

## **Getting Good Press Looks Different These Days**

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The Michigan School Public Relations Association recently offered a social networking workshop. It was packed with those from the education community including local school districts, education associations, and intermediate school districts. Julielyn Gibbons, an online campaign strategist, provided a fantastic overview of new, high-tech tools that can supplement and even replace what used to be considered “good press.” She shared some helpful tips on getting started.

First, realize that the target audiences of parents, students, and community members are already online. More than 80% of Americans have regular access to the Internet and there is no variance by income or education level. There is a higher percentage of Internet use by minorities. Two-thirds of Internet users are over 18, or the age of one of our primary stakeholder groups: taxpayers.

Of those online, 35% regularly use social networking sites like Facebook, Linked In, or MySpace. Of those using social networking sites, 95% use them for personal reasons which means they are considered “authentic” ways to communicate. Facebook for example has more than 175 million active users while its fastest growing demographic is made up of those 30 years old and older. As of December 2008, 11% of online American adults said they used a service like Twitter or another service that allowed them to share updates about themselves or to see the updates of others. (To learn more visit <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1093/generations-online>.)

Second, make the use of social media part of the larger school communications plan. Creating a Facebook site or establishing a Twitter account will only be truly effective if it is part of your bigger plan. Ask yourself what communications objectives your school has, who the key audiences are that you are trying to reach, and which social media tactics will help meet those objectives. Also consider whether or not you are ready for an ongoing commitment to social media tools. How you will implement your strategy? What it will cost? How you will measure your efforts? You will also need a policy that governs your school’s use of social media tools.

Third, experiment with social networking and new media products yourself to determine how they might work for your school. (Hint: Enlist the help of someone who or an organization that already uses these tools.) On your own personal time, establish and use a personal Facebook ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)) site. Facebook is highly interactive and encourages two-way communications. Twitter ([www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)) may be a great way to update your staff, students and parents about news from your school and drive traffic to your school website. It tends to be more of a one-way communications tool and can be great for alerting others to new press releases. Many schools are successfully using blogs and emails as well. Ms. Gibbons reinforced the value of sending emails to lists of your key communicators or others with whom you want to connect. She suggested using short, attention-grabbing subject lines to prompt your audience to open them.

The bottom line is that “good press” may be no farther away than the computer on your desk. Instead of just hoping that the newspaper will print a press release, post it to your website, blog about it, tweet about it, write about it and post a related photo on your social networking page. These days there’s more than one way to get a good message out.