

# Online social networks mean business, marketers say

BY CANDACE S. HUGHES

Contributing Writer

Texting, blogs, Facebook and YouTube — it isn't kid stuff. It's serious business.

Through her firm, Simply Put Marketing Communications LLC, Tisha Pelletier helps clients boost business using social media. "From blogs to MySpace to Facebook to YouTube to LinkedIn, all are part of the social media mix and can help you market your business more effectively," she said.



Pelletier

Many think these methods of communication are just for teens. Not true, said Pelletier. An industry report by comScore shows more than half of the visitors to social networking sites are 35 or older, "which just happens to be most of our target markets," she wrote in her newsletter, the "Simply Put Scoop."

"Social media are especially effective for small businesses that can't afford to do expensive traditional marketing campaigns," she said from her Gilbert home office. "And if your blog or video is creative enough and grabs the attention of your market, it can lead to viral sharing — which means more hits to your site and potentially more sales."

The amount of time it takes to interact with visitors can be a drawback, she said. She advises experimenting to find what works best.

## SOCIAL MEDIA LINGO

**Most know "blog" is short for "Web log," but here are some other definitions from the social network scene:**

**VLOG:** Derived by combining "video" and "Web log," a vlog provides a video journal on a subject rather than just text entries. Vlogs can best be thought of as online video diaries. Vloggers are video bloggers.

**WIKI:** A type of Web site that allows users to easily edit content. Such open editing allows for easy interaction between users and/or groups, and is effective in collaborative authoring.

**SOCIAL BOOKMARKING:** Allows consumers to share their favorite bookmarks, Web sites or content with others by submitting links to a public or semipublic forum.

**FOLKSONOMY:** An online social network.

**WIDGET:** An application within a Web site that offers users interactive features. Popular widgets include photo slide shows, videos, music playlists, sticky notes, horoscopes and virtual pets.

Source: netlingo.com

## HERE TO STAY

The concept drew more than 50 Valley public relations and marketing professionals to "Communications and Social Media: Next Steps," a seminar sponsored by the Phoenix chapter of the International Association of Business Commu-

nicators.

Shel Holtz, principal of Holtz Communication and Technology in California, presented tips from his books "How to Do Everything with Podcasting" and "Blogging for Business." Social media is egalitarian, he said, because it moves the flow of information from the hands of institutions and gives it to individuals.

Jessica Hansen, senior public relations account executive with McMurphy Inc., is using information from the seminar in her communications strategy. The communications firm, which has offices in Phoenix and New York, maintains a group Facebook page featuring its staff.

In addition, McMurphy uses an internal wiki and is developing a company entry for Wikipedia. Staff members participate on MySpace, Twitter and other content-sharing sites such as del.icio.us to find new technology.

"I personally track approximately 150 feeds using a Bloglines account and absolutely agree with Holtz that it is a more efficient way to stay on top of the information now shared via numerous news outlets," Hansen said.

She is a fan of idea-sharing sites such as Dell's IdeaStorm blog and My Starbucks Idea, where consumers offer suggestions and rate ideas for companies.

## KNOW YOUR GOALS

Eric Reid, social media services manager for Off Madison Ave in Tempe, writes in his blog about the April seminar: "[Blogs]

don't spin hay into gold just because you have one. They have to be part of a larger strategy."

As a communicator, he also advises using an informal voice. "People don't trust pasteurized, safe PR-speak. Frankly, that tone doesn't work to communicate anything. Conversely, someone talking straight to you, like a peer, creates that connection," he said.

Reid also cautions that it's difficult to quantify social media's benefits. "If you find yourself thinking, 'Wow, I want to jump on this whole Facebook bandwagon thing,' back up and ask yourself: 'What am I trying to achieve?'" he said. If you want people to know who you are and what you stand for, a social media campaign is the way to go, he said.

And if one of your goals is getting traditional press attention, blog exposure is ideal, said Kelly Isley, a partner with Corcoran Associates in Scottsdale.

She noted a recent Brodeur/OmniComm study in which 61 percent of the reporters surveyed said blogs affect story tone and 50 percent said blogs influence editorial copy.

## GET CONNECTED

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