

## Four Predictions about Social Media for the Coming Year

### PR CORNER: Start 'talking' now

By Nona Patrick

As 2009 comes to a close, I am left feeling like I was unable to turn around this year without hitting something related to social media. We've all heard about it, some of us participate in it and others wish it would go away altogether.

But the truth is social media is not going anywhere and the time to join in is now.

In August, Twitter had 54.7 million unique visitors worldwide compared to the 4.3 million unique visitors it had in August 2008, according to ComScore. Twitter's cousin, Facebook, also experienced incredible growth. Nearly 50 million people joined Facebook between July and September 2009 alone, bringing the grand total of users to 300 million worldwide.

The numbers are undeniable and so is the integration of social media into the average person's daily schedule. People are spending more time on Facebook and Twitter than other sites on the Internet.

So, what is a business to do?

Stop hitting the snooze button and start participating. You know who your customers are; now you need to find them and engage them. This year is almost gone, so here are my predictions for social media in 2010 to help prepare:

1. Social media will begin to look more exclusive. Facebook currently allows users to "hide" posts from hyper updaters and I think the amount of "hiding" will only increase.

This will make strategic planning for businesses in social media more important than ever. The more people use social media, the less time businesses have to find their voice and the less forgiving people will be if they receive repetitive, pointless updates from companies or feel like they are being "talked at" instead of "engaged with."

2. Sharing information will no longer be done predominantly by e-mail. As people spend more time on social media platforms, sharing will mean posts/updates to Twitter and Facebook rather than e-mails. Online newspapers, event listings and other Internet content providers currently have sharing functionality that people use to post information to a number of social media platforms.

Local businesses can add these sharing functions to their own online content and products and make it easy for people to let their friends and followers know about recent purchases and other information about a business. Making it easier for your customers to "talk about you" means they will.

3. If companies don't have specific rules of engagement for social media platform use at work now, they will in 2010. Formalizing the access of social media at work — how employees should conduct themselves as business representatives online — and official plans for using social media will help tame the insecurity of using social media for business and public relations. A comprehensive social media policy will also shape the perception of businesses that "get" social media and those who don't.

4. I don't think we'll see the creation of new social media platforms in the next 12 months but will instead see increased usability of each. The number of services available on Facebook and Twitter will increase and become even more user- and business-friendly. This relates directly to conducting public relations, advertising, building brand loyalty and leveraging social media to meet business objectives.



If you are waiting to get on Facebook and Twitter ask yourself, "What am I waiting for?" The time to find your customers, learn how to speak with them and increase customer loyalty is now. Yes, 2009 is almost over but Facebook and Twitter have just begun.

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