

SOCIAL MEDIA FOR MEETING PLANNERS

<http://experiencecolumbus.com/Social-Media-Toolkit.cfm>



SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLKIT

Everyone's talking about social media and billions of people use it every day. Here, we take a look at a just of the few tools that are major players in the social Web.

Learn what they are, why they're important and how they can be used to promote your meeting in Columbus.

Facebook: With over 400 million active users, Facebook is one of the largest social networks in the world.

Twitter: One of the fastest-growing social networks, Twitter and its users have revolutionized communication.

Flickr: The largest photo-sharing community on the Web, Flickr hosts billions of images and thousands are uploaded every minute.

YouTube: The #1 video site in the world and visited by millions each day, searches on YouTube are second only to Google.

Blogs: A mainstream way to publish and receive information, blogs can play a role in any promotions plan.

Tips: A handful of general guidelines to help you work your way into the social Web.

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BLOGS

What they are:

Blogs are regularly updated Web sites made up of posts. The posts themselves often contain links, photos, video, podcasts and comments.

Why they matter:

The blogosphere rivals traditional media in terms of its impact and influence on readers. According to [Technorati's State of the Blogosphere 2008](#), 77% of active Internet users read blogs. That includes over 77 million Americans.

Blogs are now considered to be a mainstream way to publish and receive information. Plus, they offer readers an easy way to be updated via RSS feeds.

How you can use them to promote your meeting:

- Share [Experience Columbus' blog](#) with your attendees so they can begin to learn about dining, playing and shopping in Columbus. On the blog, attendees can read about Columbus experiences shared by the people who've been here or live here.
- Start your own blog for your association or event. If you take the leap, keep in mind that among other things, a good blog is constantly updated, provides unique information and it stays true to a particular focus or topic.

It's also important to remember that blogs allow your audience to have some level of control because readers can comment on what you post. This can certainly seem like a risk, but it's also incredibly powerful for sharing information and building engagement with your audience. By encouraging conversation, you can create an active online community made up of your attendees and members.

It's probably wise to extend your blog beyond your meeting, and use it as a tool for engagement year-round. Before you start a blog, consider that it will take a fair amount of time and effort to do it right.

Wondering what you'd post? Sit in your audience's shoes and consider things that would be of interest. A few ideas:

- News and updates relevant to your organization/meeting
 - Reminders about registration deadlines or hotel booking
 - Information about Columbus, including posts about things to do, where to eat, etc.
 - News relevant to your group's interests or mission
 - Interviews with attendees or members
 - Information about conference session topics, interviews with speakers, etc.
 - Requests for feedback about your event
- Participate on other blogs, particularly those that are read by your attendees. If there are specific blogs relevant to the topic and focus of your meeting or association, you'll likely find value in responding to posts and participating in the conversation. If appropriate, you can also reach out to blog authors with information about your meeting. If the information is relevant or interesting to their readers, you might find it featured in a post.

Referenced URLs:

Technorati State of the Blogosphere 2008: <http://technorati.com/blogging/state-of-the-blogosphere>

Experience Columbus' blog: <http://ExperienceColumbus.com/blog>

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FACEBOOK

What it is:

If you visit Facebook.com, you'll find that the site bills itself as a place to "help you connect and share with the people in your life."

Facebook makes it incredibly easy for users to share information with each other. As a result, Facebook has become a powerful tool for marketing anything (including meetings) online. And not only do people connect with other people, but they connect with brands, causes, events, organizations, and more.

Why it matters:

Consider these statistics, provided by Facebook:

- Facebook has more than 400 million active users
- Over half of Facebook users are outside of college
- The fastest growing demographic on Facebook is 35 years old and older

If you're interested, you'll find even more stats [here](#).

Not only are a lot of people using Facebook, they're using it quite actively – more than 3 billion minutes are spent on Facebook each day.

How you can use it to promote your meeting:

- Drive your attendees to the [Experience Columbus Facebook page](#). The page includes photos, videos, and the opportunity for your attendees to connect with other Columbus visitors and local residents.

Fans of the page often post news about events, ask questions about what there is to see and do, and talk about their Columbus experiences. This allows your attendees to tap into a large group of people who love Columbus and are happy to suggest their favorite things to see and do in our city.

- Create an event on Facebook. Some reasons this option is worth a look:
 - An event allows you to provide the details of your meeting and can drive attendees to another Web site for more information or official registration.
 - When a user RSVPs to an event on Facebook, it may appear on that user's Facebook profile (this is dependant on user settings). The user's friends see the RSVP and as a result, awareness spreads about the event.
 - Users can help promote events by inviting their Facebook friend lists.
 - You can send messages to guests. You can also opt to send specific messages to specific groups – a message can go to everyone, to only those attending, to only those not attending, or to only those who have not replied.

For more information on how to create a Facebook event, click [here](#).

- Create a Facebook group or page for your organization or association to give your members a place to gather, connect and interact. Groups and pages are also a great way to build awareness for your organization and mission.

