

Putting back the social in social media

It's been discussed to pieces but social media is just a channel for communicating with other people. It is not the be-all-end-all. Yes, it can be used for marketing (just like that ad you just saw on your way to work this morning) or to incite political action (as in Egypt) or to let people know when the next event is.

Recently, I was at a women's business networking event and we were told to discuss resources we recommend for new businesses, and our own goals and achievements. When I talked about blogs (I write blog content for clients, among other things), many of the women started saying things like "I am not on Twitter/Facebook, and I just don't get it." My response was this: well, you better learn because people are using these channels to communicate much the way you use the telephone or we used to use the fax or the telex even longer ago.

Social media has become the communication channel of choice for many people. Will people still use the phone? Yes. Will some use the fax? Maybe. Telex, no. In a few years, we will be communicating some other way (not on Twitter or Facebook). We will use what other people are using.

Communicating on social media is just a phone conversation on steroids.

It is about people speaking to other people. Yet, there are many people out there scheduling their tweets, and broadcasting irrelevant news and/or sales pitches. There are people who never attempt to learn anything about the PERSON at the other end of the avatar. People who are too busy looking at their screens to interact with other people at an event.

(As an aside, a few weeks ago I was at an event regarding social media, and one of the organizers never introduced herself to anyone and barely looked up from her laptop. And she is supposed to be a social media whiz. Apparently, she knows how to use the tools of social media but not how to be social in real life with actual people.)

Last week, I made a point of having coffee with someone I regularly chat with on Twitter: Diane Danielson (founder of the Downtown Women's Club). I had traveled up to Boston for my college reunion, and asked Diane if she would like to meet up. It was nice to be able to talk face-to-face, and make a more tangible connection.

In my opinion, the real goal of social media or any other communication channel is to connect, whether it be to converse or to exchange information or to perhaps to sell (products, ideas, services).

So, try to put the social back into social media by realizing you are using it as a way to communicate with other people.

Don't go knocking traditional media

Last week I wrote that social media is not all that. Even if I do believe in the importance of social media, I don't think everyone HAS to be on it. And now, Pew Research has found that 1 out of 5 Americans do NOT use the Internet. This means if you are still aiming for high coverage you cannot rely on Internet ads/social media marketing alone. Traditional media (I know, it sounds old-fashioned) is still viable when attempting to reach those Americans who won't or can't access

the Web.



Is Twitter a High School for Adults?

There are followers and lists and getting many of each seems to be the focus for many people on Twitter. Some people make pleas for more followers and then there is “Follow Friday” in which people recommend to their followers other people to follow.

If this sounds a bit like a high school popularity contest, it is, for some people. Many people use Twitter to give and get information and ideas, but there is a subset of people who use Twitter to prove their hotness/coolness/hipness/in-the-knownness. These people go so far as to form cliques on Twitter, endlessly referencing their clique friends in every Tweet. They converse in public with each other and rarely engage with non-clique/inner circle people. Several of these people are “social media experts,” which is ironic since they are not being very social (I must credit Daria Steigman of Steigman Communications with this idea).

I have theories as to why Twitter becomes like a high school for these people but I won't share them here. It is important to remember what social networks are for, and that is to make it easy to create connection. If all you are doing on Twitter is sending shout-outs to your five closest buddies or endlessly promoting yourself, you are not using Twitter to its full potential. I can't say that you are not using Twitter for

what it is intended because I have no idea what its founder was thinking when he created the microblogging site.

Twitter is a great learning tool and it is a great sharing tool. It democratizes access and can really serve to mobilize people around causes. Eugene Robinson makes excellent observation in today's Washington Post, saying:

Twitter and other networking sites are unfiltered by editors or other gatekeepers. They rely on the wisdom of the crowd to sort out what is accurate and what is not. To someone (like me) who has spent his career as a gatekeeper, this was tremendously unsettling – at first. During the Iran protests, I saw how quickly Twitter users identified misinformation that was being posted by government propagandists. The self-policing capability of the medium is impressive.

The other big difference is that social networking offers not just information, but also the opportunity to take action. Twitter users were able to work together to mask the identities of the Iranian demonstrators who were using the site to tell the world what was happening. Last night, along with the news from Haiti came suggestions for how the Twitter community could most effectively help the relief effort.

Is this “news” the way we used to think of it? No. But it's news people can use.

Read complete article [here](#).

To those popularity hounds on Twitter I say put high school behind you. If you have something worthwhile to say people will follow you no matter who your friends are or aren't.

Your minimum social media presence

If you are in marketing communications – advertising, public relations, direct marketing, design or anything else involving promotion, you should be conversant in social media. You should know what it is and you should be using some social media tools yourself. How will you be able to recommend “new media” to clients if you are not on any social networks yourself?

I am not covering any new ground here, I know. However, I am continually shocked when I meet people who are in the marketing biz and who are completely out of the loop in terms of social media. Or, what I think is worse, is people in marketing who have dipped their tippy toes into social media only to have Twitter accounts they never use, or incomplete LinkedIn profiles with 10 connections or a blog that was last updated in 2007. Do you know these people? Are you one of these people? Don't be!

OK. If you buy in to the paragraphs above let's proceed.

LinkedIn–your professional social networking site

- Set up your profile, and include a photograph of yourself. You can most likely use the same photograph on other networks as well. Make sure you have a robust description of what you do now, and an informative headline. If you have older profiles, get rid of them. Make it easy for people who know you to find you.
- If you own your company, set up a profile for your company. Include your company logo and website.
- Link your blog to your profile.
- Grow your network! When you meet people you'd like to do business with, see if you can add them to your network.

- Answer questions. LinkedIn has an “answers” section...see if you can contribute to it.

Blog already!

- If you have a website, that is fine. But keep in mind that websites are static and don't invite interaction. If you can add a blog to your website you will keep it fresher.

Twitter

- Set up a twitter account. If it is personal, use your name. If it is business, use your business name. Getting long and complex doesn't pay off. Remember, your name is part of any re-tweeting, so don't take away precious characters from the 140 you are given.
- Your Twitter profile should have either a photograph of you or your company logo. Do not use the Twitter bird. Be sure to write up a bio and include your website or blog URL.
- Follow people. Make lists (the newest Twitter feature)
- Tweet! Have something to say.

Facebook

- In my book, Facebook is personal. However, you can and should set up a fan page for your business. It is a no-cost way of promoting your business.

To succeed in social media, you must invest some time, be consistent and be persistent.

To recap, get on one or more social networks already!!!!

Online reputations

A few months back I wrote about companies that check on what is being said about them online. I had written a post about Comcast and their lack of customer service and I myself got a comment from Comcast. I theorized that this was a new outreach program for them, and today's New York Times has a story confirming this. They compare it to a sort of outbound customer service department, trying to fix things before they get out of hand. I will give kudos to Comcast simply for acknowledging how important blogs, social media and other online forums have become and how they can affect reputations.

Reputations are perceptions and thus changeable. We've all heard of sterling reputations, and we should all aim for that. Bad reputations can be damaging in a very real, economic way. This blog will always deal with companies and never with individual reputations. However, this new online world order can damage individual reputations as well. I saw a story on TV not long ago (I can't remember which TV news show or I would link to it) where an individual had the same name as a famous rock star. Clearly, his online reputation would be somewhat buried because 99% of mentions referred to the rock star. He went to create an online reputation agency that charges lots of money to clean up companies' (and individuals) images. In any case, this is an ongoing issue and one that more companies will be expending effort to deal with.