

Social Media and Trade Shows – Five Musts Before You Post

By Marilyn R. Kroner

Are you apprehensive about incorporating social media into your event marketing strategy? Perhaps you're not sure if it's right for your company, or you simply don't know where to begin. Following are the first steps any trade show marketer should take *before* posting one word on a social media site.

1. **Learn:** It's easy to become overwhelmed by the many social media sites out there. Start by focusing on only one to three*:

Twitter – Considered a “micro blog,” your posts are called “tweets” and are limited to a maximum of 140 characters in length, including any links you want to add. (Twitter has a new link-shortening tool, or you can use <https://bitly.com> to shorten a long link AND track how many folks have clicked on it.) In my own experience when implementing social media for my clients, I've found a higher number of Business to Business followers on Twitter. Here's an example of a good tweet:

This speaker is really nailing it. I think her slides are brilliant! #web2expo

- Note that this post included a “hashtag” (#). When you place a hashtag in front of a “tag” (in this example the tag is “Web2expo”), Web2expo will be able to see that someone read their post, and that helps with measurement. But remember, right now you are just observing. See how many others use hashtags and how they use them.

Facebook – On Facebook, you can post longer messages. To me, engagement is a bit easier and more transparent on Facebook.

- Both Twitter and Facebook offer ways to include website links, photos, and videos.

LinkedIn - Even if you never use LinkedIn for your company business, it is a great resource. You can join discussion groups (the EXHIBITOR group is one of many terrific active groups). As part of a group, you can put forth questions to the rest of the members, and give input when requested. LinkedIn is also good for job-seekers and those looking for qualified employees. And it's a great way to stay in touch with former and future colleagues.

* I chose not to include information about blogs in this article. Although blogs are another viable social media strategy, I decided to keep content as simple as possible for the beginner.

2. **Observe:** Even if you've never tried out any of the social media sites, you will find they are very easy to learn on your own, or have a friend or colleague show you. It's fun! At first, it might seem awkward but like anything else, once you play around with it a few times, it becomes second nature.
 - Signing up on social media sites is easy, but be sure to read the small print first. It is very important that you read the Facebook [Statement of Rights and Responsibilities](#) and the [Twitter Terms of Service](#). There are many legal issues with using social media, and these will help you get up to speed. This is important for your own – and your company's – protection. Work with your company attorney if you have one. (More about this in section 4.)
 - Research what is being said about your company's area of expertise. Are your competitors out there? Industry analysts? Respected online and print press?
 - Where is your target market? Are they following your competitors and/or reading industry blogs? See if there are groups devoted to your company's industry. There seem to be groups for everyone, from architects to volunteer fire fighters to green technology. Poke around and see what you can find. A few industries are not there for myriad reasons including strong legal constraints. There is no point in posting to a non-existent audience. However, that's no excuse to keep from learning about social media yourself. There are enough exhibition industry resources alone on social media to make it worth your time.
 - Consider taking a class about social media and the law, either through the EXHIBITOR conferences or perhaps a webinar.
 - It's interesting to see how folks in other industries use social networking. See how they are able to incorporate the human element into their posts. How do they get interactive conversation going? How often do they post? What do you perceive to be far too infrequent posts and what do you consider bombardment? Who do you think does it well? Prepare to be inspired!
 - Browse through [Kodak's great booklet on social media tips](#).
 - I recommend the book [Power Friending](#) by Amber Mac. You can find it on Amazon.
3. **Objectives:** What do you hope to realistically accomplish through social media? How will you measure success (number of followers, number and sentiment of responses, links to your website, or reposts by others are a few examples)? What are your inhibitors (not enough resources, executive support, no budget for outside help)?
4. **Review and Define Roles and Responsibilities:** Is a team or a person already responsible for social media at your company, or will it be your responsibility? If you are leading the effort, you – and your executive management – will feel more secure (with good reason),

when you develop a solid set of social media guidelines for the company. Here are two good ones from which you can pull ideas.

- Many companies have used [IBM's social media guidelines](#) as a template.
- [Intel's social media guidelines](#) are worth reading, too.

5. **Brainstorm:** There are so many fun things you can do to extend the trade show experience, so before you even type that first post, you can start developing ideas like:

- Create contests/promos that will bring people to the booth. Maybe you can even find a way to bring some followers who aren't at the show into the fun.
- Develop a "show special" discount or free product trial just for your social media followers who are at the show.
- Offer a white paper, gift card, or special gift to those who come to the booth with a secret word or a completed survey.
- Post pictures. And ask your followers to post them too.
- Once you get going, the sky's the limit!

Take plenty of time to decide if it's right for your company, and then take more time to think through your strategy. When you actually start to implement your plan, you will be absolutely ready to put your company's unique brand on social media marketing!

Author's note: Unfortunately, I spend much more time on my clients' social media marketing than my own. Still, I invite you to follow my posts. I also invite you to tell me what you thought about this article, and what I missed that you'd like to read more about!

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Author's Bio: With over 20 years of experience in the trade show industry, Marilyn Kroner, Principal of Kroner Communications, has planned, managed, and implemented exhibit, public relations, and marketing communications strategy for a variety of technology companies including: Quantum, Storage Technology, Exabyte, and Benchmark Storage Innovations. Her current clients include Body Bar Inc., EXHIBITOR Media Group, Exhibit Surveys Inc., and Rebit Inc.

Marilyn is a member of the Business Marketing Association (BMA), Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) and currently serves on the BPA Worldwide Event Audits Advisory Board. She is a past member of the EXHIBITOR Conference and EXHIBITOR Magazine advisory boards, the Event Industry Audit Commission (EEIAC), and is a past president of the Corporate Event Marketing Association (CEMA). She has taught sessions at the EXHIBITOR Conference for over 10 years; she has presented marketing topics at Blue Goose University for the last five years.