The Relationship of Social Media to Computer Graphics

Carley Augustine
Department of Computer Graphics Technology
Purdue University, Statewide. 1733 Northside Blvd. South Bend IN

April Buck
Department of Computer Graphics Technology
Purdue University, Statewide. 1733 Northside Blvd. South Bend IN

Abstract—Incorporating the theory, practicality, usability, and potential of social media into a computer graphics line of study may open doors to more opportunities for individuals in the computer graphics field. Social media, also known as social networking, involves blogging, Internet forums, podcasts, instant messaging, and music sharing on web sites such as MySpace, Facebook, LinkedIn, and YouTube. These forms of media are consistent with practices in the computer graphics field. The use of social media is said to be a process of trying to make one’s content available to a wider audience, however it is also currently used by corporate public relations departments to gain clientele. An examination of the practices of social media in several different applications should help determine what relationship to computer graphics technology exists.

I. Understanding the Social Media Phenomenon

Social media is a moderately new form of networking and reaching out to people. It is anything from blogging to posting pictures for friends, family, and even perfect strangers to see. “It is an umbrella term that encompasses the technologies and the activities that people use to share experiences, ideas, and information with each other” (Burchill, 2008), “The term ‘social media’ most often refers to activities that integrate technology, social (or human) interaction, and the construction of words, pictures, videos, and audio—better known as ‘user generated content’ an example of UGC would be YouTube” (Burchill, 2008). This social spider web of networking referred to as “Social Media”, (SM). Social Media is an Internet tool used for sharing information among many different types of individuals. In the United States alone, leading consumer social networking sites attract more than 110 million unique monthly visitors according to ComScore Inc. (Vascellaro, 2007). It is an integration of person-to-person communication with technology.

II. Networking to Develop a “Super-Net”

Social media has evolved from a source of casual communication and entertainment to a professional source of networking for business and industry. There are many branches of social media, as well as many concerns with the validity of using such media for marketing and public relations on a professional level. “Social networking sites provide a way to organize an egocentric social network” (Donath, 2008). It’s being questioned whether the sites are a passing fad, or the up and coming future of human relationship. Social ties provide many benefits, including companionship, access to information, and emotional and material support” (Donath, 2008). Without the spider web of networking via the Internet, these ties were limited, but now it is possible to generate a super-net of contacts.

Social networking is very important in many different fields; one example is the medical field. Often now in medicine, a diagnosis is not made in the doctor’s lounge, but on sites such as Sermo.com, a
social networking site for licensed physicians. “Not everyone interested in Social Media Marketing is a big company or start-up business. There are a lot of freelancers, artists, and performers out there who can really get some great benefits from utilizing all that Social Media has to offer when it comes to marketing” (ignite.com, 2008).

There are sites such as MySpace and Facebook, which are typically used for personal networking. People of the younger generation are attracted to sites such as these to maintain friendships with peers. Instead of meeting for a soda after school, students go home to converse via the social networking sites (Vascellaro, 2007). But, lately, those sites are also used by professionals, where the use of visuals is important in marketing their product. Tattoo artists, musicians, and graphic designers use the site to display their portfolios. These sites allow a user to generate several different photo albums where an artist or designer can easily display their work. Musicians are able to post pictures of album covers, concert events, and also post music for their friends to listen to. An artist’s popularity and success could then be identified by his or her number of friends.

For a more professional source of networking, there are sites such as LinkedIn, where professionals build a network of social contacts based on their area of expertise. These sites do not use any personal information, such as a photo album, displayable to the public. Its sole purpose is to generate professional contacts with those who have similar training and interests for professional growth. Such sites enable professionals and executives in industries such as advertising and finance to rub virtual elbows with each other (Vascellaro, 2007).

III. Utilizing Social Media in the Professional World

Industrial media, such as printing, was typically a source for informing, educating, and selling for a company. Recently, social media has become a substitute for some marketing and PR, providing a more cost effective approach than industrial media. With this relationship, there becomes a question of studying and teaching social media within a computer graphics technology curriculum. Would the application of the knowledge of graphic design aid in the effectiveness of the generation and use of social media to help brand a company via the Internet in situations where social media is already being used to generate clients for industry, and create bonds with those clients based on trust, knowledge and communication?

IV. Enhancing Business by Blogging

Another type of social media contact is one that works within an industrial website that exists as a marketing and information delivery aid. Companies such as Owens Corning, Merillat, and the greeting card designers of Hoops and Yoyo have contact blogs built into their corporate Web Sites. This style of blogging is used to create a personal bond with clients, which should ultimately increase business.

