

minding your biz

Are You LinkedIn? Tweeting? Powncing?

PR
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The latest and greatest ways to promote companies, services and products are through social marketing. Innovative tools like Twitter, LinkedIn, MySpace, Facebook, Pownce and other social networking sites, as well as blogging, have become hugely popular ways to disseminate messages and reach target demographics.

If you're not tweeting, blogging or linking in, you're missing out on cutting-edge opportunities to generate awareness for your business.

Tools like Twitter offer significant benefits, such as allowing companies to monitor "chatter" and post immediate "real time" responses. Some highly respected companies, like Dell, Southwest Airlines and Comcast, are following Twitter to monitor mentions of their companies and respond to customer input.

These tools change daily, and the newest

ones emerge rapidly and virally. For instance, 12seconds.tv, is one of the latest tools that allows people to microblog by video for 12 seconds. What Twitter is to words, 12seconds is to video!

Another major advantage that many of these tools are free. (Isn't that a nice change of pace during the current economic downturn?) It costs nothing to join social marketing sites like LinkedIn, a popular online professional networking site that links people worldwide. You invite your colleagues, friends and professional contacts to join your LinkedIn page and then you have access to their friends and their friends' friends, and so on ... It's a quick, easy way to meet contacts, potential customers and business resources.

You may have heard your teenage children talking about their MySpace or Facebook pages. What started out as online networking sites that attracted mostly high school and college students have become valuable tools for businesses.

Movie studios are posting promotions and film clips on MySpace pages and even developing pages for the movie's central characters. Companies are launching new products through MySpace, capturing a captive audience in the millions.

Even politicians have tapped into the power of social networking. People can follow political candidates' opinions, policies and campaign schedules through social marketing sites. Candidates and their spouses have written "guest blogs," securing a virtual podium for their positions. Candidates' supporters –

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and opponents – can voice their opinions and have interactive online discussions about current events and issues. What a powerful way for people to get involved in the upcoming presidential election.

Blogging has become a tremendously popular – and effective – way to communicate. Today, there are blogs targeting just about every demographic, from business executives to stay-at-home mothers. There are blogs targeting pet owners, gay/lesbian audiences, stu-

dents, future brides — the list goes on. Companies can easily reach specific demographics through these specialized blogs.

I follow industry blogs – adage.com, adants.com – and enjoy reading the writers' perspectives on the marketing and advertising industry. I also read a number of special interest blogs, especially those written by working mothers. These blogs often make me laugh out loud, making me feel like I am not alone in trying to balance a business, a family and all the responsibilities that accompany both. Some of my favorites include mothersofbrothers.com, themomentpreneur.blogspot.com and wouldashoulda.com. They are well-written, moving, sometimes downright hilarious, and keep me coming back to follow the writers' adventures. And smart companies are advertising on these sites – promoting diapers, laundry detergent and other must-have products for busy working moms.

I'm so convinced that blogging is a long-lasting trend that in May I started my own working-mother blog, walkinginmysleep.com. In it, I pontificate about the happenings in my life, and I invite the world to read and comment on my musings. I'm thrilled to say that the blog is taking off, and I've even secured national advertising, which provides another stream of revenue during these tough economic times.

So, how can you leverage these social marketing tools to maximize success for your company?

Suppose your company needs to quickly sell an overstocked or soon-to-expire item. If you have encouraged your customers to follow your Twitter account, you can announce a special sale through a "Tweet." No advertising costs involved!

If you're networking through LinkedIn, it's easy to post an announcement and have it distributed to your network of contacts. Additionally, it's simple – and free – to establish yourself as an industry expert (regardless of your industry) and disseminate information by posting answers to the questions posed by people around the world. Talk about spreading the word.

You can effectively reach a very specific population through blogs. If you're opening a new dog grooming shop in Portsmouth, for instance, you can promote it through pet-themed and Seacoast area blogs, reaching very specific audiences that will likely use your services.

If you haven't done so already, start riding the social marketing wave. Even if you don't yet fully understand its power, you will find it takes you for an incredible ride.

So, Tweet me at twitter.com/lauriesm, link up with me at linkedin.com/in/lauriestorey-manseau, and comment on my blog posts at walkinginmysleep.com! **NHR**

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