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# The Value Of Social Media

How It's Affecting Our Industry & What You Can  
Do To Reap The Benefits

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## **The Value Of Social Media**

### **How It's Affecting Our Industry & What You Can Do To Reap The Benefits**

#### **Social Media's True Value Is In The Sales Process**

Social media and electronic marketing have grown immensely over the past few years and cannot be ignored. This is especially true as the age groups that have essentially lived and consumed these relatively new tools are now slowly climbing the ranks of influencers and management within the global and North American markets.

The adoption and impact of social media on the construction and related industries is still in its infancy compared to personal use, but we continue to see its growth. Based on our recent industry-related research and our work with manufacturers, we know the current real value of social media for our industry is in the sales process.

Because smart phones, and now iPads, have grown in popularity, field salespeople have immediate access to information from several Web-based and social media platforms. Salespeople can show a product or technology on their smart phone or iPad right in front of customers on the job site or at a production facility in a non-threatening manner.

Such a customer visit could occur in the following way:

1. Meet with the customer, and pull out a smart phone or iPad.
2. Quickly access the company website to review the product or technology visually and review key written information.
3. Access videos on YouTube to show it in action.
4. Pull up your more targeted product and application photos via Flickr.
5. Return to the Web for customer testimonials and/or ROI calculations.
6. Pull up competitive comparison information if beneficial.
7. Immediately e-mail any of the information the customer requests.
8. Plug in notes immediately during or after the meeting to define the next step.

BMG recently presented a manufacturer's 2010 marketing and sales support program to 52 dealer owner/management personnel from 40 dealerships from around the world. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest level of experience, the group's knowledge and experience

with social media was typically 1 to 2. Several had yet to adopt any form of social media and many had very limited websites.

As we proceeded through the presentation and came to the social media plan, we discussed its real value and effectiveness in sales situations. The group's interest immediately climbed to a new level and became far more interactive. Several of the manufacturer's territory managers pulled out their BlackBerry devices and were physically showing attendees.

As awesome as this capability is for sales right now, most professional social media gurus fail to mention the sales impact of this social media phenomenon. Instead, they are focusing on the costly, more high-tech uses for social media that our industry is nowhere near adopting.

### **Make Social Media Part Of Your Marketing Plan**

Businesses are using social media to grow, and increasingly a social media strategy is an integral piece of the overall marketing plan of any smart business. The construction and related industries have been slow to get involved in social media, but we cannot ignore its potential as a sales tool and industry information center. It can be a daunting task for a company to understand social media and add it to their marketing plan. That's where BMG can help. Our Social Media And Related Technologies (SMART) Group is researching all aspects of social media to determine how each can benefit your company. Social media will help you connect with more customers and allow you to join the conversation that is already happening online about your brand.

### **Our SMART Group Research**

We started by researching available social media tools and websites. There are a myriad of options out there, but we found that Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and Flickr are the most popular. Here are a few statistics about each:

- **Facebook** – By far the most popular social media tool, this site currently has more than 500 million users. 30 billion pieces of content (links, news, etc.) are shared on the site every month. It is available around the globe in 70 different languages and has an estimated worth of \$11.5 billion.
- **Twitter** – This site has about 180 million users. An average of 65 million messages (“tweets”) go out every day. It has an estimated worth of \$1.4 billion.

- **YouTube** – The most popular video-sharing site, about 2 billion videos are viewed on the site each day.
- **Flickr** – One of the most popular photo-sharing sites, more than 4 billion total images have been uploaded to the site for public view.
- **LinkedIn** – More than 75 million professionals in more than 200 countries use LinkedIn to exchange information, ideas and opportunities. A new member joins LinkedIn approximately every second.

How much is social media being used in the construction and related industries? Our industry has not embraced social media on the level that others have, but it is starting to take interest. For example, AEM started a social media campaign for the 2009 ICUEE show. The show was on Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook and YouTube. It had a combined total of almost 500 followers, and its 12 YouTube videos registered 1,000-plus views. “ICUEE” was used in nearly 500 tweets during the week of the show.

In general, the construction and related industries have traditionally been slower to adapt to changes in technology and communications. Because of that, these industries have not yet seen the impact that social media has made in mainstream society. It was estimated that as of late 2009 just 20% of AED dealers were using Facebook and only 5% were using Twitter.

BMG wanted to investigate our industry’s involvement in social media further, so we asked editors from different contractor, producer, government and dealer focused publications what their readers were saying.

- Most publications have a Facebook and/or Twitter page and are slowly starting to interact with people in the industry.
- Most readers are not using Facebook to make purchasing decisions.
- However, nearly every publication believes social media sites will become common places for the construction and related industries to get news and make purchasing decisions in the future.

Social media is not a mainstream fixture within the construction and related industries, but it will be. Establishing your company in social media now will make you a pace setter for the industry, not a follower. As the use of social media continues to grow, you will already be there and be able to quickly adapt as social media trends change.

## **A Social Media Game Plan For Your Company**

Here's a simple starting point and way you can fit social media into your overall marketing strategy. It includes specific ideas with specific action points, along with clearly-defined goals and ways to track them.

**Create A Social Media Policy:** This will help guide how your employees use social media websites. A policy like this keeps everyone on the same page and helps them understand that there are expectations of what is permissible and what is not when communicating either on behalf of the company, or in personal, off-the-clock conversations about the company. The companies that have had the most success implementing social media have written policies guiding its use, however informal they may be. (Please contact BMG for a sample Social Media Policy you can use.)

**Track Your Progress:** To see how effective your social media plan is you must track it. This can be done by monitoring traditional metrics such as number of fans, followers or views. There are also services, like PostRank Analytics, Swix, Omniture and ViralHeat that allow companies to track website analytics alongside social media analytics to show how the stats relate.

**Evaluate Its Effectiveness:** Social media is all about connecting with people, cultivating relationships and developing new ones. It is very important to realize that it's not something that will reap great monetary rewards overnight. Rather, it is a tool that requires time to build momentum. You should enter into a social media strategy with a long-term mindset and long-term commitment. After periods of three and six months, look back and evaluate the effectiveness of your social media initiative. Have you made progress in achieving your original goals? This will help you adjust your plan and proceed accordingly.

## **Join The Conversation**

Conversations about companies and their products and services are always taking place. Using social media for business allows you to not only monitor these conversations, but also take part in them and use the information to grow your business. It gives you the opportunity



to grow relationships with customers, dealers and end users. It also has the potential to increase your website traffic and boost search engine optimization.

Implementing a social media plan is not easy. It takes time, effort and resources to make it an effective component of a marketing strategy. There's really no risk in getting started with social media, but there is great potential to grow your customer base and overall businesses.