

## Social Media: Disease or Business Tool?

*Is it a time waster, a distraction, a legal time bomb, a sales tool or a PR device? Or, as 83% of you said in our recent survey, is it an up and coming business tool? Social media is all that and more. Americans spend more time on social networks and blogs than on email and instant messaging combined. Twice as much in fact. What role should it play in your organization?*

Things are changing. Today, fully 18 percent of researchers surveyed **begin their research** with social media (Wikipedia, blogs, facebook, Twitter) rather than search engines and portals. Would you rather learn about the best new mobile phone from friends, and even virtual friends in some relevant and timely context, or from one of hundreds of Google hits? It is about trust and distilled information for this growing segment. Social media has become one of the most valuable referral systems in history. Sounds like a business opportunity to me.

Facebook grew 700% last year. Yes, your HR manager is probably using it to recruit (or check out) applicants. LinkedIn is a mainstream job and business networking tool today. Both give incomplete and edited visions of a topic or person, but participants are passionate. If you go to my Facebook page, it may seem many of my friends are

20-something young women, and that would be untrue. (Buy dinner for your daughter and her friends sometime and see what happens.)

### Workplaces will ultimately reflect society.

CAI's brand-new "Social Media in the Workplace Survey" of North Carolina employers found:

- 45% of members use social media as a business tool NOW for networking, relationship building, branding, marketing, external and customer communications, or recruiting
- Another 25% are considering using social media for those same purposes
- LinkedIn is the most accepted business tool for networking (43%) and recruiting (31%). Facebook is growing fast in these areas and dominates in branding/marketing, external communication and reaching new customers. Blogs are most used for

branding and marketing. Twitter has an external communication focus

- 52% say they use social media in business "some of the time" (vs. 18% "frequently" and 30% "never")
- Lack of expertise, concerns about productivity and concerns about legal issues were the primary obstacles to the use of social media
- 65% allow employees to use social media under some conditions (mostly HR, marketing, recruiting and sales)
- 23% have a formal social media policy in place and 35% have some informal guidelines
- Only four members (out of 200+ responses) said they had actual legal-related problems or claims so far (such as internal complaints, confidential data or threat of suit)
- **83% of responding companies expect their organizations' use of social media for business purposes to grow**

8

### MY PREDICTION:

**Just as the Marconi Wireless Telegraph revolutionized communications in the age of the Titanic, so will the new and yet-to-be-invented tools find exciting ways to revolutionize the mixture of workplace and business communications. I believe more organizations are willing to adopt new technologies sooner because the pace of change is so fast they cannot afford to wait too long. True, some companies will implement poorly and create new legal claims. Legal concerns should be a consideration to address, not a driving or deterring factor.**

*Credits: I used and cited data from a draft of CAI's recent Social Media survey. Participants received a free copy of the results. Email me directly and I will provide you a free copy. I also generally used data and concepts from ABC News, NielsenWire, and Nielsen's "What Americans do Online" report from August 2, 2010.*



### HOW TO PREPARE:

**In no particular order, think about these ways to prepare for new tools and new possibilities:**

1. If concerned about time wasting or legalities, why not address the issue broadly rather than focus just on social media? Over-emphasis on the ills of social media will cause you and your employees to stay behind the curve. Your policies and culture can focus on "work time is for working," for example.
2. Do you think that your customers are not complaining about your failures to their friends? Why not provide a forum for those things to be aired and repaired?
3. Get your early adopters in a room together to brainstorm possibilities. Take a webinar together. Use a no-idea-is-a-bad-idea approach and see what happens. Respond to ideas with "yes...AND" rather than "yes...BUT" to improve (not squelch) them.
4. Learn what your competitors for the best people, customers or resources are doing.
5. Try it yourself and experience some of the good and bad. Yes, much of it is frivolous and unreliable. Name a form of communication or learning that does not have problems.
6. Purposefully focus on an area where you can have success in social media then talk up that success. Let people try, experiment and fail.
7. Remember the hot stove approach: reward quickly and publicly the good behaviors; provide immediate and serious feedback to abusers.

Contact me directly if I can help you or your team.

*Bruce*

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*Executive Scan* provides a quick monthly update on legal and external issues affecting your workplace with timely advice on ways to respond. It is provided to members and friends of CAI.

*Executive Scan* is written by CAI's CEO, Bruce Clarke, JD.

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This is your September 2010 EXECUTIVE SCAN

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