Social Media Marketing in Education

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Introduction

This white paper and survey on *Social Media Marketing in Education* is co-sponsored by the Education Division of the Software & Information Industry Association (SIIA), edWeb.net, and MCH Strategic Data.

The paper provides an overview of some of the recent research that has been conducted on how companies that sell to the education market are using social media. The way your organization uses social media will be directly influenced by how your customers and your target audience are using social media.

The survey was conducted in February of 2011. It was conducted via an online survey to SIIA Education Division members, edWeb.net industry contacts, MCH education industry clients, C. Blohm & Associates clients, and the DOLS industry contact list. We received 182 completed surveys. This survey will help you benchmark where you are in developing your social media marketing strategy vs. other companies and organizations in the education industry.

Social Media is Here to Stay

The social media stakes are rising. Since the creation of the first social networking websites — MySpace, Facebook, and LinkedIn — in the early 2000s, more and more people are using this form of online communication to extend their network of friends and colleagues, to create groups for collaboration, to organize events and movements, and to stay informed about any and every topic.

Social media platforms and tools are great for collaboration— whether it's for fun, for work, or for political movements—and they are getting better and better. Social connectivity is becoming a component of every type of communication: email, social networks, microblogging, text messaging, webinars, document sharing, video and music sharing — you name it. Communication is no longer just one-to-one, or one-to-many, but many-to-many.

If you are an education company — or any type of educational organization — social media needs to be part of your marketing and outreach campaigns. This is not a big revelation, but many organizations are still not sure how to begin, how to do this effectively, and how to manage the added workload.

Getting started is critical to keeping up with the latest information and trends in your segment of the industry, for staying ahead of competitors, and for keeping up with the information and knowledge that educators are gaining from participating in online communities with peers.

The organizations that learn how to harness this technology and integrate it into their marketing plans, marketing research, sales efforts, training programs, customer support, and product development will be the leaders of the future.

Social media requires that you give in order to receive. Educators will join your communities because you are providing something of value — not just promotional information. Since every company has unique expertise and assets, the value you provide is unique, and your social media program will be unique. Now is the time to experiment and find the model that works best for your organization.

Many organizations rely on Facebook for their primary social media presence, but there are a growing number of social media options targeted specifically for educators. Educators are joining an expanding list of emerging communities, and it's important to tap into this growing movement of online professional learning communities. In fact, many of these communities provide an unprecedented opportunity for industry executives to participate as colleagues with educators in discussing key issues in education, creating a virtual 24/7 conference.

Social networks and online communities of practice in education are now encouraged by the U.S. Department of Education in the National Education Technology Plan (http://www.ed.gov/technology/netp-2010) and the Connected Online Communities of Practice Project (COCP) (http://edcocp.org).

Social media is not going away: email response rates are declining; direct mail costs are exorbitant; the digital natives are moving into the workforce; competition for scarce dollars is tougher than ever; funding is increasingly tied to complex requirements; teaching and learning are becoming more personalized and more technology-driven; the pace of information and innovation are accelerating.

Creating and managing an effective strategy for building community and engaging with customers takes some time, research, and planning—but it is well worth the effort. You can often repurpose existing content like case studies, white papers, e-newsletter articles, lesson plans, and webinars to deploy via your social channels. You can provide incentives for educators to solicit information and create conversations. Social media is multi-channel marketing in and of itself, and provides variety and flexibility to support a wealth of innovative ideas to help advance your goals and mission.

More and more, educators are going online to participate in communities that help them find information and resources, provide professional development, and give them a place to support each other in coping with the changes and challenges in education. You can help create, sponsor, listen, or join the conversation.

What's the social media profile of your customer?

A critical marketing tool for any organization is creating a customer profile. Understanding the characteristics of your customers creates a profile you can use to extend your marketing and lead generation efforts to reach prospects with a similar profile. The practice of creating a profile can apply to new products or new markets as well. The key concept is to define the attributes and characteristics that define your target audience.

This same concept applies to creating a social media profile of your customer. You want to understand where your target audience is spending time online — and for what purpose. Purpose is key. Educators may use Facebook to connect with high school classmates, but they are less likely to use it for professional collaboration. Twitter is great for pushing out valuable information and for customer service, but less likely to be used for a call-to-action (i.e. purchase).

The use of social media varies widely by age and by market. Your plan will look very different depending on whom you are trying to reach: K-12 teachers and administrators, K-12 parents and students, college students, college faculty and administrators, librarians, and so on.

You can start with current research on how your prospects are using social media to begin to create a basic social media profile for your target market. Here is some research that can help you begin:

- *Social Media and Young Adults* (Feb 2010) from the Pew Internet and American Life Project, a project of the Pew Research Center. For this report and many others on the use of social media in American life, go to: http://www.pewinternet.org.

