

WEB 2.0/Social Media What It Is and How to Start Using it

Social networks are ways to describe and communicate the relationships that we have with one another.

Social Media

It began with newsgroups and Bulletin Board Systems, AOL chat rooms and the first online forums . Within the last couple of years an explosion of social media forms and web sites have sprung up to offer literally a multitude of choices.

It has become a powerful marketplace that creates a “word of mouth” locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

Social media is an all encompassing term to describe many different types of content and delivery that fit into the following broad categories:

Social Networking Sites

Sites that operate to connect people with one another. Some would be Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, and Plaxo. Family and friends through sites like Facebook. Professional through social networking sites like LinkedIn.

Blogging

A blog (from weblog) is a frequently updated web site. Updates happening in the form of journal entries, articles and/or links to things bloggers want to share. A blog usually has an archive and allows viewers to post comments, either through joining or open to all.

Microblogging

A format for posting short updates, limited to a set number of characters, about anything. Twitter has been the most popular microblogging app.

Photo and Video Sharing

A web site that allows uploading and sharing of photos and video with anyone. MySpace and Flickr are the most popular sites for this.

Bookmarks

Bookmarks can be shared with others and tagged. del.icio.us can make it easy for finding sites that use the same bookmark.

Social News

Social news sites like Digg provide links to news stories on the Internet. Stories that have been submitted, voted on by the users and then published into category lists.

Podcasts

Sharing audio and video recordings online. Also, both audio and video can be streamed live to the Internet through web cams.

How to start with social media

Listen

Online people may already be talking about your business or service. At the very least they are communicating about other businesses and services just like yours. What are people saying? Are they frustrated? What do they like? What do they not like?

Do this by reading blogs related to your products or services. Use a web site blog directory like Technorati to find the blogs.

Join

Join the social networking communities that you found in Listening that your customers are participating in. Contribute when it is beneficial for finding out more about your own business. Some tips for joining:

- Use a memorable name, such as your company name or short tag line
- Use your real photo as opposed to the company logo
- Post some contact information, especially your website and email
- Be professional, certainly don't "argue" with someone

Participate

A good way to become acclimated to social media would be to participate with the communities you have found. How difficult would it be to keep up a regular routine of participation?

- With blogs comment with your unique opinion with your expertise.
- With online forums create discussions about topics relative to your website's offerings.
- Comment on videos and photos that relate to what you do.
- Share interesting links to other web sites that you come across.
- Keep a log or notebook of what works and what doesn't.

Strategy

Now that you have experienced a number of different social networking communities build a strategy for your own social media.

- What should a blog or other communication be about?
- What will make you different than others? or which formats and stories were the closest to what you want to use?
- What will make you different from all the others?

Create

Create your own content after you have been doing the first 3 steps here for awhile. You have been building an online brand for awhile with the acts of joining and participating.

Content should be something worthwhile and valuable. Continue to build on your brand, all the while linking back into the web site.

Some web browser tools to become acquainted with WEB 2.0:

Keeping up with news about the type of business or service that you have.

RSS (Really Simple Syndication)

To be able to see everything in a simple and easy to access way is to have a RSS reader. It's a free subscription for notification when a website or blog has been updated. Some readers can be found at:

<http://www.google.com/reader>

<http://blogspace.com/rss/readers>

<http://www.newsgator.com/individuals/default.aspx>

Start Pages/a personal portal

Collecting many different types of information in one screen can be done with one of these tools.

Try either www.netvibes.com or www.google.com/ig

Feed Readers–What's happening in the blogs

Collecting similar types of information from one screen. Feed readers grab the feeds you choose so you can read say a number of blogs in one screen. Look at: <http://www.bloglines.com/> or <http://technorati.com/>

Watchlists: Keyword/Search term Alerts

<http://google.com/alerts> can be used to automatically monitor when keywords are used.

Updates to specific web pages

Want to know when a web page has been updated. Use <http://www.watchthatpage.com/> or <http://www.trackengine.com>

Searching across social networks

Want to find a name across the social networks. Then try: <http://www.yoname.com> or <http://www.wink.com>.

Rankings of searches

What are viewers searching for? See by using: <http://www.alexa.com/> or <http://www.icerocket.com>

Forums, message boards

What's being communicated on forums and message boards can be found at: <http://www.board-reader.com>

Tracking Trends

Keeping abreast of what is happening in the marketplace. What new things are impacting customer thinking. A number of tools to investigate to determine which would be best. They are all a little different from one another.

<http://www.hitwise.com>

<http://www.google.com/trends>

<http://www.buzz.yahoo.com>

<http://www.trendwatching.com>

<http://www.blogpulse.com>

<http://www.marketingcharts.com>

Information edited from a number of sources: Online Marketing Inside Out by Brandon Eley and Shayne Tilley, Web Marketing for Small Businesses by Stephanie Diamond and Six Pixels of Separation by Mitch Joel.