

N Reasons Why Engineers Will Benefit from Social Media (Where N is a large positive integer)



Introduction

Social media sites are the fastest growing on the web, doubling in traffic over the last year. Social Media, such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn are having a major impact on the way people build business relationships and make purchasing decisions. Many businessmen now use TripAdvisor to check out a hotel before making a reservation.

Review sites like Qype are becoming increasingly popular with engineers and technicians and can have a significant influence on customer decisions. For instance, people looking for internet solutions in Nuneaton on www.qype.co.uk will find PDC with 5 recommendations. Search engines such as Google are now using these sites to contribute to web site rankings.

Why engineers should participate in social media now:

- Generate more exposure in the chosen business sectors
- Build new and existing business relationships and thereby
- Increase traffic to the company web site

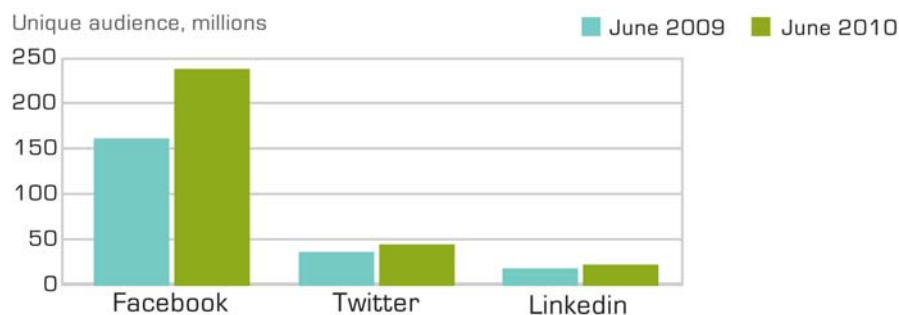


What's happening to engineering communications?

Just as everyone has become accustomed to the use of web sites and electronic mail, we are now faced with a dramatic change in people's behaviour online. Computers, electronic communications and storage have been doubling in performance every two years since the microprocessor arrived in the 1970's.

From a situation where a personal computer could do everything, it seems that we are reverting to an era of central storage and central processing – so-called 'cloud computing', with local, often hand-held devices accessing this information as and when required.

The benefit of this scenario is that it provides new opportunities for communication with current and potential business partners, and hence to build more business relationships. PDC Internet Solutions, for example, had been working with fuel cell specialists in the Low Carbon and Fuel Cell Knowledge Transfer Network and has recently been able to secure a significant prospect for new business in Asia, simply by renewing relationships on LinkedIn.



Note: Global data includes US, UK, France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Switzerland, Brazil and Australia

Figure 1

In the UK, the average user spends more than 6 hours a month on social media sites, the three most important being Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. Social media sites are the fastest growing on the Internet, with 60,000 users worldwide joining Facebook every day.

Facebook enables people to share comments, messages, web links, photos and videos. But it is more than just a great network for talking to friends: it is becoming really important as a channel through which businesses connect with consumers (B2C).

LinkedIn is a great network for engineers

Although LinkedIn has fewer users than Facebook (2.7m in the UK at June 2010), it is far more important for business-to-business (B2B) relationships, and therefore more important for engineers.

LinkedIn provides a great introduction to online networking. It is already well populated. A recent survey for a Midlands Innovation Network found that two-thirds of members were already on LinkedIn. It is possible to use an existing email address list to renew acquaintance with former business colleagues and remind them of what you and your company can offer. LinkedIn enables users to showcase expertise using an attractive company web page to list key products and services as well as presenting the skills and abilities of the individuals who work there.

For high-technology company Automotive Mechatronics, social media marketing has proven to be an important element of their integrated marketing campaign. The company has noticed a marked increase in visibility and business activity.

LinkedIn should be seen as complementary to face-to-face networking. New contacts can be invited to join existing contacts lists, and users are able to maintain contact with short, sharp valuable updates. LinkedIn makes it easy to import contacts from mail clients, such as Outlook.

