

Social + Media = A Powerful Tool

by Casey Quinlan

Back in the olden days – let’s say the year 2000 – there was your social life, and there was media. The twain met occasionally, usually for weddings, charity benefits, or new-job announcements. When the internet arrived in the 1990s, it became easier to find caterers, or worthy causes, even a new job. In the last five years, there’s been a new internet revolution – Web 2.0 – and it’s changing how we interact with each other socially, and in business.

The term “Web 2.0” was coined in 2004 – it’s defined as a “second generation” of internet-based services that let people collaborate and share information online in new ways. Some examples of Web 2.0 services are online networking sites (Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn) and wikis (collaborative authoring tools like Wikipedia).

What can Web 2.0 do for you? The answer: what do you want it to do?

On the purely social level, when you build a social network online, you can ask for recommendations on those caterers you’re evaluating for your wedding. You can invite your online friends to contribute to your favorite charity. You can network with people who work at the company you’re considering joining, and have a set of work buddies before your first day on the job. Social-networking sites like Facebook and MySpace have a huge population from all across the globe, with groups forming around everything from geographical location to favorite foods. Traveling to France? Look for some French friends on Facebook, and get some insider information before you go.

For business, I think that Web 2.0 offers a real revolution – a way to connect with your customers, your peers, and even your competition in ways that build your company’s reputation faster, and wider, than traditional marketing methods. LinkedIn, a networking site that’s all business, all the time, offers you a way to demonstrate your expertise in addition to growing your network. The Question & Answer part of the site is a gold mine of information on pretty much any business topic. You can offer your nuggets of wisdom by answering questions in your area of expertise. You can also get expert advice and input by asking questions.

There are business applications for Facebook and MySpace, too, particularly for businesses that sell directly to consumers. A clothing store, a restaurant, or an auto-repair shop can start an online community for its customers on a social networking site, creating additional brand loyalty through special offers to its Facebook friends. Charitable organizations can build communities online and market their fundraising events.

The “media” piece of social media – business or purely social – is this: you no longer have to wait for someone else to deem your story “news”. In the “olden days” I mentioned at the top of this article, you’d prepare an announcement and send it off to the press, hoping to make it into print or on the air. Now, you have your own newspaper (your blog), your own radio station (podcasting), and your own TV station (YouTube). Which you can distribute through online networking on Facebook, MySpace, or LinkedIn.

All social networking/social media requires regular updating and management – you shouldn’t just slap a page up and then ignore it for six months. Keep your content fresh, accept (or

decline) connection requests quickly, particularly if you're using the site to expand your business' brand.

A word of caution is required here – anything you post on the internet never really goes away. There have been a number of stories recently about young teachers getting fired for inappropriate content on their Facebook pages, about people not getting hired because of unfortunate college-frat-party pictures on their MySpace page. When you got in trouble in 5th grade, and the principal told you, “this will go on your permanent record!” – there was no permanent record. Now there is, and it's called the internet. If you wouldn't want to see it on the front page of the New York Times, don't post it on the web.

The most important thing to remember when using social media is the same “most important thing” to remember with mainstream media: tell a good story. This is true if you're creating an online community for your business, or just for yourself. Be authentic. Be interesting.

Be remarkable.

Resources:

Facebook www.facebook.com – social networking, can have some business application
MySpace www.myspace.com – social networking with some business application for artists, particularly musicians
Twitter www.twitter.com – where to share what you're doing right now
Flickr www.flickr.com – where to share pictures of what you're doing right now
LinkedIn www.linkedin.com – all business, all the time
YouTube www.youtube.com – share your family reunion AND your business presentations
Ning www.ning.com – create your own social network, for anything

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Casey Quinlan is a former network news field producer who has covered stories all over the world, and who knows what makes a great story. Her company, Mighty Casey Media, helps companies tell the stories that communicate their value and expand their brand – the stories that make them remarkable. Look for Casey on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter, on her blog, www.mightycasemedia.typepad.com, and on her website, www.mightycasey.com.