It's common to not know whether to start a page or a group, and there isn't one right answer. To help decide which is right for you, take a look at some of their characteristics:

Pages

- Can only be created by an official representative of the organization being represented.
- Can be customized with interactive applications.
- Allow page admins to keep personal profiles “hidden.” If you’re an admin of a Facebook page and you interact on the page, the interaction appears to come from the page as opposed to your personal profile.
- Allow admins to send messages to an unlimited number fans. Messages sent to fans appear as updates (they do not appear in user inboxes).
- Allow access to be restricted to certain ages or locations.

Groups

- Can be created by any Facebook user about any topic.
- Cannot have applications added to them.
- Don’t allow admins to be “hidden.” If you’re a group admin and you interact in the group, the interaction will come from your personal profile.
- Allow admins to send messages to every member of the group, if the group is under 5000 members. Messages sent to group members appear in a user’s inbox.
- Allow for more restricted access. If desired, a group can require new members to be approved.

If a Facebook page is your best fit, click [here](#) for more information.

If you decide you’d like to start a Facebook group, you’ll find more information [here](#).

Referenced URLs:

Facebook stats: <http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>

Experience Columbus Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Experience-Columbus/9998527302>

More info on Facebook events: <http://www.facebook.com/help.php?page=413>

More info on Facebook pages: <http://www.facebook.com/help.php?page=175>

More info on Facebook groups: <http://www.facebook.com/help.php?page=826>

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FLICKR

What it is:

A site where users can share photos and video. If you visit Flickr.com, you'll find this description:

"Flickr – almost certainly the best online photo management and sharing application in the world – has *two main goals*:

1. We want to help people make their content available to the people who matter to them.
2. We want to enable new ways of organizing photos and video."

Why it matters:

Flickr is the largest photo-sharing community in the world, where thousands of images are uploaded every minute. In November 2008, the site hosted its 3 billionth photo. Flickr users make up an extremely diverse and actively engaged community.

How you can use it to promote your meeting:

- Encourage attendees to visit the [Experience Columbus Flickr group](#) to view photos of our city taken by visitors and residents. Your attendees will view a variety of Columbus things to see and do, taken from many different vantage points.
- Start your own Flickr account.
 - Use it to upload photos of your meeting to easily share them with attendees.
 - Start a Flickr group to provide attendees with one online place to share photos. A group also provides you with an image library you can potentially use to promote future events. (An important note – individual photo owners set their own use permissions on their images. You can check them on the right hand side of a photo page under "Additional Information." It's a good idea to ask permission before using someone else's photo)

Flickr has a comprehensive [FAQ section](#) that can help with additional basics to get you started.

Referenced URLs:

Experience Columbus Flickr group: <http://Flickr.com/groups/ExperienceColumbus>

Flickr FAQ: <http://www.flickr.com/help/faq/>

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TWITTER

What it is:

You may hear Twitter described as an online social network or a microblogging service. If you visit Twitter.com, you'll find that the site describes itself as a place to "Discover what's happening right now, anywhere in the world."

Twitter allows users to send and receive "tweets," messages of 140 characters or less. Twitter is used for a variety of things including networking, breaking news, engaging media outlets, gaining information, promoting products, communicating with event audiences and more.

Why it matters:

Twitter is growing, and it's growing really fast. EMarketer [recently reported](#) that Twitter had over 12 million users in 2009, with that number expected to jump to 18.1 million in 2010.

How you can use it to promote your meeting:

- Encourage your attendees who use Twitter to follow the Experience Columbus Twitter accounts. By doing so, they'll begin to get an idea of the dining, playing and shopping options available in our city.

Experience Columbus on Twitter

Experience Columbus:	http://Twitter.com/ExpCols
Irene Alvarez, Marketing Project Manager:	http://Twitter.com/Irene_ExpCols
Marco Bloemendaal, Director, Convention Sales:	http://Twitter.com/Marco_ExpCols
Kelly Brooks, Events/Marketing Coordinator:	http://Twitter.com/Kelly_ExpCols
Brian Cheek, Tourism Sales Manager:	http://Twitter.com/Brian_ExpCols
Arica Claar, Sales Assistant:	http://Twitter.com/Arica_ExpCols
Anthony Cordo, Visitor Services Manager:	http://Twitter.com/Anthony_ExpCols
Melissa DeGraw Metz, Director, Membership:	http://Twitter.com/Melissa_ExpCols
Beth Ervin, Director, Communications:	http://Twitter.com/Beth_ExpCols
Meg Gordon, Membership Manager:	http://Twitter.com/Meg_ExpCols
Cathe Moog, Director, Marketing:	http://Twitter.com/Cathe_ExpCols
Mark Oeffler, National Sales Manager:	http://Twitter.com/Mark_ExpCols
Scott Peacock, Media Relations Manager:	http://Twitter.com/Scott_ExpCols
Vineetha Thomas, Sales Manager:	http://Twitter.com/VineethaExpCols
Sayaka Sekiguchi, Events Manager:	http://Twitter.com/Sayaka_ExpCols
Ben Walters, Visitor Center Receptionist:	http://Twitter.com/Ben_ExpCols

Greater Columbus Sports Commission on Twitter

Brent LaLonde, Media Contact	http://Twitter.com/Brent_CbusSprts
Linda Logan, Executive Director:	http://Twitter.com/Linda_CbusSprts
Gwen Verhoff, Senior Events Manager:	http://Twitter.com/Gwen_CbusSprts

Attendees can also pose questions directly to our staff on Twitter to get information that will be helpful to them during their stay.

