Results of a survey of Victorian School Principals June 2010

Why schools are spooked by social media

Denis Masseni

The sponsor-ed Group

Table of Contents

About the author

Denis Masseni

With 18 years of corporate experience Denis has spent his career latching onto emerging industries. In the early 80's it was the 1 hour photo processing boom with Kodak – a phenomenon that revolutionised people's connectedness and consumption of photos. Next stop was the telecommunications industry in 1990; the decade that heralded the deregulation of the industry.

Denis's keen interest in the digital arena found him at Monash University in 2000 as a teaching associate (part-time) lecturer. During this time he was asked to assist in the establishment of the Master of Multimedia degree. He went onto become Program Director and of a further 2 degrees; the Master of Multimedia Design and Master of Design.

Today Denis continues his association with Monash University working with multimedia Honours and Master's students.

He's also a director of 2 digital businesses; NEWMEDIA people a recruitment firm (newmediapeople.com.au) and the highly successful web publishing and online advertising business, sponsor-ed (sponsor-ed.com.au). The portfolio has recently been expanded to include a new website product specifically for school parents called 'parents-of' (parents-of.com).

Denis has a passion for the digital space and finds that his knowledge across the digital spectrum combined with an entertaining delivery has allowed him to motivate and excite audiences to feel inspired by what the digital future can deliver.

Often called upon to work with educators and business in developing strategies to harness the power of what is a communications revolution, Denis spends his time informing the frightened, the wary and the non-believers on how to harness the power of the phenomenon that is social media After all, it's all about building communities. He will relay the successes and the near fatal disasters of organisations embarking on a social media crusade imparting upon the audience the tools and an excitement to embrace the new world order in communications.'

Where's the soap box?

Denis has recently established a blog, 'the digital den' (thedigitalden.com.au) a site for those looking for a broad view of the digital world. It's not designed for the digital elite but for those that feel that the new world is running away from them and need to keep up. All are invited.

Topics as diverse as e-learning, interface design, social media, online advertising, digital entertainment, e-commerce and many more will all be covered. Cuttings from the best and brightest from around the digital world will be pulled apart, commented on and editorialised.

Denis is available to speak at conferences and at PD's (schools know what that means). To book a presentation, lecture or workshop please contact 1300 755 010 or at denis.m@sponsor-ed.com.au

Why schools are spooked by social media

Study purpose:

This paper attempts to explore why schools are underrepresented in their use of social media as a method of communicating and engaging their community. Research has shown that 43% of small businesses in Australia (socialmedianews.com.au July 14, 2010) have attracted new customers through social media networks and that over 70 percent of Australian Not for Profits are using social media, yet schools have almost no presence in the space.

In the commercial sector, community has become the new word for customer. For the purpose of this exercise, the school community will refer to a school's parents.

The title of the study 'why schools are spooked by social media' infers that schools are frightened by social media. Not surprisingly, business has been too. Anecdotally, discussions have revealed a concern about the potential for a parent to run amok in a blog as well as the spectre that has become Facebook. On an all too frequent basis, Facebook horror stories dominant the medium's publicity in main stream press. In almost all cases, bad Facebook publicity involves a student (although the activity was in private time) which means schools have first-hand experience of the dark side of social media.

A number of conversations with principals during a seminar series conducted in May 2010 uncovered a general lack of awareness of social media controls and most importantly a lack of awareness of the commercial sector's successes in building online communities through social media.

A survey involving over 140 Victorian school principals was used to provide an insight into the professions consumption habits of social media. Questions were framed based on Forrester Research's 6 social technographic profiles of a social media participant (see appendix 1).

This paper is part science, part expert commentary and a road map for schools contemplating using social media to engage their community.

Background

2009 will go down in history as the year of social media. It was during this year that Australia was bestowed with the honour (some may argue of the award's merits) of being the greatest consumer of social media in the world. We chalked-up on average 7 hours per month being digitally social; that's for every man, women and child. It appears that everyone's doing 'it'. According to Nielsen's 2010 Social Media Report, 9 million Australian's are now interacting on social networks; 46% of the population play in the social media space.

The growing digital literacy that has emerged can be largely attributed to the phenomenon of Facebook. As an almost expelled Harvard student back in 2004, Mark Zuckerberg could not have contemplated what his website called 'face mash' (later, 'The' Facebook) would one day become. Facebook is as profound a communication device as was the telephone. The proof is in the statistic that globally 29% of all time spent on the internet, is spent on Facebook (Nielsen, Nov 2009). Unlike the telephone, you can't see Facebook so its pervasiveness and impact on communications may be underestimated.

Social media is not all about Facebook. According to Forrester Research, there are 6 profiles of social media participation. There are content creators (bloggers), critics, collectors, joiners, spectators and inactives. The activity of social media has become so widespread that for years, *search* was the dominant internet activity with nearly 9 out of 10 internet sessions beginning this way (http://www.asiadigitalmap.com/2009/11/australia-socialnetwork-stats/). Today, social networking is on the cusp of becoming the number one internet activity. It's no wonder that Google developed Buzz in order to get a slice of the social action. At the time of writing, Yahoo too has gone social with their yahoo email customers.

Social media started life as just that, a social tool, unencumbered by rules and regulations; just a place for young people to hang-out. MySpace (friendster.com was there too but never gained traction in Australia) was the first platform that showed the young a new way to connect. Facebook has now become the platform of choice which has also aided a major shift in the demographic playing in the space. As mother and daughter in particular connect, today it's on Facebook. A recent Telstra survey (State of the Nation Report – Sept 2009) revealed that 61 per cent of Aussie mums use Facebook regularly - 47 per cent of these mums use it daily and 14 per cent use it at least once a week. Their reasons for joining are not altogether altruistic given that the major reason cited was to keep tabs on their children. Digital no longer equals young. The over 50's are the fastest growing sector on Facebook with 20% of the over 55's using Facebook (Digital Marketing Lab 2010) which has become the way of keeping in touch with the grandkids.

Web, digital and social media literacy has grown enormously since 2009.

Moving from purely social spaces to those with greater utility, we know that the 'geeks' have for years had their own social networks where likeminded people could share views, help each other with technical advice and build a sense of community. Today you'll find a social media community representing almost every industry sector and special interest group on the planet. The connecting devices and brands are vast and varied from Facebook fan pages (now called 'like'), blogs, wiki's, LinkedIn, ning, twitter and a raft of others. The introduction of smart phones with their internet capability will imbed social media even further into our culture.

The corporate sector began taking an interest in social media for both offensive and defensive reasons. Firstly it saw eyeballs disappearing from traditional media where its

advertising campaigns were directed. The next issue was that people were talking about their brand experiences on social networks. These views became visible whenever a brand search was conducted. People have always had views on brands (word of mouth after all is not new) but now it's being done with the amplification and distribution of social media.

A number of companies learned the hard way that to upset a customer no longer remains a discreet event as South West Airlines discovered. They upset a somewhat large customer by asking him to leave the airplane due to his size. They didn't realise that Kevin Smith http://ethical-business-management.suite101.com/article.cfm/kevin-smith-too-fat-to-fly-on-southwest-air was in fact a famous Hollywood writer, director and actor with a twitter following of 1.5 million. The twitter-sphere went berserk.

The corporate sector now understands that transparency is the new world order in communications. Control of the brand is gone. It's a world where the institutions must saddle-up beside their community and become part of the conversation as an equal. You spin – you die. It is worth seeing the shift in Telstra from one of the most guarded organisations to one where each employee is encouraged to play in the social media space unshackled other than with a policy that asks that if you do speak about Telstra you do so by not hiding under an alias (see Appendix 2: April 2009: Telstra social media policy). Some say that if you want quick service from Telstra, just twitter your grievances and they'll find you and respond in record time (there's some myth in this).

