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Susan Nye ... Email - susannye@tds.net ... Blog - www.susannye.com



The Ins & Outs of Social Media

EXPAND YOUR SOCIAL AND
PROFESSIONAL NETWORK

Once thought to be the domain of high school and college students, social media has become an integral part of American culture. Words like “Facebook,” used as both a noun and a verb, “Twitter,” and “tweet” are now part of our everyday vocabulary. In the words of John Herman, New Hampshire teacher and social media consultant, “Social media has reached the point where it is as normal and commonplace as having a telephone or a television.”

Still, it can be confusing and lots of people are trying to figure out the Internet’s latest phenom-

enon. Don’t worry about the hype and noise; the key to understanding social media is understanding that it is all about connecting with people and conversations. It’s all about building and maintaining relationships.

To get started, or restarted, decide with whom you want to connect as well as what kinds of conversations you want to have. Based on these simple networking goals, you can explore the top social networking sites—open accounts on the ones that best fit your needs and start connecting. Think of it

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COMMUNITY

"Social media is like a small town. It's all about relationships. People like doing business locally with people they know."

—C.C. Chapin

as just another way to talk with your social and professional network of friends, colleagues, customers, and associates.

CONNECTING BRANDS AND CONSUMERS

While social media is nothing more than people talking, it has the power to revolutionize consumerism and the way we interact with brands. In the past, communication about products and brands was one way. Companies told consumers what they wanted them to know and interaction was minimal or nonexistent. Only really happy or really unhappy consumers bothered calling or writing companies or spreading the word to their friends. The Internet and social media have put word of mouth on steroids.

Boloco, a regional chain of restaurants with a store in Hanover, actively engages

with its customers on both Twitter and Facebook. Sara Steele-Rogers, the company's social media and marketing maven, explains, "Social media is a great way for us to listen to and engage with our customers. It helps us understand what they want and align our brand to their needs and interests." Boloco does more than listen; it responds and acts on the comments and feedback they receive online. Whether it's changes to the guacamole recipe or turning down the music in a store, the company prides itself in responding in an honest and timely manner.

Sara adds, "Social media is also a great tool to inform our customers, let them know what's happening in the stores. Many of our customers are college students and young professionals. They are very well connected and like receiving information electronically." Finally, Sara warns, "Whether it's a promotion,





Get Connected

While there are many more to consider, the largest, most popular sites include the following:



Facebook (www.facebook.com)
The largest site with more than half a billion users, Facebook continues to grow by leaps and bounds. Initially a site for college students, Facebook's fastest-growing audience is women over 55. People use Facebook to connect, communicate, and share pictures, videos, and news with friends (including long-lost friends), family, colleagues, and customers.



YouTube (www.youtube.com)
With close to 50 million users, YouTube is the world's largest video-sharing site. From parodies to old home movies, clips of Aretha Franklin singing "Respect" to dancing babies, happy babies, and sleepy babies, YouTube has got it all. You can watch and share videos, create your own channel, and tag your favorites.



Twitter (www.twitter.com)
Twitter is bit like a constant news stream. Twitter users answer the question "What's happening?" in short, 140 character bites called tweets. The company reports that it now attracts more than 190 million visitors per month who generate 65 million tweets a day. Early users were mostly adults. With an explosion of celebrity tweeters, teens and young adults are now the fastest growing audience.



LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com)
Think of LinkedIn as a giant interactive, electronic rolodex. With over 75 million members and still growing, LinkedIn is a huge network of business people and professionals.

an event, or news about a partner or our charitable work, we can only send out information that is meaningful to our customers. Every tweet, every Facebook post must have a purpose and meaning. Otherwise, it's just annoying junk mail or spam."

C.C. Chapin, an Upper Valley native, encourages businesses, especially small businesses, to embrace social media. He advises, "Social media is like a small town. It's all about relationships. People like doing business locally with people they know. Social media provides you with opportunities to meet and build relationships with your customers and potential customers." He adds, "Your customers are already online, it only makes sense that you join them."

PRIVACY CONTROL

Privacy is a big concern for many. Remember first and foremost, when it comes to social media, you're in charge. Many sites allow different privacy settings and levels of access to your information. These settings can range from anyone and everyone to a select approved list. Choose the sites and settings that are right for you.

As with any relationship, honesty is critical. However, you don't need to share every secret and dirty little detail with your online community. John advises, "When you are active online, potential

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AMERICAN GEM SOCIETY

employers and dates, new colleagues, neighbors, even strangers may have access to information about you. It may seem bizarre but you need to think about your online, public face as a brand. You need to be aware and control your brand. That includes the messages you send and the photographs and videos you post.”

Colleges and companies are searching the web during the admissions and hiring process. Students have been turned down at colleges and candidates have lost out on jobs because of videos, photographs, or messages that never needed to go online. As a rule of thumb, if you wouldn't want your grandmother to read it or see it, don't put it online.

You also may want to consider the string of Nashua burglaries that were connected to Facebook postings last summer. Before you share information, understand the site's privacy settings. You don't need strangers and criminals knowing when you are out of town. If you wouldn't want the information on the front page of your hometown newspaper or the *New York Times* or *Wall Street Journal* don't put it online.

Now it's time to get started. Don't be shy and wait for the world to come to you. Send LinkedIn requests, friend invitations on Facebook, and follow people who share your interests on Twitter. Share interesting news, information, and links, post pictures and videos. Interact and respond to what others have posted, answer questions, and give opinions, thanks, and encouraging words. Networking is not all about you; it's about connecting and conversations. Go for it and have fun. ☺

Corporate dropout Susan Nye is a social media enthusiast. Her communications network covers Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, several blogs, and a website. Visit Susan's website www.susannye.com to learn more and connect to her network.

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