

What the #%@& is Social Media?!

By Paulette Fontanez, Los Angeles County Bar Association

In this monthly column, we'll explore the different facets of social media and how they are employed by those in our field. This month we tackle Twitter.

But first, what the heck is "social media"? The mainstream media recently jumped on the bandwagon and now you can't have a newscast without reference to a Facebook page or a Twitter account, but what is all that really? Wikipedia defines it as "online content created by people using highly accessible and scalable publishing technologies...[and] has become extremely popular because it allows people to connect in the online world to form relationships." (Wikipedia is an illustration of social media itself, by being an online user-generated dictionary!)

Okay, so what are these "publishing technologies"? Free online portals like Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, Flickr, Twitter, blogs, even podcasts: all of these are platforms that allow the end user (you) to publish content, whether they are in written, video, photo or audio form. Great, so where does the event professional fit into this?

Social media is about the direct connection. Suppliers can connect directly to a client, planners can connect directly to vendors, and both can connect directly to an audience. But how?

Let's take Twitter as an example. Twitter is a method of exchanging information via short, 140-character updates called "tweets." The tweets are received by followers, people who opt-in to read what someone is sending. This is the audience. One grows the audience by seeking out other people on Twitter with similar interests. Suppose an event planner was looking for other planners on Twitter with whom to exchange info. Using the twitter search function, typing in "MPI" or "event planner" will net hundreds of results, showing the latest bit of info everyone tweeted. From there, one can decide who to "follow."

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Palladium. Rick couldn't have been more excited to come down to LA and be a part of that. "When they called me about this job they had just started the Palladium renovation and I had worked a bunch of Palladium shows in the box office, so that got me really excited. It was this great iconic historic venue. You ask a music fan in Southern California, everyone's got a show they saw at the Palladium or has a good story from the Palladium. You can't manufacture that kind of heritage." Shows have been doing very well there and Rick is also thrilled to have Nine Inch Nails coming through the Palladium this year as part of their farewell tour.

Rick told me that they really worked hard to make the Palladium a great place for events. I can tell you personally that its history combined with the recent upgrades make it a very

But how do you, as a nascent Twitter user, gain followers? Think of Twitter as a cocktail party: you enter the room and listen to the conversation of a few interesting people (who you probably found via the handy search function). You comment back to them using an @reply (where you begin a tweet with the @ symbol followed by a user's name) and then start tweeting out your own opinions on the given topic. People respond, and they follow you back. As you continue to add your own two cents (or 140 characters) to the conversation, and as you receive your own @replies, more people follow and respond to you. The bio area is another important field. Here is where keywords can be included that will then be indexed by the search function, and help you to be found by potential followers.

A note about tweeting properly: tweets need to engage the community, create topical interest and, most of all, be genuine. Just as we all prefer to do business with people we know and trust, the Twitterati want their information from people they've deemed trustworthy, not just faceless companies. Twitter—and all social media—is about connecting person to person, not person to Faceless Corporate Entity X. But make sure you're not sounding like a corporate automaton—be human, be you!

Next month we'll delve into how local MPI members are using Twitter, as a marketing tool and so much more. Paulette will also be speaking on this topic at WES September 18-20 at The Mission Hills Resort and Spa!

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compelling location. The deal they struck with the union is very favorable, making it an even more attractive location for private bookings. But Live Nation also has some other terrific venues for events including the historic Wiltern Theater and the Gibson Amphitheatre. Our own MPI member, Jill Przelenski, is their VP of Special Events, so be sure to reach out to her at the next MPI function.

Rick Mueller is certainly blessed with a great energy and the creative barometer to keep Southern California a leader in the industry. And, Live Nation has become clearly one of the major players in the concert and music industry. They are also more than happy to work with the special events community to further build their reputation as the turn-key company for music and events.

Photos by: Randall/Michelson/Live Nation