LinkedIn can be used to find people of like mind, people who are engaged in the same technologies, and to initiate a dialogue with them. For instance a specialised area like foundry technology has five groups and interest from 58 others. By joining such specialised engineering groups, it is possible to build a list of qualified contacts and communicate with them in the future.

Polymer research project 'iPolycond' has a LinkedIn group that not only comprises the project partners but it has also succeeded in attracting new contacts with an interest in this technology.

Twitter: this is where it gets easy to communicate

Twitter is the best way to show (and to discover) what is happening right now by following people and sites that are of interest. Because valuable output will always attract followers, Twitter can be used to communicate with a network of former, current and prospective business partners, sending messages that demonstrate a degree of knowledge and professionalism. It follows that the output must remain focused and "on message" if it is to be valuable for the specific target group.

Essentially a "Tweet" is a 140-character text message, quick and easy to create.

"Tweets" can appear on LinkedIn and Facebook accounts as well as on a particular web site.

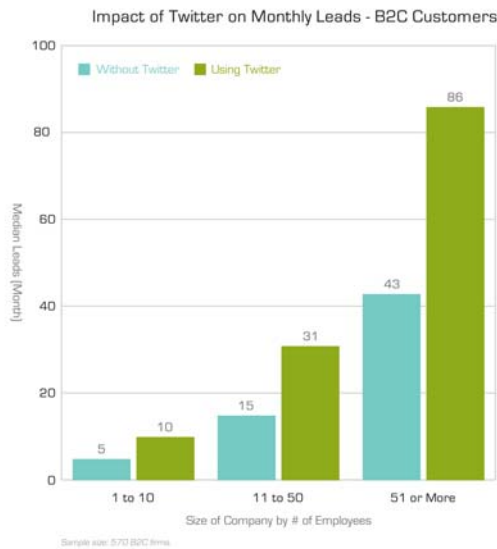


Figure 2

Used intelligently, “Tweets” can complement other marketing information on a web site, such as blogs, brochures, presentations and videos, and will help to strengthen key messages through increased exposure and additional touch points.

The Co-ordinating European Council of the Motor and Petroleum Industries, for example, feeds a regular news bulletin to Twitter using an automated service.

How do I get my message across?

“Tweets” are by their very nature short and most marketing messages require more detailed information. Many people are therefore now using blogs as a marketing tool, commenting on products or services they want to highlight. A web site blog can be very powerful in gaining listings in Google and other search engines but can be branded under many different guises to the audience, such as news or events.

External blog sites such as HotFrog and Blogger help by creating inbound links to a particular web site, one of the factors used by Google to measure the success of a site.

The use of indexes and directories will also help to generate links to a given web site, ensuring that it has a good position with Google and other search engines.

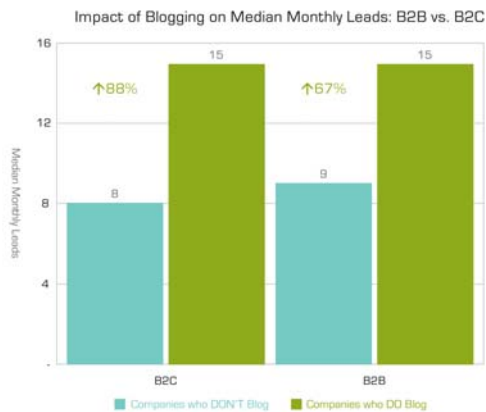


Figure 3

Submitting blogs, news, press releases and so on to blog sites, article sites and search engines such as Google will help to improve the likelihood of better rankings within major search engines. It is possible to feed sites such as Twitter automatically with your blogs and news feeds for immediate exposure.

Parity Solar, an innovative supplier of solar technologies, for example, blends engineering information with its marketing blog at parity-solar-eu.blogspot.com.

How does this relate to my web site?

Once interest has been attracted, the messages on a web site must reinforce the offer and turn a prospect's interest into response and contact. A web site only has 8 seconds to make an impression, so every page must be focussed and direct. No more than two clicks should be necessary to take the client to a sales proposition. Visual images, animation and other effects will quickly draw the visitor to any key offers. Video streaming using YouTube and slide presentations using SlideShare can also be used on a company's web site. A modern, professional web site is key to any marketing strategy these days and such tools can quickly refresh a tired looking site.

