

Social Media Engagement Tips: Study Your Target Communities First

Wednesday, December 23, 2009 at 09:08AM

By [*Dennis D. McDonald, Ph.D.*](#)

Before you and your organization jump into implementing a "social media strategy," be sure to study the communities you intend to interact with. Here are some of the questions you should ask in your research:



1. How many different communities are there?
2. How big are these communities?
3. Where are they located?
4. Who are they key players (both individuals and organizations)?
5. What types of organizations make up these communities (e.g., trade or professional associations, commercial businesses large and small, individual consultants, government agencies, think tanks, academic institutions)?
6. What are the main issues — technical, political, social, organizational — the different groups are dealing with?
7. What is your own organization's position on these key issues?
8. Who are your potential partners — and competitors — in engaging with these different groups?
9. Who are your potential competitors?
10. To what extent are these groups already making use of "new media" and "old media" in their own communications?

How much time you devote to this will depend on several factors. Depending on your schedule or budget you can do this type of research yourself or hire a consultant ([here's one](#)) to help. There are a lot of resources available on the web to aid in your research, many of them free. At minimum, you should at least be recording details about your target populations in either a spreadsheet or a database so you can update and sort the lists as they grow.

Either way, you need this research to be as objective as possible. Don't assume you know everything there is to know about your markets. Do be as quantitative as possible about numbers of people and numbers and types of organizations.

Part of what I recommend your doing is what we used to call "market segmentation analysis" in the market research business, only now a major goal for implementing a social media strategy will not necessarily be selling something but instead will be monitoring, publishing to, and interacting with a potentially diverse set of individuals in different overlapping communities. That's a lot of potential "relationships" to manage.

Of the above ten questions, be sure to pay close attention to question number ten, "To what extent are these groups already making use of "new media" and "old media" in their own communications?." Using social media and social networking based methods to engage with a variety of target populations will not completely replace the need to use traditional website, publishing, and research methodologies. The simple fact is that, in any large,

complex population, the rates for adoption of new media and communication technology will vary. Ignoring this fact will cut you off from useful information and insights.

Be prepared to meet members of your target markets on their own turf. If some prefer newsletters and email for interacting with you and your interests, and are slow to adopt public blogs, social networking, or Facebook types of tools, so be it.

Social Media Engagement Tips: Twitter Alone is Not a Strategy

Thursday, October 22, 2009 at 12:44PM

By [Dennis D. McDonald, Ph.D.](#)

I admit it — I use [Twitter](#). If I'm at my desk I check in throughout the day (I don't access it by phone but by browser). Right now I follow 690 and 1,432 follow me, so I'm certainly no "A-lister."

I do find it useful (and admittedly, entertaining). I use it to post news about new blog posts of mine, to respond with wry or sarcastic comments to the tweets of others, and to post links to interesting stuff I notice as I scan the news throughout the day. Occasionally stuff I post gets "retweeted" so that makes me happy (though I have not attempted to calculate the ROI of re-tweeting). I'm regularly pleased by the links provided by folks whom I'm following that provide insights into topics I'm tracking.

Following Twitter will never replace Search, I believe, but it's a useful component of what in the technical publishing world we used to call "current awareness" only here the currency value is dependent on whom you follow. I do get silent satisfaction from blocking spammers and get-rich-quick schemers as I have a fundamental dislike of adding ANOTHER advertising channel to those I already avoid; I hate shopping with a passion. Getting bombarded with ads I don't care about reminds me too much of shopping.

I don't channel my Twitter feed into Facebook or Friendfeed; there are too many overlaps there. I've decided that I really *do* want to keep my various online networking venues separately defined. In other words, I'm not as concerned about data and identity [portability](#) as I once was.

I enjoy the different personalities of the various online networking opportunities. I'm willing to put up with the occasional duplication in registration effort.

So what's my Twitter strategy? Basically, I use Twitter is a conscious extension of my online presence, not as an end in itself. I have a professional website, I already participate in a number of permanent and temporary online networks, plus I actively pursue face to face meetings as well.

The central focus of my online presence is my [web site](#), which is a core element in promoting my services. I constantly advertise recent blog posts with targeted emails ("I think this might interest you ...") and I use Twitter to link back to my web site as well. In

The image shows a screenshot of a Twitter profile page for Dennis D. McDonald. The profile information includes: Name: Dennis D. McDonald; Location: Alexandria, Virginia USA; Web: http://www.ddmcd....; Bio: Analysis, planning, project management, etc. The statistics show 690 following and 1,432 followers, with a total of 5,167 tweets. Below the statistics, there is a 'Following' section with a grid of profile pictures of users being followed.

fact, probably the most important element of my Twitter profile is not my ghastly picture but the link to my professional website. I regularly track where incoming links are generated on my web site and my Twitter address is steadily creeping up in importance.

