasts and content which is specially adapted to mobile devices and phones whose members broadcast limited length messages into a community with the capability of community members to tune in (follow) as few or as many mircoblog broadcasters as they choose. Popular sites include Twitter and Pownce.

The categorization above is intentionally simple. Social media channels are exploding in numbers and application differentiation. The Conversation Prism displayed in the Appendix was developed by Brian Solis, a principal in the leading online PR and communications firm FutureWorks and blogger at PR 2.0. The Prism presents a greatly expanded view of social media channels for those uber followers of the fast changing landscape of social media. Brian has permitted the reprint of Prism in this article.

Social Media Has Surged into the Communications Mainstream

Companies are using social media to make and shape relationships with job applicants, employees, customers, shareholders and stakeholders in staggering proportions.

- ◆ Visitors to social networking sites grew 34% in 2008 to 530 million people, worldwide according to comScore research.
- ◆ Dell estimates it engages in 2,000,000,000 “customer conversations” each year.
- ◆ Facebook adds 1 million new faces each day, every day.
- ◆ 133 million blogs are tracked by the blog search site, Technorati.
- ◆ Nielsen, the global information and media company, has begun tracking the global online media landscape. Their April, 2009 analysis offers clear evidence of social media’s mainstream impact:

- Per month, there are 167 million active online visitors in the U.S. Americans jump online 57 times per month and spend slightly more than 2 hours per day on line. They view a mere 386 billion pages of content. Users in France, Japan and the UK are not far behind. Online experience in both Brazil and Germany is rising off smaller base numbers.
- Across only a few years, the demographic profile of the online population has begun looking more and more like the overall population. Women aged 55+ are the fastest growing slice of social media adopters.
- Online access has moved from a luxury to a basic business requirement in the B2C market.
- While social media is today's darling, a monetization formula continues to elude marketers.

How long will it last?

It is estimated that Web 2.0 technology has a half-life of four to six years, so the current social media capability and technical proficiency requirements of designers and users will likely be with us for a while. This means that your social media knowledge and skills will likely be current for a considerable time period if you dig in, learn, and master the tools.

A long term question about social media is monetization—will it pay its way over time? Interestingly, Twitter use is exploding while it operates without an apparent revenue model. Countless other channels operate similarly.

Your Company Will Have a Social Media Department

Your company's social media department, most appropriately, will be housed within your marketing organization. Department census will be low relative to larger groups in brand marketing, media or event management. This group should clearly stand apart from daily sales operations, e-commerce, or call center activities which invalidly appear to offer synergistic advantages and partnership.

The social media department leader is often called a community manager (or alternatively, a more appropriate designation of corporate rank). Your community manager is responsible for your company's social media program via its direct management and cross functional influence. The department's role encompasses:

- ◆ *Strategy.* Overall social media strategy and functional alignment.
- ◆ *Channel Selection.* Evaluation and tool selection in coordination with IT.
- ◆ *Compliance.* Awareness of statutes, policy development and workforce deployment. Company registrations.
- ◆ *Metrics.* Formulation of business measurement scorecard, and predictive models.

- ◆ (Often) *Managing Blog Operations*. Site staffing and management. Preparation of spokesperson themes, coaching authenticity, and ensuring timely response by company spokespersons.
- ◆ *Reputation and Brand Monitoring; Business Analysis*. Blog and social media monitoring which result in reports and trends about your company's reputation, as well as competitive intelligence which leads to constructive impact on new product development and revitalization, business strategy, and marketing advantage.
- ◆ *Crisis Management Support*. This group would be called upon in crisis management situations—product or service failure, gaffes, accidents, and etc-- to offer advice and solutions for appropriate social media outreach and response.
- ◆ *Bringing Social Media Innovation and Best Practices into the Company*.
- ◆ *External Outreach*. Engagement and relationship development with the outside blogger/social media community which serves to enhance company reputation and creates a leadership role in influencing industry standards and statutes while defining and enlarging social media's business impact.

Social media staff most likely will be recruited from Marketing, Communications, Public Relations professionals with ample technology, solid persuasion skills and abilities to design and manage analytic and technical projects. Staff must be competent in the interpretation and presentation of these analytic studies to multi-functional senior management.