- *A Survey of K-12 Educators on Social Networking and Content-Sharing Tools* (Sept 2009), co-sponsored by edWeb.net, MMS Education, and MCH Strategic Data, is available under edWeb research reports at www.edweb.net.

- *Social Media in Higher Education* (2008), conducted by Pearson in conjunction with Babson Survey Research Group, and New Marketing Labs, can be downloaded at http://www.slideshare.net/PearsonLearningSolutions/pearson-socialmediasurvey2010

To refine your profile, conduct your own survey. Poll your customers, or your target audience, and find out what tools they are using, how they use them, what information and resources they are looking for. Talk with them at conferences or create an online focus group to probe the tools and the ways your constituents are using social media.

Once you find where your customers are congregating online—and why—look for ways your can contribute to the community that adds value while creating awareness of your products, programs, and services.

Social Media Marketing in Education — Survey Results

This February 2011 online survey, co-sponsored by SIIA, edWeb.net and MCH Strategic Data, was sent to a sampling of education industry executives to understand how companies and organizations in the education industry are using social media.
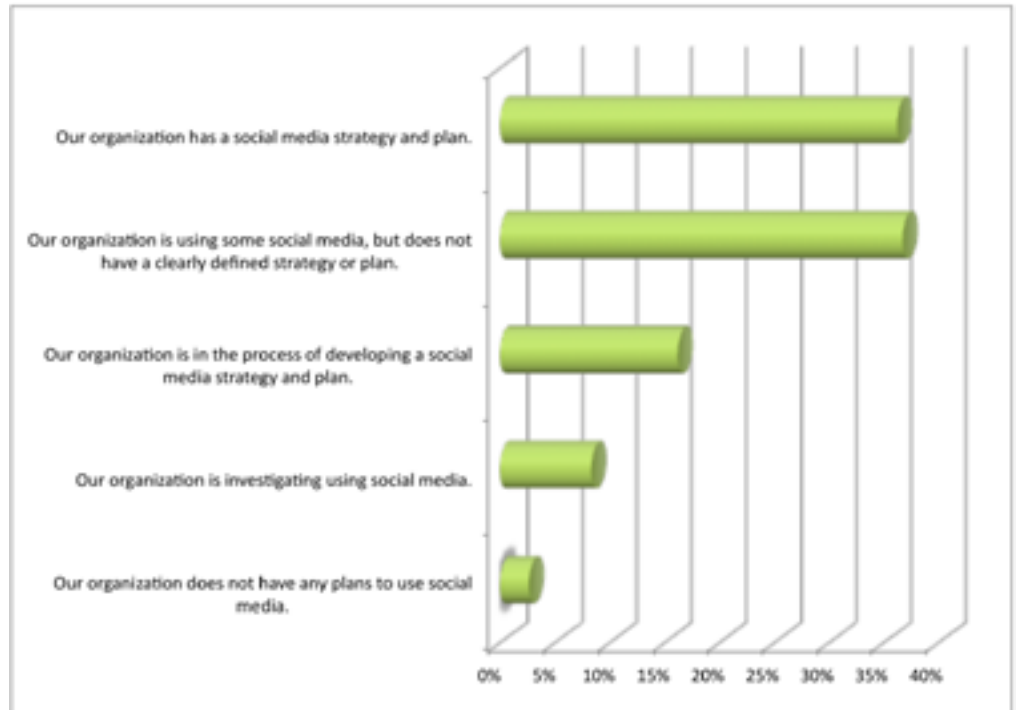
The survey was deployed to SIIA Education Division members, MCH Strategic Data clients, C. Blohm & Associates clients, edWeb.net industry contacts, and the DOLS industry contact list.

We received 182 completed surveys. The breakdown by market segment is as follows. Respondents were able to select more than one category.

- Higher ed publisher: 14
- K-12 publisher: 56
- Library publisher: 4
- Educational technology/digital content publisher: 73
- School supply company: 7
- Trade publication: 5
- Industry association: 12
- Consulting firm: 28
- Marketing/advertising company: 12
- Other: 24

