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Social networking isn't just for tweens and computer geeks

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Recently, I was lucky enough to attend a meeting with several of the leaders of the sustainable building industry. During a brainstorming session at this meeting I brought up the concept of social networking. As the youngest member of the group, I stay fairly quiet at these meetings, resigned to the fact that the others attending usually know much more about the topics at hand. For the first time I could confidently say that I was the expert in the room. After a brief explanation that the social networking I was referring to was of the online variety and not in person, I felt the room beginning to turn on me. I did my best to convince these old guys that online social networking isn't just for tweens and computer geeks and I'll try to do the same here.

I'm a social networking believer. First of all, it's a free way to market your company to a huge audience and to actively engage with your community. These technologies allow you to be introduced to large numbers of people who might otherwise never have known you existed...and they're free.

Secondly, it's the wave of the future. Remember when you thought email would never really catch on? Like it or not, virtually anyone under the age of 30 (and a large portion of those over 30 too!) are on a social networking site. Chances are the majority of your clients are already using at least one of the many social networking sites out there. You don't have to introduce them to the sites - they're already there.

And finally, social networking is a great way to keep your clients informed about news and events at your company. While you probably wouldn't buy an advertisement to announce a new hire or an award, you could use social networking sites for such announcements.

Each networking site has a different purpose. The three sites we use at Coldham & Hartman are Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Facebook is a service with more than 300 million active users (<http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>). People typically use Facebook in their private lives and most keep it separate from their professional world because the atmosphere is not business focused. That said, Facebook does have a feature that allows businesses to set up a page on their site and the option to set up a professional profile for business networking. Users can become fans of your page and will be alerted of new posts.

Twitter is another large social networking site with over 23.5 million users (<http://siteanalytics.compete.com/twitter.com/>), from students to senators. This site is a perfect way to share quick news or interesting links. We look forward to reading articles and tidbits posted by other professionals in our field.

LinkedIn is a site strictly for professionals. It is less of a social tool than Twitter or Facebook. On LinkedIn, you post a resume-style profile that lists current and past jobs and education. LinkedIn then helps you to make connections through this information. LinkedIn has a jobs page for posting and searching for jobs in your area (www.linkedin.com/jobs). It's a good way to keep in touch with

former co-workers, classmates and friends, and (we hope) to find new work.

Go sign up for one, two, or ten of these sites. Just be prepared for the workload and responsibilities that come with them. It takes daily/weekly/or at the very least monthly updating. Don't be scared by all of this. Google the how to's and the faux pas of the site that interests you. Network and be friendly.

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