

Using Social Media to Advance Your Online Training Program eGuide

A Quantum Leap Marketing eGuide

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Introduction

Social media has forever changed the way organizations market to new prospects and customers and interact with their customers, prospects and employees.

The social media revolution has come to online training as well. Those trainers who embrace social media will have bigger classes and better, more collaborative interactions with their students.

This Quantum Leap Marketing eGuide, sponsored by Citrix Online, looks at the latest uses and trends in social media and how those factors apply to improving the online training experience for both trainers and students.

Readers will gain strategies to promote their training through social media marketing, engage students for better interaction and experience with your training, and learn what's working now from leading organizations and trainers.

This eGuide, "Using Social Media to Advance Your Online Training Program," will answer key questions, including:

- What do online trainers need to know about social media?
- How can trainers get more interest and attendance at by using social media tools?
- How can you create a more collaborative experience for your students using social media?
- What is the easiest way to build better, more engaging online training content with the help of social media?
- What are some features to look for in an online training solution?
- What's working now for leading organizations that combines online training and social media?

A note to the reader before we get started: We have provided social media context, ideas, and examples in online training throughout this eGuide. Not all situations will apply to you. But rather than saying to yourself, "that does not relate to my role in online training," consider rather, "How might this apply to us, now and in the future."

The Changing Training Landscape – Online and Social

One of my favorite quotes from Microsoft Founder and technology visionary, Bill Gates goes something like this, "People always overestimate the level of change possible in the short-term, say a year. But they massively underestimate what is possible in a decade."

There has been a revolution in both online training and social media over the past 10 years.

And these two trends together have altered the training landscape forever.

1. Major Trends Driving the Growth of Online Training

It is likely not news to you that the demand for online training of all types is growing rapidly, and there is no end in sight. By online training we mean any type of training created and shared online, whether in a live or on-demand format.

Online training is created by individuals, a company to train its employees or customers, or a for-profit training company. It includes but is not limited to: HR training, employee training, training for professional CE credits, online classrooms as part of educational institutions, customer or product training, and free preview training with marketing objectives.

The most common scenario is a class or series of classes given live using an online training solution projecting voice and slides or sharing a desktop. The session(s) may be recorded and shared with current or future students.

Whatever your specific training environment, curriculum, or objectives, here are a few reasons why this growth is likely to continue.

- Online training is relatively easy and inexpensive to deliver and record. Trainers of all types have typically attended numerous online training programs themselves and many have been presenting online for years. Generally those conducting online training have gotten a lot better at knowing how to deliver effective trainings.
- The last 10 years have seen a rise in effective online training tools. These technologies offer robust functionality, easy-to-use interfaces, and favorable pricing.
- Students are increasingly interested in consuming training at their pace, and at a time and place convenient to them. There also

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may be cost savings to the student taking a training online rather than in-person.

- Both trainers and students are familiar with online and digital media. Online training takes advantage of both visuals and voice, and can be recorded for review or watched later from the office, home, or on the road.
- While there are certainly potential disadvantages to a remote presentation, such as not being able to see your students, the recent growth in online training shows that the market votes for the benefits of online training, and watching recordings far outweighs any disadvantages.
- Because of current economic pressures, individuals and companies are generally doing more with less. Larger companies have generally reacted to the current worldwide recession by cutting expenses rather than trying to grow revenues to increase or maintain profits. Fewer employees are required to do the same work and thus learn new skills to meet their expanded job responsibilities.
- Travel and education budgets are generally lower, if not cut out completely. Shifting to online training is way of getting much of the benefit of in-person training at a fraction of the cost.
- Online training increases productivity because it can be re-used or viewed individually at a future date.

Thus, the demand for online training is growing and the above trends would indicate that it will not stop any time soon.

2. Overview of Social Media for those in Online Training

According to Wikipedia, "Social media is media designed to be disseminated through social interaction, created using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques.

"Social media uses Internet and Web-based technologies to transform broadcast media monologues (one to many) into social media dialogues (many to many). It supports the democratization of knowledge and information, transforming people from content consumers into content producers."

Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content."

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Well-known examples of social media include blogs and social networking sites such as LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, and MySpace. (See Appendix A for a list of popular social media tools and their relationship with online training.)

Additionally, Wikipedia offers a related concept, The Attention Age. "The Attention Age is marked by the ability of individuals to create and consume information instantly and freely as well as share it on the Internet using social media. The period is believed to have begun with the emergence of Web 2.0 technologies and social media since 2000."

We believe those connected with online training need to understand and begin to take advantage of the following implications of the Web 2.0 wave and social media phenomenon.

Social Media Increases the Demand for Online Training

The rise of social media helps fuel an increase in demand for online training and the key features and benefits of online training. It also helps promote the decline of in-person training.

Social Media Makes It Easy to Market Your Online Trainings

Social media tools and communities can be used for marketing your training. You can tap into existing communities, create new communities, cheaply connect with a large list of prospective students, and promote specific online training events.

Students Have Different Expectations About Training

Students of all types have different expectations today than they did 10 or 20 years ago, which you must acknowledge and address in your training. Students, for example, are more eager to learn at their own pace, do a "deep dive" into special areas of interest, and consume the training when and how they prefer.

The teacher/student relationship has changed so that students expect to take control of their learning, gain information and insights from outside the classroom, and quickly and easily access networks of geographically dispersed peers along with other experts in their area of interest.

Social Media for Extending the Online Classroom

Social media can be used to extend the classroom beyond the current training session. Prospective students can find out what past students have said about the online training or trainer, preview course materials, converse directly with current students, and network with other current

students or graduates of a course for career development or to take advantage of lessons learned.

Most Students Behave Differently From The Way They Did 10 or 20 Years Ago

Social media and the continued proliferation of media in general have changed the way today's individuals, especially the younger generation, behave and communicate.

Consumption of media of all types continues to rise, more user-generated content is created, multi-tasking increases, workers are more connected and extend the boundaries of work beyond the traditional notion of an office, and the speed and frequency of communications (many times in bite-sized chunks) have all increased.

We suggest you monitor the broader trends and specific innovations in communications, education, online learning, and the evolution of Web 2.0, especially as it relates to your industry and the current and prospective consumers of your training.

But...the most important social media trends are those that affect YOUR particular market, students, and online training situation.

While the broader societal implications of these trends are interesting, this eGuide will offer an introduction to what those engaged in online training need to know about social media and how to take advantage of social media for better and bigger online training.

Significant Benefits of Social Media with Online Training

Here are the primary benefits offered to online trainers and the online training experience by social media.

Recognizing your training audience and objectives will be unique to you and your organization. Some will have freedom to explore each of these avenues.

1.Social Media Helps You Find and Reach New Students – Your audience increases with the use of online social media. A recent Merkle “View from the Social Inbox” study states that 66 percent of consumers are active on one of the top social networking sites. Your potential students are likely participants of top sites like Facebook, YouTube, MySpace, or Twitter.

And one of the fundamental rules of marketing is to go seek out your market where they are rather than waiting, and hoping, they find you.

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You or your firm can also create your own social media account or site to attract your target audience.

Whether you are engaging prospects at other social media sites, or creating new sites or accounts to attract them, all are ways to reach a new audience.

2. Social Media Offers An Opportunity to Promote Your Own Trainings – Social media opens up a new channel to market and promote your online trainings. You can promote online for an online offering, and the match will increase the chances of reaching “like-minded people with an appealing offer.”

Keep in mind with your social media marketing this proven promotional model for online training: Promote your training to existing prospects and customers (people who are familiar with you), or those who have taken similar training from other organizations.

Consider using social media marketing to gain followers as the first step. Then, market to that list, site or group with a recruitment campaign for the online training.

3. Social Media Helps You Engage Your Students – Social media creates new opportunities to get the attention of, and interact with, your students before, during, and after any training sessions -- with significant benefits.

Many who work in education or online training will decry social media as a distraction that takes away from “learning.” Savvy online trainers will look at social media as an opportunity to engage students where they can get their attention.

