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## Opinion: Why Trucking Should Adopt Social Media

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Social media are transforming the way America does business, and there's no reason that shouldn't include trucking. When it comes to traditional trucking products such as vehicles, systems and components, the development life cycle can be fairly long. The time span required from initial concept through design, research and development and testing before production can begin can be measured in years. Information-management technology, on the other hand, often has a much shorter development life.

What that means for those of us who supply the advanced technologies used to manage trucking companies today is that our objective has to be communicating more effectively with our customers and partners.

Traditionally, we have employed such practices as focus groups to accomplish this task, and while they yielded results, these groups were expensive, time-consuming and static. Fixed in time, they simply could not address technology issues and customer and partner challenges in an effective and beneficial time frame.

But today, many trucking companies and industry suppliers of all types of technologies are successfully using social media communication channels such as blogging, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube to meet almost immediately the challenges and needs of customers and partners.

These communication tools are happening live, giving us the ability to have a viral — i.e., rapidly spreading — ongoing conversation about what's important to our customers and partners in general, as well as in the specific context of a customer's application of a particular technology. That helps to resolve problems quickly and leads to the more rapid development and deployment of new features and enhancements to products on an ongoing and constant basis.

Through the various social media channels, suppliers in all parts of the trucking and transportation marketplace are having conversations that help develop customer-driven solutions and drive improvements in how trucks, trailers and related assets are operated. On these pages, customers and partners challenge each other, with thoughts and comments that help collectively bring about positive and constructive changes that will benefit everyone.

In this industry, leading suppliers also are using these tools to bring together the broadest possible collection of in-context, relevant information and streamline interactive decision-making so that:

- Fleets can make accurate, fast and fully informed decisions about their assets.
- Manufacturers can deliver consistent and expert support.
- Service providers can deliver timely, quality service so their customers can get back on the road.

Online social networking usage also is growing among trucking companies, where these communications channels are helping to drive up sales and more effectively recruit and communicate with employees.

Trucking companies are using social media sites to connect with shippers and prospective customers. In this arena, social media's incredible marketing power is apparent.

For example, if a motor carrier is looking to fill half-empty trailers to cut costly deadhead mileage, a special rate reduction can be made instantly and be widely available to shippers that might have freight heading in the same direction.

These sites also can serve as a forum for customers wishing to post comments about a carrier's service, giving prospects a chance to learn from their peers and competitors what a trucking company has to offer.

Trucking companies also are using social media to bolster employee-recruitment efforts. A national less-than-truckload carrier, for example, can use Twitter to send messages in different geographic regions about open positions with the company and attract candidates. This proactive approach not only is proving effective, but generally is much less costly than more traditional print and Web-based recruiting methods.

Social media are fundamentally transforming the way all kinds of trucking businesses communicate with customers, suppliers and employees. They are clearly penetrating the overall business world at tremendous speed. New social media tools are changing the way successful businesses operate because these channels of communication offer the ability to provide what customers and employees need, when they need it.

When the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth Center for Marketing Research conducted its most recent annual study on the Inc. 500's use of social media — the Inc. 500 being the fastest-growing entrepreneurial private companies in the United States — it reported a marked drop in the number of companies that did not use these growing forms of communication. In addition, 56% of respondents reported that social media were "very important" to their business strategy, a number that jumped from 43% in 2009.

Regardless of the business you're in, open, comprehensive forms of effective communication are central to your success. Today, trucking industry businesses are learning how to connect in this new world of ongoing communication and networking. Those businesses understand that social media channels are shaping the way we do business, and their effective use can bring about a competitive advantage, with adoption ensuring not only survival but also success in an increasingly competitive global marketplace.

Social media are more than a business tool. They collectively represent a communications medium that can be used to accomplish company goals. Their value, relative to the development and refinement of technology, is game-changing — and clearly a new frontier worth further and ongoing exploration.

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