

# Staying Competitive with Social Media

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WHEN I FIRST SUGGESTED staying competitive with social media to the project manager, he just looked at me blankly. “What would be the purpose?” he said. “Wouldn’t it just be another level of overhead?”

Valid questions, I thought. So I explained.

## Project Management

A LinkedIn group would allow everyone to exchange information and to discuss issues openly. We could all see who else was involved in the project, and we could review everyone’s background. That would allow us not only to appreciate each other more, but also to call on the most appropriate person for a particular topic. We wouldn’t have to know each other’s email addresses; we could just communicate through LinkedIn. And everything discussed on the project would reside in one place where we all could review it and access it from wherever.

The group would be members-only. People would have to request to join, and I would pass any names not associated with the project to the project manager before I allowed them to join. Ultimately, it would give



Social media has transformed the way we communicate. This column discusses the intricacies and ramifications that social media has on our everyday personal and professional lives. Suggestions for topics are welcome. Email me at [rich.maggiani@solari.net](mailto:rich.maggiani@solari.net).

us all a sense of purpose, ownership, and camaraderie.

I could see that the project manager was ruminating on that a bit, so I waited. What he said next brought a smile to my face.

“If we are going to use LinkedIn to better manage the project, what

about using another social media tool for topics that demand more immediacy, like Twitter.”

“Actually, using Twitter is a great idea,” I said. “We could create a hash tag for the project and communicate using that. We’d be able to communicate quick messages to each other, and,” I added with a smile, “it would allow everyone else to watch an interchange and comment when they have something of value to offer. That increase of knowledge sharing can only enhance the final product.”

He mulled that over for a moment, then said, “Okay. Let’s do it.”

Most participants were reluctant at first, mainly because they had never worked on a project this way before, but they all eventually got onboard. Some are actually intrigued about how it will go and anticipate using social media for future projects. At the very least, using social media has brought a sense of togetherness to the project.

Managing projects is just one way that technical communicators can use social media. What it requires, of course, is that you set up a LinkedIn account and take the time to fully describe your professional self.

## Engaging in the Greater Conversation

Another way to use social media to stay competitive is to contribute and learn from the greater conversation. This enables you to get outside your box and engage with other technical communicators from around the world. You can also watch trends evolve, which can help you ride the crest of future developments as they unfurl—a true measure of surfing the net. If you are not seeing what you need, start a discussion and see where it leads.

Begin by joining the following Facebook groups:

- ▶ Society for Technical Communication, [www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=6287702135](http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=6287702135)



- ▶ Technical Communication 2.0, [www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=208713908443](http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=208713908443)

Many of you have already joined the Society for Technical Communication’s LinkedIn group (one of the largest with over 2,500 members). Join your local STC chapter’s LinkedIn group as well as relevant SIG groups. Be sure to set your “digest email” setting to “daily digest email” for “delivery frequency” so that you’ll see activity every day. Join some of the other technical communication groups as well.

And while I find much of the Twitter stream meaningless, I recommend following the #stcorg hashtag. Search for hashtags once, then save them for future use. STC’s feed generally contains up-to-the-minute information about STC goings-on and other information relevant to technical communication. It is really a wealth of information.

Set a reasonable amount of time every day (I spend about fifteen minutes every morning) reading through the discussions that seem most pertinent to you and contribute when you can.

The social media conversation has truly changed—forever. To stay competitive, you must participate. ■