

# PANORAMA

magazine

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The Voice of Hamilton Business

# Web 2.0: Communication e-volution

... social media  
can do for your business

Written by Christian Es...

When John Donne wrote “No man is an island” in 1624, it was with a quill pen painstakingly dipped in ink and carefully applied to parchment to ensure readability. It took years for his message to reach his audience and he probably passed away never knowing the profound impact it had on so many lives. Today, he would likely post his meditations on a blog or podcast and reach his audience in a matter of seconds. That audience would respond with equal haste, either praising his genius or expressing

their disagreement on Twitter or Facebook. The rise of social media has revolutionized the way we communicate, and Donne’s words ring true today more than ever before. Web 2.0 is providing the information highway with a radical upgrade; changing it from a series of one way streets into a complex, multi-directional grid with various points of entry and departure. With the free flowing exchange of ideas, dialogue and collaboration fuelling the online renaissance, anyone can control the stream of traffic. Companies can no longer post a stationary

website on the side of the road to get their message out. They need to actively participate to drive traffic to their sites and encourage the exchanges that social media provides.

"I like to say a website is not an island," says Gerry Visca, co-founder and creative director of Redchair Branding. "Too many of us used to position our website as an island. It was about us, and we didn't take the time to ask what it is that you want as a visitor to the site. Those days are long gone. There's a shift in power from the producer to the consumer. They're the ones that are saying why you should buy an iPod or why you shouldn't buy this lipstick. With social media, the consumer has the ability to spread that message across multiple channels simultaneously at the speed of thought."

your audience, you may want to have a fan page or a business page on Facebook. But if you're only communicating to your trade, Facebook may not be the place you want to be because it's such a wide group."

"Or, you may want to develop your own internal community and use the same tools as a way of communicating with your employees. We often think of social media as externally facing but there are a lot of great tools that you can use internally. For example a CEO could have a blog just for employees, and employees would have a chance to interact with a CEO. They could have podcasts they share internally."

Once you decide on your specific needs, the next step is to create a social media policy for your company. Waxman



Martin Waxman, president of the Canadian Public Relations Society Toronto at the 2009 AGM

Photo courtesy of CP Images

In social media there are so many pretty, shiny things. You can't get caught up with them. It's interesting to try them, but they may not be right for you.

—Martin Waxman, Palette Public Relations

Although he still maintains a website, Visca uses his blog as his primary marketing tool. It allows him to make instantaneous updates, and to link videos directly from his YouTube account. He Tweets daily and those status updates are automatically delivered to hundreds of thousands of people networks around the world. He credits social media applications with much of his professional success – and they're all free; guaranteeing a good return on investment. But he admits that with so many to choose from the challenge is figuring out which applications will best serve your company's needs.

Martin Waxman is the president of Palette Public Relations in Toronto and will be teaching a course on social media at McMaster University this fall. He says the first thing a business must do is monitor what is happening out there and find out what is being said about your organization. Then, as with any marketing or communications plan, you need to step back and decide what goals you need to achieve, and which tools will help you accomplish them.

"In social media there are so many pretty, shiny things. You can't get caught up with them," he explains. "It's interesting to try them, but they may not be right for you. Not every organization needs to be on Twitter. Depending on your customer base or

says this is important because organizations have lots of staff members who are already participating in various networks and communities and the line between a person's personal and professional lives is increasingly blurred.

"Sometimes people forget that this is a public conversation, not a personal one," he explains. "You're not whispering to a friend or a colleague; you're in essence broadcasting it. If you put something out on Twitter and don't use good judgment, you can get an organization into a lot of trouble. It's important to know what is appropriate and what isn't. As an individual on Facebook you can do whatever you want and take the consequences, but if you're in any way, shape or form representing an organization, you need to adhere to policies."

It is the informal and oftentimes playful qualities of many social media applications that make the tightrope between private and professional such a difficult one to navigate. Those potential hurdles have been eliminated from LinkedIn, a social networking site tailored specifically for business purposes. Launched in 2003, the site now boasts more than 40 million users, who use it to build contact lists, seek and post employment and business opportunities, join industry groups, or pose questions for other community members to answer.



Jim Rudnick, president of KKT Interactive.

Jim Rudnick builds websites through his company, KKT Interactive. Clients are increasingly asking him about the various tools social media has to offer as a means to increase traffic to their websites. He too recommends LinkedIn more than any other and adds that not only does it help bring people to you, it also gives you access to their knowledge and expertise.

I like to say a website is not an island.

—Gerry Visca, Redchair Branding

“It also provides me with a great advisory board, because I can access people who have more experience,” he explains. “For example, I was looking for a VOIP service so I queried my LinkedIn connections and asked ‘Who are you using? What are the pluses and minuses for whoever you may be using? Who



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would you recommend?" I got lots of great answers, including the one that I finally purchased for the office."

Rudnick says you need to be aware that social media is a moving target that is constantly evolving; trying to stay current and technologically advanced can become a full time job. He himself has a thick stack of print-outs that he adds to daily. At the end of every working day, he takes part of that stack home and spends his evening catching up on the latest news and developments.

"Most companies don't have the time for that. They are too busy making steel, providing accounting services,— they don't want to know all that stuff," he says. "My advice would be to either do as I do and spend that time in learning things to stay as abreast as you can, or hire someone who does it. You'll pay the freight, but you'll see rises in your website's search engine ranking positions, more traffic and more money."

For business owners hesitant to take their first steps into Web 2.0, Gerry Visca offers the following solution: "The simplest way to turn your website into a social media tool is to add a dialogue box that asks, 'What do you want? What do you need? Give us some feedback.' Insert anything that allows someone to enter information, and you immediately redefine the experience and turn it into a social media site." **P**



Photo courtesy of Redchair Branding

Gerry Visca, co-founder and creative director of Redchair Branding

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