

# Social Networking for the C-Suite: Maximize Free Media, Minimize Risk

By Dan Miller

**S**ocial networking is no longer a new technology operating at the margins of your organizational priorities into the mainstream. It is now expected at the top of any large company or organization and has moved into the C-suite. In fact, many company presidents and CEOs use social networking to great success.

There are many positives to using social media to further the cause of your nonprofit or to promote your efforts. First and foremost is social media's relative affordability and ease of use—it is free to post and tweet and no special software or hardware is required.

The benefits of this free media are now measurable and social media is widely considered to be a key component of corporate responsibility—as well as any good marketing and PR plan.

That said, the boss cannot just start tweeting. In a world where there is no taking it back, a simple mistake by top management can be career ending for the executive and cost the company thousands of dollars. An ill-conceived or error-filled tweet by the CEO can derail the best-laid plans for a new green initiative or new corporate grant plan.

Corporate responsibility is more than making charitable grants and having a green headquarters. How your CEO or President responds—or doesn't respond—to news about the company or world events tells the public more about your company than a news release or a generic Facebook post.

In order to ensure success in this rapidly changing social-media world, there are responsibilities on both sides of the desk:

## For the CEO

First, you must accept the value and buy into the need to use social networking. Even if social networking is outside your comfort zone, you can-

not ignore its powerful impact in today's business world.

Simply put, there are two types of organizations: those that embrace social networking and those who will be left behind. There are steps you can take to make sure your foray into social networking will be successful.

Once you have embraced the social-networking concept, trust your staff to do their job. If you have hired well, your staff will know what they're doing and will do it—if you let them.

Finally, be yourself. Although you need to listen to your staff and embrace new ideas, don't use words that are out of character for you or discuss topics outside your area of expertise or comfort.

Perhaps the most important advice—don't tweet alone. Make sure someone reads what you post or writes your posts for you. As a C-suite executive, your words carry weight—and the wrong words can set your cause back years.

Since it will take time for your staff to get this right, you will need to devote resources in order to be successful. Remember: the media is free, but

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Done well, social networking can create success, enlighten millions and even change the world.

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the effort to use it not. You need the right people. Social networking is not an IT function—it is public relations or marketing. Remember, it's about words not wires.

## For the Staff

You have to push. You need to convince the CEO

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## Best Practices for Social Networking by the CEO or President

Using Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest or Instagram to announce your latest project, or to share news with your supporters, can have an immediate impact. The viral nature of these tools allows news—both good and bad—to travel around the world at the speed of light. To get the most out of your efforts and avoid mistakes, consider the following:

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1. **Think it through:** Make sure the message is on point with your organization and its mission. Don't post personal thoughts or irrelevant photos. Honestly, no one cares who the CEO picked in the big game.
2. **Proofread relentlessly:** Typos and spelling mistakes tell people you don't really care about your organization or its mission. Always have two people read every post.
3. **Post regularly:** Don't start if you aren't going to keep it up. People use social media to interact, so if you aren't there, they aren't either.
4. **Adapt:** Change the medium and the frequency as you get responses. If people re-post certain types of photos or tweets—do it more often.
5. **Adopt:** When you see a good idea that fits your organization, use it. Good ideas are good ideas.
6. **Have a policy about negative posts:** Do you allow comments? Do you delete negative comments? Whose job is it to respond? Most large companies and organizations allow comments. Don't delete negative comments, but do respond with positive customer service. Treat social media as you would a phone call.
7. **Monitor your feeds:** Make sure someone monitors all of your networks every day, seven days a week. Never let problems just sit unanswered.
8. **Monitor others:** Make it someone's job to know who is doing social well. Who is making mistakes? Who in your industry or nonprofit sector is hitting home runs?

Like any new medium, social networking can be scary for beginners. Remember, Facebook was invented in 2004—that's really not that long ago. Not only is social networking a new phenomenon, but it's always changing.

Since you can't take anything back once you post it, you have to decide as an organization whether the value of social networking outweighs the pitfalls. If others in your field are out there, you probably should be too—just be careful.

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to let you do your job. It's best to write for the CEO, get his or her approval, and then schedule the social-media posts. Although this is more work for you at the start, it will pay off in the long run with better writing, fewer mistakes and better response.

Show your boss the checklist in this article and ask for his or her thoughts. The most important thing you can do is to make your boss and your organization look good. Write, read, re-read, have someone else read it—then read it again. Remember, you're writing for the boss: It's high stakes. If

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## The CEO's Social Media Checklist

- ✓ Trust your staff. If you did your job and hired well, let them do their job. Listen to them.
- ✓ Don't start unless you are prepared to keep going. It's ineffective and a waste of everyone's time to build an audience for your tweets, then stop tweeting after six months.
- ✓ Stretch out of your comfort zone, but with help. Let your staff read your posts or let them post on your behalf. Don't let your ego get in the way.
- ✓ Check, double check—and then let someone else read everything that goes out. You can't be too careful.
- ✓ Every time the staff wants to add a new social media stream, ask who the audience is, how it can be measured and whether you should drop another initiative that is no longer relevant.
- ✓ Be flexible. Social media changes everyday—just ask your younger staff about MySpace. Be ready to go wherever your audience is at the moment.

## The Staff's Social Media Checklist

- ✓ Stand up for what you know. Push the CEO where he or she needs to go. If you are good and work hard, they will listen.
- ✓ Check, double check and then let someone else read everything that goes out. You can't be too careful. Assume your job is on the line with every tweet.
- ✓ If you are writing for the top executive, get their voice. Don't use words or abbreviations that he or she wouldn't use. Don't be trendy or try to make them into something they are not. If the CEO is influential or an industry leader, write that way. Listen to his or her speeches and read things that she or he has written.
- ✓ Find out about the next social network trend before the CEO hears about it from someone else. Be ready to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses and make suggestions as to the appropriateness for your organization.
- ✓ Stay away from social media that doesn't fit. For example, Instagram is all about photos. If you have a visual message, be on Instagram. If you don't, steer clear.
- ✓ Have a plan. Write out your message plan weeks or months in advance to make sure that you don't miss important events or dates in the life of your organization. Be ready for emergencies. How will your CEO react to a major event or disaster? Think it through and have a plan.

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you mess up what you're doing for the boss, you will probably be fired.

Demonstrate your value by finding new tools and new ways to get the message out. Talk to your friends, see what others are using and know about

it—before the boss sees a story on CNN. **PRN**

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