

Social Media For Beginners

The hot topic on the web today is **SOCIAL NETWORKING**.

Chances are you've heard this word. If you watch CNN, you'll notice that tweets have taken the place of reporters, rock bands no longer carry demo tapes, just cards with their MySpace page, and every self-respecting job hunter combs their Facebook profile before any big job interview, making sure Osaka Karaoke marathons don't come back to haunt them. For people outside of this universe, just approaching the Social-Networking-Industrial-Complex is a daunting task. For people already down the rabbit hole, just keeping track of your various identities, updating profiles, and keeping up with all of the things you follow become a job in itself.

To the most technologically-adept person on Earth, that is WAAAAY too much information to comprehend, but luckily for you, we're here to help. Our team of crack experts has researched, analyzed, and otherwise got scientific on the science of the social network for you. We are going to present three (arguably, **the** three) "best" (read: most useful for you and your chapter) Social Networking platforms to you, as well as one very robust way of keeping up with them.

Uses of Social Media:

Let's break down what's so "social." about this "media."

For a long time, the internet was a place to deprive the postal service of 44 cents (e-mail) and for organizations and individuals to publish large amounts of information for anyone to look at. This is the "static internet" of personal websites (remember Geocities?) and one-way information flow. Interactivity was limited to the tunnel between user and site. But then the web grew up. Today we live in the world of Web 2.0. The logical question you have now is, "What is Web 2.0?"

Here is a perfect example of Web 2.0. I'll use Wikipedia to define it:

"web applications that facilitate interactive [information sharing](#), [interoperability](#), [user-centered design](#) and [collaboration](#) on the [World Wide Web](#)"

Web 2.0 is the interactive web, and social media is the umbrella term that catches all of the new things on the internet that allow for people to share and collaborate among themselves. To be, "social." (you knew we'd get there eventually). The internet now finds users maintaining a profile on a "social networking site," using tools to "follow" other people who are writing on "blogs", and "share" cool things they find with other people in real time. Social Networking enables users to create new places and ways to interact with other people online. Given that a major function of JETAA is to serve its members and create networking opportunities, tapping into that community will yield results for your chapter.

Benefits:

Why Use the Social Network? There are a few good answers for this:

1) **Your members, and potential members are probably using one, if not several social networking systems.**

Every chapter is looking to find new members, and inform current members of current events and programs. If you want to get new members onboard, you can easily reach out to them if you make a presence in the medium that the potential or current member uses the most.

2) **Web 2.0 works hard to make browsing more efficient, which means fewer people are actually, "going to your website."**

There are some awesome looking, well maintained and frequently updated Chapter websites out there, but the tech-savvy returning JET though is using modern web tools like RSS readers and e-mail alerts to have just the information they want delivered to them. In other words, the modern user is used to the web coming to them with content they want, so they will spend much less time searching it out. A chapter leveraging social media is essentially going to the member, not waiting for the member to come to them.

3) **There is an amazing community of really technically-able people inventing amazing things with social media**

As with any fantastic new creation, we use and abuse and curse and sing the praises of social media, it is developing and growing with us. Not a day goes by where someone doesn't create a novel, and a potentially helpful plug-in, application, or API that can really help your chapter. Long story short: Social Media is already a fantastic creation, and it's only going to get better.

Negatives:

1) Information **Overload**

As previously mentioned, there are an incredible amount of Social Media sites out there. Chapters deploying a new social media strategy run the risk of over saturating members with their presence now extending into new areas of the web. You're not just content to stay on your little site any longer, and now you're hunting them down. Care should be exerted to not have an event update hit the same audience from 5 different sources (example: Website update, Facebook Invite, Evite Invite, Tweets and an E-mail announcement for your Shinnenkai: it *could* be a little much)

How to Avoid It: Vary your wording on announcements so that you aren't just adding to the echo chamber.

Add specificity to your information distribution channels so that members/recipients can self-select into and out-of what you're putting online (i.e. subscribers who opt-in to only hearing about upcoming events, not general announcements). Sign up for all of the channels that you are putting information out on, and put yourself in the place of your members. If you are getting burnt-out with the amount of stuff coming at you, then you're probably already a little too heavy on the output.

2) **More sites to maintain = more work for officers**

Simple fact: if you are increasing your chapter's web presence, there will *more things to update and maintain*.

While this smirks of common sense, it is important to bear in mind that your chapter's webmaster/tech-person probably is already overworked, and relying on one person to keep tabs on everything **will not work**.

Luckily, there are tools that can help this (RSS readers, integration systems like Hootsuite, etc.). Furthermore, *social media is being developed for accessibility*. This fact will be made painfully clear once your mother joins the Facebook. This means the systems are designed to be approachable, and there is bound to be a wealth of support information out there written by lay-people who are in the same boat as you.

All in all, part of the fun of social media is that you really are participating in **the** new and exciting trend, a defining movement of the new information age. Even with the sheer scope of information and things to learn out there: **there really isn't a reason your chapter should *not* be leveraging Social Media**. So let's get in there.

The Rabbit Hole: Diving into Social Media

Given that one could write a book about "Diving into Social Media," we've taken the time to prioritize and provide information to you on what we feel will be the three most efficacious ways for your chapter to expand into this realm. You will be reading about:

Facebook: The grand-poobah of them all. Over 5,000,000 users (and your mom). Facebook is the largest, most heavily hyped and used social networking site out there. Rod McLeod from San Francisco will briefly explain Facebook, and particularly "fan pages" and "group pages:" two things chapters can quickly put to use.



Twitter: Twitter is the up-and-coming micro blogging tool that allows us to know what is going on with people we *follow* in only 140 characters. From the mundane (Shaq has cornflakes for breakfast, a lot) to the inspirational (Iranian protestors using twitter to organize demonstrations), Twitter is fast becoming a necessary part of digital life. Sandra Sakai, from Seattle will explain the lingo, and how chapters can keep their members up to speed as well as stay up to date with others.



LinkedIn: Part of being a JET Alumni is that you have left your job in Japan, and chances are now you are looking for one here. Alumni Chapters very often serve as a not only a social and cultural group for members, but also an increasingly a professional network. LinkedIn combines the ease-of-use and massive footprint of social media, with the sanitized (Osaka Karaoke Marathon not included...) and driven nature of a professional network. Dusty Downing from Austin shares how chapters can use LinkedIn to great effect for assisting members with their professional lives.



Hopefully by now, you've got a bit of a grasp on this world of social media. You have the broad idea, you have some tools to help manage the torrent of awesome you are about to unleash on your members and community. Let's get right to it...

For questions or more information, contact Ben Erickson, Pacific Northwest JETAA