

Evolving uses of social media



There's a strong case for using social media networking, but not without a plan.

When emerging communication devices or channels reach the tipping point of mass appeal, organizations typically react in one of three ways:

- » They adopt it on the spot.
- » They eventually get on board - often later than they should.
- » They ignore it and hope it will go away.

Human nature being what it is, reaction to the social media networking phenomenon of the past half-decade hasn't been much different. But considering adoption and usage statistics, it's hard to believe there's anyone left in the third category – even harder when you consider the evolving and powerful uses for social media networking in professional settings.

Social media networking is here to stay. It has become a proven way to reach, engage and cultivate relationships with your customers, stakeholders and audiences. So whether your organization is an early adopter or a Johnny-come-lately, you have to know how it can help and hurt your brand reputation, and how it's going to impact your bottom line. You also have to know how you want to use social media and who you want to reach with it.

In short, you have to have a plan.

The numbers speak for themselves

Facebook	Twitter	LinkedIn
500 million users	Awareness has grown from 5% in 2008 to 87% in 2010	75 million users
50% of users log on daily	51% of active users follow companies, brands or products on social networks	Members in 200 countries
Average user connects to 80 community pages, groups and events	A natural companion medium to other channels, such as Facebook and TV	Members from all Fortune 500 companies
Source: Facebook	Source: Social Media Today	Source: LinkedIn

“Big bang” theory

Why have social media networks grown so explosively? Unlike the telephone or Internet which began as business communication tools, they were designed for social interaction. They're the closest thing we have to face-to-face human contact. And they're as organic as two or three friends meeting at a coffee shop.

Witnessing (wide-eyed, no doubt) the impact social media networking was having on consumer behaviour, it didn't take long before industry and other sectors co-opted it for professional purposes. Smart organizations are seeing the benefits: what better way to establish, retain and grow brand reputation and loyalty than to engage directly with existing and new audiences? Better still, what better way to build customers and audiences than to have them doing your marketing for you? Viral marketing is always the most powerful way to get bottom line results – and the cheapest. If the average Facebook user is connected to 130 friends, and that user mentions your product or service favourably, how much more viral can communication get?

Of course for every benefit, there's a potential drawback. If that same Facebook user has a bad experience with your product or service and warns their friends about it, your brand can quickly take a beating.

Social media networking is a double-edged sword, for sure. But ignoring it is not an option, nor is using it without a plan.

A new take on planning

If you haven't already embraced social media channels as part of your organization's plans to reach target customers or stakeholders, don't panic. You don't have to throw out your tried and true methods. Using social media networks are tactics to use along-side the traditional ones you employ as part of your strategic planning.

As an expert in marketing or communications, you probably have more instinct on this than you think. Consider this: You wouldn't buy a full-page ad in a daily newspaper without asking whether it reaches your target market, would you? If you want to reach 15-24 year-olds, you're not going to advertising in a publication geared for seniors. These days you're not likely to advertise in print in the first place if you're trying to reach a young demographic.

The same logic applies to social media. You do your homework first. Like any planning or investment exercise you undertake, you start by asking yourself some basic questions:

- » What do I want to achieve? A stronger brand presence? Lead generation? More customers?
- » Who do I want to reach?
- » How do I want to do it? What social media channel is the right one?
- » What tactic will work best for my audience? A Twitter message? A social media release? White paper on my website? A Facebook presence?

Make up your mind to invest

Once you decide to use social media networking and choose the channel that's right for you, you have to think it through straight to the end. Be prepared to invest time and money. You can't establish a presence on Facebook or LinkedIn, or make your website social media friendly, without putting time and effort into it. You spend time writing news releases and marketing brochures. This is no different. But instead of just writing a news release you're sharing information, listening to feedback and exchanging ideas – all in a real-time setting. It's an interactive relationship. You can't adopt a social media strategy and then abandon it.

When you use social media tactics, if you're honest about who you are and what you're there for you will before long cultivate a respected place in the community of interest you're targeting.

Still doubtful? Spend some time reading on the subject. A great place to start is [StayOnSearch](#). Read what Internet marketing expert Mark Thompson has to say on the subject.

Monitor and measure

Every communication, marketing or investment plan worth its salt includes a monitoring and measurement component. Social media networks allow you to measure your return on investment in ways that investments in traditional media channels cannot.

Think about it: the metrics from a newspaper ad can give you circulation figures on the day your ad ran, but not much else. Did your sales go up after the ad was published? Sometimes you can make the link, but you can never be certain. And your ROI is contingent on so many other variables, such as ad placement, day of the week you advertised, circulation figures, etc.

On social media networks, there are a variety of ways to measure your ROI – tools that gauge traffic to your website, comments on your latest blog entry, requests for your new white paper, attendance at your latest webinar, a jump in sales, and so much more. And if your activities aren't quite getting the results you want, you can adjust them easily and redeploy quickly.