Cross functional competency is essential for the small social media community. The primary functional touch points include Marketing, IT, Sales/ e-commerce, Legal and HR. Traditional marketing functions may actually be oppositional to these new wave practitioners. Public Relations may believe the brand reputation space is theirs to protect and advance as well as crisis management mobilization. IT may act to slow down hyper growth to protect the company from electronic assault. In contrast, Customer Service is often a partner as social media enables these representatives the platform to reach out in constructive and proactive ways plus provides opportunity for incremental sales.

Social Media Will Be An Element of Your Strategic Plan.

Your company's social media strategy should be built with focus in five key areas.

1. Marketing Plan

Investment in social media is rapidly increasing—business leaders are enticed with the cost effectiveness of social media initiatives and expecting to realize higher ROI ratios from social media than found in traditional marketing and market research programs. Large-company, progressive corporations are reportedly now directing 10% of their annual marketing budgets to social media programs. The expected outcomes are the same as with traditional marketing--- define and expand (company or products/services) recognition, increase product trial, and bolster reputation but the relationship building process does differentiates social media from its traditional ancestors.

Social media is proving to be the gateway to more engaged (vs. uni-directional) participation with markets. This approach is first about your company's contact strategy with its constituents, managing the quality of the relationship that emerges and only then about positioning product and services. It's clear the new marketplace expects a level of authenticity and candor about products and services that traditional marketing departments find difficult to deal with—the traditional approach of we tell you has been supplanted with we tell each other. Top down, interruptive mass marketing is dying. As evidence, less than 10% of adult TV viewers can name a brand that has just been advertised on the show they just viewed. Consumers are just not listening any longer.

Social media marketing is about conversation and earning the privilege to educate and involve your market—not campaigns. Via these relationships, social media-savvy companies are:

- ◆ Accessing and engaging early adopters to learn, not to initially persuade,
- ◆ Engaging customers in early stage product development because these constituents find interest and involvement in shaping product and services features,
- ◆ Using social media instead of focus groups to accelerate R&D and save tons of cash,
- ◆ Preparing legions of free disciples equipped with convincing messages and online support to advocate a company, its products and services to a broad array of online community members,
- ◆ Monitoring the success, impact and obsolesce of marketing messages and in fact, product life cycles,
- ◆ Using social media in crisis situations to instantaneously respond to dangerous or embarrassing marketplace blunders such as the corrective action Dominos Pizza recently initiated using Twitter to counter consumer chatter swirling on YouTube about questionable ingredients applied as a prank to pizzas by a few miscreant pizza chefs. The immediate and authentic actions by Dominos reassured the marketplace and fueled a viral wave of support for the company—in this matter; social media was successful in stamping case closed on this matter.

2. Customer Service and Sales Plan

Companies are completing sales and bolstering customer service through a wide range of social media channels. But the road has not been rosy for many companies including Dell Computer, Comcast, J&J, Southwest Airlines, General Motors and others. In most cases these companies started passively listening to the comments and tone of customers and ex-customers. These companies perceived how rapidly messages were moving through cyberspace and the speed and strength of negative sentiment to galvanize online communities.

Then, trained customer service representatives began to constructively interact online with disgruntled customers and re-recruit former customers. These online ambassadors intervened directly with dissatisfied customers to successfully resolve the failure and rebuild the relationship. It is important to note that these representatives fully and initially disclose their company affiliation with those with whom they interact.

How can companies listen in? Specialty channels have been designed to gather and aggregate and alert companies when their name is mentioned on line. These channels include Technorati, GoogleAlerts, GetSatisfaction, Twittersearch and others. Peer review sites including Yelp and Customerreview.com are also used as clearinghouses to share information. Public Relations firms have become outsourced vendors for gathering and analyzing these data.

The rules of engagement by customer service personnel include:

(Excerpted from *Word of Mouth Marketing*)

- ◆ Insure customers understand they are dealing with an authorized company representative.
- ◆ Disclose all the social media channels that your company participates on your website.
- ◆ Get every visitors email address and add to the database.