How do I measure success?

An important element of any marketing campaign is the tracking and measurement of performance. At the end of the day, the result of any campaign must be new customers and new business.



Google Analytics facilitates the tracking and monitoring of user information that can be easily interpreted and processed. Charts and graphs help to monitor visitor traffic over days, weeks, months and years. From these, custom reports can be generated. Data exporting makes it possible to pull information offline for further manipulation and analysis, or for presentation purposes. Email reports can be set up to send the information directly to computer in the customised format specified.

Pay-per-click

Google AdWords provides an opportunity to gain instant exposure on the first page of Google using key phrases. Every time someone clicks on the advertisement, the advertising company is charged a small fee. AdWords is a useful tool to help determine which keywords and phrases attract the most interest. By monitoring the click-through rate against enquiry rate and feedback from the website it is possible to gauge which keywords and advertisements are the most effective. This helps to improve rankings within Google and other search engines by refining site pages.

Find out what's being said about you and your technology

Social Mention is a social media search platform that aggregates user generated content across the universe into a single stream of information. It allows the user to track what people are saying about him, his company, a new product, or any topic across the web's social media landscape in real-time. Social Mention monitors 80+ social media properties directly including: Twitter, Facebook, FriendFeed, YouTube, Digg, and Google.

Google Alerts makes it possible to track as many different topics as required. By indicating what is to be tracked and what kinds of content should be monitored a list will be generated and sent via email or RSS as often as necessary. Google Alerts are an easy way to track brand references and to listen in to on-line conversations. They can be used for keywords, competitors and even to find who is looking for a particular product or service.

The value of positive recommendations

Potential clients will 'know' a would-be supplier through LinkedIn or Facebook, but how will they know that he is a good business partner? The answer: by checking his "recommendations". LinkedIn encourages users to recommend

people who have provided valuable profits and/or services. Such recommendations are then displayed on individual or company profiles.

We all look for reviews and recommendations when making purchasing decisions, for instance using TripAdvisor or Amazon reviews. For professional services, Qype is a good solution and its recommendations are shown in Google maps. This is why it is really important to register every business with Google Places.

Conclusions

'Social' media can be used very successfully as 'business media' and are a productive way for engineers to promote their technology and services.

There is a range of particularly valuable web sites and services that can be used to:

- o Introduce new prospects
- o Repeat key marketing messages
- o Build business relationships
- o Enhance reputations
- o Leverage positive recommendations
- o Improve the function and performance of a web site

The technology is changing and developing continually. However it is relatively easy to get started and it does not require a lot of time to maintain a presence.

How to get started

PDC Internet Solutions is delivering a series of Internet Marketing and Social Media Training Workshops. The workshop will present tips and methodology for the promotion of products and services. The very practical training will include demonstrations of internet marketing techniques, many of which are free and really easy to use once shown.

These are 'hands-on' workshops where participants will learn to manage Google, LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook to achieve success.

Email contact@pdcnet.org.uk or call 01455 290222.

LinkedIn: linkd.in/bHZJ0P

Facebook: on.fb.me/9y3B6P

Twitter: @pbromby1

About the author

PDC Internet Solutions specialises in internet, intranet and extranet design, content management, search-engine promotion, social media, hosting, email and archiving services. The company also provides project administration and general management consultancy.

Eur Ing Paul A G Bromby BSc CEng CITP MIMechE MBCS has been Managing Director of PDC Internet Solutions (PDC) for 11 years. He is an experienced senior engineer, having previously worked both for Ford and MIRA.



PDC is a UK-based consultancy. The company's target customers are Europe-wide engineering and R&D organisations including major blue-chip multi-nationals as well as regional manufacturing/service companies.

References: Figure 1 - Source: BBC – The Nelson Company, June 2010. Figure 2 & 3 – Source: HubSpot US.