

The Original Social Network

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Social media has sure taken a strong hold in our society. Marketing and communications strategies around the world will tell you that having a coordinated social media strategy is one of the most important aspects of any business now. There is some solid truth to that. If you don't implement social media strategy in your communications and marketing, you miss the opportunity to get your message to an entire growing segment of the population.

Most of us already know that fewer and fewer people read the newspaper and magazines, at least in print. The existence of the internet has made providing news and information much less capital intensive. That has not only led to increased competition for the traditional news companies, who have been forced to move online, but it has also led to a fractionation of online news sources, which means there are no longer dominant players. (Ok, if you want real and accurate news, there are still leaders in the field, but the average person's desire to read material that supports their preconceived notions, even when they are wrong, means there is a lot of garbage out there.) That fractionation is happening on television, as well. Frankly, if it wasn't for the news and Sunday football, I don't believe we would have cable/satellite at all in our house. The kids never watch "regular" TV. They watch what they want, when they want it, on the internet. So, those market and communications experts are right. If you don't get online and use social media, you miss an entire growing market segment.

Using social media, however, isn't the answer to everything. The success of any business, organization or town is dependent on building a strong internal community. Building a community can be aided with online and social media tools, but ultimately a strong community comes down to building relationships. In fact, there is a great study I read while researching my MBA thesis that indicates people are drawn to communities (whether it is a business, organization or town) by the services they offer. However, they become committed to a community because of the relationships they build. Some communities are built and exist within social media, but the community *you* need to build requires more than that. A strong community with strong relationships is what will make your business, organization or town stronger, but that means utilizing the *original* social network, with people meeting face-to-face and getting to know each other.

There are many companies, organizations and towns out there who have completely forgotten how to build an internal culture that fosters strong relationships, which would in turn make them stronger. Instead, many have implemented a social media campaign intended to connect people, while failing to realize that it doesn't build the relationships necessary to build loyalty and understanding, or facilitate real team building. It is tough in our busy world to find time for those personal moments and opportunities to really get to know each other, but if we let those opportunities slide, we lose the chance to build a strong culture within our business, organization or town.

Building community starts with building real relationships, and real relationships start with the *original* social network.

This syndicated content is provided by Doug Griffiths, best-selling author and chief community builder at 13 Ways, a company with a mission to push communities to face their challenges to find their unique path to success. For more information visit www.13ways.ca, or we can start the conversation at info@13ways.ca.