

[Social media for businesses, in action.](#)

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Social media is incredibly hot right now and businesses are jumping on the bandwagon. In the past year, social media has transformed from the social space to the commercial space in a big way.

More and more businesses are using Web sites such as LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook as integral parts of their marketing plans, and some even employ a full-time staffer to take over the job.

We spoke with representatives from two local businesses to find out just how they are using social media.

Clear Directions

“Social media is a very important part of our marketing mix because it is an inexpensive way to reach out to our customers and connect with them in a more meaningful way than just pitching marketing materials to them,” said Denise Stillman, principal of Clear Directions, an Oak Lawn-based business advisement firm.

The company primarily offers “free advice to our customers” via Facebook and a blog, she said.

“We put info on our blog about other entrepreneurs and how they became successful,” Stillman said. “After posting something on the blog, we have it set up to duplicate that on all of the other social media sites that we are members of.”

Stillman employed a social media business consultant to help her get set up and said it is important to seek the help of a professional when breaching cyberspace.

“Definitely find the right business partner that can help you do it,” she suggests. “Don’t take it upon yourself; you can easily offend many people on the Internet. If people see you just as a promoter and not as an informer, they can block you from e-mail lists.”

Why is social media so important for businesses?

“It is important because it helps increase your visibility on the Web,” Stillman said. “If you are not well connected on social networking sites, chances are your Web site won’t rank highly on major search engines.”

While Stillman admits the return on investment of social networking sites is difficult to measure, she said it is still worth the time and money.

“A lot of what you are doing is trying to build your perception,” she said. “When I write a good blog, my page views go up. It gives people that I don’t know a reason to come and check us out. The more eyeballs you have on your Web site, the more buzz you create about what you are offering to the public.”

Pure Water Technology

“One of the key ways we use social media is to consistently educate people,” said Peter D’Amico, account executive and social media strategist for Pure Water Technology, based in Mokena. “We use it as an educational tool for our customers, so they see us as experts.”

Last year, Pure Water Technology read a study put out by Harvard University claiming a chemical in bottled water was linked to diseases such as cancer. D’Amico immediately used this study in the social media space.

“We shared the study with our customer base via Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook,” he said. “It got the information into people’s hands. Our goal here is eliminate bottled water.”

D’Amico said the company also blogs on a regular basis, posting messages about what they do as well as information on the water industry.

“We will write a short message, the same as what we want our clients to hear if we were in person and trying to tell them about us,” he said. “After a series of posts educating people, we will get responses. From there, we continue with the typical sales process. I recommend that people post daily.”

D’Amico is passionate about using social media in the business realm.

“It is a great sales and marketing tool,” he said. “You can reach so many people. There are more than 350 million users on Facebook alone. If Facebook was a country, it would be the fourth largest country in the world. That is a huge venue for you to reach people.”

D’Amico offers a few pieces of advice for those just getting started in social networking.

“Start with Twitter,” he suggests. “Twitter.com has a great section on using Twitter for business. I would read it and start to implement it. Then I would make a Facebook page. Ask one of your fellow business owners or friends who has posted a business on there. Then link the two and you have the start of it.”

He also recommends going to your local chamber of commerce.

“Look for your local chamber to do events and they might have a social media 101-type seminar,” he said. “If they don’t, ask your chamber to put together a series. You’d be surprised in how many people would want to come to something like that.”

Intimidated? Never fear, he said.

“My 86-year-old Grandma is now on Facebook,” D’Amico said. “Anyone can do it. Sit down with someone who is doing it for 10 minutes and you will have the beginnings of what is an extremely helpful marketing tool.

“Remember when people were resistant to the cell phone? How would you do business today if you didn’t have a cell phone? Social media is going to be like that.”

