
A Skeptic's View of Social Media

By Avery Horzewski, WIC Blog

I must confess that I grudgingly signed up for many of the social media tools. They simply aren't the way I prefer to communicate. At the same time, the entire phenomenon intrigues me. The reason for my simultaneous disinterest and intrigue in relation to social media can be traced back to my education and that which I love and love to study: communication.

I much prefer to speak to someone face to face and over the phone, or watch/hear someone express their views on TV or over the radio. I like the richness that those modes of communication provide, both in the nonverbal cues that accompany the words as well as the depth of information that they provide because they're not limited to 140 characters or a screen page.

However, so much about social media gets my nerdy side operating in hyper drive. What is it about Facebook that has people spending endless time sharing brief snippets of their lives, taking quizzes, writing notes, and the like—and why should businesses care? Why is everyone chomping at the bit to express their thoughts in 140 characters or less on Twitter? And why have these become almost the standard for hooking up with friends—and now colleagues?

I am on Facebook. I do Tweet. I blog. And I am active on LinkedIn. However, as I mentioned, I went on Facebook and Twitter reluctantly. I needed to; I didn't want to. As a consultant who helps companies develop and implement effective customer communication strategies, it's my job to understand the various mechanisms by which users want to interact—and more and more users want to interact using social media.

Bottom line: it doesn't matter if you like social media or not, if your audience does, you need to consider it—seriously.

You CANNOT Not Communicate—this is one of my favorite phrases. I even use it as my company tagline. It's also a good reminder that everything you do—and don't do—sends a message. If you write off social media because you're not interested in it, then you likely risk alienating at least a portion of your audience. More importantly, you risk losing a pretty amazing opportunity to get to know your audience in a way that you might not otherwise be able to do.

And it's this latter component that has this skeptic convinced that there's value in exploring social media. In addition to giving your customers something they want and expect, you have the potential to gain incredible customer insight and see a side of them that might otherwise remain hidden. I didn't think I would, but I did.