Melanie Ingrey, Research Director for Nielsen's online business (http://www.nielsen-online.com) in Australia states, "Incredibly, nearly nine in ten Australian Internet users (86%) are looking to their fellow Internet users for opinions and information about products, services and brands, and Australians' engagement with online word of mouth communication is going to increase in coming years as social media plays an increasingly important role in consumer decision making."

With over 9 million Australians using social networks, why are schools not using social media to build and strengthen relationships with parents and communicate in a way, and through, mechanisms other sectors have embraced?

Why are schools spooked by social media?

Results of the Principal's Social Media Survey

The survey conducted in June 2010 of sponsor-ed's 270 schools produced an extremely high response of 140 – 52%. The survey was a snap shot of Principal's use of social media. The survey did not measure the depth of engagement but simply use of a social media device/application/process with the most limited participation weighted as equally as a 'power' user.

The survey's premise was to investigate if the almost non-existent use of social media by schools (as a communication and engagement device for parents) was due to the Principal's lack of awareness of social media. In the commercial world, if the leader doesn't understand or at least embrace social media, the organisation will not be likely to play in the space. What has emerged in the survey's findings is a gender and to some degree an age imbalance effecting social media participation by the Principal. It has also identified a gap in social media policy setting

Survey Summary

Female Principals are 38% more likely to have a classroom blog or wiki than Male Principals. Of those schools with a classroom blog/wiki, female Principals are 3 times more likely to give parents access (30% v 11%).

Further, of those Principals with a classroom blog/wiki only **12% contributed content to the site**. Whilst the blog is a classroom activity, it does present the Principal with an opportunity to learn about the checks and balances and writing styles of the social space.

Only 11% of Principals had a personal blog (school or private use). This was equal for both genders. This statistic is quite revealing. If Principals don't blog, they are unaware of the simple controls available to stop inappropriate material going live. If schools were to implement social media with parents, the device of choice would most likely be a blog – not Facebook. However, Facebook is the most dominant of social media devices and the one receiving predominantly sensationalised bad press. If a Principal doesn't blog and is 'spooked' by Facebook security, where is the motivation to participate?

Speaking of **Facebook, 32% of Principals have an account**. This figure drops significantly for the over 56 year olds to 24%. Surprisingly in the age group 46 to 50, Facebook participation was only marginally higher at 28%. The highest participating sector on Facebook was female Principals between the age of 51 to 55 at 35%.

The only other social network to register double digit participation was Ning at 12% with Twitter ranked 3rd at 3%. Ning usage is almost exclusively confined to professional collaboration.

Overall, participation as social media critics amongst the principals was reasonably high with 56% having commented on a blog/online newspaper/forum etc and 63% having rated a video on YouTube.

As collectors of content they also rated reasonably highly with almost all those surveyed receiving some form of 'subscribed to' online content.

Again the spectre of Facebook has ignited discussions about social media policy and the space between private after hour social media activity and its impact on roles as teacher and student. **14% of principals had a policy for staff and 13% for students on after hour use** of social media. There was almost no difference in the uptake of after hour social media policy implementation across any mix of gender or age. Interestingly, a recent survey revealed 29% of businesses have a social media policy (http://www.infinitytechnologies.com.au/blog/2010/02/18/only-29-of-companies-have-a-social-media-policy-is-your-company-at-risk/)

A road map for social media participation in schools

The conclusion from the survey and the recent seminar series was that schools could only see negatives in the use of social media as a method of communicating with parents. The negatives stemmed from security right through to extra work load.

With almost no examples of schools using social media as a community building vehicle, '*a road map for social media participation in schools*' was created to provide an insight into the issues. The road map uses the experiences from the commercial sector which as a collective has had a 3 year head start on the schools. It would be foolish to ignore their successes and failures. There are parallels between the two sectors.

Blockers to social media participation in schools

* Not clear on the purpose: *'What am I going to get out of it?'*
* Misunderstanding content creation: *'It's more work for me isn't it?'*
* Unclear of how social media applications work: *'Where do I start?'*
* Unclear about security and protection: '*Isn't an aggrieved parent going to run amok in a blog?'*

A social media definition

There are many definitions of social media. Unfortunately many over intellectualise the term. Here's one plucked from Wikipedia, 'Social media is media designed to be disseminated through social interaction, created using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques.' There's a simpler definition.

Social media means accessing, sharing, commenting and collaborating online.

For the purposes of this paper and to save repeating the definition, social media will refer to blogging, twitter and email newsletters predominantly. Facebook is not recommended for use by schools other than for alumni's.

Not clear on the purpose: *'What am I going to get out of it?'*

Many Principals are unclear of the benefits of social media. This is mainly due to a lack of role modelling. In the education sector few (if any) models exist of successful use of social media as a connecting device with parents. In the classroom, fewer than 39% have a blog or wiki and only 13% of Principals contribute content. This low level participation translates to a lack of understanding of the benefits of social media.

Clues as to how schools can benefit from social media will come from the commercial sector. Commerce has a 3 year head start with many well documented successes and failures that would serve schools well when contemplating their social media strategies (see Appendix 3 for books on using social media).

The first step in understanding social media is embracing the term *transparency – social media point number 1*. This was the sticking point with business and remains the biggest inhibitor; most have rationalised this either negatively (the horse has bolted I may as well play) or positively (I really want a relationship with my community). Transparency can be interpreted as communicating as an equal void of any spin, hype or posturing. Organisations have always presented a façade based on how they wish to be seen rather than reflective of whom they really are. Social media exposes this and shifts the power base to one of two positions. If you spin, the power shifts to the people – you need not look any further than the recent BP disaster in the Gulf of Mexico for an example. If you're open and honest, you will form a strong bond with your community and be seen as an equal.

People have perceptions of schools. There are many myths circulating about a school's operations and its people. A classic example was the May 2010 NAPLAN tests. Rumours circulated about regular classes ceasing in the run up to the test with the emphasis on teaching to the tests. Sure there were a few examples where this may have occurred but they were isolated. Schools could have dealt with this issue in their regular newsletter but with all releases of this type, a prepared and well crafted statement does little to allay fears.

Social media point number 2 – you write *conversationally*.

The NAPLAN issue could have bubbled to the surface in the school's parent blog. The question may have been asked by a parent and dealt with quickly and in a conversational tone for all to see. If one parent dares to ask, you know that there are many that would be seeking the same answer. As an isolated case this may not appear to be inspiring enough to move schools to become bloggers. However it should be seen as an example of how when communications are free flowing, relationships are built and issues are exposed earlier and can be dealt with in a conversation, not a statement. This is the new order in communications and we all have to get used to it.

At this juncture it's worth noting that social media is not just about blogging – there'll be more on this later in the document.

Some of the best examples of businesses use of social media can be seen from the following companies.

Dell Computers

Dell uses its community to help each other with technical support and advice through blogs. Dell learned the hard way through its 'Dell Hell' era of 2005 (type Dell Hell into Goggle and you'll quickly learn what happened) where they suffered a number of product performance issues. They didn't respond quickly enough and were slammed by the blogosphere. They learned from their lack of transparency and have since adopted a more open method of communication. If they have an issue they now say it openly and with no spin.