Engaging them at different points in time promotes better training, more questions, and increases the chances that students will go through the Recognize, Relate, Assimilate, and Apply (R2A2) process outlined below and get deeper into the “apply stage.”

4. Social Media Helps You Develop Better Presentations – As discussed above, online training challenges presenters to get and keep the attention of students they cannot see. Therefore, the best trainers employ a variety of strategies to create and deliver better content.

Online trainers can tap social media’s vast resources of timely information, networking, and feedback to deliver insights you need, when you need them. This, along with interactive tools such as polls and in-session quizzes helps to improve content and delivery of your presentations.

5. Social Media Tools and Networks Help You Stay on Top of Trends, Competitors, and Market Developments – Our social media age offers

abundant opportunities to access information and insights instantly and freely on the Internet. Those who work in the online training realm who ignore social media risk being out of step with their marketplace, just as someone who avoids the Internet and does not use email would be in today's workforce.

Social media offers additional benefits to the world of online training; we have summarized above just a few of the primary benefits.

The next section will cover key ways to promote your next online training through social media.

Social Media for Promotion of Your Online Training

This section will help you understand ways to leverage social media and supplement your current marketing efforts. (See Appendix B for a sample "Online Training Marketing Process" with a few examples of how social media fits in with each step.)

Social media naturally lends itself to creating communities of like-minded individuals. And you can reach into these networks or communities through the new social media tools.

Marketing Power Point – Remember the core marketing asset for any training is a great list of prospective and past trainees. Keep this in mind when you are approaching marketing with social media. That is, ask the vital question, "How will this help me expand my reach and increase attendance over time?"

In fact, many online trainers and marketers will employ a two-step model of using social media to gain opt-ins, fans, and followers as the first step, then go back to that list or group with a marketing recruitment campaign for the training.

Common Social Media Tactics for Promotion of Online Trainings

1. Building a Twitter Following or Facebook Fans – Social Media as Another Channel for Creating a Prospect List

Many marketers and those in the online training community are using social media tools and strategies to get prospective students onto their list "at the top of the marketing funnel." They build their brand and position themselves or companies as a valuable resource, and in that way, their prospects are more receptive to signing-up for online training.

Remember, typically you will need to build this list ahead of using it to promote a specific training.

Marketing Power Point – Social media can stimulate last minute registrants. Many Webinar producers will give a final Tweet about their Webinar 30 to 60 minutes before the event. This also serves as a reminder to those already registered to attend.

2. Using Other Tactics Such As Blogs and Online Video to Create and Convert Online Traffic

Similarly, you can use social media outlets like YouTube or blogs to share content that increases your search engine ranking and helps create traffic to your Website.

You may want to develop a series of blog postings on your corporate site, or comment on a blog of an external popular site which might include a link back to more information on your online training. For example, a product trainer may participate in a company blog devoted to support of a particular product line.

In addition, because YouTube is one of the top five most visited sites in the United States, simply posting a video there may be enough to attract new viewers who can then seek out more information on your Website. As you may know, YouTube has viral marketing potential where – if your content is compelling – others may share it with their friends and followers via other social networks (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.) by linking to your videos as well.

3. Participating in Social Networks and Elsewhere with Postings

User-generated content is highly valued in the social media world. You can spur a conversation, demonstrate your expertise, and if done correctly, drive traffic to your social media outlets or your Website through posting on other social media sites and networks.

Educational trainers could Tweet occasionally on the corporate Twitter account or share an educational piece with their Facebook fans.

For example, an online trainer who runs his own training programs regularly monitors the top 23 Websites, blogs, and social media sites and comments on postings and shares resources an average of once a day. In this way, he is seen as one of the few experts in this market and greater community, and has built a Twitter following of over 5,000 in his market in a few short years.

4. Driving Traffic to Online Training Registration Pages with Your Social Media Reach

Social media can be a great vehicle to promote your online training, specifically by driving traffic to a sales or registration Web page. A simple example is mentioning the title of an upcoming online training to your Twitter followers, making sure to include a link to your sales or registration Website page.

