



Photo by Ulf Buchholz

The Entrepreneurial Linguist

The Power of Social Media

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Many readers might know that I am a strong believer in social media and professional networks. For us as small business owners, I think that Web 2.0 is the best way to promote our services. It is largely free, but it requires some work. Even though I was critical of it in the beginning, as many people are now, I was an early adapter of Web 2.0 and social media and quickly became a fan. Now, many years later, I have been able to use the power of social media to achieve something I never thought possible. With the help of hundreds of cyberfriends, most of whom had never met us in person, my twin sister and I raised almost \$10,000 for a colleague in need who had suffered a heart attack. I have never been more convinced of the power of social media than after the overwhelming response from our colleagues and friends around the world.

Here are some tips for creating a powerful online presence while building strong relationships with colleagues.

Consistency and continuity are key. Just like in real life, creating bonds and relationships in cyberspace takes some time and effort. Do not set yourself up to fail by thinking that you will see an immediate increase in business once

you start a blog or start tweeting a lot. Over time, as your exposure grows, so should your business—but there are never any guarantees. Consider your social media efforts a long-term investment in your business.

Do not engage in hard selling. A few weeks ago, I saw a tweet stating, “If you need a good Spanish-to-Mandarin translator, contact me!” Needless to say, this person did not have many followers on Twitter, as all his tweets were quite sales-oriented. In general, you will be able to build a strong following on Twitter if you have interesting things to say (go beyond the “I am sitting in a café” tweets), retweet what others are posting, ask open-ended questions, answer questions that others might have, and find interesting links to share. It is all about building an online community.

Surround yourself with good people. When I was in graduate school, my mentor was the very successful chief executive officer of a Las Vegas casino. He gave me plenty of good advice, and I particularly like the tip to surround yourself with good people. This was back in 2000, so my mentor was not talking about the Web, but his advice is as valid online as it is offline. The Web can be a big, scary place, and just like in the offline world, you might encounter some phonies, flakes, impostors, and all sorts of want-to-be translators and interpreters. You might be judged partially by the company you keep, so choose wisely.

Give before you get. Our blog is probably my favorite social media outlet. Granted, a blog is a lot of work, but it is also a wonderful opportunity to share what you know with colleagues, clients, and whoever reads your blog. Posting to a blog also presents an opportunity to establish yourself as an expert. A dear friend of mine, who is a CPA, recently started a blog and turned to me to figure out why no one was visiting it. I had a look and realized that all her entries were sales-oriented, along the lines of “Tax season is around the corner. I am the CPA you have been waiting for!” As with tweeting, do not look at a blog—whether it be a translation blog, a cooking blog, a gardening blog, or a Dungeons & Dragons blog—as a direct sales opportunity, because it is not. It is an opportunity for you to build your brand online, and you have to give something for free (read: advice) before you can reap the potential benefits of online recognition. Once my CPA friend started posting entries such as “five things you should know before tax season starts,” she saw her traffic increase tremendously.

Meet your cyberfriends in person. I go to great lengths to meet cyberfriends in person when I travel or when they come to Vegas. Make an effort to interact with your contacts in person and share a meal or a cup of coffee. As wonderful as the Internet is, there is nothing quite like personal contact.

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http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/ata_business_practices. You will need to register with Yahoo! (at no charge) if you have not already done so, and provide your full name and ATA member number in order to join the group.

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