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Harrington: Making the case for social media

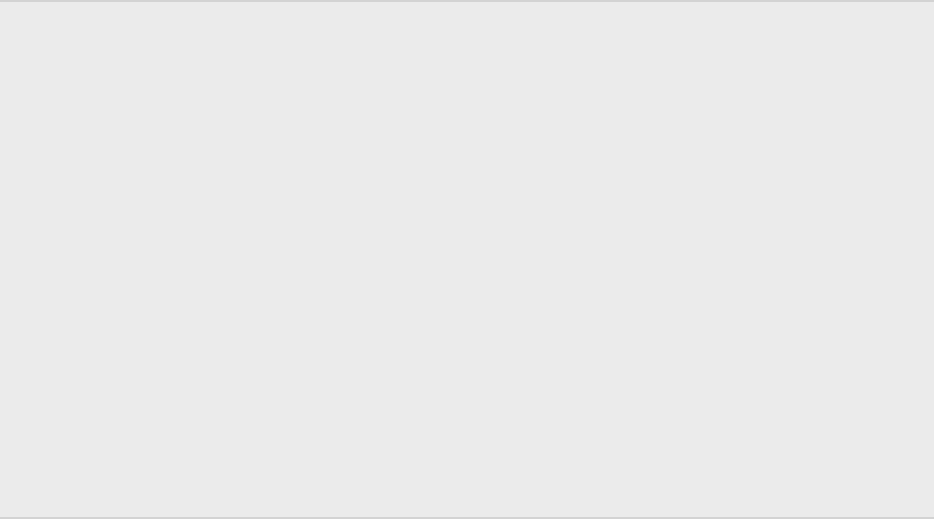


By Carly Harrington

Posted February 25, 2010 at 9:42 p.m.

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Knoxville Social Media Summit



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Regardless of the industry, social media are playing a greater role in how we do our jobs and how we connect with our target audiences.

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That was evident this week as health care professionals, journalists and business representatives joined together to participate in panel discussions on social media use in an event presented by the Knoxville Social Media Association and the Social Media Club of Knoxville.

More than 200 people armed with smart phones and laptops heard TeamHealth, Instapundit.com, E.W. Scripps, Pilot Corp. and AC Entertainment among others share their insight on leveraging various Web tools to distribute, gather, and yes, control information while engaging with consumers.

It's a new world and organizations are realizing they can't afford to be left behind. "Change or die," Dave Foulk of WNOX radio stated so bluntly.

There are challenges, of course.

Even early adopters are still trying to figure out what works and what doesn't, as evidenced when Ruby Tuesday Social Media Manager Gavin Baker asked panelists to describe their biggest "social media fail."

To help, more businesses are devoting personnel to direct their initiatives and monitor what people are saying about them. Others are engaging professional services to draft social media guidelines for not only the company but their employees as well.

Amy Howell, founder and principal of Howell Marketing Strategies in Memphis, said social media give businesses the "opportunity to tell your story."

But she added, "We tell clients posting online is global, discoverable and permanent so having a policy in place is important."

Health care officials admitted they have been slow to use social media because of privacy risks, yet the potential for physician and patient interaction is great.

Summit Medical Group said it is looking at how to make online consultations work. "We think patients would like to engage our physicians," Summit Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer Jennie Campbell said.

Panel participants said it was important to reach customers where they are and that is increasingly on the

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Web.

So they are creating Facebook pages, launching Twitter accounts and starting online chat communities. Yet as businesses move into the social media realm, they should keep in mind not everyone will love you, and that's OK, said Lynne Farmer, marketing manager for Bush Brothers.

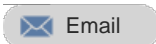
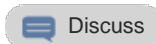
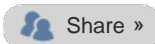
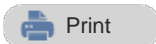

Translation: You're never going to get 100 percent of the people to like beans.

"Not everyone will love your brand, but that makes you more authentic in the social media space," she said.

Business writer and The Bottom Line columnist Carly Harrington may be reached at 865-342-6317 or harrington@knoxvillebiz.com. Follow her on Twitter at www.twitter.com/knoxgirl75.

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February 26, 2010
7:38 a.m.

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