A training registration page is designed to convert prospective registrants to registrants right away while they are on the page. So it should make your best marketing case for registering for the training now and it should be easy to register.

Registration Power Point – Some online training solutions provide their own registration page templates which offer the ability to have registrants answer questions that are pre-defined by the trainer or have a section where registrants can write their own comments when they register.

5. Building an Opt-In Email List with Web and Social Media Marketing

This can be thought of as the two-step marketing process.

The first step, through social and other media, is to get your prospective students to opt-in to your marketing email list. Then, as the second step, you aggressively promote your upcoming online training(s). This model works for both free as well as paid training.

For example, one small training company aggressively promoted their free white paper to drive interest in their upcoming training programs. Many of the tactics above, in addition to traditional Website marketing, increased their opt-in email list by over 33% and their training class size grew at about the same rate.

Marketing Power Point – Different people respond to different media, so communicating with your audience in the ways that they prefer and getting results for you must be your focus. For example, one Webinar trainer had 8,000 Twitter Followers and only 1,000 names on his Opt-in email list, but the email list consistently out-pulled Twitter for online training registrants.

If you are new to online training or social media, or simply want to expand your reach, a great way to step up the learning curve quickly is to model winning ideas by watching what competitors and other online trainers do successfully with social media marketing.

The 80/20 principle applies here, meaning there will be a minority of individuals and companies who are doing it well and creating successful results, so model what is working and apply those lessons to your goals and resources.

Finally, keep social media marketing in context. It is a means to an end and not an end into itself. So those new to promotions via social media may want to identify top tactics or steps which require little effort or have high potential gain and try a few to help drive more attendees to your next training.

Next, let's examine a topic at the heart of almost every online training experience, getting more student interaction and engagement, driving deeper learning, and seeing the result of better "trained" students.

Improving Online Training Interaction and Engagement with Social Media

Before we get to social media tools for these objectives, let's make sure your training technology is helping you engage and interact with those attending your online training.

A good online technology platform offers ways for presenters to interact with their students online.

The various tools and techniques can include:

- A portal or document repository where presentations, companion training materials, checklists and guides, class lists, and training session archives can be accessed pre-, in-, and post-session.
- The ability to both mute all attendees and open up the phone lines for audio questions as desired by the leader, and allow students to raise hands and be unmuted.
- A cost and technology model which makes it practical to train fewer than 5 attendees, or scale to 200.
- A capability to see who is present and attentive at the training.
- The ability to do online chat, take text questions, collaborate with a white board, ask pre-planned and ad hoc polling questions, and give tests.
- The capacity for the instructor and attendee to share their desktop, slides, and different files, applications or Web pages.

Different students prefer different media to interact with. So offering more ways to interact with trainers before, during, and after the training will increase feedback and interaction. Many trainers have great success

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today with Web chat or questions and sometimes “opening the phone lines” to questions at certain times during the training.

Social media can extend these tools and interaction points and help increase the quality, number, and duration of interactions with your students. (For a list of potential interaction points in online training, see Appendix C.)

Here’s why taking advantage of social media for more interaction is so critical.

Social Media Can Compensate for Any Weaknesses of Online Training

One educational formula that some in online training use is “R2A2.” This stands for Recognize, Relate, Assimilate, and Apply. Meaning students learn when they recognize the concept, relate it to their own work or lives, assimilate into their own being, and apply it appropriately.

If we extend this model to online training, we discover that it can expose a weakness in the structure of many online trainings, in that some are delivered with little student preparation and follow-up. There can be a limited number of sessions or minimal amount of time students are participating in the training.

Thus, social media can offer some solutions to deliver a deeper training experience through engaging content and different interactions.

Ways to Use Social Media to Deepen Engagement with Students

Richer, more engaging content will increase student satisfaction and benefits from the ideas shared, encourage better reviews and more referrals, and generally make the online training experience better for presenters and attendees alike.