Since Dell Hell, blogger Jeff Stenski has taken it upon himself to help other Dell customers. It has been purported that Jeff has spent over 473,000 minutes, read 250,000 messages, posted 20,000 times and has had his content viewed by over 2million people. Dell believe Jeff saves them over $1million a year in customer service costs (Groundswell - Forester Research Inc 2008)

Communities can help each other – *social media point 4.*

Ford Motor Company USA

While Ford has had several initiatives, by far their most ambitious one has been the 2009 Ford Fiesta Movement, a grassroots social media campaign to promote the new Fiesta model. Ford placed Fiestas in the hands of 100 social "agents" and allowed them to do and say whatever they wanted about Ford's new vehicle through Twitter, blogs, video, and events, all without spending a dollar on traditional media. It's important to note that Ford's instruction to all the bloggers was there is no instruction. Just write about the car in any way you see fit – don't like it, then say it, love then say that too. If you don't want to write at all and get a free car for 6 months then power to you.

Ford's bold and brave campaign was held up as a model of social media at its most open from an organisation that never released any communications in the past unless it was vetted by its corporate affairs department.

So how has Ford's experiment fared? Well, Ford shared some stats on the Fiesta campaign – why wouldn't they, they've shared everything else.

Six months into the campaign

4.3 million YouTube views thus far
500,000+ Flickr views
3 million+ Twitter impression
50,000 interested potential customers, 97% of which don't own a Ford currently.

Social media is free and can propel world of mouth very efficiently – *social media point 5*

Not for Profits

Just over 70 percent of Australian Not for Profits are using social media, and in particular Facebook, as part of their everyday operations according to Pro Bono Australia's Facebook Factor Online Survey. Surprisingly, out of the organisations that are using a combination of social media such as Facebook (71%), Twitter (50%) and YouTube (37%) only 21% have a social media policy or strategy in place (more on social media policy later in the document).

The online survey of 112 of Pro Bono Australia's readers found that a majority of charities are using social media (72%) as a way of communicating with their supporters and 62% are

using it to promote events and campaigns. It also found that some 28% of organisations are using social media to recruit volunteers.

Victorian-based charity and one of the largest hospital fundraising appeals in Australia, the Royal Children's Hospital Good Friday Appeal is counting its Facebook fans in extra dollars after the Easter campaign saw another record amount in donations. The annual campaign went from raising $13.8 million in 2009 to $14.4 million this Good Friday. And organisers say some of that success has to go to the more than 38,000 Facebook fans who joined up in the final days of the campaign.

Appeal Director Christine Unsworth says the Facebook page was only really up and running about four weeks before the Good Friday Appeal, which has a day-long Telethon and radio-thon and more than 100,000 volunteers across Victoria rattling collection tins.

Unsworth says the Facebook page went from hundreds of fans joining up each day to thousands as the Appeal got closer – with each fan telling their own story of appreciation and care from the Royal Children's Hospital. She says as it got closer to the day the fans then began urging each other to donate as well as connecting up with families they had met at the hospital over the years.

Another example of social media being free and propelling word of mouth very efficiently – *social media point 6.*

So what can schools get out of social media?

Simply by delivering information in more contemporary mechanisms and allowing for two-way communications, will lift parental involvement and promote engagement. Parents don't connect in the school yard in the numbers they once did – the pace and pressure of modern life has seen to that (August 2009 Sunday Telegraph: Parent too busy for P&C http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/sunday-telegraph/parents-too-busy-for-pc/story-e6frewt0-1225761929389).

Every mobile will soon have the potential to be internet enabled; currently at 35%. This means that every parent will have access to school content in their pocket. If the communications mechanisms changed to cater for parents preferred receiving devices (mobile, pc, ipad etc), engagement would surely lift.

We have developed a sharing, collaborating culture in the social space. 86% of Australian's online are looking to fellow internet users for opinions and information about products, services and brands (Digital Media Lab 2010). Why not get that same level of support flowing through a school community.

Schools need to be careful that their assessment of their community's digital consumption may not reflect reality. 'In seeking to better understand the difference between the home and the school, look in particular at the trends and not so much the current state of play. It is a mistake that many of the early and even more recent analysts of the 'digital divide' have made. The rate of technological development is so rapid that within 12 to 18 months your situation can have changed significantly'. The authors went further to say that the technology available in people's homes is on average 14 to 15 times greater than that of the average classroom. *Developing a Networked School Community: Lee and Finger; Acer Press 2010.*

And why would schools want parents to be more involved? It takes a whole village to raise a child (author of the statement unknown).

Misunderstanding content creation: *'It's more work for me isn't it?'*

One of the great misnomer's of social media is that it's up to the host organisation to create all the content. This preaching from the mountain top philosophy is old school. There's a place for regular corporate communications but at the very least people should have the opportunity to comment. Parental engagement will come from opening up two way communications.

The ideal social media goal is one where the community creates some of the content (called 'crowd sourced') framed within the auspices of the organisation – *social media point 7*. This is where the community……….well, begin to feel like part of the community.

The mantra of the social media evangelist is allowing your community to 'be part of the conversation' – *social media point 8*.

This following analogy may be particularly pertinent for schools. Think of social media as a playground – swings, slides, monkey bars, sand pit. The school owns the playground but when the children play, they create the games; the content if you will. Teachers don't push the swing or hold onto the children as they climb and they certainly don't control the games. There are only a few basic rules in the playground and they all revolve around being a decent person along with a few safety pointers. That's social media.

Many organisations struggle with social media for a variety of reasons with a significant one being content. It's not always necessary that the content revolves around your product/industry. In most cases quite frankly many of our careers are centred on content that beyond its utility may not be particularly exciting. The successful companies look at the lifestyle of their community and create a social environment that will bind them together; sharing, chatting, and helping each other.

The communications mindset from old institutional communications to social media is significant. Every school has the objective of keeping their community informed but is this a community builder? If a school wants to move from information provider to community builder it must move its communications strategy from 'one to many' to 'many to many'.

An example of *one to many* is the school newsletter. One entity pushes the content out to many. *Many to many* communications means that the school plays host to the conversation allowing the entire community to engage. Changing the newsletter to a blog style where comments are invited will certainly up the engagement and begin the two way communications.

A misunderstood element of social media is that it has to occur in one of the devices clearly branded as social media; Facebook, blog, twitter etc. One of the most significant social media community builders is online Footy Tipping. This simple application is the catalyst for many school yard conversations, online chatter and good spirited competition. Statistics have shown the average tipper will visit a school website 52 times per month to place their tips, check results, send another tipper an email and plot next week's strategy. Every visit to the website means the visitor collides with more school content. They can't help but be better informed about school activities.

Footy tipping on school websites is a perfect example of the playground analogy where the school hosts the conversation but does not provide content.

One of the best examples of crowd sourced content in the commercial world is with Huggies.

Huggies (the nappy people) in Australia has created a community of around 600,000 parents. The website certainly has many product exposures but it's in their forums where the power of social media really kicks in (http://www.huggies.com.au/forum). The Huggies brand serves mothers from conception through to toddler-hood. Huggies has created a space where likeminded people can support each other. A visit to their forum will reveal an astonishing range of parenting topics discussed along with an equally impressive volume of community contributors to the discussions.

On the category of 'sleep and settling' there were 2053 articles posted with 6.616 replies. 'Breast and bottle feeding' 4021 articles, 18,513 replies and with 'Baby names' 5138 articles, 47,500 replies. None of the posts nor replies centred on nappies.

Is it the schools place to be hosting social media conversations for parents outside of school issues? You bet. In a world where it is difficult to get the busy parent in the school yard, the only way of building community beyond the physical is online. This doesn't mean turning every parent into a blogger, or alienating those that feel threatened by technology. It means hosting the free flowing information amongst the community for the betterment of all. Making the disconnected feel part of the community can today be solved through social media.

It will take an effort and some support to assist schools to climb on board, but once the systems are in place, then it will be the crowd that will provide most of the content. If this doesn't occur then the social media strategy needs revisiting; but this won't occur quickly so expect to be on a journey of cultural change.

