

Social Media Snapshot

Making the Most of Available Tools

By Rebecca Patrick

With each turn of the calendar, more and more organizations are embracing social media for what it can do to further its products, services and messaging. The debate has seemingly gone from “should we do it?” to “how can we best utilize it?”

A few Indiana companies recently shared with BizVoice® what efforts have worked for them and why.

Tweet, tweet!

Twitter – A quick-hitting approach with brief messages (Tweets) of 140 characters or less. Accounts acquire both followers and those to follow for information. A user’s timeline reflects messages from the accounts being followed. The @connect function allows users to see who is talking to or about them. As of early June 2012, there were nearly 600 million Twitter accounts worldwide; more than 100 million of those were in the U.S.



The lure of Twitter made a distinct impression on John Cannon, an Indianapolis auto mechanic who runs My Car Doc, in the summer of 2009. He was at a networking luncheon where “seemingly everybody was tweeting or talking about Twitter. I was like: ‘We’re not even talking to each other; we’re sitting around and tweeting’ – and I was about the only one around the table not on Twitter,” he recalls.

“That’s the first thing that piqued my interest. Wow, all of these people were really, really into this. That’s what got me started. As soon as we signed up, it had an immediate impact on my business,” Cannon notes.

“Now, I would say approximately 25% of my business comes from social media. In fact, the first few appointments I had this morning were set up via Twitter last night.” Cannon adds that while most of these social media referrals stem from Twitter, he does receive a portion from Facebook and “a little from (the professional networking service) LinkedIn.”

Twitter can be a bit like a game of telephone, with a message getting repeated – in this case retweeted – X number of times, so it’s no surprise that avenue has taken off for Cannon.

“A lot of my customers have become salespeople for me. I find a lot of my clients through their followers saying, ‘Hey, my car broke down or my car is having trouble’ – and a lot of my customers/followers will tell them to ask me – @mycardoc – about it. So it then will show up in my (Twitter) timeline.

“Then I jump on it and ask (tweet) how I can help. Sometimes it’s as simple as just answering a question and giving advice, but it makes an impact. Other times it’s setting up an appointment. The point is they know that somebody is out there that is willing to help them out,” Cannon concludes.

This type of productive Twitter networking doesn’t necessarily happen overnight, though, and needs to be cultivated – both through following people and a little effort.

“If I have free lunch time or time available, often I will let people know and open it up on Twitter to answer questions. I’ll just give out free advice and free information – and it does help,” Cannon believes.

“It’s not just about shouting ‘Sell, sell, sell.’ That’s the thing I try to get other businesses to realize: Twitter is not advertising space. Twitter is a place for you to engage your customers on a one-on-one basis and to be able to reach out and tell them how you can help them.

“It’s not just, ‘Here are my services,’ but I specially want to talk to you and interact with you. Don’t use Twitter for a billboard,” he asserts.

“Instead, make it fun, make it entertaining. Give away free information

Tweets and hubcaps (and the rest of the car in need of repairs) go together for John Cannon’s business – My Car Doc.



and tips. That doesn't mean you have to give your services away, but just let them know that you are there for them. And it doesn't have to take a big portion of your day; just check in periodically."

Do you 'like' us?

Facebook – Each month, over 900 million users log on to this social network at least once to stay connected to relatives, friends, classmates and business associates. Individual users acquire "friends" while companies/entities receive "likes" as the methods for people receiving information.



For Indianapolis-based benefits consulting firm FirstPerson, there was a desire to "get information out to customers, vendors and partners without sending just another e-mail," offers Brittany Luebke, product marketing manager.

"We do targeted e-mails to customers so that we are reaching the right ones, but at the same time we want to be able to give out (timely) information without e-mailing multiple times a day; that's not something any recipient would enjoy. Social media has been a great way for us to reach out and do that. Facebook has been the most effective with Twitter a close second."

While company news or health care benefit updates certainly fill a need, the more personal communications have gone over well on Facebook, Luebke reports.

"We have worked with many of our clients for several years and are close to them. So whenever someone on our team has a birthday or we have an event, we post pictures to Facebook. That's one simple example that's been really popular with clients that know us and see us a few times a year.

"They like to see what we do, what our office is like, and it further builds that connection. To be able to interact with them via Facebook has been really great for us, and they comment on the timeline. It's a way to keep in touch," she states.

And it's a two-way street. When clients have something special going on that shows up in their Facebook timelines, FirstPerson returns the favor.

