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In Your Face(Book): Why Social Media Isn't Just for Kids



By
Nancy A. Shenker

All of a sudden, as if someone flicked a switch, at least 20 of my Westchester neighbors and colleagues appeared on Facebook and “friended” me. I have had a sudden surge in Twitter followers. And I’ve noticed that I’ve lately been getting more “fan mail” in response to my monthly e-newsletter and more comments on my blog. Even The New York Times and NPR send me Twitter alerts about things happening in the world.

Other “digital immigrants,” those of us born before the invention of the personal computer, seem to be waking up to the world of social media, once just the territory of college kids and stalkers.

What is social media? It’s any interactive form of online communications. Whereas the first forms of online media were one way, these new applications enable people to share, chat, collaborate and comment—real time, all the time. (I even shared the inauguration experience with my Facebook friends. We posted comments

and congratulations as we watched CNN...all on the same screen.)

I have been an avid Facebook user and blogger for quite some time. These new forms of media do not “de-personalize” humanity. In fact, they make connections possible that are far beyond what you can experience in the “real world.” Whether I’m looking for help with a business challenge, seeking a new staff member, trying to lose a few pounds or simply researching an obscure fact for a client project, I now have a whole new circle of experts to reach out to. And yes, I use it for social purposes too like connecting with classmates from high school and having late-night long-distance chats with friends and family in other geographies.)

These new tools alert me when a colleague is having a birthday, when a person I care about is in a bad mood or when a friend should be congratulated for a great accomplishment. If used properly, this media can create meaningful and unique connections.

I encourage clients and “traditionalist” friends to get over their fears of new media and hop aboard the social train.

But be careful not to get run over or thrown off for bad behavior. Here are some simple do’s and don’ts for the social media world.

1. Mind your manners: If you wouldn’t do something in “real life” it’s probably not appropriate to do it online either.

2. Brand and “sell” yourself but be discrete: You can use Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and other social media platforms to make others aware of what you do, but don’t aggressively push products or services via social media.

3. Share (but know when to stop): Sharing personal pictures is cool, but don’t post anything you wouldn’t want your mother or clients to see. And don’t bore others with countless pix of Grandma Ida. It’s like watching bad home movies online.)

4. Remember, you’re a grown-up: Don’t “friend” your kids unless they want you to. Would you plop yourself down in your child’s room when he has friends over and join in on the conversation? Creepy. Similarly, don’t friend all of someone else’s friends. Ask for introductions like you would in the “real” world.

5. Control your time and space:

When someone “friends” you, you can be selective about who enters your inner circle.

6. Limit your time online: Social media can be addictive and distracting.

7. Be interesting and tidy: Check your spelling and grammar. Even in new media, the old rules of writing should apply.

And, above all, remember that social media enhances but doesn’t replace “traditional” communication. The printed word, face-to-face contact, the phone (not just text messages) and mail all still have valuable roles in our world. When used properly they can build new and deeper business relationships, help you find new sources of entertainment and information and connect with friends, neighbors and colleagues. So, I’ll be seeing you all on Facebook!

Nancy A. Shenker is founder and CEO of theONswitch (www.theonswitch.com) in Thornwood NY (and all over the Internet). Her company offers traditional marketing as well as social media services. Visit her on Facebook, follow her on Twitter, or read her blogs, www.happytowiki.com,*

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