Don't expect everyone to be a blogger (Forester's 6 profiles will tell you this won't happen) but you will need to find some of the more active social media practitioners in your community to help lead the charge and provide some of the initial content and cultural tone. And don't worry if you don't know who they are. Just announce that you're about to embrace social media and they'll find you. They may even ask what took you so long.

Writing for social media

A subset to the content issue is changing the way you write for social media and it's largely about writing conversationally, writing less and writing spontaneously.

The first thing to note is that people today are not suffering from a lack of information – it's time we lack. You must learn how to grab people's attention and do it very quickly. We live in a skimming era. Our brains have been trained by texting (SMS) to a certain extent but it's email that's the culprit. The average office worker receives 99 emails per day and sends 34. *81% of all emails received are spam – sadly*. The sheer volume of content we all manage today is simply overwhelming.

We start our days by skimming our in-box assessing ways to attack the contents based on our own criteria. Boss emails first perhaps, funny emails maybe even ahead of the first category – anything to avoid beginning the day – and so on.

Newspapers are masters of managing and seducing people to read their material. The headline is key. It's interesting to observe how newspapers have adapted their writing style

for the web. With the print version, the headline and content are part of the same space. Newspaper's web version provides us with the best clues on writing in the digital space.

Online newspapers chunk their data using 4 components.

- Catchy headline (funny, shocking, dramatic – anything to arouse interest)
- A picture
- A few leading sentences to take you to another level of detail
- And then the important *read more…..* link to another page where the entire story is revealed
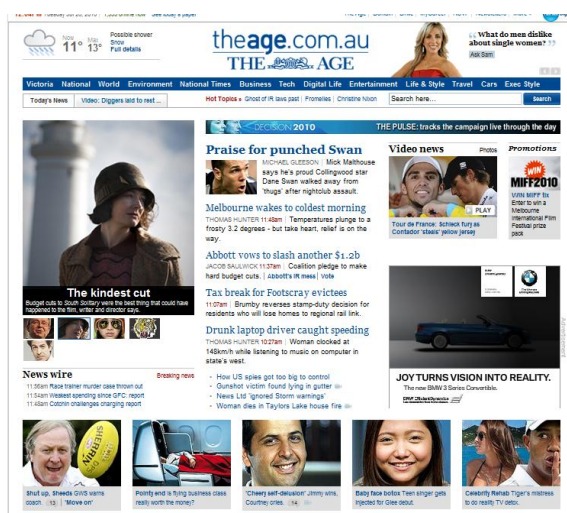
theage.com.au July 20, 2010

This approach I've termed *merchandising* content. Merchandising is a term normally associated with retailers but it does have a place in the social media writing vernacular. What drew you to those shoes? Why didn't you walk right past the store? It's likely that it was the way the shoes were merchandised – they were just calling your name. Well content works in exactly the same way. If you are presented with a page (web or print) that has text from one corner to the other you're unlikely to read it. Lame graphics and a poor headline certainly will put you behind the 8-ball.

The book Tipping Point (Malcolm Gladwell) refers to the merchandising phenomenon as *context*. It's not only what you say but where you say it. An example of this can be seen in a browser add-on called Cool Iris (available at cooliris.com) that presents images and YouTube videos in an exciting 3D video wall format. Users of Cool Iris watch 12 times more YouTube videos than those using conventional means. It's the way the videos (content) are merchandised.
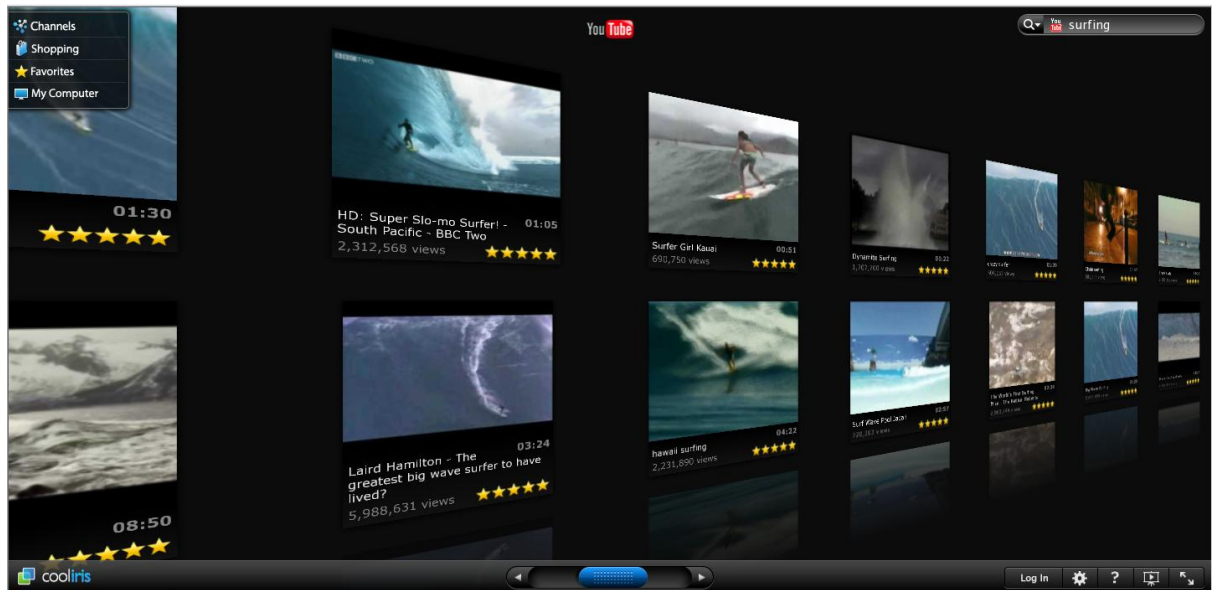
Screenshot of the cool iris plug presenting YouTube videos

Still not convinced, well Twitter is a great example of writing less. In fact it's restricted to 140 characters with around 20 of them devoted to a link to a website so there's not much space. If you're a twitter sceptic, rest assured that twitter is and will become more ingrained as a common societal communication device. It's found its place. In 2008 Twitter had 13,000 users in Australia. This moved to 800,000 in 2009 and today sits at 2.5 million users.

The most interesting aspect of twitter is that links in a tweet are 4 times more likely to be clicked than in an email (source: Share This the sharing network 2009). Why? Well we can guess that it's the headline tease. If twitter were 400 characters would the same click through rate occur?

Mentioned earlier was a reference to writing spontaneously. This is critical for the cut through element. Cyclical communications may be preferred by institutions but breaking the cycle will interrupt your target enhancing your engagement. Spontaneity should be accompanied with *crisp* as a writing style. You won't engage by dumping several hundred words but you will if it's few. Twitter has grown enormously by exploiting this human trait of skimming and being teased with a headline.

Schools could put twitter in the hands of some of its teachers. The maths teacher could send weekly trivia questions, the health and well being coordinator could tweet positive messages and healthy eating tips. And the principal could simply use twitter to build their accessibility and personality.

Principals can rest easy. This paper does not propose principals engage in trivial status updates, 'just bought a new jacket – now I'm looking forward to the footy'. But updates such as, 'Jonathan Brown from the Brisbane Lions is due at school today – everyone's buzzing', or, 'Just saw the Japanese garden the year 4's have built – what a wonderful job that will be enjoyed by everyone'.

Unclear on how social media applications work: *'Where do I start?'*

The technology is a blocker for those not inclined to jump in and have a go. With a little support or the burning of a day's effort will yield a result. Once you break through you really do wonder what all the fuss was about. Secondary schools generally have people well versed in the devices but primary schools would require some hand-holding through the process.

