

What is Social Media and Why Should I Care?

By Lance Simon

Social media is a living term describing changing trends in the use of Internet technology and web design that aim to enhance creativity, information sharing, collaboration and functionality. According to Wikipedia, “Social media are media for social interaction, using highly accessible and scalable communication techniques. Social media is the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into interactive dialogue.” In some sense – from iPads to Facebook to Google TV, LinkedIn and Amazon.com, social media is the new Internet!

You might already be using social media to:

- Connect with people across your industry
- Research answers to tough questions
- View training webinars by worldwide experts
- Share your own findings and questions with others

If not, you should seriously consider trying it out. Brian Solis, an authority on social media, has created a chart

containing 24 categories of social media applications. It seems neat and pretty, doesn't it? As we know, the Internet isn't really so pretty. It's a mess just like a teenager's room, with possessions all over the place and in need of cleaning up, but with a lot of fascinating and useful experimentation and innovation going on.

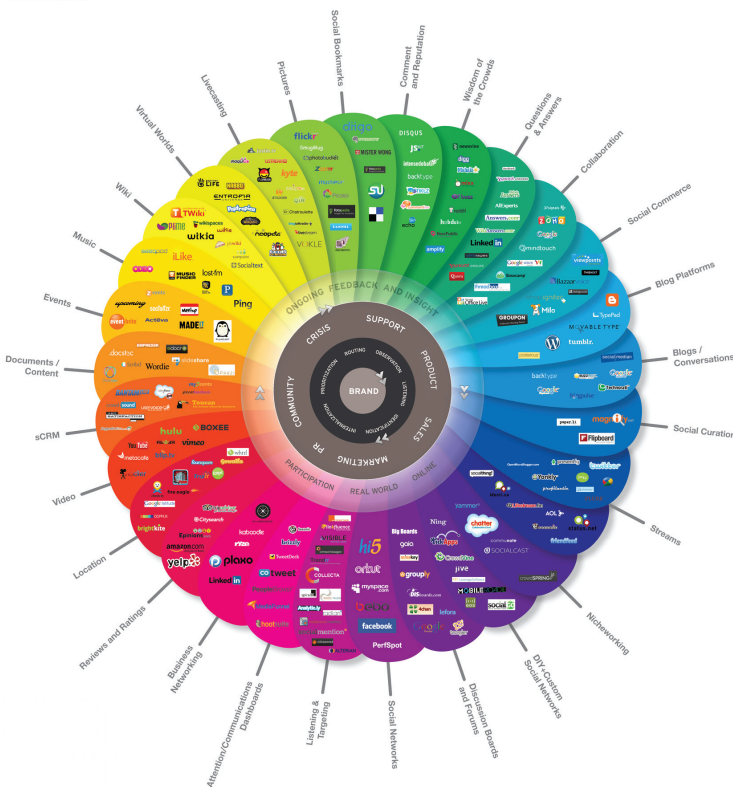
After I started getting into social media, I thought I was doing pretty well with over 350 LinkedIn connections. That is until I saw my 18 year-old has over 1,500 Facebook friends worldwide! As younger generations are becoming adults and entering the workforce, many of them have grown up online and their expectations for TV-quality multimedia, snazzy design, ease of use, and mobile device access are sky high!

They assume that they will not have to travel to have access to high-quality content or collaboration or learning. With these expectations being met and surpassed, their assumptions are true, which means social media is not a fad. And the information gleaned from using social media is not just for teenagers. It might be somewhat intimidating at first, but no harm no foul. Give it a shot. Here's why:

The global reach of the top social media sites is staggering. Consider Facebook, which just started in 2004 from a college dorm room, now has the following statistics:

- More than 600 million users as of January 2011
- 50% of active users log on to Facebook in any given day
- Average user has 130 friends
- People spend over 700 billion minutes per month on Facebook

And in case we think that most of these users are in the US, that is not the case. There are more than 70 translations available on Facebook, and about 70% of Facebook users are outside the United States. For some of those thinking social media is just a clandestine way to troll for your private information, well, that may happen, but the level of privacy can be controlled by



the account settings and not using certain applications within the particular media.

How does all this relate to AHE? AHE is providing more and more functionality in social media for members. One of the new exciting parts of this strategy is MyAHE (formerly the AHE Bulletin Board). This site provides members with a social networking directory to find other like-minded members, and a vibrant discussion board where various topics are discussed on a daily basis with professionals nationwide. MyAHE as a social networking platform is a member-only benefit that provides real-time networking opportunities with peers, experts and leaders in the environmental services field and related support disciplines.

I recently spoke with AHE Board member Kent Miller, CHESP, who is the Director, Environmental Services at Jackson Hospital & Clinic. "One of the best member resources is the online discussion board," Kent told me. "Time is getting tighter and tighter for us in the health care industry, so people don't have a lot of time to spend at their computers. People sometimes run into issues and they're out of ideas on how to handle it. That's where (MyAHE) comes in. You can almost always find someone on the discussion boards with knowledge regarding your question and/or regulatory links."

The discussion board couldn't be easier to access. You can login to the AHE site, or click on "MyAHE" in the main left menu. Both methods use the same login, and you only have to login once. Members can then choose from 10 different discussion boards on important professional areas. For example, there are separate discussion boards on design and construction, environmental sanitation, infection control, patient transport and throughput, and more. There are over 500 posts in MyAHE already "At the conference I run into people who I've seen on the boards," Kent told me.

You may find answers to critical questions in the information that has already been posted. To search through the existing posts and discussion boards, click on the search icon (the flashlight symbol) in the upper right corner of the window and type in the term, date or contributor that you are searching for. Your results will come up almost instantaneously.

Members can also upload documents, photos, videos, or other files to share. If one healthcare facility has an effective checklist already in place, it can be shared

with other members directly through MyAHE. Click on "Deep Search" to search through any documents that have been uploaded in the discussion forum. Updates of discussions you are following can be sent directly to your email address. You can post to a discussion directly by clicking "Contribute" in any email updates you receive from the discussion boards.

Another valuable area of the site is "User Profiles". You can search through member profiles to find people in your area of responsibility who may have further information on questions and issues you are running into in your day to day operations. Simply click on "User Profiles" in the main menu of the site and search for other members. You can also save "vCards" of members to your Outlook address book. Be sure to fill in your own profile with your pictures and other information in the appropriate fields, so people can search and find you too.

I asked Kent what his advice is for members just getting started with MyAHE: "Get on there and you'll find a wealth of information, all the way from regulations to everyday troubleshooting, equipment to be used, and all of the day-to-day problems our peers deal with. You're not a "lone ranger" out there, this is one way to find out what's worked and what hasn't. I've got contacts from this all around the country now from using this program."

MyAHE is a tool that will enhance your career and day to day operations. It gives you direct access to experts in the various healthcare environment fields from around the county. However, you have to be a member to have access to this priceless tool.

For questions or for someone to help you log in for the first time, give AHE a call at 312-422-3860. Staff is always ready to assist!

About the Author

Lance A. Simon is Vice President, Business Development for iCohere, Incorporated, headquartered in Walnut Creek, CA. Since relocating to the Washington, D.C. area in 2002, Mr. Simon has focused on the association, nonprofit and government markets. Lance graduated with a Bachelor of Arts, Magna Cum Laude, in Political Sciences from San Francisco State University, and studied graduate level Computer Sciences at University of Massachusetts at Amherst before leaving school to join Digital Equipment Corporation.