Many tools exist to help you monitor and measure the impact of your presence on social media channels. See the section **Monitor and measure** below for how it can be done.

When social media networking is approached strategically, it can deliver outstanding results. The examples below describe some pretty creative ways social media is being put to work.

Four pointers to keep in mind when using social media:

1. Know what you want to achieve
2. Choose the right social media channel for you
3. Be prepared to invest time and money
4. Measure, adjust, measure, adjust ...

Social media networking for fundraising

Every U.S. presidential election campaign in the last century has embraced the preferred mass media channel of the day in some unique way to secure votes. In the depths of the 1930s Great Depression, Franklin Delano Roosevelt used the relatively new medium of radio to reach and uplift Americans with his now legendary fireside chats. In the early 1960s, fresh-faced and handsome John F. Kennedy became the natural choice for voters following televised debates with Richard Nixon. In the 1980s, the emergence of the CNN 24-hour TV news network revolutionized the timing of message delivery and response. In 2008, social media channels took their place along-side earlier innovations to build support and, ultimately, voter commitment on election day.

Two years ago social media channels weren't exactly new, but the Obama campaign team embraced them not just to convince voters (especially young voters who use social media networking) to vote for him, but to donate money to the campaign.

In an analysis of the campaign written for **PC World**, Grant Gross writes that some dissenters believe the Obama campaign may not have been as innovative with social media channels as it has been given credit for. But there's no denying his team transformed web-based politics in a number of ways:

- » It attracted young people of voting age where they get their information.
- » It converted people interested in Obama's platform into committed voters.
- » It raised money – lots and lots of money.

For fundraisers, social media networking offers some ideal tools. Campaigners can send out short and concise messages to targeted audiences, reach millions of potential voters, and ask for small sums of money.

It worked for the Obama campaign, which raised \$750 million, about \$500 million of which was pledged via email, Twitter, Facebook and other social media channels.

Duane Raymond deconstructs the Obama campaign further in a blog entry called **How to Campaign like Obama** published on **Fairsay.com**. He argues that good old-fashioned strategy, planning, good local campaigning, a charismatic leader and real face-to-face contact combined with social media networking is what won the 2008 election. He describes the formula as "Planning + Message + Opportunity = Success", adding the Obama campaign did everything well.

For Obama and U.S. presidents who have come before him, successful uses of mass media were not accidental. They were and continue to be the result of careful strategic planning and hard work.

Social media networking for knowledge translation

While the Obama campaign transformed how fundraisers reach donors, most organizations deploy social media strategies for stakes that aren't quite so high but no less important – to engage in discussion, share information, and build communities of interest. The difference is that engagement is more targeted, direct, and in real-time.

A good example of this is the **Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)**, whose Communications and Public Outreach group uses social media networking as an integral part of its work to reach Canadians about government-funded health research initiatives.

One of the many ways CIHR's communications team reaches its communities of interest is through a program called Café Scientifique. It organizes and promotes interaction between the public and experts in a given field at a café, a pub or a restaurant. All people need to participate is a deep-rooted interest in engaging in a dialogue on a particular health research subject. Those who can't attend in person can do the next-best thing: become a member of the **Café Scientifique Facebook community**, which currently has more than 40,000 fans

Through this social media channel, abstract research ideas and their applications in the health sector – or knowledge translation – are made accessible to people with an interest in subjects that range from HIV/AIDS treatment to innovations in diabetes or arthritis research. Using Facebook helps to build interest among people who otherwise might not know about the research work, let alone participate directly in discussions about it.

The success of the Facebook side of Café Scientifique is the result of a significant commitment in planning and an investment in time and resources. It provides a valuable window of insight into CIHR's work and enables relationships that would be far more challenging and costly to cultivate.

Social media networking for employee use

Innovative organizations don't need much convincing to use social media networks to protect and grow their brand reputation. Getting them to use the same tools inside their own organizations takes a bit more work. You'd think employers would consider employees as their best brand ambassadors. In theory, they are. But company leaders get caught up in a number of worries:

- » Control over how tools are being used.
- » What employees are saying or could say about their brand.
- » Investment in time, money and resources.

Like other communication programs, starting with a plan is the best approach – exploring why social media networking would be valuable, how they could help sustain and build brand reputation, and how they could serve as internal communication tools as well as avenues to reach customers and audiences.

One company that has made big strides in its use of social media networking is **Intel**. Published on its website are the rules of engagement for employees. Really, it's a brilliant stroke and a triumph of social media networking in its own right. Intel has clearly figured out how powerful a source of knowledge and engagement its employees can be for the company.