"Had we not been paying attention to our Facebook feed, we may not have known that one of our clients had recently won an award, but we did and were able to recognize them."

Luebke confesses the company didn't have a lot of expectations when it started using social media, but rather took the approach of "we'll test things out and see where it goes.

"As a small business (41 employees), we wear multiple hats and don't have a social media manager. Because these are essentially free products, you can afford as a business to invest some time in it and learn how the Facebook timeline works, for example.

"Or you can decide that maybe Twitter isn't for you – and you have to be OK with that. It can be part of the process. To test something and see the response is a positive step," she stresses.

Another key component is paying attention to analytics.

"While we don't have a large number of Facebook fans – we don't have a large number of people who 'like' us –

I can tell that people look at what we post. They may not click the button and like us on Facebook, but they check us out from time to time and look at what we say.

"I know that because of the analytics. We can see that it's a sizeable number of people who check us out when they need us. So maybe we're not popping up in their timeline, but they come back to us when we have new information or they're looking for benefits information," Luebke explains.

She suggests those considering the Facebook plunge examine what other companies "you admire are doing. See what leaders in the marketplace, your industry or companies like Nike are doing. It's about knowing what's out there and just poking around."

Blogging about

Those looking for a little more space to share news and viewpoints may elect to have a corporate blog. In September 2010, pharmaceutical giant Eli Lilly and Company launched its version called the LillyPad.



"The idea started with our government affairs group in D.C. so they could better reach out to their audiences in state capitals and on Capitol Hill, and to influencers who would have an impact on those audiences," described Greg Kueterman, director of government legislation – and one of three employees who post on LillyPad.

"Those folks in government tend to follow social media quite closely, so we thought it was an opportunity to possibly have an impact. So we launched the blog and a Twitter feed, and we feel like that's been effective in reaching those audiences." He adds, "We continue to look for ways to make it interesting and even provocative where we can. We know that's how you get more people engaged in what you are doing."

LillyPad focuses on three areas from a content perspective: policy and legislative advocacy efforts; corporate responsibility (giving back to the community and programs to help patients); and life at Lilly, be it medical innovation, major speeches executives may be giving or diversity and other employee issues.



LillyPad has been an effective outreach for Eli Lilly and Company.

Kueterman describes the significance of social media in general for Eli Lilly: "It's a very important tool we are embracing because not only media but many others are closely following what people are saying through these venues and it's important for us to have a voice there. The conversations are often going to be happening with or without us, so we feel it's important to be there."

"It gives us the opportunity to engage and have two-way conversations. We try to stay away from just pushing messages and leaving it at that. We try to pose questions and write things that can start a conversation because we also think that's important," he concludes.

Advertising also an option

The viability of social media as a paid advertising outlet has also been increasing. Hirons and Company, an advertising and public relations agency with offices in Indianapolis and Bloomington, has been endorsing this option to clients for approximately four years, with more getting on board the past 12 months, says vice president/media director Amy Mitchell.

"We are actively recommending it – Facebook in particular – and believe it's a viable tool in a toolbox; it can be a valuable piece in a media campaign. Moreso, I'm seeing that clients are receptive to it. Obviously, Facebook is huge, so the legitimacy of it is improving. And Facebook advertising is a very affordable medium," she states.

"The nice thing about Facebook is you can get as targeted

as you want based on geography, age, gender, interests and education levels; it's all based on and pulled from the Facebook profiles (that users build for themselves)."

The ability to hyper localize a campaign to a town (or target to a much larger region) and the low cost, Mitchell says, make Facebook advertising quite appealing.

"On the smaller scale, we can cap a budget at a very modest amount each day or week if we choose to. Most Facebook campaigns run on a cost per click model, meaning you are only paying for an ad if someone is interested enough to click on it (as opposed to impressions for traditional online advertising).

"The cost depends on the competition for the audience you are seeking, but most of the Facebook clicks range anywhere from \$1.50 to \$2."

The affordability and the easy editing portal make Facebook a good outlet for testing messages, Mitchell contends.

"We suggest a series of ads. ... They may all be trying to reach the same result, but start out with different ads with different copy to see which ones may be performing the best."

But Facebook is getting stiffer competition, Mitchell adds.

"Twitter is creeping up behind it, and we're going to start looking more at the sponsored tweets (to promote a product or service) and such since that's becoming more viable. Also, LinkedIn is an interesting prospect because you can advertise to specific industries. For example, if you are trying to reach attorneys only or dentists only, you can do that."