

## **Should We Be Twittering and if so, for what purpose?**

By Michael Schaffer

Everyone seems to be talking about social media websites such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and others. And it appears many companies and other organizations, including those in our own industry, are jumping in and developing their own pages and groups for these new sites.

Social networking websites may in fact prove very valuable to business-to-consumer organizations. For instance, Dell Computer's Dell Outlet division secured \$1 million in sales in just a few days by posting a special sale using Twitter. Although this amount is just a fraction of Dell's \$60 billion plus in annual sales, what impressed the company is that the posting cost the company absolutely nothing.

Dell is not the only company that has jumped on the social media bandwagon. Priceline, Pizza Hut, Southwest Airlines and JetBlue Airlines all use Twitter and other sites to post sales or entice customers to consider buying something or taking a trip.

The big question, however, is how effective these sites will be for business-to-business (B2B) organizations. More specifically, can they help janitor manufacturers and distributors market their products, especially in today's slow market?

It's easy for computer manufacturers to assume their customers are Twittering, but does this apply to folks buying brooms, vacuums, and floor machines as well? To help answer that question, Tornado conducted an online survey of Facility Service Providers (FSPs), Building Service Contractors (BSCs), and other JanSan professionals asking what types of social media they use. 40% of respondents indicated they use LinkedIn to stay connected with others in the industry, 25% indicated they have active Facebook accounts, and 20% said they Twitter.

More data is needed regarding whether our end-users are using the sites, and for what purpose, but early indications support that Social Media is indeed growing in the jan/san industry.

If our customers are using social networking sites, or will be soon, the use of these new mediums must be structured into our marketing plans and we likely will need to put a reasonable amount of time and resources in to them in order to evaluate the results. Some consumer based organizations have already gone much further. Southwest Airlines actually has an entire department, albeit small, devoted just to scanning and participating in social media websites that mention the airline.

While the jury is still out as to the ultimate effectiveness of these new mediums for marketing purposes, jansan manufacturers and distributors must learn how to engage potential and existing customers--not simply try to turn these sites into new forums for traditional advertising methods. That's unlikely to be successful. Sales pitches tend to fall flat in these social media settings, yet many manufacturers keep posting them because it's the only way they know how to market. This new medium calls for new methods.

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