

Blogging and Other Social Media

*Exploiting the Technology and
Protecting the Enterprise*

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Introduction to Social Media

CHAPTER

6

Important as they are, blogs are just one many forms of social media. The chapters in Part 2 consider some of the others.

It goes without saying that the more familiar a business is with the various types of social media, the better placed it will be to make the most of them:

- as means of communicating with clients and potential clients;
- as tools to improve efficiency;
- by being able to react rapidly and appropriately if a client or supplier begins a social medium in its own business.

In Part 2, our aim is to make you aware of the various forms of social media and get you started on the road to using those that interest you or are relevant to your business.

What is 'Social Media'?

The term 'social media' is credited to Chris Shipley, co-founder of Guidewire Group, a San Francisco-based company that researches and reports on technology trends. The term is used to describe online tools and utilities that allow:

- communication of information online; and
- participation and collaboration.

The following technologies fall within the 'social media' category:

- blogs
- professional and social networking sites

- wikis
- podcasting and videocasting
- virtual worlds
- social bookmarking.

This is a non-exhaustive list.

We discuss each of the main forms of social media in the chapters that follow, illustrating their uses and discussing some of the leading platforms. Although we have categorized certain services as belonging to a particular social media form, many of these services contain aspects of other types of social media. The competition between service providers for new users is relentless, and this has led to many services seeking to provide various social media services under one umbrella brand, and in some instances even combine them.

For example, many blogging services contain features from other social media such as the ability to send private messages to other users. A second example is Flickr, which we include in the ‘consumer-content distribution’ category (see Chapter 8). Flickr is not just a method of distributing content, it also contains social networking features and links easily with various blogging technologies.

So Many Choices ... So Little Time

Do a quick internet search for wiki services, podcasting services and any other type of social media services, and you will find a massive selection available. There are seemingly hundreds of platforms out there – too many for a book, let alone a few chapters. By the time this is published, many of the services will have evolved in expected directions, some will have merged together and others will have disappeared altogether. This is an inevitable weakness with any book on emerging technologies.

This part does not therefore attempt to list every single social media platform. Instead, for each of the main categories of social media we discuss the main services that existed at the time of writing. Whilst individual platforms will over time rise and fall in popularity, and change in character, the social media concepts that they implement will stay constant (although we are likely to see new concepts develop). Therefore, a discussion of the social media platforms

current at the time of writing is worthwhile, even if just to give a feel for what the social media concepts are about.

Should you join and use each of the services that we discuss in Part 2? The answer has to be no; just as business people do not have the time to attend every single networking event in their local city, they will not have the time to use every type of social media that is relevant to their industry. We therefore suspect that most business people with an interest in maximizing the opportunities presented by social media will end up using:

- one professional networking service;
- one consumer-orientated media service; and
- depending on their target audience and/or information needs, one or two of the other types of social media such as a wiki, podcasting or videocasting service.

Just as with 'real-life' networking and marketing opportunities, the only ways to see whether a particular type of social media platform is good for your business are to:

- see what other people say about particular services;
- try them out for yourself.

In the chapters that follow, we seek to provide you with the former; only you can do the latter. Like most things in life, what you get out of anything you try will largely depend upon what you put in. It's not enough to simply sign up for a particular social media platform. Once signed-up, give it a trial for a week and actively experiment with its features. See what colleagues and maybe even clients think of what you produce using the platform.

To save time using your chosen social media service, you can use a social media aggregator. We look at these in Chapter 14.