

Introduction to Social Media – Reference Guide

Introduction

This document has been provided as a means of introducing you to what Social Media and will provide you with some examples of Social Media sites. For additional information and assistance in how you could be making effective use of social media, along with other instructional technologies, please contact IRT (Instruction and Research Technology) at <http://www.wpunj.edu/irt> and/or at 973-720-2659.

What is Social Media?

Social media is media that has been designed in a way so that a wider group of people can become contributors of content; not just its audience. Whereas traditional media has always involved a line between those who create and distribute content and those who view it (or hear it, etc.), that line gets blurred and sometimes disappears altogether with social media.

To illustrate this difference, let's use the example of an encyclopedia and how it changed with social media. Those of us who grew up consulting something along the lines of the Encyclopedia Britannica (or who continue to) have had to rely upon its authors and editors to maintain its content and hoped that they did what was needed to "get it right." And on those occasions where an error made it into an edition, it would not be until a subsequent printing that it could be addressed.

But with the most popular social media encyclopedia, Wikipedia, each of us has the opportunity to serve as one of the encyclopedia's contributing authors and/or editors should we choose to do so. Spotted a typo? You can fix it. Think they missed something? You can add it. And this is just one of many examples of social media.

Some Popular Types of Social Media

Let's take a look at some of the more popular examples of social media. We'll start by listing several categories (with two popular examples of each), and then we'll follow up with descriptions of each category. This list is not meant to be exhaustive, as there are just too many examples to list in this document. Rather, our goal is to help you get better acquainted with what types of things fall under the umbrella of "Social Media."

- Blogging and Microblogging (eg. WordPress or Twitter)
- Document Sharing (eg. Google Docs or Docs.com)
- Location-based Services (eg. FourSquare or Facebook Places)
- Photo/Video Sharing (eg. Flickr or Youtube)
- Social Bookmarking (eg. Scholar or Delicious)
- Social Networking (eg. Facebook or LinkedIn)
- Social News (eg. Digg or Reddit)
- Wikis (eg. Wikimedia or Wikispaces)

Information on Teaching with Social Media

The following articles and web pages provide important information about teaching with Social Media.

- "Social Media Usage Among College Faculty," at FacultyFocus.com:
<http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/trends-in-higher-education/social-media-usage-among-college-faculty/>
- "The Effect of Twitter on College Student Engagement," from Journal of Computer Assisted Learning
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1365-2729.2010.00387.x/full>
- "How Social Networking Helps Teaching (and Worries Some Professors)," from Chronicle.com
<http://chronicle.com/article/How-Social-Networking-Helps/123654/>

Blogging and Microblogging: What originated as a term by combining the words “web logs,” has come to be used as both a noun and a verb. Blogs can be (and have been) used for anything from personal journals to journalism. In short, a blog is a section of a site that is updated on a regular enough basis for visitors of the site to keep coming back to follow the ongoing thoughts of the blogger in question.

Microblogging, meanwhile, entails shorter posts. In the case of Twitter (a well known microblogging platform), for example, entries are limited to just 140 characters. While this shorter length makes it less practical for in-depth analyses, it also makes it so that microblogging can be done using a mobile device like a cell phone.

Document Sharing: Document sharing sites like Google Docs and Docs.com allow you work collaboratively on documents by storing your documents remotely and giving specified users the permissions needed to modify them.

Location-based Services: Location-based services like FourSquare and Facebook Places are typically used on mobile devices, allowing users to “check in” at various locations, letting others know where you are and what you’re doing. Users check in at locations that range from restaurants and sporting venues to places of employment and professional and academic conferences.

Photo/Video Sharing: Photo and video sharing sites like Flickr.com and Youtube.com allow users to become creators and providers of multimedia content, sharing them either with a specific audience or the world at large. Visitors to this content, furthermore, can typically comment on the work of others and/or post their own content in response to it.

Social Bookmarking: Social bookmarking sites like Scholar and Delicious allow you to more easily share links to web sites of interest with friends and colleagues. Users can maintain multiple lists of permissions, some (or many) of which will invariably overlap, and specify which links are shared with which groups of users.

Social Networking: Social networking sites allow you to connect and/or reconnect with friends, family, classmates, and colleagues. And while some, like Facebook.com, have evolved into general-used social networking sites, there are others that are more specific in terms of scope and use. One example would be LinkedIn.com, a professional networking site that is mostly used to make and maintain connections with current and former colleagues.

Social News: Functioning similarly to social bookmarking sites, social news like Digg and Reddit sites allow users to share news stories of interest with other users, effectively redistributing these stories to a wider audience.

Wikis: Wikis allow users to contribute to and maintain a repository of information, relying on the combined work of a large group to keep that information timely and accurate. In addition to the example Wikipedia.org, the online encyclopedia we mentioned in the section on “What is Social Media,” other uses of wikis include story documentation, policies, and other types of information that can be maintained collaboratively. Access to wikis can range from restricted to a specific group or users to completely open to the public at large.