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BUSINESS BOOKS

Social media good for businesses

Three books explain the new tools that help connect companies and customers.

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Facebook, Twitter and other social networking tools have evolved from being merely the latest annoying fads to nearly essential tools for social and professional networking -- and the blurry and fading border between the two.

LinkedIn has become a mandatory site for those seeking employment and freelance assignments, but Facebook has morphed from a college student connection tool into an all-ages affair that allows unintrusive virtual relationships with friends, acquaintances, long-lost classmates, colleagues and relatives, and their "friends," too. But it's also a powerful business application, and an invaluable resource for job seekers, freelancers and sundry promoters of products and ideas. Lately, Twitter has emerged as a powerful, yet ill-understood tool, too. Here are three new books to enlighten the un-networked.

The Social Media Bible: Tactics, Tools and Strategies for Business Success. Lon Safko, David Brake. Wiley. 840 pages.

I generally prefer books that are specific and somewhat narrow in their focus. But there are exceptions, of course, and this hefty "bible" may be one. It's an overview of various tools, practices and ideas surrounding social media, with contributions from some very sharp practitioners who aid, abet and amplify the authors in explaining the inherent business uses of social media networking.

The main drawback with their approach here is that the field is rapidly evolving and it's not possible to capture everything. Especially in the online world, companies come and go. Moli.com, for example, a hybrid social network-commerce-content site (to which I contributed) based in West Palm Beach is listed herein but recently ceased operations, changed hands and is in the process of re-starting, all of which apparently occurred after this bible went to press.

Still, this very large snapshot of the online social media landscape may have a place on your reference bookshelf, though its own shelf life may be limited.

Facebook Me! Dave Awl. Peachpit Press. 216 pages.

The best way to get started with Facebook is to just jump right in, but if you don't know what it is and are overly risk-averse, this could be the book for you. However, it's very basic and somewhat simplistic, so if you're trying to figure out how to leverage Facebook as a marketing asset, you may want to keep looking.

The Twitter Book. Tim O'Reilly, Sarah Milstein. O'Reilly. 240 pages.

My dear mother asked me recently if I tweet. I nearly choked on my chopped liver but regained my composure quickly enough to query, "Do you know what that is, Mom?" "No," she replied sweetly, "but everyone's doing it."

Indeed, the mainstream media has been buzzing about Twitter and its 140-character messages, called "tweets." Movie stars, media figures, captains of industry and others seem to be doing it, but how can businesses discern the twits from the tweets?"

O'Reilly and Milstein present as lucid and intelligent an overview as you'd want or need. Twitter is clearly not for everyone, but it's quickly becoming as important as e-mail for certain professions and this terrific primer shows why.

The format is concise but quite rich, and there's plenty here to convince you to employ Twitter as a marketing tool and a very good way to engage customers.

To receive business book reviews by e-mail or join the Business Monday Book Club, e-mail Richard Pachter at rap@richardpachter.com. To read more of Pachter's musings, go to www.richardpachter.com