

# OMG



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## Should Your Biz Embrace Social Media?

**UNLESS YOU'VE BEEN** living under a rock on Mars, chances are you have heard about social media, Twitter, Facebook, Squidoo, LinkedIn, the list goes on, and on...and on. Frankly, it can be exhausting. But just what are these forums and online communities and why should business people care?

Social media is a broad and daunting form of communication populated by a diverse demographic of users. Social media manifests as blogging, micro blogging, social sites, e-mail, podcasts, forums, music sharing and more. All of these can be done simply and cost effectively. Social media is highly accessible and changing the way people read, write and share news and information every day.

Wikipedia goes so far as to call social media the "fusion of sociology and technology." Now that's a powerful statement. Sociology is the study of human social structure. In the social media-sphere, then, we're applying classic sociology with new technology to drastically change the way humans interact.

### Once Upon a Time

Just how did social media start? Many trace its birth directly to free e-mail clients such as Hotmail. The term "social media" is generally attributed to Friendster, which ironically doesn't have many friends these days. The site's initial goal was to "create a safer, more effective environment for meeting new people...allowing members to expand their network in face-to-face type scenarios." Friendster was the one of the first networking sites to encourage users to use their real names for a more personalized and fulfilling online experience. For example, I would be "Jacob Lebo" instead of "kinglebo2027."

You can still get a Friendster account, but good luck finding any of your friends and family there. Friendster suffered a fabulous and almost instant death, similar to what is happening with MySpace right now. Jon Gibs, vice president of online media and agency insights for Nielsen Online, predicts we'll hear more tolling bells in this arena: "Remember

### Social Media Terms

RT - A ReTweet. Proper twitter lingo to attribute original source of material

DM - Direct Message. Sending a direct message to a fellow twit

Tweet - The act of posting messages on Twitter

RSS - Real Simple Syndication, web feeds to publish frequently updated work

Widget - Stand-alone application you can imbed on desktops and websites to view news, and important updates

Avatar - Picture to represent yourself or your business across the web

Friendster? Remember when MySpace was an unbeatable force? Neither Facebook nor Twitter are immune. Consumers have shown that they are willing to pick up their networks and move them to another platform, seemingly at a moment's notice."

### Down to Business

As a business owner, it's in your best interest to have a strategic plan to understand which networks are worth engaging in and which to skip. But does your business need social media at all? An estimated 36 percent of the U.S. population regularly uses social networking, according to a July 2009 Anderson Analytics report. A regular user is someone who logs in at least once a month. Within the "regulars," Facebook dominates with 78 million users, followed by MySpace with 67 million, Twitter with 17 million, and LinkedIn's 11 million.

With 110 million members in a captive audience—people who willingly share their thoughts, feelings, and emotions—wouldn't your business be hurt by not participating in social media?

The best way to get your feet wet is on a personal level. Then you can decide if social media is right for your business. Obviously, making an informed decision is critical, so here are some points to get you splashing around in the pool.

DO NOT accept every social media invitation. I constantly turn down invitations to many different social media

circles because, quite frankly, I don't have enough time.

DO NOT use social media during the day. I know it can be addicting, however in addition to building relationships, it can be a time vacuum. Many social media activities should be done outside of business hours.

DO engage. In Facebook, wish happy birthdays, and make relevant comments to your friends. In LinkedIn, pose and answer relevant questions that relate to your business. On blogs and forums, leave thought-provoking comments and compliments. "That was a great article" doesn't count; make it thought provoking!

DO NOT get overly personal. Remember these comments are generally read by your peers and business associates. Don't write anything you wouldn't say in person, and be aware these will be listed forever.

Remember, the key to any successful social media strategy is to actively listen, participate and engage with your industry, customers and other relevant players. If you do this correctly, the relationships you build will foster a greater ROI for your business and brand.

Nothing is ever deleted from the web; it just goes into Google's cache ... What's a cache you ask? Google it! ■

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