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giving meeting or seminar participants a way to meet before an event and to maintain relationships after an event; accelerating the development of teams by helping members get to know one another and to identify individual areas of expertise; and sharing information throughout the organization.

- **Building communities.** Social networks are a natural tool for bringing together *communities of practice* (people who engage in similar work) and *communities of interest* (people who share enthusiasm for a particular product or activity). Large and geographically dispersed companies can benefit greatly from communities of practice that connect experts who may work in different divisions or different countries. Communities of interest that form around a specific product are sometimes called **brand communities**, and nurturing these communities can be a vital business communication task.
- **Socializing brands and companies.** According to one survey of company executives, *socialization* now accounts for more than half of a company's or brand's global reputation.⁹ **Brand socialization** is a measure of how effectively a company engages with its various online stakeholders in a mutually beneficial exchange of information.
- **Understanding target markets.** With hundreds of millions of people expressing themselves via social media, you can be sure that smart companies are listening. In addition, a number of tools now exist to gather market intelligence from social media more or less automatically. For example, tools for *sentiment analysis* (also known as opinion mining) and *reputation analysis* assess the reputations of companies and individuals, measure the emotional quality of online conversations, identify outrage "hot spots" on social media, and uncover trending topics of interest.¹⁰
- **Recruiting employees and business partners.** Companies use social networks to find potential employees, short-term contractors, subject matter experts, product and service suppliers, and business partners. A key advantage here is that these introductions are made via trusted connections in a professional network. On LinkedIn, for example, members can recommend each other based on current or past business relationships, which helps remove the uncertainty of initiating business relationships with complete strangers.
- **Connecting with sales prospects.** Salespeople on networks such as LinkedIn can use their network connections to identify potential buyers and then to ask for introductions through those shared connections. Sales networking can reduce *cold calling*, or telephoning potential customers out of the blue—a practice that few people on either end of the conversation find pleasant.
- **Supporting customers.** Customer service is another fundamental area of business communication that has been revolutionized by social media. *Social customer service* involves using social networks and other social media tools to give customers a more convenient way to get help from the company and to help each other.
- **Extending the organization.** Social networking is also fueling the growth of *networked organizations*, sometimes known as virtual organizations, where companies supplement the talents of their employees with services from one or more external partners, such as a design lab, a manufacturing firm, or a sales and distribution company.
- **Crowdspeaking.** Companies, nonprofits, musicians, authors, and others can use *crowdspeaking* to "boost a signal" by taking advantage of the *social reach* of their supporters. By recruiting supporters to spread their messages, communicators can reach hundreds or thousands of times as many people as they could on their own.¹¹



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Socializing a brand is becoming an increasingly important element of marketing and public relations strategies.

Smart businesses use social networks to listen to stakeholders and their concerns.

MOBILE APP

The social media management app **SocialOomph** lets you monitor multiple social media sites, schedule updates, and perform other time-saving tasks.

STRATEGIES FOR BUSINESS COMMUNICATION ON SOCIAL NETWORKS

Social networks offer attractive opportunities for business communication, but they must be used with the same care as other professional media. Follow these guidelines to make the most of social networks for both personal branding and company communication:¹²

Successful communication on social networks starts with choosing the best compositional mode for each message.

A hub is a central online location such as a website or a blog that unifies your online presence.

Products can be promoted on social networks, but it needs to be done in a low-key, indirect way.

- **Choose the best compositional mode for each message, purpose, and network.** As you visit various social networks, take some time to observe the variety of message types you see in different parts of each website. For example, the informal status update mode works well for Facebook posts but would be less effective for company overviews and mission statements.
- **Offer valuable content to members of your online communities.** People don't join social networks to be sales targets. They join looking for connections and information. *Content marketing* is the practice of providing free information that is valuable to community members and also helps a company build closer ties with current and potential customers.¹³
- **Join existing conversations.** Search for online conversations that are already taking place. Answer questions, solve problems, offer advice, and respond to rumors and misinformation.
- **Anchor your online presence in your hub.** Although it's important to join conversations and be visible where your stakeholders are active, it's equally important to anchor your presence at your own central *hub*—a web presence you own and control. This can be a combination of a conventional website, a blog, and a company-sponsored online community, for example.¹⁴ Use the hub to connect the various pieces of your online “self” (as an individual or a company) and help people to find and follow you.
- **Facilitate community building.** Make it easy for customers and other audiences to connect with the company and with each other. For example, you can use the group feature on Facebook, LinkedIn, and other social networks to create and foster special-interest groups within your networks. Groups are a great way to connect people who are interested in specific topics, such as owners of a particular product.
- **Restrict conventional promotional efforts to the right time and right place.** Persuasive communication efforts are still valid for specific communication tasks, such as regular advertising and the product information pages on a website, but efforts to inject blatant “salespeak” into social networking conversations are usually not welcome.
- **Maintain a consistent personality.** Each social network is a unique environment with particular norms of communication.¹⁵ For example, as a strictly business-oriented network, LinkedIn has a more formal “vibe” than Facebook, which caters to both consumers and businesses. Adapt to the expectations of each network, but be sure to maintain a consistent personality across all the networks in which you are active.¹⁶

See “Writing Promotional Messages for Social Media” in Chapter 9 (pages 235–237) for more tips on writing messages for social networks and other social media.

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Social shaming in today's business landscape

See how today's consumers use the power of social media to get satisfaction from companies. Go to real-timeupdates.com/bce8 and select Learn More in the Students section.