A 2010 study by the 1080 Group and QLM on “How to Promote and Deliver Engaging Webinars,” asked, “What keeps Webinar attendees engaged with the presentation?” Respondents cited “use of stories or examples to illustrate facts, presents specific ‘how to’ or actionable ideas or data, and presents market-oriented data” as being important to keeping engaged with online training.

We would also argue that more targeted, relevant content gives you or your marketers more ammunition to help promote your live or recorded trainings.

So how can online trainers use social media to improve their content with these factors in mind?

Mine Social Media and Networks for Sources of Engaging Content

Start by mining social media and networks for sources of engaging content.

One online trainer, for example, started to use Twitter to follow the top 30 individuals in his area of expertise who Tweet regularly about studies and trends in his market. He found in the first month an average of 2.5 new specific studies, stories, facts PER DAY that he could use in his online training and promotion.

Content Impact Power – The most important piece of your training content is the title or subject of your training. Make sure your social media interactions and feedback help you generate new relevant topics and validate that your current subjects are the optimal ones now.

Use Social Media for Your Own Surveys, and To Find New Surveys By Others

If you are stumped on what to present for a new training, or what content your audience finds most valuable in your training, what can you do? Simply ask!

As mentioned above, social tools and networks are a great place to get new data and survey results related to your market. In addition, you can ask one or more questions of your target audience.

Content Impact Power – If you strategically build your social media relationships and Twitter followers and Facebook fans, for example, others will have the ability to promote your surveys and share industry and market surveys with you. This will help you build smarter training content.

An example: A trainer needed input to help create a new session curriculum. He ran a few surveys, including a quick Twitter poll, and reached out to his LinkedIn contacts. He then used the results to structure the new training which he reports went, “very well indeed.”

Content Impact Power – While using the social media survey methods will get you more feedback, be sure to have an online training solution that allows you to create pre- and post-session surveys. A simple survey with 3 to 11 questions will help identify top challenges and perhaps more importantly, unimportant issues related to your content so you stay away from subjects that are not important to your audience.

More and Better Training-Related Interactions with Social Media

Here are some common ways to use social media to deepen the interaction with students. Generally, think of the idea of fostering and leveraging an online community to further your training objectives.

The idea is to extend the training experience to add more background information, give students a chance to ask questions outside of the formal channels, and have both students and training leads learn from each other.

Create Your Own Social Networking Site, Community, or Facebook Page Where Students Interact with Faculty and Other Students

For example, some trainers create a Facebook account specifically as a community for their students . . . a place where students can join and you can place course materials or resources all in one place.

Reap the value of this social medium where others start to interact and post resources, answer questions, network, and stay in touch outside of the limited hours of the online training itself.

Blog Entries and Twitter Posts

Both are real-time or short updates or links from the trainers themselves or the company. You can also post links to registration pages, blog entries or other resources.

For example, one marketing training company launched a Twitter account to cover a 3-day seminar. That way those that attended stayed up-to-date with resources and the goings on of the event, and those that could not attend sampled developments and information shared at the conference. They then used the account to promote future online trainings.

YouTube Videos

Supplement online training with online video that students can watch before or after a training session. This is especially valuable if part of your training lends itself to demonstration through the medium of video, not just a talking head. Some trainers have posted an archive of past live training sessions to supplement the online training experience and information.

Social media should be viewed as a tool to help you create and deliver better content and interact with your training audience. Avoid getting bogged down with any one tool or technology or having it impact your training experience.

Content Power Point – Social media is a great opportunity to get feedback and continue the conversation after a training. For example, one successful online trainer Tweets links to stories and examples of “success stories.” This shows others how to be more effective, and reinforces the idea that if you take action on the ideas, you will get results.

Keep the Conversation Going with a Social Network

While some online trainers would like you to believe they launched their first training on a topic without needing any ideas or examples from anyone else, this is totally false. In fact, many of the best trainers are not very good at generating their own ideas, but are masters at using existing ideas, stories, and examples and presenting them in their own unique way for greater impact.

