



# Social Networking: Should You Care? (Part 2)

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In the last issue, we explored the phenomenon of social media and discussed the utility of the networking sites Facebook and Linked-In, wondering if they would live up to their hype as marketing's next great panacea. In this issue, we'll look at two more, Twitter and YouTube, and discuss how they can be used in business.

## Twitter ([www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com))

Twitter is an egomaniac's dream. Although it's hard to understand why people would be interested in daily, hourly, and sometimes minute-to-minute updates on the comings and goings of average individuals, millions of registered Twitter users do just that. So if you believe that people are interested in your daily musings, this is the forum for you.

Here's how Titter works. A user accesses his Twitter page and answers the question "What are you doing?" As with a text message the answer must be kept to 140 characters or less. Other users, who have declared themselves "followers" of that user can then read the information on their computer or smart phone. Similarly, new Twitter posts, or "tweets", can be added online or by text message.

As of June 7<sup>th</sup>, Oprah Winfrey had 1,352,678 followers and was following 14 others, including Shaquille O'Neil, Larry King, and George Stephanopoulos. Oprah's tweets include such heavy-hitting, society-advancing posts as this one from May 5<sup>th</sup>: "Got to hug Whoopi. Haven't seen her since????! What a fun night." Just imagine, 1.3 million people consciously chose to read that, taking time away from their jobs and family! Although it's easy to poke fun at things like this, it is just another example of what makes Oprah the queen of all media and the keeper of all the money. She "connects" with people unlike any-

one else and they perceive her as a regular person. So when Oprah tweets on May 27<sup>th</sup> that she's looking for a surefire remedy for ticks because she pulled eight of them off of one dog, her enthusiastic followers get to give advice to their idol. From a public relations standpoint, that's pure genius. (for the record, followers suggested she try Avon's Skin So Soft – I wonder how many millions of bottles of that were sold after Oprah said she'd try it!).

The Oprah example is a good illustration of the benefits of much of social media – these tools are a great way for mega brands to stay in touch with their most ardent fans. But what about small businesses, which make up the vast majority of our economy? I think there is certainly some benefit for these companies, but a Twitter presence is unlikely to attract a lot of followers and new clients; more likely, your followers will tend to be existing relationships, unless you happen to write about a unique topic for which people are actively searching. In that case, they might actually click through to your website after reading your Tweets.

A better use of Twitter is in operations, not marketing. Imagine you're a busy project manager with three technicians in the field, all at different locations. With a tool such as Twitter, you can stay up-to-date, passively, rather than taking 20 phone calls throughout the day. As you monitor their posts, which they could update from their cell phones, you can stay informed with minimal effort. Because Twitter users can restrict who can follow them, you could include only yourself, the technician, and the client on a given project. A recent news story featured a similar example of an organ transplant team who tweeted during the surgery, keeping the recipient's family informed about the progress of the operation.

## YouTube

Regardless of age or job function, I'd bet that each of you has seen a YouTube video, even if you didn't realize it. Anytime a funny video is forwarded by friends and family, it's most likely on YouTube. Have you seen the Evolution of Dance? If not, go to [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and search "evolution of dance". This is the most downloaded video in the site's history. Another very popular theme concerns the infamous Mentos mints in Diet Coke. The explosive result is very entertaining, and many amateur scientists/video producers have tried plenty of interesting variations. Search "domino effect mentos coke" for an elaborate demonstration of the power of pent-up CO<sub>2</sub>.

Although these examples are fun and entertaining, YouTube is one of the few social network sites with demonstrable marketing benefits. It has reached 100 million viewers and its videos played 14.8 billion times in January 2009 alone. Visitors use the site to research products and services and view demonstrations.

You can also place video advertising on YouTube, targeted by geography, interest area (topic), and demographic. So if your company needs to advertise, YouTube is a great place to find interested, engaged prospects that perfectly fit your target market.

Perhaps the greatest utility of YouTube is its free hosting of your video content. Using this tool, you can post video of just about any subject matter you desire. This is a great way for your company to demonstrate some aspect of what you do. Clients and prospective clients can view your content, learn more about what you do, and better understand your approach. There are thousands of videos of interest to geologists, for example, and they can all be found with a quick query in the search box. I found such diverse topics as radon testing for granite countertops, customized fabrication of a percussion drill bit,

and a demonstration of one of Golden Software’s programs for geophysical logging of a borehole. Indeed, no matter the size of your company, it’s very advantageous to post a video or two on YouTube, simply from a search-engine optimization perspective. The site is so popular and well used, that a simple search of Google for a given term will often yield several YouTube videos that pertain to exactly that topic.

One of my clients is about to use this approach. As we upgrade the website for this well-established residential and commercial title company, we’re going to tape a mock settlement and place it on YouTube. The settlement will target first-time home buyers with the hopes of putting them at ease regarding the voluminous and intimidating paperwork involved with a mortgage-loan closing. We’ll break the settlement up into segments, each focused on a different set of loan documents, and clearly explain what the forms are for (indeed, the majority of the paperwork is designed to ensure protections for the borrower, but many people don’t see it that way). An added benefit of this strategy, and actually the primary reason we’re doing it, is to provide a resource for the title company’s true clients – the real estate

agents. Our hope is that the agents will direct nervous first-time buyers to the website where they can click on a link that plays the video. The video will not actually be hosted on my client’s site, taking up valuable bandwidth and causing the site to load slowly. Instead, the video will be hosted on the YouTube site, and will appear to be on the title company’s site.

This is a fairly slick application that will not cost the client a lot of money, but will use technology to their benefit. If you are unsure about the utility of this application, consider that in the time it took you to read this short article, approximately 7,200 minutes of new content was added by other users. And all you need to do is switch your digital camera setting from “photo” to “movie” and press record. You can’t get a better bang for your marketing buck than that.

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