Emerging platforms for online collaboration are fundamentally changing the way we work, offering new ways to engage with customers, colleagues, and the world at large. It's a new model for interaction and we believe social computing can help you to build stronger, more successful business relationships. And it's a way for you to take part in global conversations related to the work we are doing at Intel and the things we care about.

— **Intel Social Media Guidelines**

Intel's rules are simple, clear and practical. Write and talk what you know about. Be transparent about who you are. If you make a mistake, admit it. The rules provide real insight into the strategic and thoughtful approach Intel has taken to turn its employees into brand ambassadors. For example, the guidelines are tightly aligned to the company's code of conduct. And they include recommendations on what employees need to think about when they're writing; namely, that everything they write should add value to the conversation.

Social communication from Intel should help our customers, partners, and co-workers. It should be thought-provoking and build a sense of community. If it helps people improve knowledge or skills, build their businesses, do their jobs, solve problems, or understand Intel better—then it's adding value.

— **Intel Social Media Guidelines**: 'Are you adding value?'

Thinking about a social media networking strategy for your organization? Here are five pointers to consider:

1. Make a plan that maps out two-way communication from the top down and the bottom up.
2. Ask employees what tools they like to use.
3. Start slow and grow according to your comfort zone.
4. Encourage employees to use company language. Keywords that define your value proposition are critical to driving traffic to your website and the conversations you're having with your audience.
5. Measure your progress. If your tactics aren't getting you the results you need, your measurements can help you make strategic adjustments for better results.

Make your website social media friendly

Even in Web 2.0 settings, your website is still the most important window into your organization. It's where you communicate with the general public, media, stakeholders, and other audiences. If you haven't already made your site social media friendly, you should.

Three tips to make your website social media friendly

Good advice on how to boost your site traffic is a click away. When you start that search, keep these three simple ideas in mind:

1. Ensure your customers and audiences can link to every page on your website.
2. Put tools in place that let your audiences comment on your service or product and, better still, share it with their friends.
3. Create a social media resources page, where your traditional materials and your Web 2.0 content (blogs, Twitter messages, YouTube channel content) are easy to access.

Monitor and measure, monitor and measure

If it isn't already clear by now, social media networking tactics for professional use will only work if they're part of a strategic plan. Integral to strategic planning in communications, marketing, investor or government relations engagement is monitoring and measurement. Unless you have mechanisms in place to do both, you can't know for certain whether your efforts are succeeding or failing. Nor can you gauge how to change your tactics if they're not delivering the results you need to see.

What to measure and monitor

Do you know what to look for? Here are five options:

1. Monitor what your Facebook friends are saying about you and the blogs and Twitter accounts you follow.
2. Monitor your website traffic. Consider a search engine optimization strategy and a keyword search exercise. Your audiences will find you faster and traffic to your site – including your social media networking accounts – will grow.
3. Set some benchmarks. Get a reading on traffic and growth before you begin using social media networks, and then measure your progress on a regular basis.
4. Measure changes in lead generation and sales.
5. There are free monitoring tools you can use, but consider professional support. Once you have it, you won't want to live without it.

Making the case for monitoring

Convincing the C-suite to adopt social media networking as part of your communication and marketing efforts, can be a challenge. Convincing the C-suite to invest time, money and resources in social media is even more difficult. But you can make a good case for it if you can demonstrate ROI.

dna13 offers the premier team-based software for media intelligence and public relations management. dna13's MediaVantage solution is a powerful, web-based application that delivers real-time media monitoring and other intelligent solutions that help you maintain control of you brand and reputation. It's everything you need to monitor, manage and measure your communications efforts.

The MediaVantage solution:

- » Delivers real-time intelligence on the conversations about your organization or brand.
- » Improves productivity by centralizing monitoring and measurement activities.
- » Presents summarized media coverage reports.
- » Provides response data so you can adjust your strategies.
- » Increases efficiency in how you manage your PR activities.

The requirement to monitor social media networks is swiftly taking its place alongside monitoring traditional news media. Your customers and audiences are no longer getting their information from traditional sources only. They are talking about your brand whether you choose to listen or not. While the prospect of staying on top of all that chatter can seem daunting, it actually presents opportunities. The tools are now available to help you to easily monitor what's being said, share information, evaluate the outcome and adjust your message. Less than a decade ago this kind of intelligent audience interaction would not have been feasible. Take advantage of this opportunity by incorporating social media networks and monitoring into your communications plans today!

About dna13

dna13 is a leading Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) provider for public relations and marketing communications professionals around the globe. As the premier web-based application for media intelligence and PR management, **dna13's MediaVantage** solution provides real-time access to TV, print, online and social media content, providing communicators the insight they need to plan marketing strategies, securely align corporate teams, synchronize the delivery of corporate messages, and engage with key stakeholders.



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