

Virtually Social

By Karel Murray, Our Branch, Inc.

Social networking... on-line. What a concept. I know that people have met others through dating services provided via the internet, but to reveal the personal nature of oneself to cyberspace is something of a new concept to me. I was asked to link to a friend of mine about two months ago. I couldn't figure out why we needed to "link" when we had the phone and email.

Okay, I'm of the baby boomer generation...but I'm willing to explore places where no man has gone before, like Captain Kirk of the Starship Enterprise. Well, at least explore areas that involve the newest technologies. And like any sensible being, entering into the unknown is usually done with caution. For the first couple of weeks, I felt like a furtive rabbit, hoping a speeding car didn't careen around the corner and crush me before I had a chance flee...

But, funny thing happened. I started getting linking requests from people I hadn't heard from in years and I discovered that having an on-line personal diary is a simple way of continuing to connect at a level that goes beyond the annual Christmas card.

This is going to be fun.

Because I've discovered that inquiring minds want to know more about me than what I'm willing to reveal during a motivational or instructional talk. Quite frankly, I've never believed I was that interesting... just a woman who has struggled for her fifty plus years to not be classified or quantified. Fortunately, my husband has always recognized that and supports my lifelong learning efforts.

So, I'm diving into the online community, hoping there is someone around to catch me. Each social networking venue seems to have its own personality and draws different types of individuals to them. I started checking out "profiles" and entering in common first names to see what people actually put on their sites. It's good to have a frame of reference

That was an education all in itself.

The younger generation thinks nothing of putting all of their everyday thoughts online for the world to view. I saw photos of people sleeping, hugging, mugging for the camera, preparing for work and some posing in minimal clothing.

I'm feeling really old here. If I did that, I believe the internet police would be knocking at my door within hours.

I've learned that in order to be effective, it requires at least 1.5 hours a day to manage the social networking web sites. Who knew there was so much to do; responding to

“nudges – still not sure what that is”, acknowledging venue chats, and offering personal updates that might have value to those currently listed as “friends”.

It also appears that as I add friends, more people ask to become my friend also. Still trying to figure out whether it is appropriate to allow everyone to be my friend or respond only to those who I’ve met professionally and personally. There doesn’t seem to be a book on social networking etiquette.

However, I can easily see how this type of connection has real value. This is a fluid world of ongoing referral and recommendation. A place where others can broadcast their feelings about a product or service and know they are being heard. I’d recommend that all individuals who are in any type of business consider using this media since it is the wave of the future. Before you leap in, make sure that you plan for the following:

- a. Your online image... what do you want others to feel about you after they visit your site?
- b. Your networking objectives – are you entering into it with an attitude of giving rather than just taking from your group of friends?
- c. Learn about the different networking sites and determine which best fit your profile and social objectives (I’ll name just a few to consider):
 - MySpace.com – younger generations like this site
 - Facebook.com – full gambit of generations – more social oriented than business. Spam efforts and heavy marketing are frowned upon.
 - LinkedIn.com – older generations and professional orientation
 - Plaxo.com – appears to be patterned closely to Facebook.com
 - Ecademy.com – business online networking at its best
 - Twitter.com – people put their thoughts and comments on for all to see. It seems almost like a stream of consciousness thing.
 - Plurk.com – comments and postings can be made that show a timeline per registrant. Still trying to figure this one out.
- d. Set aside time to “work” your sites and update your profile so it remains current.
- e. Remember, that unless you choose the option for privacy, everything you place on your profile and social networking site is visible to the world. This includes responses to chats and notices placed on other people’s “wall”.

Work to make your online profile consistent between the different networking venues. Find a useful balance between personal details and business professionalism. Not everyone needs to know you wore your underwear for two days in a row without washing them... a proud declaration I read on one profile.

Whether the world is ready for this or not...Karel Murray is revealed on-line. Just wait until I figure out Blogtalkradio.com and give a voice to the personality profile. Now we are talking!

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