- Get acquainted with hashtags. A hashtag is simply a "code" that Twitter users type into their tweet with the # sign before it. It allows users to find all tweets related to a specific topic or event.

We're seeing more and more meetings and conventions assign hashtags to their events. Recent Columbus examples include the Arnold Sports Festival (#Arnold) and the 2009 National Youth Ministry Conference (#NYMC). By following the hashtag used for your meeting, you can stay on top of attendee questions, thoughts and experiences relevant to the event.

There are a number of ways to follow tweets that use hashtags. A few popular options include:

<http://search.twitter.com> (simply enter a hashtag in the search bar)

<http://hashtags.org> (enter the hashtag in the search bar, then click on it under the "Tag search" results)

<http://tweetchat.com> (Twitter account required – login with your Twitter credentials, then enter the hashtag to view the conversation)

- Speaking of hashtags, let your Twitter-using attendees know about [#ExpCols](#). By including #ExpCols in a tweet that includes a question about Columbus, Experience Columbus staff and local residents will help with answers.

Questions asked include things like "I'm staying at the Hyatt Regency. Where can I eat that's nearby?" or "I have free time and want to check out some galleries. Where should I go and how do I get there?" By including #ExpCols in their tweets, your attendees will tap into a local network of assistance, opinions and recommendations.

For more information on getting started with Twitter, click [here](#).

Referenced URLs:

eMarketer: <http://www.emarketer.com/Article.aspx?R=1007059>

#ExpCols: <http://www.experiencecolumbus.com/blog/index.php/2009/04/21/expcols-columbus-recommendations-on-twitter/>

Meetings Podcast post: <http://meetingspodcast.com/?p=101>

Getting started with Twitter: <http://help.twitter.com/forums/10711/entries>

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YOUTUBE

What it is:

YouTube describes itself as “the leader in online video, and the premier destination to watch and share original videos worldwide through a Web experience.” YouTube provides an easy way for Internet users to upload, view and share videos.

Why it matters:

comScore [recently reported](#) that U.S. Internet users viewed 14.8 billion online videos during January 2009, representing a 4% increase over December 2008. YouTube led the charge, accounting for 91 percent of the growth and surpassing 100 million viewers for the first time.

But that’s not all. comScore [also reported](#) that YouTube achieves a remarkably high level of search traffic. So high, in fact, that YouTube is now considered the second largest search engine on the Web. The only site with greater search traffic is Google.

How you can use it to promote your meeting:

- Encourage attendees to visit the [Experience Columbus YouTube channel](#). There, they can watch several videos that will generate excitement about traveling to Columbus
- Take the videos from the Experience Columbus channel and use them your way. Every video is sharing-enabled; you can feature them on your own Web site simply by copying the embed code found on each video’s page.
- Start your own YouTube channel, featuring videos of conference events, keynote speakers, breakouts, etc. Drive your attendees to it to allow them to watch the reasons why they should attend.

The [YouTube Help Center](#) provides a wealth of information to get you started on building your own channel.

Referenced URLs:

comScore report, YouTube Surpasses 100 Million U.S. Viewers: <http://ir.comscore.com/releasedetail.cfm?ReleaseID=368924>

comScore report, YouTube Now 25 Percent Of All Google Searches: <http://www.techcrunch.com/2008/12/18/comscore-youtube-now-25-percent-of-all-google-searches/>

Experience Columbus YouTube channel: <http://YouTube.com/ExperienceColumbus>

YouTube Help Center: <http://help.youtube.com/support/youtube/>

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TIPS

A handful of general guidelines to help you work your way into the social Web:

- Find out what sites your attendees are using already, and use that as a basis for determining where to direct your social media efforts. If you have no idea where your attendees are gathering on the Web, survey them.
- Do a little research to see if and where your meeting is being represented on the social Web. For example, you might be surprised to find photos of last year's meeting on Flickr, or you might find a Facebook group that was started by an attendee. Take an audit of what's out there now.
- Be willing to experiment and try different tools. Start by listening, and try sites out on a personal basis. Getting acquainted with the social Web will help you better identify if and how it can work for your meeting.
- Don't feel like you need to use every tool that's out there. Choose none, choose one or choose several. There isn't a magic formula that applies to everyone.
- When selecting sites to participate on, keep in mind the level of difficulty or commitment involved. At a minimum, you can send Columbus meeting attendees to social media communities that Experience Columbus has already developed. You can also take things to the next level, by building your own social media presence devoted to your organization or meeting (regardless of its location).
- Don't abandon your other promotional activities. For most organizations, social media is a nice enhancement to already existing marketing and promotional efforts, not a replacement.
- Don't give up too easily. Some social media tools are far less intuitive than others when you first start using them. A learning curve is to be expected.