For example, one of North America’s leading continuing education training organizations for professionals extends the conversation from its online trainings using multiple social media tools like LinkedIn. Attendees ask follow-up questions and offer feedback on what worked for individual sessions. The company routes specific feedback to its roster of trainers and helps guide improvements to the training for future sessions.

A technology company which holds weekly online training sessions has created a Facebook account for its customers. The organization posts updates on news, events, product updates, and upcoming trainings, and shares insights from select customers. The customers become fans and post updates with top questions and problems they have yet to solve, additional resources, and ideas. This builds a feeling of community by sharing news, photos, and scheduling user-sponsored training sessions with others around the world.

Social media is a great way to keep the conversation going among your market and those that have already attended one of your training sessions.

You will get new ideas, hear about persistent challenges, and receive success stories that you can integrate into your next online training. And in addition, you can promote your training program and expand your reach for attendance.

Your Action Guide: Step-by-Step Guide to Better Online Training with Social Media

Many in online training want to know, “How do we bring online training and social media training together?” Asked another way, “What are the

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key steps those in online training should take to leverage social media for better, more interactive training and more attendees?"

Above all, social media lets you create and tap into the power of a like-minded network of individuals in the free exchange of information, ideas, activities, and emotions. It also helps you find and communicate with prospective students.

Begin with the End in Mind

Start by understanding the key business AND training results you are trying to achieve.

Social media tools and marketing are not an end in themselves. There are countless examples of leading online trainers who are currently doing little with social media.

So understanding the marketing, content, and training results that you are trying to achieve with social media helps you measure the results of your efforts and keep you on course for success.

This could also mean putting together a mini-plan to leverage social media based on these objectives. Your plan could include: Objectives, timing, activities, the best social media tools, and resources needed.

Creating Better Online Training Topics with Social Media

Generally, the better the topic for online training, the more attendees and satisfaction is achieved with the training. Remember, the topic is comprised of the general area you are covering in the training, and also the specific title of the training used in marketing. You need both to "hit an online training homerun."

Directed towards your online training, social networks can give you feedback on your current topic, suggest new ideas or improvements to your current focus, or validate that the current track you are on is likely to be the most popular moving forward.

Creating Better Content with Social Media

While there are certain rules for creating content that works, nothing helps you improve your training content and examples like getting feedback from the crowd. This is especially important with online training where you can't see your audience and learn from their body language.

Social media helps you learn from, and interact with, prospective, current, and past students to improve training content.

For example, some online trainers let the students continue the conversation, ask questions, and share ideas immediately after the online training using social networking tools and post-session surveys. You can use social media to help get feedback from past attendees. You can also maintain contact with students for rich examples to use in your next training.

Expanding Your Reach with Social Media

As discussed above, social media marketing gives you new channels of distribution and helps you tap into new communities and networks.

Creating more Twitter or Facebook followers who are potential training attendees or buyers gives you a bigger prospect list from which to generate students. And, generally, simple math applies: Those online trainers who are pulling from a larger set of prospects will have bigger classes.

Many online trainers will need to prioritize their social media marketing plan to add one tool initially, or work with a company's marketing department to help promote their training through the company's existing social media marketing channels.

Building and Converting Traffic with Social Media

Social media marketing is a great way to get a short ad or notice of your upcoming training out to your followers, communities, or networks.

Getting an effective title and link to the online registration or sales page in front of your audience multiple times will help to drive traffic. And if others re-Tweet and/or help promote your upcoming training, all the better.

Remember the best practices for better conversion of landing page/registration page traffic. Don't make the mistakes that many make to just focus on building traffic. You must focus on traffic AND conversion.

Improving the Training Experience with Social Media

Some trainers are using social media tools during the training itself to enhance the online training experience. While others may use these tools selectively because of their style or the nature of the training, you now have a rich set of tools to pick from to make the training more interactive and immediate.

Whether your online training is one 60-minute session, or many sessions over time, social media tools like Twitter and Facebook can be ways of taking questions or sharing insights.

Getting and Promoting Better Training Results with Social Media

Our belief with any kind of training is that you must have goals for the outcome you are trying to achieve. That is, once a student is “trained,” what specific and measurable benefits will they gain?