Does your organization currently use social media to connect with your customers and prospects?
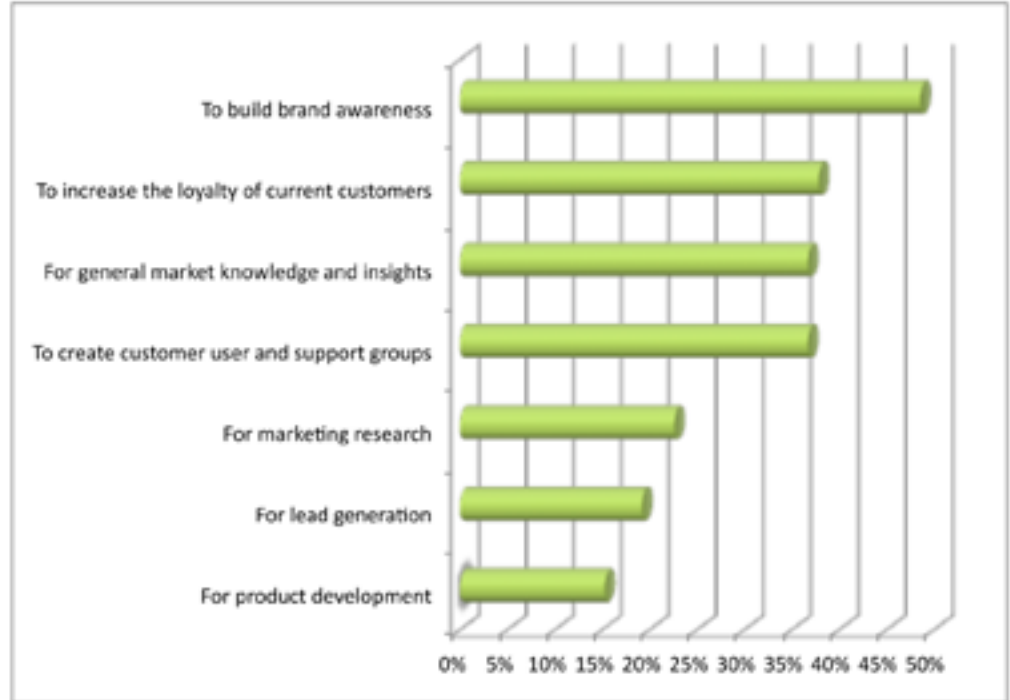

The results for this question indicate that most companies and organizations are at some stage of investigating or developing a strategy and plan for social media. This means that the race is on, which is no surprise.

The companies that already have a strategy and plan are finding out faster what is working, and what isn't working. Successful social media marketing requires lots of experimentation. The more engaged you are, the more you will learn.

Fortunately, social media is inexpensive to experiment with compared to the cost of testing email and direct mail campaigns.

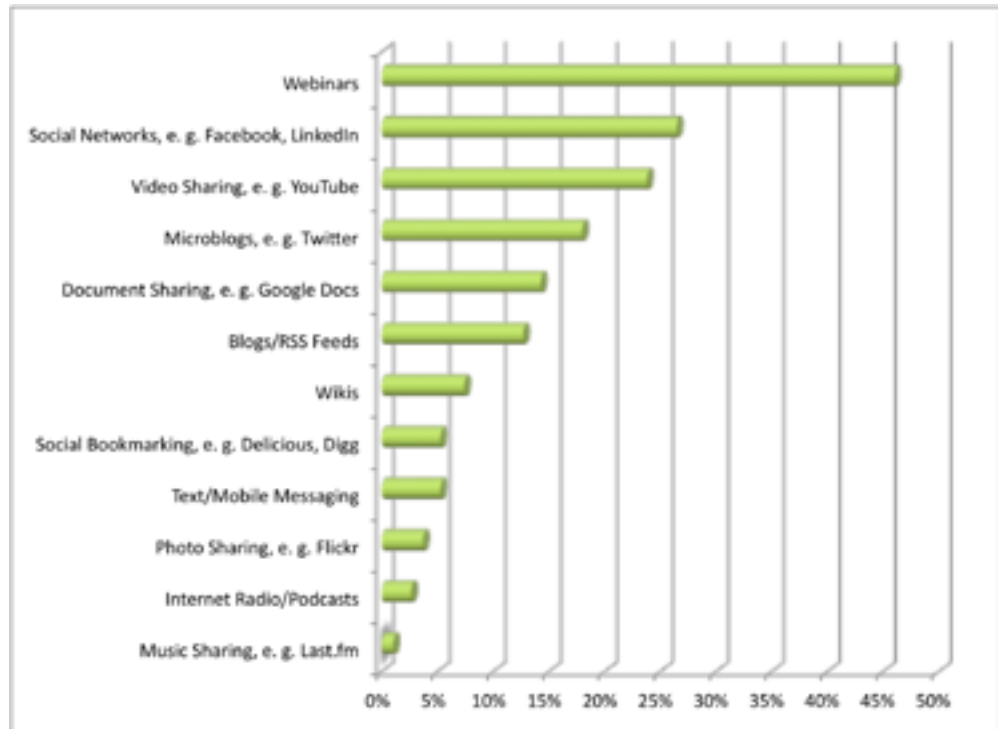## For what purpose are you finding social media to be very effective?