3. Human Resources Plan

Establishing a social media policy is an essential best practice. Human Resources takes the lead and the policy is finalized with involvement from the company's on line community manager and consultation with Legal. Your policy requires adoption, publication, new hire and existing training along with documented monitoring and corrective action for misuse and abuse.

While companies have begun publishing social media policies, its best you're your company's policy is home grown and reflects your culture, the depth and prevalence of regulatory compliance requirement which exist within your sector and the talent pools you tap. Contract and contingent workers and their employers must understand and abide by your company's policy and practices. A sample policy is included in the Appendix.

A checklist of matters to address in your policy includes:

- ◆ Reminder that the policy covers workers 1)while at work, 2) while using company communications devices or 3) at any time the individual can be associated by others with the company,
- ◆ Prohibition against disclosing confidential/non-public financial, product, customers, pricing, strategy or forward-looking information,
- ◆ Disparagement of protected groups and competitors,
- ◆ Prohibition in the use of fraudulently obtained information, obscene content, the promotion of illegal behavior, and restricted political or advocacy statements or endorsements,
- ◆ Disclosure of personal or confidential information about other workers, and
- ◆ Repeated unwanted contact with individuals inside or external to the company.
- ◆ Standards for new hires and existing workers to be trained (updated) in living this policy.

Major innovation is occurring with the use of Wikis and internal blogs to enhance employee collaboration and knowledge management.

Social media tools including company website, FaceBook and LinkedIn are used to source top-tier talent in both wide open and niche talent pools. Company-managed applicant databases are being made obsolete by externally-supported talent channels and resourceful online recruiters. Major technology companies report that a quarter of their new hires are sourced through internal referrals and a similar proportion is now being sourced from LinkedIn and FaceBook.

4. Information Technology Plan

The Information Technology team within your company engineers a secure and seamless environment for social media channels to operate. Certainly, Web 2.0 has ushered in simpler design and construction of online material. But, IT continues to bear ultimate responsibility for traffic across voice, data and networks whether a social media channel is hosted internally or externally. Measures of speed, rich content management, security and message volume and size impact service and support levels and translate each year into capital expenditure requests for additional server and communication equipment and IT support personnel. This situation is further complicated with more sophisticated internal users.

While trust has been invoked several times to describe the attraction of social media, your IT department all too often experiences the dark side as external social media sites especially blogs are loaded with Trojan horse worms, virus and malware. Social media's IT friends are dutiful and invaluable sentinels.

5. Senior Executive Participation Plan

NewPRWiki, an online site which covers the blogging space, tracks CEO blogging. Executive blogging is surprisingly widespread and longstanding. John Patrick of Jupiter Media started his blog long ago, in 1997; recently, J. W. Marriott began blogging; many leaders fall between then and now. Business Week recently featured more than 20 CEO's who are regular Twitter contributors. And, CEO Jim Schiro was reported in a June, 2009 NYTimes article as a YouTube user.

Should your CEO be a social media ninja?

Maybe. But, not without clear intent and social media department support.

Many senior leaders perceive direct participation in social media as is an attractive and appropriate leadership activity. Participation puts these leaders face forward as the energetic, with it brand champion. Participation visibly puts the leader on the front lines with the workforce—we are all in this together. Unfiltered information comes directly to leadership quickly and economically.

But, participation is not without significant risk. Since these channels are two-way communications, there are audience (i.e., community member) expectations that must be understood, site management, ethical, and compliance matters to tend and senior leaders must

connect with the audience with authentic, relevant, interesting and even sometimes, controversial discussion. Can senior team members pull this off—even with coaching and help? The guidelines can help:

- ◆ Start with an objective of what executive participation should achieve (Goals)...don't begin with a test drive it first mentality.
- ◆ Consider using a senior team—not just the CEO. Your company's messaging will likely be more interesting, fresh, and appealing to the community and the CEO will not wear out his/her welcome with the community.
- ◆ Design communication themes—vision, values, business success and new initiatives, updates, customer focused matters, social responsibility.
- ◆ Develop themes or talking points for executives to incorporate in their messaging—not scripts. The community leader along with PR can take the lead here.
- ◆ Enlist a spell checker, a fact checker, a presentation skills coach---- but never a speech writer or copy editor. This is real communication among real people. Always moderate comments when using blogs or mircoblogs.
- ◆ Allow spokespersons to be real---treat this interaction as an opportunity to inform, educate, connect ---lighten up on product or service promotion. And it's OK to be controversial, on occasion.
- ◆ Clean up obscene language incoming from the community; remove comments and information that violate your Social Media policy and the law. Inform your community that you will do (and have done) clean up.
- ◆ Connect with other social media communities—because there are many and quite inter-connected. For example, Hewlett-Packard has more than 2,500 employee-written blogs; Microsoft, more than 3,000; IBM, more than 4,500. P&G, Coke, Pepsi—have internal and participate in external blogs.

There is risk in not participating. Disgruntled customers, suppliers and shareholders plus disillusioned employees are taking aim at your brand, your markets and your reputation. This is not the time to be a laggard in this space.

Statutory Compliance Demands Continuous Monitoring

Social media compliance seems not to be confounded by much un-chartered legal territory or emerging philosophical dilemmas. Your General Counsel already knows this space. Albeit social media jargon is new and often clever, the legal issues are largely familiar ones. Compliance matters range from traditional topics in commerce----trade mark/service mark protection, copyright infringement, false advertising, libel, breach of privacy and contract, brand and intellectual property protection, and unfair competition to social media wrinkles that include domain name dispute resolution, child privacy matters, e-commerce, taxation, and protection against identity theft and impersonation.

Yet, there is significant risk to your company from the use of social media by employees, authorized spokespersons, and also unauthorized persons deceptively representing your company. Those regulatory bodies that govern traditional forms of commerce and extend to social media include:

Federal Trade Commission (FTC)

The FTC regulates unfair, deceptive business and competitive practices. It also provides for the protection of consumer privacy and the protection of children participating in the public sector. Social media communication within any company is subject to fair business practices related to your company's information and competitor's information that is intentionally released, leaked or used in a deceptive manner in the areas of competitive strategy, pricing models, and/or proprietary customer secrets, formulas or intent. Blogs, Microblogs, social networks, and forums including chat rooms have transmitted information that FTC would find objectionable and most likely illegal.

It is also clear that the FTC requires that company employees or agents acting as a company representative or spokesperson to acknowledge and identify themselves as such when engaged in online discussion, defense or promotion of their company's products, services and brand.

Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC)

The SEC regulates the release of financial and business information by public corporations. Their objective is to insure that information material to the condition of a public company is fully and fairly disseminated to the public...this typically means that accurate and material information is disclosed to all interested parties at the same time. In the past, social media has prevented this full and fair disclosure of information in instances when financial and/or material information about a company is intentionally or unintentionally released to selected (non-public) recipients, during designated SEC-defined quiet periods, or at any time maliciously and inaccurately reported. Blogging, microblogging, social networks and other social media pose risks to any public company due to unauthorized or selective release of material information, speculation and/or forward looking statements.

In July, 2008, the SEC broke new ground in setting conditions for a public company's financial information to be released onto a company's website. This decision established the company website as a recognized channel for release of material information and added "electronic" to the traditional "printer format" for acceptable release of investor information.

European Union's Unfair Commercial Practices Directive.

This body operates similarly to the FTC. It limits companies from deceptive business practices and specifically prohibits paid company representatives from posing online as consumers. Foreign companies doing business in the 27 EU countries are bound by Commercial Practices Commission statutes.

The statutory challenge to companies in the use of social media is preventing deceptive, invasive, unauthorized and untimely disclosure of information by company representatives and imposters. Law firms specializing in protecting intellectual property, information technology and social media suggest the following best practices to mitigate risk:

- ◆ Register your Company's On-line Identity as an essential step to protect your brand.
- ◆ Institute a social media policy. Train employees (see Human Resources, below).
- ◆ Continuously monitor social media sites and be willing to take corrective action to protect your brand and intellectual property.
- ◆ Designate company spokespersons.
- ◆ Understand terms of use agreements for external social media channels

To the dismay of many social media users, more regulation seems forthcoming.