Social media allows you to extend the classroom by reinforcing the lessons shared in the online training itself. You can highlight success stories and continue to communicate lessons learned from past students. You can have a place where students can go for the shared and new/evolving resources like checklists.

Perhaps the biggest benefit is giving online students who have gone through a similar training experience a place to meet, share, and interact directly, so they can learn from each other. This previously had been a weakness of online training that can now be corrected through social media and other online tools.

Creating a Learning Loop for Continuous Improvement

Social media is too new, vast, and evolving for any one trainer or organization to master and harvest its potential in a short time. But by doing nothing, you will be further behind in leveraging social media for online training benefits. Therefore, you must prioritize, execute, and complete one or more social media initiatives or steps.

Once you complete a cycle of initiatives, evaluate what worked, what did not, and why. And take this valuable learning into your next training event or social media outreach. It is in this way that you will “get up the learning curve” and begin to tap the power of the social media Revolution.

Summary

There is no denying it.

Social media has forever changed the way organizations market to and interact with online training students.

Those who take advantage of the social media opportunities in front of them will have larger online classes and better interactions with the class.

Use the ideas most appropriate for your objectives and market and stay current with the latest social media trends and opportunities.

Appendix A: A Sampling of Popular Social Media Tools and How Online Trainers Can Use Them

Here are popular examples of social media and how they can be used in the context of online training.

Many in training will use this knowledge of the key tools available, their audience, and their top challenges to decide how to get started with social media.

Blogs – Blogs were an early example of social media but are still going strong. Blogs allow you to create a mini-site with frequently updated content which can help with Web marketing and SEO (designing a Website for a high search engine ranking). You can also send prospective or current students to your blog to get important updates or convert them to students for upcoming training.

Blogs also give you an opportunity to share your “point-of-view” on an issue in the news, and don’t forget that posting comments on the popular blogs of others can be a great way to generate interest about your training program.

Custom Social Networking Sites – Such as Ning.com, which allow you to join or create communities or get to know your target market better, build a following, position yourself or your organization as a resource to your target market, and promote your trainings.

Facebook – Facebook is a great way of building a community around your company or your training. Trainers could promote training, share news, files, and pictures, and encourage user-generated content related to this community or your training. You can also join others’ Facebook sites and become an active member of related communities.

LinkedIn – Online trainers might use LinkedIn to create and stay in touch with their peer group or students. It can also be an easy way to start a new community, area of interest, or training alumni group for networking and information sharing for both students and teachers alike.

MySpace – MySpace started out primarily as a music sharing site and remains a social media Website which is more heavily used by a younger audience. Although creating less buzz than a few years ago, it remains an incredibly popular social media site.

Twitter – Twitter has been the hot social media property recently, so much so that many overestimate its reach. This short-message engine can be quite useful in the online training world. Twitter helps you build a following

of people interested in your content or stay connected to your community.

YouTube – Online video hosting and sharing site owned by Google. Trainers could post videos for both marketing and training purposes. You can use YouTube as a simple online video repository which current, past, or prospective students can access. Online trainers can post videos of themselves or related speakers or training. Many training organizations will post a short sample of past trainings to promote future trainings delivered live or through all types of media.

The Power of Social Media through Combinations

The bottom line for online training is that social media should not be confused with just one tool or platform. The power of social media can come in using these different media or sites in combination.

For example, you might post a snippet of training video on YouTube and let your audience know about it through email, a blog and a Twitter message. Students may then share a link to this video through their own Facebook page or by re-Tweeting your Twitter post to create a viral marketing effect.

Appendix B: 9 Key Steps to a Winning Online Training Marketing Plan

Here's a sample online training marketing process that will apply in many situations.

Remember, even if your audience is an internal or captive audience such as employees, many of these marketing strategies can be applied to get their attention and attendance at your training.

1. **Identify Target Audience** – knowing your target market is the first step to building and marketing successful online training. Social media can be leveraged to highlight training issues and topics, find out more about your target audience, and offer ideas about where to find prospective students (see the next tip, tip number 2).

