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Social media tips from the marketer's toolbox

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Social media is everywhere. Twitter Facebook and Linked In - the big three - are redefining language as well as the way in which people communicate. In fact, each platform on its own has a membership total that can rival the population of a large country. By all accounts however, social media is still a relatively new addition to the integrated marketing communications toolbox. As is the case with any new phenomenon, successful implementation of social media communications requires research, training, strategic planning and time. Whether you were an early adopter of social media messaging or you are just now beginning to incorporate it into your overall marketing mix, it is important to remind yourself of the following principles:

The social network is not limited to web-based interaction.

The true value of social media in the built environment, or in any other industry/environment for that matter, is the added ways in which bonds can be formed between a firm and its clients. When it comes to making a first impression however, social media tools still cannot compete with a handshake and eye contact. Construction is a service-based industry that relies on human interaction and trusting relationships. A client is more likely to remember your face and a story you shared with them at a networking breakfast, than a one-time mention of their Twitter handle. Successful social media marketers supplement their networking skills with carefully planned social networking skills. Linked In for example, has become an essential tool for following up on new contacts. Some professionals are going as far as referencing a Linked In profile on their business cards to encourage future online communications, or even creating customized cards specifically designed to encourage Linked In connections. As wireless technology and cloud computing reshape the way companies do business, it becomes increasingly important to find balance between our methods of communication.

Manage your expectations.

Creating a corporate Facebook page or Twitter account for the sake of being trendy rarely yields results. Successful use of social media tools requires substantial time and effort. Some companies are hiring full-time social media coordinators to augment their marketing and PR departments. It is important to set reasonable expectations for the success of your campaigns before jumping into the social network. When implemented properly, social media tools can foster relationships, add online presence and build brand awareness. In order to succeed, managers must set goals for their social media initiatives, think about which employees are best suited for social media responsibilities, and be willing to give them the time to succeed.

Content always matters.

Social media success is not instantaneous. It takes time to build a network because your network of connections needs to know they can trust you to provide value. Unlike traditional mass media, social media users are not captive audiences. Twitter followers, Facebook friends and Linked In

connections can opt-in or opt-out of a relationship with ease, and will do so if they find a company's content to be inaccurate, boring or otherwise unimportant. Aside from total number of connections or followers, it is easy to identify a true social media maven. Power users make the most of their 140 Twitter characters by engaging their followers with statistics, anecdotes, and links to interesting articles. Retweeting the content of others also goes a long way in validating a user's place in the Twitter universe. Successful Linked In users join groups that are pertinent to their business or industry and get immersed in conversations. Companies with popular Facebook pages offer exclusive content or incentives that drive users to "like" their brand. There is a human aspect of social media to consider when developing content for Twitter, Facebook and Linked In. Behind every brand is a group of people that are reading, sharing and reacting to social media content. Chances are that if your content interests you, it probably interests those in your social and business circles.

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