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Marketing/Business Development

Firms Tap Into Power of Social Media

Stats on File

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Kristen Napoli

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Total Staff: 111

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Total Staff: 68

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Total Staff: 168

Matt Putvinski, Director of IT
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Online Tools

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Think of it as the world's shortest press release.

That's essentially what **Kristen Anderson Napoli** of **Smythe Ratcliffe LLP** was writing when she began using Twitter to distribute information about the firm's annual community volunteer day. Since postings on Twitter, called "tweets," are limited to 140 characters, messages sent to promote the Vancouver-based firm's volunteer day of action had to be short and sweet.

The firm started using the social media outlet about six weeks before the firm's Oct. 15 Community Day in which the firm's 111 employees volunteered at one of six local non-profit groups. The firm tweeted about once every three days leading up to the event to keep excitement growing and to let local media know it. The effort paid off, with the event receiving three mentions in calendars published in local media. A bonus, Napoli says, is that several of the firm's clients began following the tweets and reposted them on their own Twitter accounts. This process, called "retweeting," helped spread news about the service day and also generated goodwill with clients. One local media outlet also retweeted one of her postings, she noted.

"Seeing our news on their sites was pretty cool," Napoli recalls.

Napoli isn't alone in using social media to promote professional causes. **Beth Johnson**, marketing and business development director of **Schechter Dokken Kanter** in Minneapolis, has taken the plunge into social media as well. Both Johnson and Napoli strongly advocate planning how social media will be used by the firm before launching any new initiatives.

"We talked strategically first," Johnson says, noting that she met with department heads and the human resources director at Schechter Dokken Kanter to discuss strategy and potential benefits of social media marketing. She also kept the managing shareholder and marketing shareholder apprised of the strategy meetings.

Napoli did her homework as well, creating a four-page [social media marketing plan](#) before presenting the idea to

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Using Social Media to Build a Personal Brand

Judging from his level of activity on LinkedIn and Twitter, you would think **Matt Putvinski** spends half his day on social media sites – but he doesn't.

"It doesn't have to take a lot of time. I use a series of tools that make me look active throughout the day, even though I only spend about 15-20 minutes on it every morning," says Putvinski, who is director of the firm's IT audit and security assurance services group and chief information security officer at Wolf & Company, P.C.

Putvinski uses a tool called www.SocialOomph.com to schedule his posts, so when he sees something of interest he wants to share with his followers, he adds it to the queue. "I always have a backlog, so if there are two or three days where I can't focus on social media, it doesn't matter," he says.

But he only schedules one post per day. "If you're pushing out 10-15 things a day, it loses value," he says.

That small investment of time creates great returns in terms of

leaders at her firm.

Part of her research included attending a social media marketing road show hosted by **Sales and Marketing Executives International**. It was time well spent, she says, and she walked away with two key pieces of information. First, all social media tools should be connected. For example, a Twitter posting could be tied to a Facebook page, which could then link to a blog. Second, pick a specific audience for social media marketing. Doing so, Napoli says, is how she realized that the community volunteer event and the audience of charity organizations and student recruits were a good fit for Twitter since, she says, Twitter is more news-based and is used by the groups she sought to reach.

All Aboard

After discussing several social media possibilities, including Twitter and Facebook, Johnson opted to start her efforts with LinkedIn because she was already familiar with it.

"I've been using LinkedIn for a long time now," she notes. "For me, it was an easy sell."

Her first initiative was to get as many of Schechter Dokken Kanter's 65 employees on LinkedIn as possible. When she started, only about 20 had LinkedIn accounts, so she began by creating a group for the firm on LinkedIn and encouraging employee participation via the company newsletter.

Some employees, Johnson says, were interested in joining LinkedIn, but they were intimidated by the idea of creating their individual profile on the site. Johnson allayed their fears by teaming with the firm's technology expert to offer four training sessions; employees could attend whichever session best suited their individual schedules. By using a laptop and a projector, Johnson could show those in attendance exactly what to do to get their profiles set up quickly while maintaining the level of professionalism the firm desired.

"We literally had people sitting around the table on their laptops and got people on LinkedIn together," she recalls, adding that she brought her digital camera so that she could take pictures of those employees who didn't have one they could use for the site.

The training session alleviated a lot of apprehension, she says, noting that 15-20 employees participated in the group sessions and several others sought out one-on-one assistance later. Almost 50 Schechter Dokken Kanter employees are on LinkedIn now.

Though the firms began their social media efforts using different outlets, they had similar purposes in mind. Both, for example, wanted to use social media in their recruiting efforts. While Schechter Dokken Kanter chose not to create an official firm page on Facebook (one that would have featured general information about the firm), the firm did set up a recruiting page geared only to

building Putvinski's national reputation as an expert in IT audit and security.

