

The Ramifications – Positive and Potentially Negative – of Social Media Networking



At the 2012 annual conference sponsored by Kansas Rural Water, Carol Bonebrake, attorney with Holbrook & Osborne, P.A. of Topeka, presented a breakout session on the topic, “Social Media Networking”. The session peaked my interest in social media; I knew if I were interested, perhaps other office professionals, city clerks, board members and operators would be intrigued too. When Carol discusses Facebook, Twitter, list serves, etc., the questions just flow from audience members. In September and October, KRWA sponsored three training sessions about social media networking. There will be more. The sessions were held at Mayetta, Independence and Valley Center. The training was attended by 28 administrative personnel, two council members, three certified operators and nine others. A total of 25 different cities and rural water districts were represented. Everyone left the sessions with a much better understanding and usage of social media networking.

Carol has had her own law practice. She has been Assistant City Attorney for Topeka and was a research attorney for the Kansas Court of Appeals. Carol also held a position with Goodell, Stratton, Edmonds and Palmer. She has degrees from both KU and KSU. She is

uniquely qualified to speak on the topic of local governance and human relations issues. KRWA appreciates the opportunity to make her presentations available to KRWA audiences.

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What is social media networking?

Well, here’s a definition. Social media includes the various online technology tools that enable people to communicate easily via the Internet to share information and resources. Social media can

include text, audio, video, images, podcasts, and other multimedia communications.

Social media technologies take on many different forms including magazines, Internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, microblogging, wikis, social networks, podcasts, photographs, video, rating and social bookmarking. In an article *Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media*, published by the Kelley



Social media, employee internet abuse and IRS reporting were topics at three training sessions sponsored by KRWA in September and October. The sessions were held at the Prairie Band Potawatomi Casino at Mayetta, city of Independence and city of Valley Center. The training was attended by 28 administrative personnel, two council member, three certified operators and eight others. A total of 42 different cities and rural water districts were represented.

Pictured are Glenda Stoppel, Deputy City Clerk, and Larry Paine, City Administrator from the city of Hillsboro as they review Hillsboro's Facebook page to Carol Bonebrake (center), attorney with Holbrook & Osborne, P.A. of Topeka. Carol presented on the topic of social media. This photo was taken during the session in Valley Center on October 4. Allison Jones with the Internal Revenue Service, Wichita, also presented on reporting responsibilities by cities at rural water districts at all three sessions.

School of Business at Indiana State University (Business Horizons 2011) lead author Jan H. Kietzmann presented a Social Media Honeycomb that defines how these social media differ according to the extent to which they focus on some or all of seven functional building blocks: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups. By applying a set of theories in the field of media research (social presence, media richness) and social processes (self-presentation, self-disclosure), Kaplan, A., & Haenlein, M. (2010). *Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media*, Business Horizons, 53(1), 59 – 68. created a classification scheme in the same publication, with six different types of social media: collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia), blogs and microblogs (e.g., Twitter), content communities (e.g., YouTube), social networking sites (e.g., Facebook), virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft), and virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life). Technologies include: blogs, picture-sharing, vlogs, wall-postings, email, instant messaging, music-sharing, crowdsourcing and voice over IP (VoIP), to name a few. Many of these social media services can be integrated via social network aggregation platforms. Social media network websites include sites like Facebook, Twitter, Bebo and MySpace.

What makes social media networking interesting? It is a quick, to the point, type of communicating. In this modern day world, that is what it is all about – “saving time.”

Social media can work as a great marketing tool. For instance, you post (write) something wonderful about your company, city or water district, or about yourself, on a Facebook page. You have 153 “friends”; the post goes

So, what is your social media IQ? Below are some basic questions.

Yes No

- Have you created a Facebook Profile?
- Have you added a Facebook Profile picture?
- Have you installed a Facebook Application or App?
- Are you on Twitter?
- Do you have more than 100 updates on Twitter?
- Do you use your mobile device to send SMS text messages?
- Do you use Twitter from your mobile device?
- Do you have an online photo gallery (anything besides on Facebook or MySpace; Flickr counts)?
- Have you invited someone to an event, party, dinner or other event using an online invitation?
- Do you have a personal Web site?
- Do you have a personal Web site and/or email account that uses your personal domain?

Every “Yes” answer is worth 10 points. Seventy or better is passing. Below 70 and you should be concerned that you will be left behind in the new Social Media economy. The average score for most people is 30 or below. Two attendees at the recent KRWA sessions had 70 and higher!

Advantages and disadvantages of using social media . . .

There are many advantages to using social media:

- ✓ Enhances information discovery and delivery
- ✓ Employees can share information, discuss ideas, ask questions.
- ✓ It's an opportunity to expand contact; targets more people
- ✓ Expands market research and campaigns

Disadvantages include:

- ✓ Loss of productivity
- ✓ Possibility of hackers
- ✓ Risk of online scam
- ✓ May result in negative comments about company
- ✓ Possible legal consequences

to all of them, each one of them has 153 “friends” and the post keeps rolling, and rolling, and rolling; where it stops nobody knows. Kari West, Public Information Officer at the city of Parsons, demonstrated to the KRWA training session audience in Independence how the city of Parsons’ Facebook

page works very well for them. Kari stated, “It takes me about two hours to view posts and answer back to patrons. It has reduced the number of phone calls coming to city hall. The city recently had a water main break. It was a quick way to alert the residents of the situation. Having a FB page works for Parsons!”

Technology blurs the line when employment is concerned. Should bosses and employees “friend” each other on Facebook? Presenter Carol Bonebrake stated, “There’s a FINE line there. You have to be VERY careful with this type of situation.” From January 2010 to October 2011, American courts published 674 decisions that made reference to evidence obtained from social media sites. Let’s say the employment goes bad and the employee is terminated. The manager winds up with too much information if they have friended employees, including personal information that may be protected by employee law. The disgruntled employee may argue that the personal information was the reason for the adverse action taken.

Emails sent from personal email accounts are arguably not company property even if emails are sent on work computers. Employers should be sure of their reason to delve into personal emails. Some employees use their cell phones for business as well as personal. The employee may receive a reimbursement for the use of the cell phone. It is just that – it’s a reimbursement. The employer has no rights to the phone.

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ramifications. Provide some sort of guidance for social networking outside of work and the effects on confidential and proprietary information. Have employees sign off on the policy. Review or update the policy at least annually,” Bonebrake commented.

Train, train, and more training

Employers are encouraged to hold different types of training for the different levels of staff. Some staff won’t even know what “Social Media” is and others will need to understand why posting personal information is not professional. So training is crucial.

Twitter has more than 140 million users and Facebook has approximately 900 million monthly active users as reported in April 2012. In an article dated July 5, 2012 in *The Huffington Post*, Britney Fitzgerald writes, “In a recent study Americans spend eight hours a month on Facebook.”

Social media – it’s a way of life and business and it’s here to stay. So when you can’t beat ’em, join ’em – but know what you might be getting yourself into.

Create a policy

In the recent training sessions, Carol Bonebrake encouraged those attending to add social media references to already existing personnel policies. She commented that the policy should determine what social media is.

“It’s important to establish a clear purpose for the policy. It should be stated, who can use the sites and for what purposes. Make special focus on restrictions of usage and the possible impacts social media have on productivity. Specify the consequences of infractions and any legal

Rita has extensive municipal experience with the city of Troy, KS for eleven years. She was a certified EMT and served as the Ambulance Director for two years. Rita also worked on or completed most water and wastewater utility reporting requirements. Her focus at KRWA is to provide assistance with applications for funding for cities and rural water districts.



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