Metrics. Measuring the Impact of Social Media on your Business and Culture

Your company's social media program is one of three online activities operating simultaneously. The value of each can and should be measured using appropriate measures of process excellence and results--- logically, the metrics for each will be different.

First, the company website is the most basic channel for customers, employees and stakeholders to access company information, read press releases and investor information as well as learn about access to product and service information. Secondly, many companies have an e-commerce capability which is accessed from the website. Its purpose is traditional marketing, advertising and incremental sales revenue. E-commerce coordinates order specification and quantities allowing inventory search and purchases to be consummated online. Electronic interface with the company's supply chain often allows customers to view production and delivery status. Social media is the newest online activity. Its objective is to influence and engage—enabling small groups to muster significant impact upon larger groups of customers, employees, investors, casual visitors or the competition.

The impact of social media upon your business and culture stems from two factors: influence and engagement. Determining impact begins with understanding and tracking visitor identification (who; where; when) which leads to engagement (click in; click to; session duration; posting behavior) and then to the establishment of trust and loyalty (trends, reports, RSS, referrals) to indicators of influence (Digg or Technorati activity) and the chain culminates with action---commercial or cultural (applicant hires, sales conversions, successful product introductions, and etc.).

Numerous vendors offer measurement services: Google Analytics, Radian6, Feedburner, HitTrail, BuzzLogic and others. These services typically tally volume of posts, comments and link clicks to other sites, plus actual onsite time. Other vendors offer sentiment evaluation services and complex measures including the Conversation Index which is the ratio between the number of blog posts by the primary author to the number of comments and trackbacks the blog receives. While these measures are all interesting, they offer few explanatory clues and little predictability in connecting initial contact measures with commercial or cultural outcomes--- it boils down to lots of measurement that is perhaps interesting but not very meaningful.

Social media experts Jeremiah Owyang and Joel Postman recommend tracking several social media criteria listed below. Each of these is soft data thus requiring a great amount of faith in predicting hard outcomes.

- ◆ *Sentiment*—is your company, its leadership or brands referenced in a positive, neutral or negative manner?
- ◆ *Tone*—what is the overall tone of a visitor’s comment or conversation?
- ◆ *Knowledge*—how well does the visitor seem to know the company’s products, business values or brand judging from questions, comments or suggestions?
- ◆ *Purpose*—is the visitor surfing or was there a valid business reason for the visit such as to present a problem to be solved or seek to have questions answered?
- ◆ *Message*—does the visitor repeat or reflect existing company messages or promotions?
- ◆ *Positioning*—is your company, leadership or brands acknowledged by a visitor in ways that the company deems optimal, or favorable, or not favorable?

Summary

Create a Social Media Plan

In any emerging area, the process of planning ---discovery, benchmarking, resource estimation, trial balloons, coalition building and etc. ----is more essential than the creation of that buttoned-down annual plan document. Your social media program will be, at best, a work in progress for several annual iterations. Below are the key questions that guide planning:

1. What do you want social media to achieve for your company?

State the objectives following SMART guidelines.

Don’t stray into e-commerce space, initially.

Most likely your objectives will be based around—listening, learning, issue awareness in the market, building relationships with influencers and communities, assessing reputation, building traffic and page rankings, asserting social responsibility, appealing to talent markets.

2. What audience(s) do you want to reach?

3. What tools and channels will be used?

4. How will social media integrate and compliment other online programs and initiatives? How will overlap be managed and confusion avoided?

5. How will social media be used to change your performance culture? Address apparent loss of control over brand and message control. Describe how information (negative, in particular) will be processed, analyzed and disseminated within the company.

Identify internal touch points and decision rules with other company functions.

Define the safeguards for compliance.

6. **How will executives be included, supported and featured?**

7. **What will social media cost? Are there off-setting savings available?**

Assemble a Top-flight Social Media Team

Recruit demonstrated experts---a small staff of social media technophiles skilled in using Facebook, Technorati, Twitter, flickr, YouTube, Digg and emerging channels. Assemble talent that works nights to keep their skills state of the art. Insure collaborative relationships are working well with IT, customer service and Public Relations, in particular. This is a team that has already made their mistakes and has already reached mastery--- most likely this is not a place where members strive to reach competency after trial and error learning.