The social media apps are free (generally), very powerful, now work in concert and made for those with modest computing skills. They also have a great deal of security allowing the author to operate in a completely open environment through to one where only registered users can participate.

Today, school communications centre on 2 executions, the cyclical newsletter and website. In the broader world of communications there's;

- Email (HTML) newsletters
- SMS
- Blogs
- Twitter
- Facebook
- Websites
- Websites optimised for mobile phones
- RSS feeds
- Forums
- Wiki's

All received on either a computer, smart phone and now an ipad too. Why does the modern organisation utilise so many communications mediums? They recognise that to get their message heard they need to deliver it in a medium the customer wants not the way they want. So if someone is only interested in the highlights then maybe they'd prefer to follow you on Twitter. Another may want to be heard and would love the opportunity to comment, then blog it up. Do anything you can to engage your audience.

The school newsletter's major issue is that it's being created using print based technology – Word or Publisher then converted to a PDF. Print based output does not present well on a computer monitor and is illegible on a smart phone. School newsletters need to move to an online optimised format. This is very important with the growing use of smart phones. Mum and Dad now have the ability to connect with school content on the run via their mobiles. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Mums tend to be the most engaged with school activities with the paper based newsletter a factor in the inequity. Sadly they're more likely to empty school bags. The smart phone and the move towards multiple delivery methods and formats will ensure everyone has equal access to content in the format of their choosing.

An interesting article posted in the UK showed that men view 33% more social networking sites than women on their mobiles (http://www.itpro.co.uk/622186/men-dominate-mobile-social-networking). In complete contrast (there's never a shortage of social media statistics) a study by Nielsen Interactive (http://www.bizreport.com/2010/03/women_dominate_mobile_social_networking_scene.html#) concluded that in fact women dominate mobile social networking. The article went further by suggesting that the older 35 to 54 year old demographic were the most dominate

practitioners. Either way – the smart phone is the great game changer and we all must consider mobile optimisation seriously in our communication strategies.

The digital world is constantly evolving driven by product innovation and society's growing digital literacy. The most surprising development is that people do not visit websites in the numbers they once did. This is incongruous considering that we are more web savvy, connected and being subjected to more content than we ever have been. The big change is that websites are no longer the font of all knowledge. Content is being pushed out and social media is creating and absorbing much of our time online.

The chart below shows declining web traffic to Australia's major car websites over a 2 year period

What does this all mean? It means that if your communications strategy is confined to the cyclical newsletter and institutional website you're almost already a dinosaur.

So where to from here?

In the case of schools they must allow parents to receive content in the way they want, to be read on the device of their choice. At a glance this appears to imply writing to cater for different mediums which clearly schools do not have the time to do – nor does anyone else. The answer lies in writing once and allowing the 'system' to chop up the content automatically and have it delivered to the device of the receivers choosing and in the format they prefer. These systems do exist in-part but in reality are not as integrated as they need to be for schools. The gap is closing.

The most applicable mediums for schools and those that are easier to implement are e-newsletters, blogs and twitter. A summary of the key features and their application is provided below.

E-Newsletters

The e-newsletter (or HTML newsletters) takes the regular content and delivers it to subscriber's email inbox as a series of headlines, sometimes with pictures, along with leading sentences and a link to a *read more*. Every major organisation has an e-newsletter.

- E- newsletters have been optimised for digital presentation and most importantly they allow the reader to skim the contents for articles of their interest.
- The newsletters can be easily archived
- The *read more* links back to the corporate website where the reader can collide with other information

- The metrics available in most e-newsletter packages can be used to learn;
  - How many subscribers have opened the email
  - The number of clicks per article and who has read them (email addresses have been captured via the subscription)
  - The data can be used to refine content to ultimately produce more relevant material to increase engagement
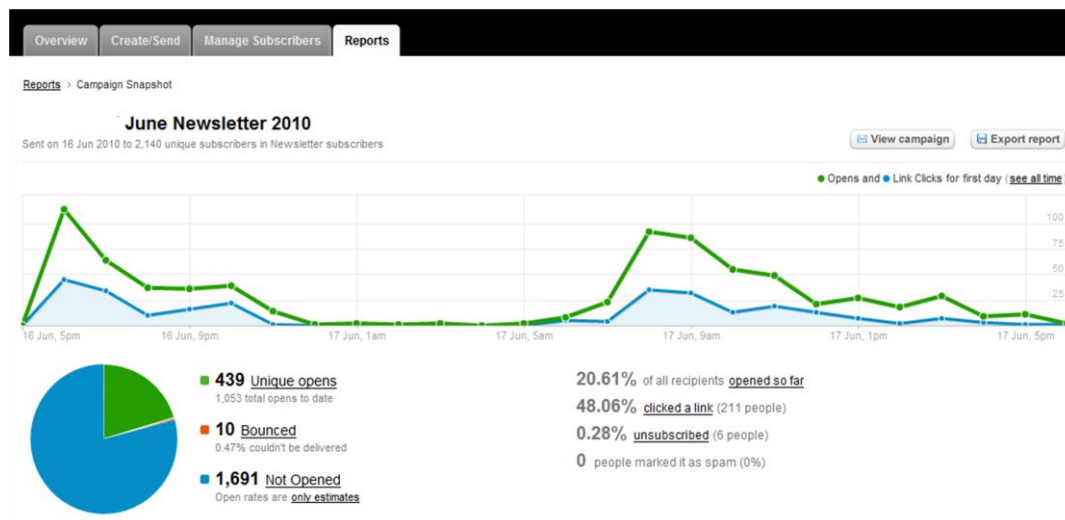 - Articles can invite the reader to comment

Key benefit

- Metrics with presentation optimised for on-screen viewing

Tips for schools

- Master the art of the headline to increase readership

Typical e-newsletter in an email inbox

Campaign report for an e-newsletter

Blogs

The world's most popular blogging tool is Wordpress and it's free for the base service (view below www.thedigitalden.com.au Wordpress example). A blog (short for web log) is the frame within where articles are written by the organisation's author. Blog articles are called posts.

- A blog has been optimised to be viewed online unlike a newsletter created using print based software. Most blogs are also optimised to be viewed on a smart phone
- The organisational blog can have multiple authors
- Authors create a post using familiar tools as found in Microsoft Word
- The community can subscribe to receive email notification when the blog has a new post
- The blog can be delivered as it happens, or bundled and done once per week (or other time frame)
- The power of blogging is in allowing your community to comment
- The receiver can view the blog on their computer or smart phone (internet enabled)
- The blog can be automatically connected to twitter so when the blog post has been updated, a 'tweet' goes to those following you.

Security

- Authors have password access
- Blogs can be open for all to see and comment, or
- Open for all to see and only registered users able to comment, or
- A closed user group where only those registered can view and post
- In all cases it is highly recommended that the blog be moderated. This means before the comment goes live for all to see, it first passes through the author for approval. Don't blog without this control.

Key benefit

- Allows your community to comment on posts. Optimised for digital viewing; pc or mobile.

Tips for schools

- Write articles concluding with a question inviting comments from your community. Articles without a question at the conclusion, even though a reply box is included, do not generate anywhere near the same level of engagement.

Screenshot of a Wordpress comments panel

Screenshot of a blog post

Auto generated email from the blog to the subscriber

Auto tweet generated through the Wordpress blog

Twitter

Twitter is called micro-blogging because it is restricted to only 140 characters. Twitter grew from celebrity following – at last count Lady Gaga reached over 10 million followers. Twitter whilst being referred to as micro-blogging is really a broadcast tool. Twitter is ideal for short and spontaneous communications – similar to sms but free and in the style of 'one to many'.