3 LEARNING OBJECTIVE
Explain how companies and business professionals can use content-sharing websites.

YouTube and other user-generated content sites are now important business communication channels.

Content-Sharing Sites

Social networks allow members to share information and media items as part of the networking experience, but a variety of systems have been designed specifically for sharing content.

USER-GENERATED CONTENT SITES

YouTube, Flickr, Yelp, and other **user-generated content (UGC)** sites, in which users rather than website owners contribute most or all of the content, have become serious business tools. On YouTube, for example, companies post everything from product demonstrations and TV commercials to company profiles and technical support explanations. A *branded channel* on YouTube lets a company organize all its videos in one place, making it easy for visitors to browse the selection or subscribe to get automatic updates of future videos.

Unfortunately, as emotions heat up during the project, some of the blog posts are getting too casual, too personal, and even sloppy. Because your boss and other managers around the company also read this project blog, you don't want the team to look unprofessional in anyone's eyes. Revise the following blog post so that it communicates in a more businesslike manner while retaining the informal, conversational tone of a blog (be sure to correct any spelling and punctuation mistakes you find as well).

Well, to the profound surprise of absolutely nobody, we are not going to be able meet the June 1 commitment to ship 100 operating tables to Southeast Surgical Supply. (For those of you who have been living in a cave the past six month, we have been fighting to get our hands on enough high-grade chromium steel to meet our production schedule.) Sure enough, we got news, this morning that we will only get enough for 30 tables. Yes, we look lik fools for not being able to follow through on promises we made to the customer, but no, this didn't have to happpen. Six month's ago, purchasing warned us about shrinking supplies and suggested we advance-buy as much as we would need for the next 12 months, or so. We naturally tried to followed their advice, but just as naturally were shot down by the bean counters at corporate who trotted out the policy about never buying more than three months worth of materials in advance. Of course, it'll be us—not the bean counters who'll take the flak when everybody starts asking why revenues are down next quarter and why Southeast is talking to our friends at Crighton Manu!!! Maybe, some day this company will get its head out of the sand and realize that we need to have some financial flexibility in order to compete.

Collaboration: Working in Teams; Planning: Selecting Media [LO-1] Working with at least two other students, identify the best medium to use for each of the following messages. For each of these message needs, choose a medium that you think would work effectively and explain your choice. (More than one medium could work in some cases; just be able to support your particular choice.)

- 6-15. A technical support service for people trying to use their digital music players
- 6-16. A message of condolence to the family of an employee who passed away recently
- 6-17. A collection of infographics from a variety of sources on the state of the consumer electronics industry
- 6-18. A series of observations on the state of the industry
- 6-19. A series of messages, questions, and answers surrounding the work of a project team

Media Skills: Writing Email Subject Lines [LO-4] Using your imagination to make up whatever details you need, revise the following email subject lines to make them more informative:

- 6-20. New budget figures
- 6-21. Marketing brochure—your opinion
- 6-22. Production schedule

Media Skills: Messaging, Creating a Businesslike Tone [LO-5] Your firm, which makes professional paint sprayers, uses messaging extensively for internal communication and frequently for external communication with customers and suppliers.

Several customers have recently forwarded copies of messages they've received from your staff, asking if you know how casually some employees are treating this important medium. You decide to revise parts of several messages to show your staff a more appropriate writing style. Rewrite these sentences, making up any information you need, to convey a more businesslike style and tone. (Look up the acronyms online if you need to.)

- 6-23. IMHO, our quad turbo sprayer is best model 4U.
- 6-24. No prob; happy2help!
- 6-25. FWIW, I use the L400 myself & it rocks
- 6-26. Most cust see 20–30% reduct in fumes w/this sprayer—of course, YMMV.

Activities

Each activity is labeled according to the primary skill or skills you will need to use. To review relevant chapter content, refer to the indicated Learning Objective. In some instances, supporting information will be found in another chapter, as indicated.

- 6-27. **Media Skills: Social Networking [LO-2]** Joining an ongoing social media conversation, such as a comment thread on Facebook, requires a delicate touch if you work for a company that has a commercial interest in the subject at hand. Imagine you work for a company that makes audiophile-quality headphones, acoustic guitars, or electronic drum kits (choose whichever product interests you the most). While monitoring a Facebook group for enthusiasts of this product category, you see an active thread in which people are complaining about the quality of one of your competitor's products. You know that for years this company had a reputation for making high-quality equipment, but after a poorly executed plan to outsource manufacturing in order to cut costs, quality has suffered. A similar product that your company offers is slightly more expensive but has significantly higher quality, according to a recent survey conducted by a respected and impartial industry website.

Draft a brief comment that you could use to join the conversation. Decide what information you'll include and whether you will disclose your company affiliation. Assume that representatives from various companies do occasionally make posts and leave comments in this group, but overt selling is explicitly forbidden by the group's moderator.

- 6-28. **Media Skills: Email [LO-4]** The following email message contains numerous errors related to what you've learned about planning and writing business messages.

SUBJECT: Compliance with new break procedure

Some of you may not like the rules about break times; however, we determined that keeping track of employees while they took breaks at times they determined rather than regular breaks at prescribed times was not working as well as we would have liked it to work. The new rules are not going to be an option. If you do not follow the new rules, you could be docked from your pay for hours when you turned up missing, since your direct supervisor will not be able to tell whether you were on a "break" or not and will assume that you have walked away from your job. We cannot



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