Have in-house IT technical strength in platforms and languages-- development and programming skills including HTML, PHP (scripting language), .Net (internet domain), Java, Flash, XML (encoding and serializing data), and etc.

Become (even) More Visible in the Blogosphere

Learn to generate immediate bang from your involvement in social media----ramp up the chatter, now and realize the incoming messaging may just not be all that positive. Employ social media optimization (SMO) techniques and tactics to become highly visible in the blogosphere--- generate publicity. Develop an accomplished blogger team— staff inside the social media community and staffed in other company functions who are knowledgeable about how to blog, clever in devising interesting themes and communication messaging, skilled at coaching executives, knowledgeable in the technical outreach with other bloggers, and familiar with tracking and interpreting blog analytics.

Rohit Bhargava, a social media expert, offers a straight forward game plan for generating visibility and publicity from social media effort. These are: increase your company's linkability, make tagging and bookmarking easy, reward inbound links to your sites, enable your content to travel easily/ encourage mashup, and connect online communities inside and external to your company.

Ensure Visuals are Amazing

Across all three of the onsite activities—website, e-commerce and social media--- enlist graphic and design specialists to create eye-popping, jaw-dropping media that sets your company apart from those competitors for visitor's time and attention. Rely upon internal and external media and IT to design technical interfaces and links that function seamlessly with lightning speed.

Put Your Executives to Work

Do not risk your leaders' reputation or expose them to personal embarrassment. Expose your executives slowly into your social media channels--- allow them to gauge their personal comfort in interacting with channel visitors and coach them toward an authentic style that appeals to the channel and allows them to connect. The role may just not work--have the right advisors around who are willing and capable of delivering this message. On the other hand, operating an executive blog team or having an executive represent him/herself on a mircoblogging channel -- -most likely impossible on YouTube!—offers some degree of message and quality control.

Prepare executives to deal with mountains of incoming messages which are often contradictory, unflatteringly blunt and negative, plus employee names are mentioned in complaints and disputes—this untidy and uncomfortable information is unlike information that these executives commonly deal with— at least, not with since they were middle managers attempting to smooth, consolidate and interpret data for their (then) executives.

Track and Talk-up the Metrics

Metrics are always important in a corporation –so have them handy and be prepared to honestly report and responsibly interpret them. Most importantly, help supporters and detractors follow the intuitive chain from initial visitor contact to their interest and engagement with your vision and offerings toward the establishment of trust and loyalty and finally culminating in action— commercial or cultural.

Don't dwell on Return on Investment. You cannot make the case with currently available data and measurement techniques

Encourage Authenticity

Dial down the hard sell. Dial up social responsibility.

Glossary of Social Media Terms

Social media is filled with new jargon and old terms with new meaning. An extensive glossary of terms is a necessity for understanding this space.

Richard Kastelein is a pioneer and expert in bringing social networking benefits to organizations. He is currently the Managing Director of V.O.F. EXPATHOS, a social media web development company and network based in The Netherlands. Richard has assembled an extensive glossary of social media terms and approved inclusion of his glossary in this article. The link below provides access to this comprehensive glossary of social media terms:
<http://www.expathos.com/social-media/glossary.html>

Social Media Policy (Sample)

Using social media can be a fun and rewarding way to share opinions with friends, family and co-workers around the world. When posting information online, it is important to remember that this information can affect both you and The company. Ultimately, you are solely responsible for what you post online.

The same principles and guidelines found in the Company policies apply to employees' activities online. The company fully respects the rights of individuals in all countries in which it operates. The company is aware of its obligations with regard to protected activity under the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), and none of the prohibitions contained in this policy are intended to infringe upon your rights under the NLRA.

Social media, for the purposes of this policy, refers to all means of communicating or posting information or content of any sort on the Internet, including to your own or someone else's Web log or blog, journal or diary, personal Web site, social networking or affinity web site, Web bulletin board or in a chat room, whether or not associated or affiliated with The company.