- 80% of all tweets emanate from mobile phones
- Followers can reply to your tweets, retweet them and also reply privately
- The organisational tweet generally has only one author (it's one author per email address)
- Authors create a post and attach a link to a website (preferably your own) which is recommended. Links in tweets are almost 4 times more likely to get clicked than if included in an email (see graph below)
- The community can subscribe or more correctly, 'follow' to receive your latest tweets

Security

- Authors have password access
- You can set twitter to allow only those whom you approve to view your tweets and subsequently, comment.
- Only followers can comment/reply
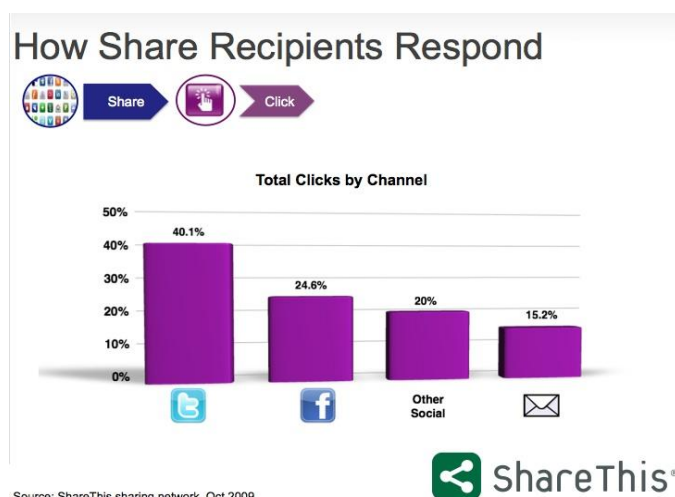- There is no moderation in twitter

Key benefit

- Allows your community to get short, spontaneous updates on life at school.
- Tweets are void of corporate speak – there's just not enough space. Tweets have a personality.

Tips for schools

- Consider giving your leadership team access to twitter as simple daily (this may be a burden – even weekly would be worthwhile) trivia posting to the community.
    - Maths question of the week
    - Geography…..
    - English word of the week
    - Health and wellbeing positive tip of the day
- Build the principals profile, accessibility and personality – random thoughts, bits of advice, positive messages.

Interesting twitter links

- Great twitter tips at http://oneforty.com/blog/chris-brogans-50-power-twitter-tips/
- http://www.hackcollege.com/blog/2010/1/5/twitter-in-the-classroom-3-moderation-options.html

Graph of link click through rates across various mediums. Note twitter at 40%

Sample of Mt Erin College's (Melbourne) twitter (twitter.com/MtErinCollege)

Unclear about security and protection:
'Isn't an aggrieved parent going to run amok in a blog?'

Security and unsavoury comments in social networks remain an issue for the commercial world but are being managed with some technological help, a philosophical shift and some insights from the law. Yes there is a certain amount of letting-go or openness required to embrace this new world but there are also protections that for schools can prevent an aggrieved parent running amok. The first thing to understand is that there are social spaces you can control and those you can't.

People's Facebook comments you can't control but those on your schools blog you can.

Did you know you can track what people are saying about your school and you via simple social monitoring tools? And did you know that salacious social media comments made about your school and you in those spaces you can't control, can land the author in serious legal trouble?

Schools must at a minimum adopt a defensive social media strategy. But let's start with a positive and look at what protections are available should schools implement social media communications with parents.

Offensive strategy

Embrace social media and create content where your community can feel like part of the discussion; start a blog. Allowing people to be part of the discussion does sound open ended and without control but there is a process called moderation that almost all blogs adopt. When you make a comment on a blog you rarely see your comment published immediately. Online newspapers are a good example. When you read an article and feel compelled to comment, you can, but it will be some time before the rest of the world sees your comments.

Moderation works by sending your comments (or in blog speak – your post) to the article's author (or site owner) first for approval via email. The moderator will either accept or reject (not edit) your post based on the organisations own internal ethics standards. This process stops unsavoury comments published for all to see.

It is also worth noting that you can also limit those that can see your blog and/or comment (see section on Blogs page……). For schools it is highly recommended that only registered users can post a comment and they should register under their proper name – not under an alias.

While the technology traps the comments first, what ethical criteria should you adopt to accept posts? Clearly if someone is on a rant using abusive language directed towards an individual, a moderator would press the reject button. But what would you do with a comment such as "I've heard Mr Smith the year 7 maths teacher did nothing else but teach to the NAPLAN test for 2 weeks leading up to the test itself". As a moderator, would you let this comment be published?

We live in an era of transparency with this being the mantra of the social media devotee. You spin you die. Invariably, people will say things about you that you may not like. They're saying it now around the water cooler, local netball match – that's life. The social media non-believers use this example as an argument to not participate. They say that social media will only inflame and amplify a situation – where's the upside?

Schools can use social media to myth bust. Organisations do let negative comments go live on their blogs and use the opportunity to myth bust and they do this humbly and not with a comment prepared by their legal counsel.

An organisation that has embraced social media would perhaps answer the NAPLAN post in the following way.

"Thanks Sally for your comment. No it's not true but I do know the story has been circulating. Thanks for bringing it out in the open. Over the last 4 weeks Mr Smith has covered 3 new maths topics (Geometry 101, Fun with Algebra and Weights & Measure) all part of the year 7 maths curriculum – click here for your copy."

A corporate example can be seen in the Pepsi Facebook fan page where a person implied that Pepsi max is carcinogenic. See how Pepsi responded. Years ago it would have been dealt with by a letter from legal – not today.

James Perry pepsi is green before you add a gallon of coloring to it?
if so you you not feel guilty letting young children consume huge quantities , which can result in the contribution to cancer in later years ..... not digging at you just concerned.? btw love the taste
Thu at 11:52am · Report

View all 4 comments

Pepsi Australia Hi James, all ingredients used in our products have been approved for use by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ). Feel free to call Customer relations for more information on 1800 244 054.
Thu at 4:48pm · Report

Post from Pepsi's Facebook fan page

Defensive strategy

Yes people are talking about you and they are at times spreading untruths and being downright nasty. Today, some are doing this in their Facebook pages and under aliases in social networks. Several schools have also been victims of Facebook hate groups directed towards the principal. One such group amassed over 50 members in a very short space of time. What can you do?

There are 3 elements to a social media defensive strategy

- Social media monitoring
- Social media policy
- The law

Social media monitoring

The principal Facebook hate group could have been have been identified almost at the point of conception rather than accidently stumbling upon it after it had collected 50 members and some momentum. There are 2 quite powerful applications that will scan the internet searching for any reference to the key words of your choice. The applications will report back to you on a frequency of your choosing (preferably daily) on any references matching your search criteria.

The two applications are free and they are;

Social Mention (socialmention.com)

Social mention will scan any type of social media site you choose. The example below of Melbourne High School scanned 'all' sites and returned results across Myspace, Facebook and a number of individual blogs and online newspaper articles. Social mention also provides some analytics on attributes such as sentiment. It uses a linguistics processing tool analysing the words and phrases assessing it for positive and negative language. Social mention will also provide information on who the most prolific commentators are on your key word search.

