

Is Social Media For Business A Waste Of Time?

Lately, it seems that not a day passes without a mention—be it positive or negative—of social media causing some kind of stir in the business world. With easy access to everything from Twitter and Facebook to Linked In and Plaxo literally at the fingertips of people around the world, it's absolutely no wonder so many businesspeople have taken the plunge into the world of social media for business development purposes.

Along with such a social media business surge, however, has come a deluge of questions: Are the results really worth all the time and effort? Are companies actually gaining new business by engaging in social media? Is social media just a trend or is it here to stay?

Looking for answers to these questions, a group of 60-plus Massachusetts consultants came together recently to discuss the usefulness of social media to business. The speaker that day, Ken Lizotte, Chief Imaginative Officer of emerson consulting group inc. ,had previously conducted a survey (over Twitter!) asking about 20 professionals of all kinds if they thought their participation in social media was a waste of their business time. Responses to the

question were few in number (only four people replied), and vague: One woman responded: "It depends on the type of business." Another man tweeted: "Yes, social media is great for interaction," but adding, "We should talk about it sometime over the phone." Unsatisfied with these minimalist responses, Lizotte was looking to the group of Concord professionals to help finally find some substantive answers.

He began by asking the group how many people in the room engage in some sort of social media for their business. Almost every person's hand went up. But deeper questioning revealed something else: more than half admitted to having Twitter, Facebook, and Linked In accounts but no doing a whole lot with them. One man confessed, "I accept all Linked In requests but I don't do anything with them." In a similar vein, another attendee admitted to updating her business's Facebook status only "once a week" and not spending much if any more time each week than that.

Of the 60-plus in the room, only three people said they dedicate more than two hours per day to updating their social media accounts, interacting with clients



Michaela St. Onge is a Scribe-at-Large at emerson consulting group, (Concord, MA), which focuses on turning consultants, attorneys, CEOs and professional service firms into "thoughtleaders." A member of the class of 2010 at Lafayette College, she can be reached by email at inq@thoughtleading.com or by visiting www.thoughtleading.com.

through short dialogues, and sending out broadcasting messages. Although clearly the minority, this trio nonetheless professed very strong advocacy in a direct connection between use of social media and furthering business development efforts. One of the three, a consultant in the healthcare industry, added: "Social media is an effective filter for reading matter I wouldn't have gotten to otherwise. And Twitter is effective at getting information out to consumers. That's a big reason for my use of social media: It's where my customers are."

At this point, however, many eyes in the room were rolling. Who honestly has two hours to dedicate to tweeting and “friending” people (on Facebook) each and every day?! One man went as far as to call social media a “death knell” for professionals. “I see a lot of chatter out there but I absolutely don’t want to be seen as a chatterer—neither to my colleagues nor to my clients!”

As this conversation continued, it became clear that most people do understand social media as one of the many tactics businesspeople can use to drive new business and growth, if only one. “It’s all about what I call the ‘Findability Formula,’” a marketing professional stood up and explained. “Social media is a great way to raise your Google ranking, for example. Keywords

are what matter. If you’re effective in getting yourself up there under the right keywords, then you’ll be putting yourself in a good position. But you need to find out just what those right words are. That can be the hard part.”

Further, this same marketing professional later suggested that business professionals need to successfully locate the right people to have such conversations with. If some sort of connection through shared interests can’t be established, there’s no point in putting in the extra time and effort that social media requires for growing business, bringing in new clients, and making more money.

A definitive answer as to whether social media is helpful or harmful or a waste of time in terms of

developing new business was not established in this one discussion. The conclusion seemed to be that the matter of how useful social media will be to business depends on such factors as the type of business, the type of person, the type of social media, the amount of time invested in social media, and so on. But one man wisely cautioned, “We can’t ignore social media. Social media platforms are where many consumers are, and where many of our competitors are too. Social media isn’t transient...it’s here to stay. As businesspeople, we need to pay attention to that.”

The consensus in the room, whatever each one’s individual experience, seemed to agree.