



# RU TWEETING?

If you can't make the connection between "tweeting" and [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com) or "FBing" and [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com), then you are missing the new wave of Social Media.

By Loree Galimore and Kay Leonard

### So what is social media?

Social media is, at its most basic sense, a shift in how people discover, read, and share news, information, and content. It's a fusion of sociology and technology. "Social media networks" are internet sites, tools and services that are specifically designed to help people (or companies) connect and interact both instantaneously and with asynchronous feedback.

The real question: Are Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and/or any of the other sites relevant to increasing your enrollment?

Good question! This article will provide a few

basics about these sites; describe how they may help your enrollment; and share how a few clubs are using social media.

### How does social media benefit you?

Most gyms will tell you that one of their best advertisement tools is word-of-mouth recommendations because current parents and students, who have come to trust you, want to freely spread the word about that trust to others. Social media sites help create trust with people you don't know yet. Social networking encourages conversations, builds trust, and allows for expanded networking. It also helps people find your gym and can draw people to your website. Last, but not least, it helps you

keep up-to-date in your industry by reaching your target market through their preferred methods of communication when you sign up for "RSS" feeds or follow "Blogs."

### **Social Media Types and Benefits**

The four most used social media sites are Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, and YouTube. As of June 2009, Facebook is the most dominant site averaging 70 million users, while Twitter is the fastest growing averaging 17 million users. Below you'll find a nuts and bolts description of each.

#### **Facebook**

- URL – [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)
- Formatted social networking site open to anyone over 13.
- Uses include status updates, photo/video sharing, event update and invitations, interactive quizzes, and search capabilities
- Can be used to connect with members of your gym and other registered businesses as well as an avenue to reach potential members

#### **Twitter**

- URL – [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)
- Micro-Blogging site that allows you to let others know what you/your business is doing in 140 characters or less
- Based on the idea of "following people," this site lets you search for a member and "follow" them by getting updates via e-mail or text message when a new post is made

#### **YouTube**

- URL – [www.YouTube.com](http://www.YouTube.com)
- An internet platform, or host, for posting videos of self-made or production quality
- Anyone can search and view posted videos, comments can be left about videos if viewer is logged in, as a member (free membership) Avenue to post examples of classes, training, or to highlight gymnasts

#### **LinkedIn**

- URL – [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com)
- A business-relationship connection tool that allows "A" to meet "C" through "B"
- Based premise is that if you know "A" and "A" knows "B" but you don't, then if/when you need or want to meet "B", you can do so through "A"
- Provides greater control over your web

presence and increases outreach potential

#### **MySpace**

- URL – [www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com)
- Designable social networking site open to anyone who registers (Free membership) used most by teens and entertainment markets for updates and promotions
- Allows you to post information about your gym, check community events, and stay in touch with other users

#### **Blogs**

- A type of website, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material that is commonly displayed in a chronological order.
- "Blog" can also be used as a verb, meaning to maintain or add content to a blog
- Creates a searchable place for members to find and follow details about what is going on in your life or the life of your gym

#### **RSS**

- RSS Feeds are documents that are streamed from websites automatically to a subscriber (free) that includes full or summarized text as well as photos and publishing dates.
- Provides benefit by allowing subscribers to receive timely updates from your website or social media sites automatically through email or one or more of their social media sites

#### **So What?**

As you've probably noticed, your gymnasts are young, and their parents may be younger than you as well. Believe it when we say, they are using one or more of these platforms. So how do you turn their use into your gain? Have a presence in the social media realm.

Treat Your Approach to Social Media like you would any PR effort

**1.** Don't go running off without a plan. Meet with your marketing team/committee and decide what kind of presence you want to project and how much information you want to share. Think about sharing information on new pieces of equipment in your gym, meets your team won, special events you are hosting, etc.

**2.** Decide if/how you will measure your



effectiveness. If you just want to know if your website visits jump, be sure to benchmark your hits before you start any new web activity. Good information on measuring your social media activity can be found at [www.ragan.com](http://www.ragan.com).

**3.** Remember that anything you do or say (posting a video, disparaging a judge or judging at a meet, engaging in negative comments about a coach or gymnast) WILL get read by “someone” and that “someone” could be that person’s best friend or be “connected” to them through their social network.

**4.** Put someone in charge. You wouldn’t put multiple people in charge of updating your website, so don’t put more than one person in charge of the same social media site for the Club (they may have their own personal presence of course). Make sure you all agree on what you want out there. Example of use for multiple locations: The lead marketer emails your Social Media Team (SMT) to ask them to post “attached” on this date or within “X” number of days. That way news breaks evenly across the board with consistent messaging.

**5.** In addition to putting your Club out there, use RSS feeds, groups, and searching areas of the sites to see what’s going on around you. Maybe your competition is posting info that you’ve missed. Maybe you missed a really great article that someone is touting. Maybe there’s an event you want to join. For example: Plugging in the word “gymnastics” to a Twitter account brings up untold numbers of “tweets” that include that word in their posts. These searches are global and go outside your own ring of influence. Plugging in “gymnastics in (insert your city);” will bring up even more relevant tweets.

**6.** Does your website include the ability to create a Blog? If so, put someone in charge of posting news and information on it. Be sure

to use key words that will help search engines find you.

**7.** Monitor how it’s working. Get feedback from your web administrator (are hits going up?), from your registrar (do people check “found you on the internet” when they sign up?), and from those charged with each of the sites you’ve chosen to open for your gym (does anyone ever comment? When you search your club name, does it appear anywhere new?).

**8.** Evaluate applications based on monitoring information. Make judgments about your gym’s continued use and time against what you’ve learned. The services are free, but you don’t want to overdue the amount of time an employee spends updating the sites (It’s easy to get sucked into these sites. Make sure the people assigned don’t end up spending gym-time for personal use.) Continue doing only what makes sense from a club perspective.

### ***R U Getting the Idea?***

The message here is simple. If your customers have several choices in your area for gyms, you NEED to stay current and be the gym that people are talking about. You need to be a gym that communicates. You need to appear current and, more importantly, you need to reach new parents and students. Engaging social media helps get you there. USA Gymnastics has recognized that need and now has an online social media presence. Check out how we’re doing it at USA Gymnastics on Facebook.com and USA Gymnastics on twitter.com.

Tweet you later!

*If you’d like to share your site and how you’re using social networking email Luan Peszek at [lpeszek@usa-gymnastics.org](mailto:lpeszek@usa-gymnastics.org) and we’ll publish a list or post it on the website as well. ✕*