Social media will not be able to scan contents of sites with secure settings.
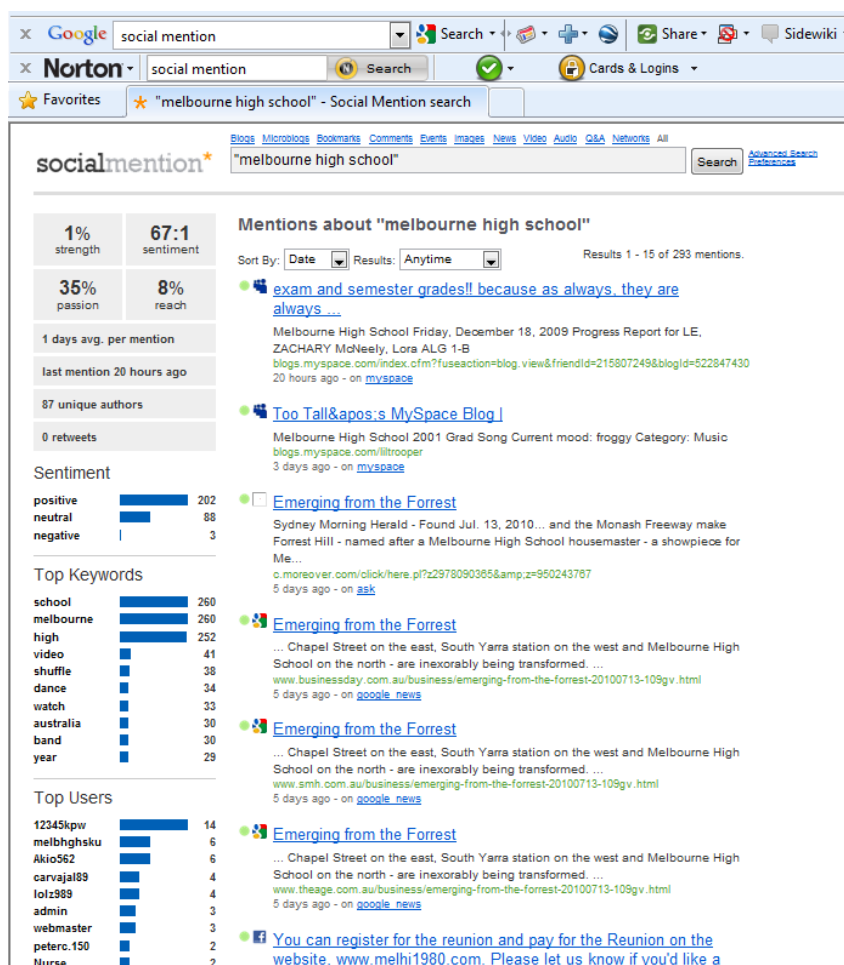
Google Alerts (google/alerts.com)

Just sign up for a google account and you'll be able to access alerts. Alerts works in the same way as social mention but without the analytics. Google alerts can send email notification of successful key word searches as they happen.

Social monitoring would have picked up an incident last year involving an aggrieved parent at an elite Melbourne private school who ran amok spreading defamatory comments about the school and its principal after her son was expelled. She was a lawyer by the way!

Schools need to set social media monitoring for references to their school and principal as a minimum. The applications won't prevent hate groups and the like being created but the school will know as soon as they land.

Social media policy

The next part of the defensive strategy is policy setting for after hours social media use for students. Entry levels for MySpace and Facebook are set at 13 years old but this is easily worked around. There is no formal process to check a young person's bona fides so there are many sub 13's on board. Official statistics are not available on the numbers under 13 but there are over 1 million users between the ages of 14 to 17 on Facebook. It would difficult being a teenager without Facebook. So schools are full of social media practitioners.

The young come with a built in enthusiasm and energy for the new but they are also naïve and fearless which means they don't necessarily think about the consequences of their actions. The world of social media can seriously damage reputations and propel bullying to a level never seen before. Social media has us all playing catch-up to the technology but also in managing jurisdictions.

The survey revealed that only 13% of schools had a social media policy on after hours use for students (and 14% for staff).

It is unusual to set student policy on behaviour outside of school hours but social media warrants this action to protect children from learning about the dangers of the cyber world the hard way, through their own experiences. What is said in cyber space carries no privilege. Children are taking their normal street speak into social media spaces thinking that it's between them and their mates. Even with security settings in place, issues may arise. The law has a view.

With regards teachers and after hour's social media policy, there is a reference in the Victorian Institute of Teaching Code of Conduct (below) to student relationships and/or connections conducted electronically – point d. There is also a reference that can serve as a guide again from the Code of Conduct in 2.1 – essentially saying you're always a teacher. But it's not enough given what can happen to reputations on the internet.

The world has moved on and social media policy needs to be dealt with as a separate topic. It's hard enough for the local teacher having to bump into families while doing the shopping or having a few wines at the local eatery let alone now watching their p's and q's in cyberspace. A policy needs to educate about how the law views content in social networks and how it may impinge on working relationships.

PRINCIPLE 1.5: TEACHERS ARE ALWAYS IN A PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE STUDENTS IN THEIR SCHOOL, WHETHER AT SCHOOL OR NOT
Teachers hold a unique position of influence and trust that should not be violated or compromised. They exercise their responsibilities in ways that recognise that there are limits or boundaries to their relationships with students. The following examples outline some of those limits.

A professional relationship **will** be violated if a teacher:
a has a sexual relationship with a student
b uses sexual innuendo or inappropriate language and/or material with students
c touches a student without a valid reason
d holds conversations of a personal nature or has contact with a student via written or electronic means including email, letters, telephone, text messages or chat lines, without a valid context
e accepts gifts, which could be reasonably perceived as being used to influence them, from students or their parents.

A professional relationship **may** be compromised if a teacher:
a attends parties or socialises with students
b invites a student or students back to their home, particularly if no-one else is present.

PRINCIPLE 2.1: THE PERSONAL CONDUCT OF A TEACHER WILL HAVE AN IMPACT ON THE PROFESSIONAL STANDING OF THAT TEACHER AND ON THE PROFESSION AS A WHOLE

Although there is no definitive boundary between the personal and professional conduct of a teacher, it is expected that teachers will:
a be positive role models at school and in the community
b respect the rule of law and provide a positive example in the performance of civil obligations
c not exploit their position for personal or financial gain
d ensure that their personal or financial interests do not interfere with the performance of their duties
e act with discretion and maintain confidentiality when discussing workplace issues.

Victorian Institute of Teaching Code of Conduct
http://www.vit.vic.edu.au/files/documents/1543_Code-of-Conduct-June-2008.pdf

See article on teacher's friending students on Facebook
http://thedigitalden.com.au/2009/11/11/teachers-friending-students-on-facebook-its-happening/

The law

This is the 3rd part of the defensive strategy and it's about knowing where the line is between work and private time and how social media has muddied the waters. If two teachers wished to share a coffee and blow off some steam by bitching about the principal it would remain with them. A similar rant in social media is a completely different scenario that can have legal ramifications.

At the time of writing, an incident occurred with an AFL footballer sledging the match review panel on his Facebook page. The comment would have stayed on Daniel Jackson's Facebook page if it weren't for one of his several hundred 'friends' making it public. This was not an incident with legal ramifications but it was in breach of his employment contract and he was asked to remove the post.

Red-faced Tiger Daniel Jackson removes Facebook sledge

Michael Warner | Herald Sun | July 14, 2010 11:30PM | 2 comments

UPDATE 1pm: RICHMOND coach Damien Hardwick says Daniel Jackson won't be punished for airing his frustration with the match review panel on Facebook.

Jackson has been forced to remove a slap at the AFL's much-criticised match review panel from his Facebook page.

After his third penalty for the season, a frustrated Jackson told his Facebook friends: "Dan Jackson is sick of playing a pussy sport and so is retiring in favour of playing a real man's sport. Perhaps I'll be better suited to the NRL?"

Hardwick said today the incident served as a lesson to Jackson, other AFL players and society at large.

"Look he was just frustrated, and he was disappointed with the comments, as were we," Hardwick told the AFL website at Richmond training this morning.

"He's learned a lesson and it gives a valuable lesson to all other players within the AFL, but also people in general, I think.

