



The Director's Link

Published by the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National Louis University

Fall 2011

What's Your Social Media Personality?

Fran Simon and Chip Donohue

Social media is all the rage. Your board members and front office staff are all atwitter about Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. The parents want an online group to connect with other parents and hear about classroom news. Your staff members want a blog or an email newsletter instead of print to connect with each other and the parents. Expectations are high. What are you doing about all of this interest?

We have identified five personalities at play in social media adoption. Which one are you; and how does it impact your program's use of social media?

The Resistor: You are dead set against the idea of using computers to communicate when good, old-fashioned face-to-face networking and promotion has worked for all of these years. *Your core challenge:* How to respond to the pressure you feel from others who are sure social media is the best development since Froebel.

The Intimidated: You want to use social networking, but don't know how to get started. It's all very foreign, confusing, and scary. You would rather keep your head low and hope the excitement dies down. *Your core challenge:* How to move forward without admitting you're not really sure how 'social networking' works or how to handle technology anxiety.

The Personal User: You have a personal Facebook page or LinkedIn profile. You use it to connect with friends, family, colleagues, and classmates. *Your core challenge:* How to use social networking in your program and apply what you already know to your challenges as an administrator.

The Tester: You've been watching and interacting with other programs and organizations that have Facebook business pages and groups or LinkedIn groups. You

set up a presence for your program on Facebook, but nothing happened! *Your core challenge:* How to get people to join in and interact with your social media pages, and how to allocate time to manage the additional work of maintaining these presences.

The Professional User: Your organization has a Facebook page with hundreds of 'fans' who are using it. You use Twitter to broadcast news and learn the latest developments in the field, and you use LinkedIn to recruit and communicate with staff. *Your core challenge:* To ensure your staff, board, and parents understand and apply best practice in social media and to determine how to use it to raise money, hire staff, advocate in your community, and increase enrollment.

The Resistor—an important role

People who resist change can actually be good for the process of implementing change. Resistance does slow momentum down. But, if a freight train is running amok, resistance is great. The frenzy about social media sometimes causes organizations to gain momentum much too quickly. Creating a Twitter presence or

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Facebook page without ever considering why you are doing it, what you hope to achieve, or how it will be maintained, can be disastrous. Resisters force the advocates to contemplate the tough questions, make a case for implementing this new, time-consuming initiative, think through goals, and question if the medium is right.

Moving from Intimidated to Confident

It can be baffling and maybe even anxiety-provoking to venture into this realm. Here are some thoughts to make it a little bit easier.

The first step is to banish the words "I'll never get this" from your lexicon! Just as you mastered all you need to know to be a confident educator and administrator, you will master this too. If technophobia and social media anxiety are holding you back, just remember these key points:

- ◆ Social media is less than a decade old. We were all 'newbies' once and started with the same questions, fears, and concerns.
- ◆ You will not 'break' anything by exploring social media.
- ◆ Nothing on the Internet is truly private. Learn about privacy settings on your social networking sites, and adjust them to the level that makes you comfortable.
- ◆ Form a basic understanding of social networking. We recommend this video from CommonCraft, Social Networking in Plain English (www.commoncraft.com/video-social-networking).
- ◆ Start with only one social media site.
- ◆ Don't be afraid to ask for help. Check out trainings such as those offered by the McCormick Center.

Once you have the basic idea, focus on the sites that are easiest to manage and have the biggest impact. Facebook (<http://Facebook.com>) is designed to walk you through the first steps of setting up a personal profile and connecting with others. Get accustomed to the site with a personal profile before you develop a page for your organization. The best ways to orient yourself are to:

- ◆ Connect with (or 'friend') your personal contacts.

- ◆ Search for some organizations (like McCormick Center, Exchange Press, World Forum Foundation, NAEYC, NACCRRRA, NHSA, etc.) and 'like' their pages (which is the same as 'friending' your personal contacts).
- ◆ Watch your Facebook News Feed to see the posts that other people and organizations make.
- ◆ Make the Facebook Getting Started Guide your new Best Friend Forever: www.facebook.com/#!/help/?guide.

Making the leap from Personal User to Professional User

The most important thing you can do to extend your social media knowledge beyond personal use is to immerse yourself in the experience. Join online groups, 'like' Facebook pages, visit the websites of similar organizations, and sign up for email newsletters. In order to cross over from personal user to professional user, it is critical to observe how businesses and organizations that are similar to yours use social media.

