

SOCIAL MEDIA

A QUARTERLY REPORT ON
TOPICS AND TRENDS

Caddell
Communications

social media

1st Qtr.2010.v2

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To Tweet, Or Not to Tweet . . .

The free nature of social media makes it a tempting communication vehicle. Compared to newspaper, radio, television and the other forms of communication, you can't beat the cost . . . well, at least not the hard cost.

But the dirty little secret of social media is the cost that is hard to define on your list of budget line-items: time. Twitter, Facebook and other forms of social media require a significant investment of time to make them viable communication tools for your organization. So as you consider which forms of social media are right for you and your organization - - here are some questions to ask:

How often do I see my organization using this communication tool?

Do we have messages we want to get out several times throughout the day?

Just once a week? These questions can be a quick litmus test. If you have "people just gotta have it" information that is interesting enough for you to be heard in the world of "Did you hear about Tiger . . ." then yes, social media could provide for a good return on investment. Twitter, specifically, is a good resource for that level of communication. If you find that your communications of note-worthy interest are less frequent, say once a week or even every other week, then Facebook is probably a better vehicle for your organization. Less frequent a few times a month . . . then you may need to revisit your communication plan. Staying relevant to your customers is key to having them stay with you.

Does my organization have the resources to effectively dive into

social media? To be successful in the world of social media, you'll have to engage in regular, dynamic interactions with people. Simply having a Facebook page and a Twitter account does not mean you're in the game. Remember - - social media thrives on conversations - - which is both the genius and risk of this medium. If your organization doesn't have the resources to respond to tweets, to regularly change your Facebook status, or to launch a campaign to attract fans and followers, then it's best to wait on the sidelines until you have the resources to engage in this level of "relationship" through conversations.

Are there legal parameters that will affect my organization?

No matter the type of organization you represent, there are more than likely legal parameters affecting what you can or should discuss on the world wide web. Before launching into new media, talk with internal and external resources (legal department, compliance, etc.) and establish guidelines about what you will and will not publish. Also, consider the guidance you follow when advertising in traditional mediums. Those same requirements will more than likely need to be followed on Facebook, Twitter, and on other social media networks.

What are my competitors doing?

As with all aspects of business, it's important to keep your finger on the pulse of how your competitors are engaging fans and followers. While retailers and nonprofits have been leveraging these mediums for a year or more, service-based businesses are still finding their footing. Perhaps you have the opportunity to be the leader in your market or industry by leveraging social media to meet your organization's goals. Be cautious about waiting for others to take the lead - - you are likely targeting similar audiences and you want the first shot at inviting that audience to become a fan of or to follow your organization.

We don't have time to get involved in things that aren't focused on meeting our goals and/or adding to the the bottom line. How's social media going to help us met our goals?

Social media can sound . . . well, frivolous to some. And if not used to meet your organization's goals, then, yes it may be guilty as charged. But more likely, several of your organization's strategic goals involve communicating with an audience to prompt action that is favorable to your bottom line. Provided your audience is using social media, then it could well be a good tool in your communications toolbox. Still think that social media is only for 20 and 30 somethings? Not so fast, my friend - the fastest growing segment of users is women 40 and over. Take an informal poll within your organization; chances are you'll find more people than not are participating in at least one form of social media networking.

For most organizations, joining the world of social media is really more of a question of when rather than if. Just like having a website, having a business Facebook page is quickly becoming a brand standard. In addition to meeting a customer expectation, you can also leverage this technology to meet your organization's goals. As you deploy communications in 2010, make sure you're exploring all of your options - - not just the ones you're the most comfortable with.