

EdNET 2008 Roundtable: Social Networking and Public Relations

With social media here to stay, education organizations are faced with the challenge of integrating Web 2.0 technologies into their marketing and public relations strategies. According to Louis Columbus, columnist for the *E-Commerce Times*, [it's not a question of whether social networking will influence your company, it's a matter of when.](#)

To help you prepare and be proactive about the opportunities social media has to offer, Columbus recommends that companies answer the following three questions:

1. How does your company communicate with customers?

Educators are drastically changing how they want to communicate. Maybe they don't want to receive a phone call or direct mail piece; perhaps your customer would prefer to communicate via Twitter, Facebook, or another social networking tool.

Social networking offers you the opportunity to provide knowledge and insight that solves problems and helps customers first. It's not about starting a sales cycle, it's about building a brand that is respected for solving educators' problems first, and identifying their un-met needs.

Examples of organizations communicating via Twitter include:

Southwest Airlines: <http://twitter.com/SouthwestAir>

Marriott: <http://twitter.com/marriottintl>

Zappos: <http://twitter.zappos.com/>

2. How is your company viewed online?

You can glean valuable information from monitoring what is being said online about your organization, and about educators' concerns and interests. Increasingly, educators (and journalists) are relying on social media for industry news, product recommendations and peer interaction. The insight you gain can help your company improve customer service, product development, marketing campaigns, and communications with target audiences.

Examples of Internet search tools you can use to monitor online conversations:

Technorati: <http://technorati.com/>

Twitter Search: <http://search.twitter.com/>

Blinkx: <http://www.blinkx.com/>

Filtrbox: <http://www.filtrbox.com>

Several companies offer fee-based social media measurement services such as Cision, Webclipping.com and Andiamo Systems. Whether you do it yourself or use a service, tracking social media conversations is a worthwhile investment to get a detailed picture of brand awareness, brand perception and the competitive landscape.

3. What is your company's online presence going to look like?

Once you have learned more about your company's online reputation, you can start to plan what your company's online presence is going to be.

Some Helpful Definitions & Resources

RSS Feed

RSS is a fast, efficient Web tool that allows subscribers to monitor and link to the latest postings from their favorite Web sites, all in one place. Examples of content that can be shared includes news releases, blog postings, podcasts, trade show promotions, email newsletter content, etc.

Common Craft: RSS in Plain English, http://www.commoncraft.com/rss_plain_english

Corporate Blog

Corporate blogs are useful for engaging in authentic conversations with customers, identifying ways to improve existing services or create new solutions, and promote company transparency; all of which are critical for brand and reputation management.

PR Week: Survey Finds 15% of Fortune 500s are Blogging, http://www.prweekus.com/Survey-finds-15-of-Fortune-500s-are-blogging/article/112584/?DCMP=EMC-PRUS_ProductsTools

Microblogging

Microblogging is a form of blogging that allows users to write brief text updates (usually under 200 characters) and publish them, either to be viewed by anyone, or by a select group chosen by the author. The most popular service is Twitter, which was launched in July 2006. Other microblogging services include Pownce, Plurk and Tumblr.

Common Craft: Twitter in Plain English, <http://www.commoncraft.com/twitter>

PR Week: Twitter Alert to FTSE Firms, <http://www.prweek.com/uk/home/article/837752/twitter-alert-ftse-firms/>

Business Week: How Companies Use Twitter to Bolster Their Brand, http://www.businessweek.com/technology/content/sep2008/tc2008095_320491.htm?chan=top+news_top+news+index+-+temp_top+story

New York Times: How Twitter Can Help at Work, <http://shiftingcareers.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/09/07/how-twitter-can-help-at-work/?scp=1&sq=twitter&st=cse>

Social Brand Index: Twitter Accounts Organized by Category: <http://www.socialbrandindex.com/twitter>

Social Networking

A Web-based online community that helps you connect with people you know, and the people they know, to disseminate personal or professional information, to ask or answer questions, look for jobs, and more. Popular social networks include LinkedIn, Facebook and Plaxo.

SIIA's The Experts Guide to the K-12 School Market: Jump on the Social Networking Bandwagon, <http://siiexpertsguidek12.blogspot.com/2008/08/jump-on-social-networking-bandwagon.html>

Common Craft: Social Networking in Plain English, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6a_KF7TYKVC

Christian Science Monitor: Companies Warm Up to Social Networks, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/0908/p13s01-wmgn.html>

Social Bookmarking

To help spread the word about your company and its products, you can add tools to your Web site that allow users to easily bookmark its content on social bookmarking sites such del.icio.us or digg. Social bookmarking allows users to share, bookmark and tag articles that are of interest to them, so others can find them easily, which helps drive potential customers to your Web site.

Common Craft: Social Bookmarking in Plain English, www.commoncraft.com/bookmarking-plain-english

Sites to Visit

Prologger.net (Darren Rowse): <http://www.prologger.net/>

Successful and Outstanding Bloggers (Liz Strauss): <http://www.successful-blog.com/>

MarketingSherpa: <http://www.marketingsherpa.com/>

Common Craft: <http://www.commoncraft.com/>

Community and Social Media (Chris Brogan): <http://www.chrisbrogan.com/>

The Education Business Blog (Lee Wilson): <http://www.educationbusinessblog.com/>

Teich Talk (Annie Galvin Teich): <http://www.theteichgroup.net>

Teacher Tech Blog (Scott Walker): <http://techartechblog.com/>

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