Facing your core challenge

A simple search on Google will reveal millions of articles about why businesses (and that includes early childhood programs) and nonprofit organizations need to use social media to achieve their goals. We'll focus on three critical points:

1) *Social media is pervasive.* Even television, radio stations and newspapers use social networking to connect with their audiences. These statistics illustrate how it has become as much of a part of daily life as brushing your teeth:

Facebook:

- ◆ More than 400 million are active users, and 50% of them log on any given day. (That's 175 million every 24 hours.)
- ◆ Over 500 billion minutes are spent on the site per month.
- ◆ More than 700,000 local businesses have active pages.
- ◆ Purpose-built pages have created more than 5.3 billion fans.
- ◆ Mothers have become a target audience for ads.

The Director's Link is made possible by funding from the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) and the McCormick Foundation, and is distributed free of charge to early childhood directors in Illinois.

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Our Mission

The McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership is dedicated to enhancing the management skills, professional orientation, and leadership capacity of early childhood workforce. The activities of the Center encompass four areas: training and technical assistance, program evaluation, research, and public awareness.

LinkedIn:

- ◆ has over 70 million members
- ◆ a new member joins approximately every second
- ◆ executives from all Fortune 500 companies are members

Facebook and LinkedIn are just the tip of the social media iceberg. For more information and guidance on social media, visit the Social Networking section of the Pew Internet and American Life Project website at www.pewinternet.org/topics/Social-Networking.aspx. The data tell an important story: Social media and social networking are impossible to ignore.

2) *Your core constituency—parents, donors, board members, grant makers, colleagues, and staff members—are also social media users!* In fact, 62% of social media users are between the ages of 25 and 54—the very face of the adult stakeholders in your organization. Besides connecting with friends, they are becoming donors, educated consumers of child care, and advocates for their children and their communities. They are making important decisions based on what they hear from other people online. When it comes to marketing and communication, there's an old adage that says, "Be where the people are," and clearly, your people are on social media.

3) *There are thousands of bloggers focused on writing content specifically for your stakeholders.* They write reviews that appeal to prospective parents—the parents of children enrolled in your program—prospective employees, and your current staff. AND they ARE talking about and comparing child care programs...Maybe even yours. Think about these facts:

- ◆ 53% of the total blogging population is 21-35 years old; 20 and under total 20%; 36-50 years old = 19%; and 51 and older = 7%.
- ◆ 38% of bloggers post brand or product reviews (They do talk about child care, and parents read and respond to these posts!)

With the facts and figures as a backdrop, balance your healthy skepticism with good

judgment and acceptance. Use your arguments against social media as the basis for questions to guide your planning. Form a small group of trusted social media savvy advisors to work through your concerns. Develop a social media policy, and a high-level plan for getting involved in social media at a sane and rational pace that makes sense for your organization.

Build in time for ample professional development so you are well-informed about the tools you or your staff will use. Most of all, relax into the process with the knowledge that, as always, you will be leading the way for your program to get to the next level with new tools and techniques. Your leadership is nothing new, just the objectives and tactics have changed.

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Chip Donohue is Director of Distance Learning at Erikson Institute in Chicago and Senior Fellow of the Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children's Media. He is a leader in the innovative use of technology and distance learning methods to increase access, enhance learning, and improve teaching practices in early childhood education. He works with new technology tools to enable relationships and build learning communities online.

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Creating a Social Media Plan and Putting it into Action

After reading the information and researching the links, you will be ready to begin your center's social media journey. The following steps provide a strategy to help you create your plan and put it into action. Use these guidelines as you travel the path to Professional User.

Putting Your Social Media Plan into Action

Take your organization's social media temperature.

- ◆ Informally assess your stakeholders by talking about your experiences on social media and what you have learned.
- ◆ Conduct a survey to get more detailed information.

Establish your vision.

- ◆ Determine what you want to achieve, and set goals and objectives for your program's use of social media.
- ◆ Prepare yourself with an 'elevator speech' about why social media will help your program.
- ◆ Arm yourself with persuasive counterpoints for naysayers.

Form a social media committee of staff members, board members, influencers, advisors, and parents.

- ◆ Set up a projector, plug in the computer, and take your committee on a social media field trip to visit some of the best examples that demonstrate what you hope to achieve using social networking.
- ◆ Identify supporters and work with them to draft a social media policy that will help ease the fears of those who are reluctant.
- ◆ Identify the people who can help you. Remember, you will need to maintain your presences, so you will need help from others for that task!
- ◆ Use your committee to market your presences, and get others to connect and engage.

Approach social media implementation as you might approach curriculum implementation.

- ◆ Provide time for training.
- ◆ Carve out time for staff to use social media to promote your center.
- ◆ Make resources available.
- ◆ Inform parents and board members.
- ◆ Develop achievable and measurable goals.
- ◆ Follow up, assess, and adjust as needed.