Not again: Daniel Jackson is reported for rough conduct against Docker Hayden Ballantyne. Picture: Colleen Petch *Source:* Herald Sun

Adelaide Now July 18, 2010

In late 2009 an Adelaide youth set up a Facebook hate group against his town's local policeman. The teenager was convicted of criminal defamation – believed to be Australia's first Facebook related legal case.

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Last updated: March 02, 2010   SEARCH

Teenager sued over Facebook defamation

Nigel Hunt | The Sunday Times, The Sunday Times | November 21, 2009 6:00PM | 9 comments   A⁺ A⁻ Share

A TEENAGER has been convicted of criminal defamation after posting false and malicious material about a country police officer on Facebook.

Defamation experts believe the case, involving Christopher James Cross, 19, from Adelaide, has set a legal precedent and should serve as a ``wake -up call'' for all Facebook users _ who now number more than six million in Australia alone.

In Kadina Magistrates Court on Monday, Cross pleaded guilty to a charge of criminal defamation - and became only the second person in South Australia ever convicted of the rarely used charge.

He was placed on a two-year, $500 good-behaviour bond.

When the apprentice diesel mechanic was charged on August 27, his police bail conditions included a ban on him returning to his home town of Yorketown, on Yorke Peninsula.

« 1 of 2 »

AUSTRALIAN FIRST: South Australian teenager Christopher Cross has been sued for defamation

In a recent article by Malcolm Burrows *(Associate at Rostron Carlyle Solicitors* see Appendix 4*) titled 'Terminating employees for after hours social media use' said 'the* recent case of Catherine Deveny, Columnist for the Age, who was allegedly terminated for what could be described as her 'unsavory tweets' about attendees at the Logies has highlighted that employees can be terminated for their after hours conduct on social networks.'

'Whilst the general rule is that an employer has no right to control or regulate the activities of an employee after working hours. Having said this, there are certain exceptions. In order to terminate an employee for their afterhours conduct, an employer must establish that the conduct complained of is sufficiently connected with the relationship of employment and gives rise to vicarious liability and therefore justifies termination.' In other words, there's grey and where there's grey there's a lawyer.

The world has changed and the constant bad Facebook press and its role in cyber bullying has meant that schools are being asked for leadership on the issue. As with all sectors, schools included, everyone is playing catch-up on coming to grip with the technology's impact on working relationships.

Policy setting is only one part of the overall strategy with education being the primary device for informing social media users of the dangers as well as the positive experiences that can be had. One of the most innovative programs seen recently was run by Sunshine College (Melbourne) where last year 20 students ran an online education session for parents that included Facebook, MSN and even World of Warcraft.

Conclusion

With over 9 million people in Australia accessing social media (46% of the population), including 43% of small businesses and over 70% of not for profits, why are schools under-represented in their use of this new communications device in connecting with their parent community?

- There is no role modelling in the schools sector of parental engagement through social media
- There is no evidence that schools are benchmarking the commercial sectors successes with social media (and failures) to inform their new communications strategies
- Very few Principals are social media content creators as defined by Forrester Research; a critical activity in understanding the full breadth of social media from the technology through to writing styles. The Principal survey revealed that 12% had a personal blog and of those with classroom blogs/wikis, only 12% contributed content.
- Principals
  - Are unclear as to what they'll get out of extending social media to parents and how it may benefit the school
  - Perceive that social media content creation will be more work and are unfamiliar with the term 'crowd sourced' and how the community can contribute content
  - Are unclear of how the applications operate and in particular how content can be created once and republished across several mediums automatically
  - Perceive that an aggrieved parent could run amok in a school blog and consequently are unfamiliar with the varying level of controls available to organisations using social media
- Bad Facebook press tarnishes social media's reputation in the schools sector

Schools have a wonderful opportunity to strengthen their community through social media. As parents become more disconnected with their children's school through the sheer time pressures of modern life, online engagement presents as a powerful method of making parents feel part of the school community.

On the negative, schools need to implement some form of social media monitoring and an after hour's social media use policy.

The way forward is to find schools that are enthusiastic about extending social media to parents and support their activities technologically, strategically, tactically and philosophically. These schools will provide the benchmarking for those waiting for someone to go first. We need the early adopters.

On a final note, social media is not about the technology – do not let the 'techo's drive the program. Social media is about content and allowing everyone in your community to contribute.

It takes a village to raise a child.

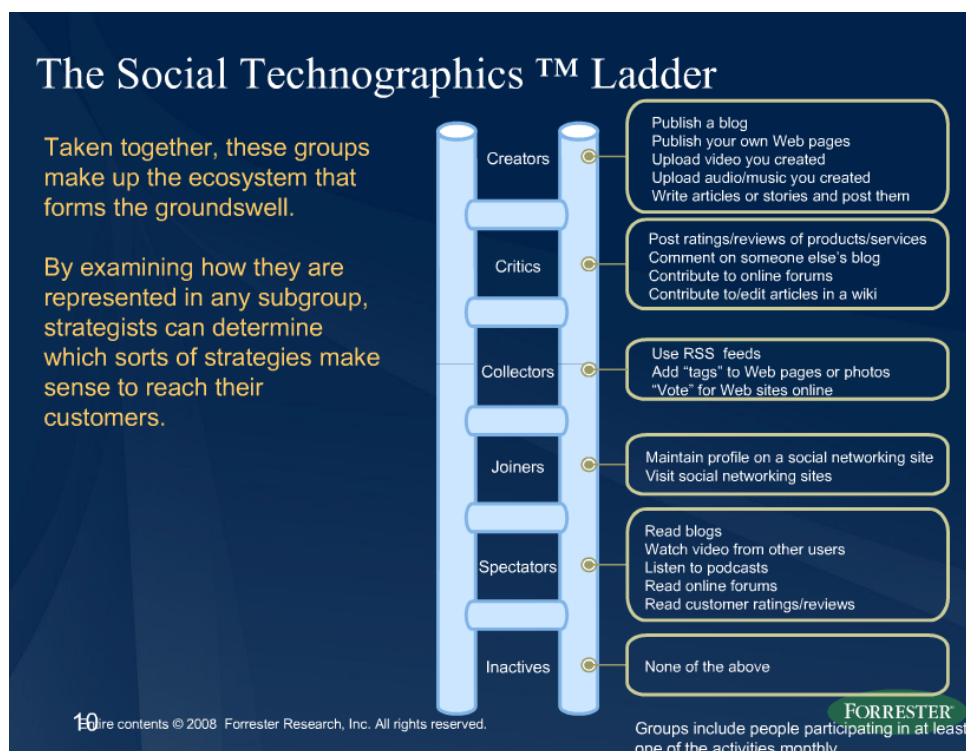# The ultimate school communication system using the best of social media

Watch this space. A mini paper will be available in August 2010 specifying each of the components from content creation, community comments, security, receiving devices and more on writing styles for social media.

If you would like a copy of the paper, please email denis.m@sponsor-ed.com.au or call 1300 755 010

Appendix

Appendix 1: Foresters 6 social technographic profiles
http://www.forrester.com/Groundswell

Appendix 2: Telstra Social Media Policy
http://www.telstra.com.au/abouttelstra/download/document/social-media-company-policy-final-150409.pdf

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XoWTZgq7q-I

Appendix 3: Social media book list
http://thedigitalden.com.au/2010/07/18/top-5-must-read-social-media-books/

Appendix 4: Terminating employees for after hours social media use
http://thedigitalden.com.au/2010/05/26/legalsocial-terminating-employees-for-after-hours-social-media-digital-media/

Appendix 5: Nielsen Australian Social Networking Report March 2010
http://thedigitalden.com.au/social-media/

Appendix 6: Parents too busy for P&C
http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/sunday-telegraph/parents-too-busy-for-pc/story-e6frewt0-1225761929389