Please keep in mind that any conduct that adversely affects your performance as an employee, the performance of fellow employees, or otherwise adversely affects members, customers, suppliers, agents or The company's legitimate business interests, may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

Before creating online content, consider some of the risks and rewards that are involved. If you have any questions about the Social Media Policy or if you feel unsure about the content of your proposed post, feel free to discuss with your manager.

Know and Follow the Rules

Carefully read these guidelines, the Company Ethics Policy and systems usage policy to ensure your postings are consistent with these policies.

Be Respectful

Do not post photographs, video, or audio of The company employees, customers, members, applicants, suppliers, or agents without first obtaining their written approval.

Be fair and courteous to fellow employees, customers, members, suppliers, or agents of The company.

Be Honest

Make sure you are always accurate when posting information or news, and if you make a mistake, correct it quickly. Be open about any previous posts you have altered. Remember that the Internet archives almost everything; therefore, even deleted postings can be searched. Never post any false information or rumors about The company, fellow employees, members, customers, suppliers, agents or competitors.

Post Appropriate and Respectful Content

- ◆ While posting information online can be a great way to communicate with others, it is important to stay clear of many of the potential pitfalls. As a company employee, you have the responsibility to post content in a respectful manner that will not be harmful to the company.
- ◆ Ensure your postings are consistent with The Company's ethical standards and do not violate the ethics policy.
- ◆ Maintain the confidentiality of the company trade secrets and private or confidential information. Trade secrets may include information regarding the development of systems, processes, products, know-how and technology. Do not post internal reports, policies, procedures or other internal business-related communications deemed confidential.
- ◆ Respect financial disclosure laws. It is illegal to communicate or "tip" inside information to others so that they may buy or sell stocks or securities. Such online conduct may also violate the company confidentiality policy.
- ◆ Respect copyright and trademark laws. Do not use The Company's logo, trademarks or proprietary graphics. Do not create a link from your blog, site or other Social Networking to the company website without identifying yourself as a company employee.
- ◆ Express only your personal opinions. Never misrepresent yourself as a spokesperson for The Company. If The Company is a subject of the content you are creating, be transparent about the fact that you are an employee, and make it clear that your views do not represent those of the company, fellow employees, members, customers, suppliers, or agents. If you do publish a blog or post online related to the work you do or subjects associated with The Company, make it clear that you are not speaking on behalf of The Company Stores, Inc. It is best to include a disclaimer such as: "The postings on this site are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the company Stores, Inc."

Using Social Media at Work

Refrain from participating in social media while on the company time, or on company provided equipment, unless it is work-related as authorized by your manager or consistent with the systems usage policy. Do not use The company email addresses to register on social networks, blogs or other online tools utilized for personal use.

Discriminatory remarks, harassment, threats of violence, or similar conduct will not be tolerated. Such online conduct violates the anti-harassment policy, and/or the workplace violence policy.

You are more likely to resolve work-related complaints by speaking directly with your co-workers or by utilizing the Open Door to discuss an issue with a member of management than by posting complaints to a social media outlet. Nevertheless, if you decide to post complaints or criticism, avoid doing so in a way that is unprofessional, defamatory, or injurious to the company or other associates.

The company prohibits taking negative action against any employee for reporting a possible deviation from this policy or for cooperating in an investigation. Any employee who retaliates against another employee for reporting a possible deviation from this policy or for cooperating in an investigation will be subject to discipline, up to and including termination.

Questions and Resources

Employees should not speak to the media on behalf of the company without contacting the Corporate Affairs Department. All media inquiries should be directed to the Corporate Affairs Department.

If you have any questions about the Social Media Policy, or you feel unsure about the content of your proposed post, feel free to discuss with your manager. Ultimately, you are responsible for what you post.

Linkage

Linkage is a global organizational development company that specializes in leadership development. We provide clients around the globe with integrated solutions that include strategic consulting services, customized leadership development and training experiences, tailored assessment services, and benchmark research. Linkage's mission is to connect high-performing leaders and organizations to the futures they want to create.

With a relentless commitment to learning, Linkage also offers conferences, institutes, summits, open-enrollment workshops, and distance learning programs on leading-edge topics in leadership, management, human resources, and organizational development. More than 200,000 leaders and managers have attended Linkage programs since 1988.

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