May I Tweet in Your Facebook?

Social networking is big. Love it or hate it, you can't avoid it. Detractors point to the amount of time that's "wasted" by on-line social networking and call for everyone to keep their eye on the ball, get their nose to the grindstone, and ship up or shape out! (Or is that the other way around?) The trouble with that attitude is that it really doesn't exhibit a clear understanding of how the world works.

So should we be networking or working? John McCain and Barack Obama both use Twitter, although probably through surrogates in some cases. Forward thinking companies and government agencies are trying to determine how Twitter can help. NPR's Ira Flatow ("Science Friday") uses Twitter to communicate with listeners. The New York Times has a Twitter feed. So does The Onion. And CNN. During the recent violence in Iran, Twitter and other social networking services have delivered news.

Who you know may not be more important than what you know, but it's certainly important. Although I live in Ohio, I might know and recommend the owner of a direct marketing service in Brooklyn and you might hire him. In fact, I do know the owner of a small fulfillment operation in Brooklyn and I do recommend him. If you choose to hire him, it might not be because he's the best service provider you could find if you took the time to do your homework. You will hire him because you trust my judgment and you know that if he can satisfy me, he must be doing something right.

Twitter Isn't for Kids

Old folks (those above 40) are surprisingly the primary users of Twitter. Hw mch cn u say n 140 chr?

Twitter messages are short, a maximum of 140 characters. I can say: *If you really must know, I'm writing an article about Twitter and other social networking sites. It's a great way to spend a Saturday nite.* That's 139 characters. I could have used "night" instead of "nite" to hit the 140-character

Tweet!

maximum. Maybe writing Twitter posts that are exactly 140 characters could be a new game, similar to writing haiku verses. Tweets (Twitter posts) can include a URL, but you'll need to use one of the URL shorteners. The New York Times uses TinyURL, but most Twitter posters seem to use bit.ly.

The Business Case for Twitter

Some people say that e-mail is instant messaging for old folks. Being over 40 (by a considerable margin) I'm an "old folk" and one of my primary means of communication is e-mail.

But I also use instant messaging every day. And I have a Twitter account, watch YouTube, belong to Guru, Pandora, Clipser, PhotoSearch, Shutterfly, MySpace, Facebook, and del.icio.us. I have a Webshots page. I do StumbleUpon. I have a WordPress blog and it goes on and on. It's hard to keep up with all of this social networking stuff. But if you own or manage a business, you'd better pay attention.

You could easily spend all day and most of the night social networking. That would be bad for business, but judicious use of social networking makes a lot of sense. It could also make dollars.

Twitter and other microblogging tools took on a new importance when a US Air flight landed in the Hudson River. People received the news first-hand from eyewitness observers. More recently, news about the state-sponsored violence in Iran continued to flow through the microblogs and cell phones after Iran expelled foreign journalists. In both cases, traditional news media incorporated the reports of amateur journalists.

Progressive managers see the value in these services and companies around the globe have started to use Twitter to talk with customers, sell products, and improve customer support. Dell and HP sell used equipment by using Twitter. FedEx, JetBlue, and Whole Foods Markets are among the users who see Twitter as a way to improve customer relations.

Technical and customer support organizations have found that microblogs and social network tools are

effective in delivering service. They can also be used to enhance and expand customer relationships. The Society for New Communications Research says these tools have the dual benefit of improving service and simultaneously lowering costs.

But there is a darker side. The Internet and Web 2.0 social networking tools have helped to produce a mob mentality that feeds the monster bent on damaging individuals, companies, and brands. People will freely say on these services things that they wouldn't say in face-to-face encounters.

Corporate lawyers have concerns about these tools that are being used to touch, assist, and learn from customers. The concern is that someone in the organization will make an innocent or malicious statement in a highly public forum. And that's when the fecal matter will be distributed (unevenly, no doubt) by the rotary impeller.

But something like that can happen with or without social media, with or without the Internet. Proctor and Gamble has fought rumors of "Satanism" for years and, despite the fact that the rumor has been debunked time after time, gullible people continue to believe it.

Mark Twain said a lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is still putting on its shoes and he was right. But organizations that are already using the social media tools will have an advantage when something bad happens.

Twitter's Revolving Door

The Twitter footprint continues to grow. Maybe 10 million accounts today. It's another way that we're constantly connected. Remember the olden days when some people would "forget" to take their pager with them on a weekend trip? Sometimes it's possible to be too connected.

Of the thousands who join Twitter each month, only about 40 percent of them stick around after a few days. That's a 60% attrition rate – worse than the churn most cell phone providers deal with.

People who are 35 years old and older dominate Twitter. Younger users are there, but it's mainly "old folks" tweeting to each other. If tech-savvy kids aren't adopting Twitter, does it have a future? I think these kinds of services will be around at least until somebody invents something that's more compelling. That could be 50 years from now or it could be next week. Twitter, Yammer and the other microblogging services deliver a valuable tool for people to get in touch and stay in touch in our hectic, sometimes chaotic, world.

And yes, there's a service called Yammer. It's intended for communication within a work group. People can have conversations with fellow employees, consultants, and suppliers. Yammer makes it possible to check status reports from your co-workers from a computer or a cell phone.

If you're not using any of the social networking tools, set aside some time to take a look. You might be surprised by the opportunities.

You'll find me on Twitter as *techbyter*. ß

Windows 7 Nears

For the past six weeks or so, I've been using Windows 7 (release candidate 1) on my notebook computer. As one who wanted to like Vista but couldn't, I approached Windows 7 with a great deal of caution. The good news is that it's a big improvement over Vista.

If you have Windows XP and you're satisfied with it, you might be wise to avoid the urge to start using Windows 7 until it's time to replace the computer. For one thing, you'll have to format the drive, install the operating system, and then reinstall all of your applications. Naturally, you'll need to have all your data backed up, too, so that you can restore it—but you should be doing that anyway.

On the other hand, if you're handicapped by Vista, the upgrade will be welcome. You'll still want to have a complete backup, but Windows 7 should install as a Vista upgrade. Now through July 11, 2009, Microsoft is taking orders for two of the Windows 7 versions: Home Premium, which I do not recommend, for $50, and Professional, which is a step below Ultimate, for $100. The prices are about half what you'll pay when the operating system is released in October.

Order now. Pay now. Microsoft ships in October.

Too Many Versions

Microsoft does everyone a disservice by releasing 5 versions instead of 1. If you have a Mac, there's just one OS X. It doesn't matter whether you're running the fastest desktop system with the largest array of disk drives inside and multiple monitors on the outside or the lightest of the notebook computers, OS X is OS X.

Linux comes in dozens of distributions that have been packaged by various people, but any individual distribution will come in, at most, 2 versions: workstation and server.

Windows 7 will have 5 versions: Starter, Home Basic, Home Premium, Business, and Ultimate.

This is idiotic! Just release a single version that has everything. Microsoft needs a customer advocate who has the power to overrule goofy decisions such as this.

What's sad is that releasing a single version would be better for everyone involved:

- CUSTOMERS WOULD WIN. They wouldn't have to try to figure out which version suits their needs.
- OEMs WOULD WIN. They wouldn't have to offer multiple operating system choices in addition to the multiple hardware and software choices they already offer.
- SUPPORT PERSONNEL WOULD WIN. They wouldn't have to ask which version is installed and then try to remember what the low-end operating systems can't do.
- EVEN MICROSOFT WOULD WIN. If the company would simply do the right thing, they would be able to soak up a little extra positive karma.

But don't hold your breath. ß