According to Connie Reece, founder of Every Dot Connects, social media is the next step in company personal relationships. Not only do PR people need an understanding for marketing a company, they need to understand the importance of blogging, requiring a detailed knowledge of new and emerging media as well as old-school relationship building skills (Reece, 2008). “Businesses worldwide invest millions of dollars in branding campaigns each year. If you think about it, providing good customer service is branding too” (deGeyter, 2007). Consumers value customer service to a point where it can brand a company, in a positive or negative way.
Blogging on social media sites is considered the most explosive outbreak in information since the Internet itself (Baker, Green, 2008). So consider this from a business standpoint. It is a must to use social media to inform, educate, entertain, and sell to your client. With nearly 9 million blogs out there, and 40,000 new ones popping up each day, assuming that 99% of them are off point, this leaves 40 new blogs a day that could be utilized to engage in business (Baker, Green, 2008). So, if a company has an almost infinite number of networking sites to choose from, where should they start? There is no one right answer. It takes a lot of research to determine the best social media site to use to market a company. After determining the best approach, it is imperative to take more time to learn how to use the site (Ogden, 2008). Ogden explains that there are several methods for learning about using social media including e-zines, reports, and articles on the subject. Once a social media site is established, take time to organize the content, using the social media site to get traffic to your web site. This generates a direct link, be it optional, for prospective clients to learn more about your company if they are genuinely interested in doing so.

One problem with social networking sites and blogging is that they are easy to use and easy to access but lack in visual appeal and obscure many of the cues that occur in social interaction. Studies noted by Judith Donath, in her article titled *A Semantic Approach to Visualizing Online Conversations*, emphasize that utilizing different styles of media expression within the blogging environment may increase the effectiveness of the content delivery. Generating a visual representation of timeline, and voice emphasis, as well as message poster versus message responder can help the user gain a better feel for the information being delivered. This may open doors for graphic designers; giving them a chance to work with interface design within blogs.

V. Utilizing Computer Graphics Technology and Design in Social Media

The design of a social networking site is related to its effectiveness and the audience’s perception of its validity. Professionally used social networking sites such as LinkedIn require password and email checks to discourage deception by users, which also increases the confidence level of a valid site. Professionally designed sites with legible information increase the sense of validity for that site. Those features then increase the trustworthiness of the site (Donath, 2002). If this is the case, then it is important for the site to have an effective use of typography, color schemes, and layout. This is reflective on the graphic/web designer, involving an understanding of human computer interface and design.

Social networking sites appear to involve the application of graphic design and human computer interface and design on several levels. One is with the front-end design of the networking site. A graphic specialist with a strong understanding of the human side of web design and interface design is a necessity in the design of a social networking site. Another is utilizing design skill to generate the photos, graphics, audio, and video files being presented within the social networking sites. A final need for design talent is with the design and usability within blogs imbedded in corporate web sites.

VI. Branding with Social Media

Where does this leave us? There seems to be an infinite spectrum of uses for social networking, and an equally infinite number of possible methods of social networking. The range branches from purely social to purely professional. A common area of interest within
this mess of communication is with the concept of “branding”, or “social media marketing”. It is possible to generate a brand in almost any form of social media. A client can brand themselves with logos, television commercials, printed advertisements, web sites, audio commercials, and the development of personal relationships with clients due to customer service.

Unfortunately it is very difficult to track specific return on investment through the branding of a company. According to deGeyter, in his article titled “Social Media is Branding”, when companies engage in social media, it is difficult to track return on investment, but that does not negate the importance of using social media as a source of branding. “It provides a way for companies to get out there and get noticed” (deGeyter, 2007). The difference with social media compared to a television commercial is that instead of forcing yourself on the client, you are simply hanging out with them, be friending them. It allows you to brand yourself long before they become a customer (deGeyter, 2007). The concept builds friendships with clients on an unlimited scale, with minimal production cost. Those friendships help to generate an awareness of business, and ultimately a brand name for the company.

One final aspect in branding with social media is to be unique, to have a niche (Hall, 2008). How can one separate themselves from the rest of the millions of users and posters? This branding via unique measures is something that many users are unable to do on their own. Graphic designers specializing in branding can help generate the most effective brand image, which will reach the desired target audience.

VII. Conclusion

Social media is evolving, and growing at an exponential rate. The importance of social media touches several aspects of industry. Almost any type and size of business can benefit from social media as a part of their marketing, advertising, and branding. With this need for social media, there should be a need for designers, marketing representatives, and small business owners to gain knowledge of the methods, effective design options, and usability of this form of communication. More research will be conducted to determine the practicality behind incorporating social media into curriculum development within a computer graphics plan of study.

References


