



"Practical Problem-Solving Advice for Publishers"

How to Think about Social Media: A McHugh Select

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Quick Read

Have you ever wondered about the value of social media to your organization? What is the right mix of company resources to dedicate to social media? In associations and societies, executives also ask what should be the role of volunteers when representing the organization in social media. The purpose of this **McHugh Select** is to suggest how you should think about social media usage in an organizational context.

Contents: Social Media Swirl and Consultants; Absence of Standards and Body of Knowledge; Three Levels of Social Media; and Writing a Social Media Policy.

There's Something about Social Media

Remember the Farrelly brothers' movie, "There's Something about Mary"? In a similar vein, we all ask, "What is it about social media?" Surely as a leader in your organization you have asked yourself this question. Is social media entertainment, information, product promotion, engagement of communities, professional networking, recruiting, family communications, news sources, celebrity trivia, or adolescent chatter? Social media is all of those things and more. Social media is constantly evolving and changing. Most likely social media is widely used in your organization already. Therefore, it's a topic you need to know about.

The Social Media Swirl and Consultants

Social media is a phenomenon that has cropped up over the last five years — with new technologies emerging almost daily. And we're bombarded by over-blown hype about what the latest social media can deliver. Now an entire army of social media experts and gurus have appeared to help your organization maximize use of social media—for a fee, of course. The social media landscape reminds me of the branding craze a few years ago.

My boss, the president of the company, was enamored with a particular branding consultant. This consultant charged outrageous money for what I considered trivial advice. After an initial planning session for a new product line, I viewed this consultant as a lightweight. When I delved deeper, I discovered most of my colleagues concurred but were reluctant to express this opinion to our president. We never understood why our president was so enamored with this person.

The branding expert's biggest contribution was reproducing a binder containing photocopied articles from periodicals such as the *Harvard Business Review*, *Wall Street Journal*, and

Business Week (bordering on copyright infringement). My sense is that many social media consultants fit into this lightweight fluff category. So be aware.

Therefore, I suggest you carefully screen any social media experts before engaging one to guide you through the social media maze. You don't want to waste your time and money on someone who is only providing information you could obtain yourself by browsing the web.

No Standards or Body of Knowledge

Unlike other disciplines, social media has no accepted body of knowledge in disciplines such as business strategy, financial management, and marketing management. Unlike auditing, financial accounting, construction management or steel manufacturing there is no one codification of standards or specifications. Rather, one finds considerable noise and many charlatans (think branding) ready to sell you snake oil by the case.

A Way to Think About Social Media

What has struck me finally with my reading, my hands-on experience with social media (LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter), and discussions with other executives, is that most of us are looking for a way to figure out how social media can benefit our organizations. The intent of this **McHugh Select** is to make some suggestions on possible ways to think about social media.

Three Levels of Social Media: A Context for Thinking

In the professional and business realm, social media is multi-layered. Therefore, I suggest that you think about social media on three distinct levels: technical; organizational; and strategic.

Technical Level: This level involves knowledge of the state of the art and an understanding of the connections, intricacies, and the latest trends in social media. This is at the most basic (micro) level; it takes time to acquire this knowledge and to establish a comfort zone. My experience in learning how to use social media is trial and error, which is time consuming.

Many entry-level young professionals fit this technical level mold. The technical level worker is akin to a machinist working on the jet turbines that power a modern aircraft. You need the machinist for optimal and safe performance but you wouldn't want him to pilot a multi-million dollar aircraft capable of thousands of pounds of thrust. You need qualified pilots to fly the airplane. This brings us to the next level of thinking about social media, the organizational level.

Organizational Level: One needs to think about how social media will work on an organization-wide basis. According to Ann Handley and C.C. Chapman in *Content Rules* (John Wiley and Sons, 2012), "With the rise of the social web, the lines between marketing, public relations, and customer service are blurring. Your customers do not care which department's responsibility it is; they look upon your company as a single entity. So as you develop a content strategy, it is critical to include the voice and input of everyone in the company if you hope to be successful."

In thinking about social media implementation in your organization ask:

- What are the differences in social media messaging in a mission-driven organization and in a product-driven organization?
- Should an organization use a combination of decentralized departmental social media with organizational guidelines overseen by the marketing and or/communications departments?

- In social media messaging what should be the role of the organization's communications department? marketing department?
- Should each department and product line have its own social media? For example, in an association, should certification, conferences, education, publishing (books, magazines, and scholarly journals) each have its own autonomous social media program?
- How should volunteer use of social media under the auspices of the organization be viewed?
- How will the organization audit the effectiveness of its social media program (s)?
- If the decision is made to hire a social media specialist, what should the qualifications of that position be?
- If the decision is made to hire a social media consultant, how will that person's credentials be evaluated?

Contemplating the organizational level of social media then leads us to consider the strategic level.

Strategic Level: Strategy means thinking in the longer term and integrating organizational goals with the social media program. It means asking:

- What does the organization want to accomplish by using social media in both the short and long term?
- What will be the effect of social media usage on the organization's brand?
- What are the intellectual property implications of social media on others' copyrights and trademarks? What is the organization's legal exposure?
- Does the organization need a social media policy?
- How is a social media policy developed?
- Who should participate in the development of a social media policy?

Writing a Social Media Policy

I recommend writing a social media policy for your organization, as the stakes are too high to proceed without guidelines for staff and equally important, for volunteer members. According to Phil Gomes (*New York Times*, April 2, 2013):

Many people ask "Why have a policy for online behavior? Isn't the company handbook enough?" If you have to ask, you might be surprised at the number of employees who sit at their computers and wrongly believe that, in the wild digital frontier, such rules do not apply. Well, they're sort of right that the online world *is* different: in social media, the consequences for violating company standards achieve greater velocity and have a more lasting impact. Thus the need for an online behavior policy.

As you start the process of writing a social media policy, think through the use of social media on an organizational basis. The leaders in an organization should understand what they want to accomplish by using social media.

The development of the organization's social media policy should be participative. Voices at the table should include all departments such as certification, conferences, education, and publishing along with human resources, finance, legal counsel and IT. Appoint one facilitator to lead the social media policy project.

Start your evaluation on the micro level and proceed to the macro level. Listen and find out what is going on with social media in your company. Be deliberative and take your time as this is a complex subject. Circulate discussion drafts to leaders for critical commentary and revise accordingly.

As social media is dynamic and will change, expect to revise your policy in the future. The policy needs to be flexible and broad enough to address each new change so that you won't have to revise every month. So pay attention, listen, and be open to revising as major changes occur.

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About John B. McHugh

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John B. "Jack" McHugh is a 40-year veteran of the publishing business. Jack has worked as an executive for Houghton Mifflin, Wadsworth, and Saint Mary's Press. Jack is also an experienced association publishing executive. For seven years, he was Publisher and Director of Programs at the American Society for Quality and for a two-year period, he served as the Interim Publisher at the Project Management Institute. Jack's specialties include association/nonprofit publishing, book publishing, executive recruiting, journal publishing, rights and permissions, organizational design, and startups. He serves as an advisor to the Friends of Kletzsch Park in Glendale WI

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