



Seven Tips to Help In-plants Get Social

Social media is all about engaging your audience. In-plants can benefit nicely from this.

EVIDENCE OF how social media is taking the business world by storm is everywhere. Facebook "Like" buttons, Twitter links and invitations to follow RSS feeds seem to grace every Web site.

Business news is full of social media success stories, like the brilliant Old Spice campaign, in which a buff "Old Spice Guy" admonishes that while most men can't look like him, they can smell like him. That campaign mixed old media (TV) with social media; people were invited to ask the Old Spice Guy questions via Facebook and Twitter, and over 200 of those questions were answered via videos posted on YouTube and Facebook. The videos went viral, sales of the stodgy brand Old Spice soared and social media was cemented as a key component in a B2C marketing campaign.

While stories like this show the power of social media engagement for big business marketing, can it do anything for an in-plant? It can do plenty. Social media is all about engagement, establishing a place for dialog with an audience, and that can be as useful for an in-plant as it can for a major consumer brand. It's also a great way to learn and to teach, and it is a conduit to a world of information well outside the walls of one's own organization.

Here are seven tips to help an in-plant operation take advantage of the social media tools out there today.

1 Establish a plan of action before you start.

As with any new venture, the first stage is always planning. Get to know any social media venues your organization already has in place and make note of who takes part in the discussion there. Think about the types of communication you would like to have with your audience and how much time you have to devote to the cause.

It's good to create an actual business plan around social media in which you record what you hope to accomplish with the effort (e.g. get to know customers better, establish yourself as an expert on a particular subject, change how your in-plant is perceived in the organization, sell more print, etc.) You might consider doing a SWOT analysis in which you determine your strengths and weaknesses, as well as the opportunities and threats around your social media plan.

2 Know your organization's social media rules.

Work within the boundaries of your organization's social media policies. In the face of potential legal issues, some organizations, particularly schools, have rules prohibiting social media engagement either on the organization's computers or with certain parties, like students. Engaging with your

customers via social tools is hampered by these kinds of restrictions, but it doesn't mean you can't still use them to your advantage.

In this situation, instead of establishing "friend" links with individuals, you can create generally accessible subject or department-based accounts, like a Facebook profile or LinkedIn Group. This is something that consumer brands do very well and so can you. This way, your audience can engage if they wish on their own time and there is nothing covert about the connection. >

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3 Determine which social media your potential audience uses.

While the big five social media platforms—Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, blogs and YouTube—seem like obvious choices, other industry-specific social media platforms might make even more sense for your social engagement plan if you happen to be working in one of them. How do you know which platform people are using? Ask.

Conduct a survey and ask your customers (a contest or small gift for participating works wonders for garnering participation) which social media platforms they use and what kind of information they would find useful from you. You can do this with a formal survey (either online or in print) that you send to all customers. Or you can do it more casually by asking the customer the next time you speak to him or her. It only makes sense to put your social media messaging on

Find Out More

For a full plan on how you can start a social media program for your in-plant, read this new book by Julie Shaffer and Mary Garnett: "Social Media Field Guide: A Resource for Graphic Communicators." Learn more and get a copy here:

Social Media Field Guide

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the platforms that are attended by your audience. There's no point in creating elaborate YouTube videos if very few people in your audience ever visit the site.

4 Establish yourself as a subject matter expert.

You can use your social platforms to educate your audience on a variety of subjects. The most obvious is how to create great print-ready files; social media is a fabulous way to get that message across. But you can also use it to establish your operation as an expert. Consider creating a blog around print-related topics, like reviewing new font faces or discussing the psychology of color. Build a Twitter channel and post links and stories that show you're connected to the world outside of your shop.

Sometimes—especially when you provide a specific service to an organization, as you do in an in-plant—you don't have the opportunity to offer value beyond those specific tasks. Social media allows you to shine as a knowledgeable subject-matter expert.

5 Use social media to keep in touch with others in the industry.

There's no better way to keep in touch with your peers in the graphic communication industry than to build social media connections with them. Quad/Graphics hosts a weekly Twitter chat for anyone interested

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in talking with industry peers about specific related subjects (@Quad-Graphics/printchat). The folks at Quad have done a nice job not only in establishing their own expertise in social media usage and in a wide variety of industry-related subjects, but they've opened a dialog with others.

LinkedIn groups are another great way to keep your finger on the pulse of topics related to what you do. The Printing Industries of America Networking Group is one of these. It has thousands of members

and features very lively discussions. If you work in a specific vertical market, you should also take part in the dialog with conversation in that community as well. There's no better way to get yourself out of the corner and into the mainstream than to fully engage with others in the field.

6 Learn through social media engagement.

No budget for travel anymore? Formal training just not something you have the time or the budget to do? Social media tools bring a

wealth of education right to you. In addition to its groups, LinkedIn offers a service called "Answers," which lets you ask specific questions and taps you into a vast network of potential answers.

Free podcasts are available on iTunes where you can virtually attend Ivy League college classes. Follow the right Twitter accounts and you'll have a non-stop feed of more related links to articles of interest than you could possibly follow—you can pick and choose the best for you. Like marketers, publications, associations and educational organizations are all using social media to get their material out to others. (Check out www.facebook.com/inplant, for example.) Take advantage of this mostly free stream of educational material to learn at your desk.

7 Use social media as a sales and customer service tool.

Social media marketing hawks will say that social media is all about the conversation and should not be used for overt selling. It's true that a tweet saying "Need postcards? Come to ABC Printing" isn't very enticing. But particularly in the case of an in-plant, using social tools to let your customers know what you have to offer isn't a bad idea. Social media messaging can be used to prod your customers to bring in work when the shop is slow ("Special today: We can turn around your business cards in four hours!") or to let them know it's crunch time and to allow a little extra time for projects.

The lines between e-commerce (Web-to-print), CRM and social media tools are fading every day, with vendors integrating these tools across platforms. So a tweet can be used as well as an e-mail to let a customer know a job is completed. Did your operation win an award or create a beautiful showpiece for the organization? Do you have a new service to offer? Let people know. I hope these tips give you a few ideas and reinforce the concept that business-centric social media engagement is not just for marketers. **IPG**



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