While he still gets most of his business through traditional networking, Putvinski has received several requests through social media venues to give presentations and write articles on IT security. As an example, he recently received through Twitter an opportunity to speak to the Arkansas Disaster Recovery Group. He notes that, while Wolf & Co.'s practice is primarily focused on New England, the firm has a proprietary online risk management product called WolfPACsm that is marketed nationally. "Social media is really powerful, especially when you are trying to sell outside of your geography," he says.

Putvinski encourages professionals looking to build their reputations in a particular niche to start establishing their online presence. "More people are using the Internet to do background checks on their service providers, and you want them to see positive things," he says.

LinkedIn and Twitter are also great ways to keep yourself top-of-mind with your clients and prospects. Before social media, Putvinski says he was always looking for an easy way to share items of interest with these key contacts. "Now, I feel like I'm always in their head."

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college students to get them interested in working at the firm.

"The whole page is written with a 22-year-old in mind," Johnson says. The site includes videos of Schechter Dokken Kanter employees who've been with the firm between one and two years describing their work experiences. Links on the site offer the college students a glimpse of other aspects of the firm, including its summer softball team in action.

The recruiting page was a huge success, Johnson says. Not only did it garner a good bit of traffic, but — for the first time — all three college students who received offers to work unpaid summer internships at the firm accepted.

While Johnson is thrilled with the results of the Facebook recruiting page, she does offer one piece of cautionary advice that she gleaned from other recruiters: Don't encourage students to join your group on Facebook, because you don't want to set up a situation where they might feel some sense of obligation.

For Smythe Ratcliffe's recruiting efforts, Napoli turned to WordPress.com, a site that offers free blog hosting.

"That allows us to tell a bigger story," she says, noting that the firm posts photos of company events and activities. One recent blog includes photos of employees who dressed up for Halloween. The blog, smytheratcliffe.com/community, has been integrated into the Smythe Ratcliffe website, which Napoli says was fairly simple from a programming standpoint.

Other Uses for Social Media

In addition to the recruiting successes, some benefits the firms received from their social networking activities were pleasant surprises.

Creating a page for current and former employees of Smythe Ratcliffe on Facebook allowed Napoli to compile a contact list for the firm's alumni, a list that will be very useful in planning the firm's 30th anniversary celebration later this year. Being able to collect that information passively, Napoli says, saved her a lot of legwork since no alumni list existed previously.

Napoli also has discovered some interesting ways to mine Twitter for new business, an option she may explore in the future. She knows of people who search tweets for posts that indicate dissatisfaction with vendors or consultants in a particular industry; they then contact the tweeter to tell him or her what their firm can offer.

"If you're proactive in sales, I can see how that could be really useful," Napoli reflects.

Besides attracting new clients, social media also can help you stay abreast of what current clients are doing. Napoli currently follows five Smythe Ratcliffe clients on Twitter and plans to search for other clients as well. While her social media efforts haven't resulted in new business, she

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says the goodwill generated by her efforts makes it worthwhile.

Proceed with Caution

While the benefits of using social media can be great, both Johnson and Napoli advise proceeding carefully.

Johnson recalls some advice she received when e-mail was fairly new: "Don't put anything in an e-mail message that you wouldn't mind reading on a billboard." The same advice holds true for LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and other social media, she says, noting that you can't expect any of your postings to remain private on these sites.

In addition, Johnson is cautious about the invitations she accepts on LinkedIn to discourage those who may be using the site for reasons that aren't purely professional. "I tend to not accept people I don't know."

Both Johnson and Napoli are mindful of how social media can affect a firm's carefully built reputation.

Schechter Dokken Kanter is in the process of developing suggested guidelines about personal Facebook pages, Johnson notes. Among other things, the guidelines will tell employees not to discuss clients on the site and to make their pages private so that only those they've confirmed as friends can view them.

Johnson monitors the firm's presence on social media, but this is purely a precautionary move.

"Oftentimes, it's not about catching people doing something wrong," Johnson notes. "It's about catching them not knowing and then educating them." A prime example is that users of social media like Facebook often don't think about the importance of activating the privacy settings to limit who can review their personal information and photos. Some personal photos may not be appropriate for client viewing, she explains.

Napoli says that all Smythe Ratcliffe employees receive client service and communication training, but adds that they haven't had any problems with social media sites.

Johnson and Napoli are careful to point out that social media won't become the only marketing platform. "As far as we're concerned, it's another tool, not the only tool," Johnson says. "I really believe in multiple pathways."

While social media marketing efforts are seen as customer-friendly and accessible in some circles, they may not be in all. Johnson notes that her firm has a number of clients who aren't yet electronically minded, so she has to remain mindful that everyone may not be receptive to outreach efforts delivered via social media.