2. **Identify Target Lists and Media** – create the media plan to identify the most effective and efficient use of your limited resources. Keep in mind that those in online training find that their own and other opt-in email lists are the best way to drive training attendees. Social media can be used to expand your reach to other communities and build a training prospect list. In addition, you could tap into your own or your organization's Twitter followers to recruit attendees.

3. **Build Your Promotional Plan** – select from potential media to match what has worked in the past for this type of training, and what lists have been, or are likely to be, the most responsive. No one has unlimited time or budget, so prioritization is key.
4. **Build a Marketing Schedule** – create a marketing calendar, also known as the promotional plan for your event. You and any marketers or the marketing team in your company and/or third-party promotional partners will be more likely to hit deadlines and get your messages out at the right time.
5. **Create Training Marketing Content** – the specific messaging you use for both promotion and conversion of registrants can have up to a 500% greater impact on class size. Yes, the actual content does matter, including your course titles and a compelling list of 3 or more benefits of attending.
6. **Execute Drafted Promotional Plan** – take pains, whether it is you or someone else, so that the marketing plan outlined on paper is executed. The best marketing plans are the one where “flawless execution” is the standard, and sloppy timing or promotions are avoided.
7. **Monitor Conversions** – watch the trends in how the marketing is pulling. Track the open rate of emails, the number of viewers on key Web pages, and the registration rate and conversions over time. View these metrics as an opportunity to make any last minute corrections before the final push.
8. **Final Push and Reminders** – as you are getting close to your first online training date and time, take advantage of this last chance window to offer final reminders to register. Registration solutions that provide automatic email reminders can make this process seamless.
9. **Convert Registrants to Attendees** – don’t forget that marketing is not complete once someone has registered. Your registrant-to-attendee conversion marketing program helps you get as close to 100% attendance as possible. Allowing your registrants to view relevant course materials uploaded to your document repository will also aid in your attendee retention.

Appendix C: Key Interaction Points for Online Training for More, and Better Trained Students

Here are key opportunities to interact with your potential, current, and past students using social media and other tools as well as the questions each opportunity helps answer.

Audience Research

1. **Market Research** – How can you gain (competitive) intelligence on hot-button issues and lists or media to find prospective students?
2. **Students of Related or Competitive Online Training Classes** – What works, what does not, what results at the end of the training should you shoot for, what might not be covered in other training that should be?

Marketing

3. **During the Marketing Process** –What can be changed in the training curriculum or marketing promotion to get more training registrants and attendees?
4. **Around Registration** – What marketing or training content is causing people to register, or stay away?

Delivering Better, More Interactive Training

5. **After Registration, Before the Course Starts** – What materials and pre-work should be assigned, what expectations and key learning goals do students have?
6. **With Students Before the Class Starts** – Chat with them verbally or through Web collaboration tools to help “walk in their shoes” and understand where they are coming from in business or life. Additionally, allow them to ask questions on the training registration page.
7. **During a Training Class** – Keep them engaged with all the tools available, make sure to answer key questions right there, or capture them and follow-up. Delivering surveys and polls that are pre-planned or ad hoc can be an effective tool for engagement as well.
8. **Students in a Course** – If a class has multiple parts, interacting between sessions can be useful to help identify issues to be covered in future sessions and answer questions right there. The use of post-session polls and quizzes can help identify these issues.

Post-Training Success and Referrals

9. **Past Students** – Can be great references and sources of examples (success stories or quotes) for future training marketing and delivery. In some situations students may take other classes from you or your organization.

10. **Post-Session Analysis** – The use of detailed reporting which tracks student attendance, performance and interactivity can assist in the development of future content.

Using Social Media to Advance Your Online Training Program

About Citrix Online

Citrix Online, a division of Citrix Systems, Inc., is a leading provider of easy-to-use, on-demand applications for Web conferencing and collaboration. Its award-winning services include GoToMeeting® Corporate, a complete collaboration solution that satisfies all Web conferencing needs ranging from large Webinars to small online meetings.

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