Adapted from article by Simon, F., Donohue, C. (2010, Jan./Feb.). *Exchange*, 32(1)
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The Igloo Project

It has been said, "it takes a village to raise a child." The following story demonstrates how children at the Oakton Community College Early Childhood Education Center were the impetus for collaborations that raised a community to a new awareness.

This past winter in Marsha Habibivic's classroom, an interest in snow life and a subsequent discussion about homes blossomed into a semester-long project. This activity involved the children and also drew the enthusiasm and support of both families and the community-at-large.

Classroom discussions sparked the concept that an igloo was a home made from snow and the idea to build one in the classroom took life. The medium would be empty gallon jugs. The most challenging part of the project turned out to be collecting enough empty gallon jugs. Original estimates called for 300, so families were invited to be a part of the project.

Realizing that might be a lofty goal for so few families, the request was extended throughout Oakton Community College. Thanks to the children's families reaching out for help and a website ad, jugs also came in from the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership, Lincoln Junior High School, some local Starbucks stores, and others in the community.

The children's interest guided the direction of the entire process: drawing pictures of their igloo vision, constructing 3-D models, and reading books from the local library. The anticipation of completing the igloo

could be felt each day as they brought in more milk jugs. Cries of, "When will it be done?", "What will we put inside?", and "How many more milk jugs do we need?" were heard daily. It was great to see how supportive the families and the community were as they brought in trash bags full of jugs and followed the progress.

The igloo took a total of 634 jugs and was turned into a home that included soft places to sit, books, and kitchen supplies. One of the greatest benefits of this project was its ability to be repurposed. During the remainder of the semester, it was transformed into a wildlife search and rescue center, a farmers market, a restaurant, and a submarine.

A wall mural was created in the college outlining the project step-by-step and photos and thank you notes were sent to all members of the community who contributed to its successful completion.



Item 19 in the *Program Administration Scale* (PAS), a tool that measures leadership and management practices, is focused on community outreach. The PAS stresses the importance of building relationships between early care and education centers and the local community. Local businesses have a wealth of information to share with children to help them become informed and concerned citizens. Partnering with neighbors and local organizations gives children a chance to put into practice the lessons they are learning in the centers. Establishing relationships with neighbors can be critical in emergency situations. In addition, building relationships with community partners can be beneficial when writing grants, seeking resources, and maintaining a caring neighborhood. When early care and education centers partner with the community, everyone wins.

Oakton Community College Early Childhood Education Center
Skokie, Illinois;
Yvonne Kostic, Site Coordinator
<http://www.oakton.edu/resource/ececenter/>

Coming next issue: A local Jamie Oliver and her own personal Food Revolution

Don't miss us at the NAEYC conference in Orlando

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McCormick Center for
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Resources

Top Social Media Sites for ECE

Facebook: <http://Facebook.com>

What is it? A very social social networking site

Why: Easy to use, high-interactivity

Best for: Connecting with prospective parents, staff, donors *Most important tool:* 'Organization Pages'

LinkedIn: <http://LinkedIn.com>

What is it? A business-oriented networking site

Best for: Connecting with other business professionals, great for recruiting staff

Most important tool: 'LinkedIn Groups'

Twitter: <http://Twitter.com>

What is it? A 'Microblogging site'; users share links in 140 characters or less

Why: Tight ECE community has grown

Best for: Getting the word out quickly

Most important tool: 'Hashtags' *Caution:* Learn about hashtags or Twitter won't make sense to you

YouTube: <http://YouTube.com>

What is it? A site where video takes center stage

Why: Nothing tells a story as well as video

Best for: Demonstrating DAP, convincing donors and policymakers

Most important tool: 'Channels'

Follow the Leaders

McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership:

trainings for early childhood professionals.

Website: <http://cecl.nl.edu>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/mccormick.center>

Fran Simon's Engagement Strategies: Resources for

Newbies: www.esbyfs.com/web20ece and

www.esbyfs.com/socialmediareources

Children's Defense Fund: intertwines social media

with website. www.ChildrensDefenseFund.org

Facebook: www.facebook.com/ChildrensDefensedFund

YouTube: www.youtube.com/user/childrensdefense

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/ChildDefender>

LinkedIn:

www.linkedin.com/groups?mostPopular=&gid=99638

The InvestiGator Club: interactivity and engagement with around 9,000 followers.

www.facebook.com/InvestiGatorClub?ref=ts

Teach Preschool: activities and resources for early childhood professionals.

Website: <http://deborahjstewart.com/>

Blog: <http://deborahjstewart.com/blog/>

Facebook: www.facebook.com/Teachpreschool

Twitter: http://twitter.com/teach_preschool