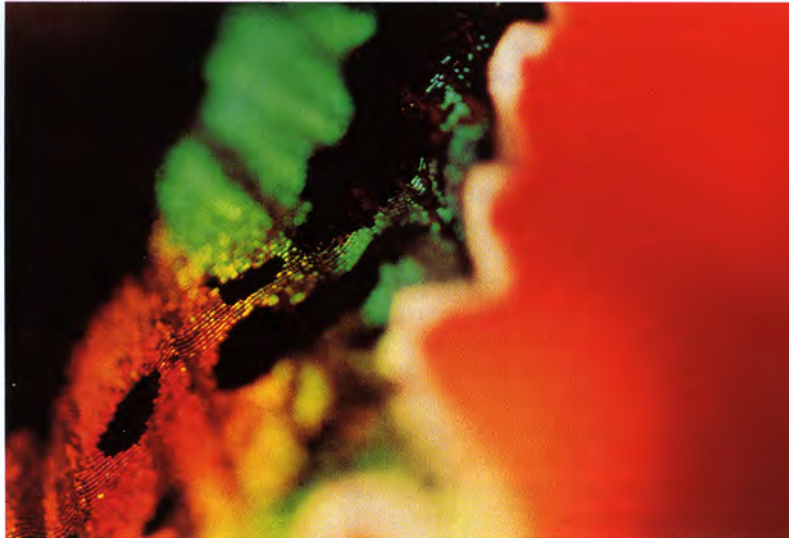


SOCIAL NETWORKING

SOCIAL MEDIA AND NETWORKING IS AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF ANY BUSINESS TODAY. BY JOSEPH STABB

SOCIAL BUTTERFLY



It seems as though everyone has the social media bug today. People seem to think that if you are not found on Facebook, you don't exist in the world. When I hear this, it kind of makes me laugh. There are hundreds of social networks, like Facebook and LinkedIn. If you are not on Facebook, it is not the end of the world — maybe Facebook isn't the right place for your brand or the correct platform for your audience to engage with your brand. Remember, just because you are engaged in social networks does not mean that you are engaged in social media as a company.

Social media encompasses everything from social networking sites, social sharing sites, life streaming, social games and virtual worlds. To really be engaged in social media as a company, you should be involved and interacting with your key publics using several different tools. Be diverse in the tools you use and you will reach a larger, more diverse audience. The key is to plan accordingly and research what is available, not just what you hear about everyday. There is a big draw to be engaged, but you should be cautious too.

Social networks are just one of the tools you have in your digital marketing communication arsenal. Social networks are more than just Facebook and LinkedIn, although, they are the two largest networks with Facebook now at 88.3 million members and LinkedIn at 48 million members. There are also specialized social networks for niche markets. Firefighternation.com is a social network geared toward firefighters with more than 40,000 members, while doctors have doctorshangout.com with roughly 12,000 >

members. Whether you are engaged in Facebook or doctorshangout.com, be sure to plan accordingly before you start.

Planning to engage in social media is one of the most important first steps. You need to make sure that you strategically decide which social networks to be involved with and which social media tools you will use to meet your overall goals. Do your research. Explore different sites, review the content, and understand the technical environment and limitations before you decide to jump in. This can help you in the long run, when you plan how you will be engaged with the social community.

You also want to be sure to plan for someone to interact in the social environment and constantly monitor the content. You should be proactive in these environments, talking with people, not down to them. You need to be sure that you are updating your content on these networks at least every other day, not including weekends. Also, make sure you plan for the best possible people to be the ones interacting and monitoring. Do you really want your intern being the voice of the company that could potentially reach millions of viewers? You can either create an internal team to manage your social media engagement or you can hire an outside agency to work with you on managing it. Which option is the most cost-effective for you?

Social media tools and social networks have become an integral part of society, globally. Now is the time to start being interactive with your key audiences. ■

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