So, yes, I have a Twitter strategy, but it's not a standalone strategy. I've thought through how I use it in connection with my other networking and promotional activities, and in the process I've learned to think carefully about who might be following — or listening.

[Social Media Engagement Tips: Don't Give Up on Email Just Yet](#)

Tuesday, October 20, 2009 at 05:28PM

By [Dennis D. McDonald, Ph.D.](#)

It's fashionable these days to point out that email really sucks as a tool for collaboration. Email's proliferation of attachments, CC's, and "reply all" emails, coupled with constant spam, has caused email to emerge as the "tool people love to hate," especially among social media evangelistas.



I admit it. I've voiced my [share of concerns](#) about email and how messy and inefficient it is as a collaboration tool. But it's not going away. So the sooner we make peace with it, the better off we'll be. Here's why:

1. Someone in the group always prefers the comfort of email.
2. Email operates as an extended user interface for many applications.
3. Software applications are becoming more focused.

1. Someone in the group always prefers the comfort of email.

In the real world, many work groups, especially outside IT, are composed of individuals with a variety of experiences and expectations. No matter how efficient a collaboration application or social networking platform is, there's always someone in the group who insists on sending and receiving group emails. You can talk till you're blue in the face, but especially if that person is a stakeholder or senior executive, you end up accommodating him or her. That means the group and the project manager has to manage multiple workflows to ensure that everyone stays on the same page. It's a pain, but it's how the real world works. Stop complaining about "technophobes," "resisters," and (my favorite) "old farts." Learn to live with it till they see the light.

2. Email operates as an extended user interface for many applications.

Like it or not, many software applications use email as an extension of the user interface. Sometimes this is just to send and receive "announcement messages" ("Someone has commented on your change to Document X"). At other times email can be used to interact with an application (e.g., see my [Posterous blog](#) where nearly 100% of the pictures and tags were posted via email).

Interestingly, among the greatest “offenders” in this regard are ... social media applications themselves. Some social networking users, as far as I can tell, never figure out how to turn off their email notifications. As a result they become accustomed to a huge chunk of their email basically functioning as links back to a web page. Again, learn to live with it. (My personal preference is to rely as much as possible on the web interface to interact with collaboration and social networking systems, except for applications I use infrequently.)

3. Software applications are becoming more focused.

This is an extension of item 2 above. Applications are becoming more focused and integrated with their communication functions. It’s not just [Google Wave](#) that’s moving in this direction, it’s also the single-function “apps” that Apple’s iPhone has popularized and which will be the focus of much Android development.

When you start moving applications to a mobile device you have to take into account (a) simplifying the physical interactivity and (b) integrating the application’s functionality with the platform’s communication capabilities. The result: phones are not just phones anymore. Email, when it moves to a mobile device and sprouts application legs, no longer acts like “you father’s email.”

In conclusion ...

Email’s going to be with us for a long, long time.

[Social Media Engagement Tips: Don't Drop the Ball](#)

Tuesday, October 13, 2009 at 12:51PM

By [Dennis D. McDonald, Ph.D.](#)

I’ve seen organizations paralyzed with indecision about how to use social media. I’ve also seen “organic adoption” succeed. The latter happens when middle managers take advantage of the cost and availability of tools they’re already familiar with from other professional or social activities. Their success breeds attention by senior management. What can happen then is that wider adoption — and planning — of social media and social networking follow.



I also see examples of groups and sites that sit idle after an initial flurry of interest. What sometimes happens is that a group or community page is set up, a community of members is recruited, and then reality sets in. Reality in this case means that an appreciation develops of the time, attention, thought, and other resources needed to keep the group going. Policies are required. Identities and permissions must be established. Most time consuming of all: content must be created, maintained, and discussed.

It all takes time. That shouldn’t surprise anyone. One thing that can surprise people is the time and energy needed to engage with people in two groups: those who are already heavily engaged with the group, and those who aren’t.

The first group, sometimes a minority of group members, needs to know it's being taken seriously for it to continue engagement with the group. That requires regular monitoring and quick feedback at a level of appropriate sophistication and seniority.

The second group requires a different type of attention that can also be time consuming. These are folks who may be less familiar with social networking tools. Or, they might be in positions of authority and have traditionally isolated themselves from the rapid give and take of the social media world. In a purely voluntary environment this group may also be overly composed of "lurkers" who rarely participate as much as the first group but who, perhaps because they are in positions of influence or authority, function as important gatekeepers and stakeholders.

Group management ignores them at the group's peril. At the same time, this second group may require more training and individualized attention in order to, say, wean them away from a total reliance on email as a collaboration tool. This may be necessary but time consuming.

It's important to remember that both groups require attention. The skills, resources, and processes involved in engaging with each may be different. That's OK. Just be sure to keep that in mind when you're planning a social media community effort that you intend to make an ongoing part of your overall organization.

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