Education companies and organizations are finding social media to be most effective for building brand awareness, for customer-focused communications, and for general marketing knowledge and insights. Companies that understand how this type of deeper communication will build knowledge, insights, and relationships tend to be happier with social media than companies looking to count leads and measure ROI.

Social media is an investment in the long-term growth of your company that can impact every aspect of your organization. Here is a comment from one of the respondents that sums it up well:

> "Rather than generate new leads, it is proving very effective at turning our existing customers into a community that educates us as a company and in turn markets us to their personal networks."
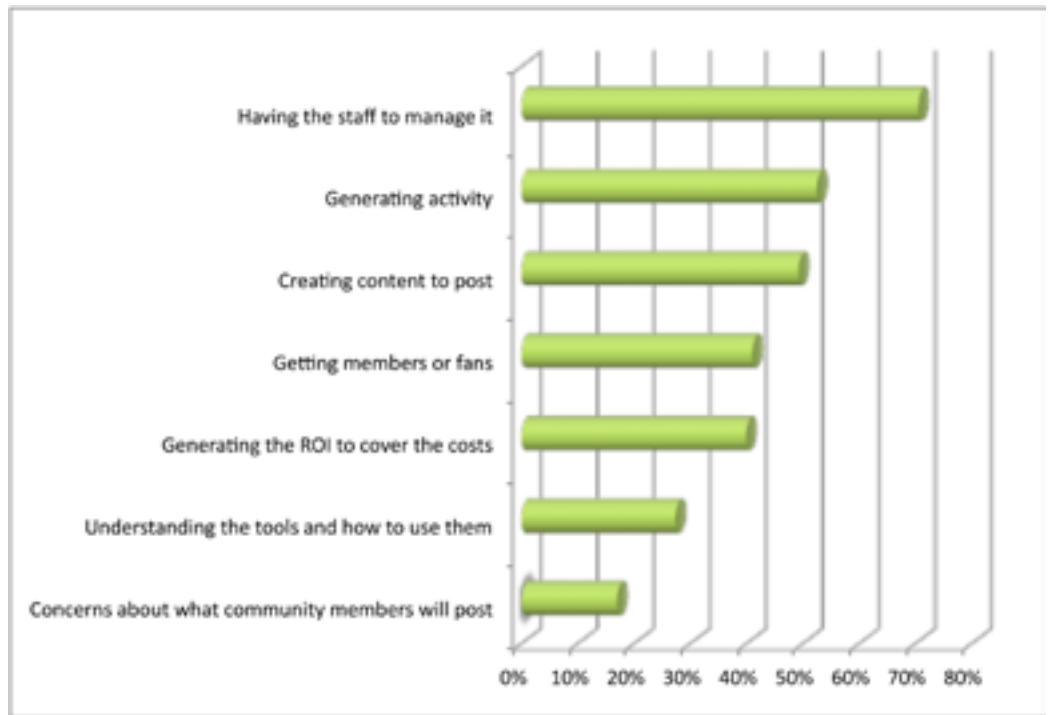
Which of the following CATEGORIES of tools are very effective as part of your marketing program?

This result is fascinating and gets back to the question of how you define "social media." Webinars may not be a category that is top of mind when thinking of social media, but webinar tools now include the ability to incorporate live video and live chat and turn the webinar experience into an event that is truly "social."

Social networks are ranked #2, and they are the best way to create community. Many of the other tools are included or can be integrated into a social networking community. As in multi-channel marketing, the tools are stronger when used in combination than any one tool is used separately.

What are the biggest challenges to using social media?

Most organizations are in the same boat, feeling it is a challenge to have the staff to manage an effective social media program. The challenge of generating activity, the #2 issue, is related to the #3 issue of creating content to post.

Conversations with companies who are having success with social media make it clear that you need to have an organizational structure like a wheel. There needs to be a person who is the "hub" for all of your activity. This person needs to set guidelines, act as a coach, be an internal monitor.

The spokes of the wheel are your social media ambassadors — in all the specialized areas of your organization — who are authorized to engage and post in your online communities. Generating activity is a two-way conversation. You need to cultivate activity internally before you will get activity externally.

Creating content is often easier than it looks. Most companies have e-news-letters, industry reports, proprietary research, survey results, success stories, webinars — all of which can be chunked and repurposed to spark social media engagement.

Creating a roadmap to social media success

We hope this article and our survey results have given you some ideas and benchmarks—and if nothing else, the motivation—to create your own roadmap for social media success. Here are some overall guidelines you can follow, but for each company and organization, your roadmap will be unique.

Getting started with social media…

- Review the available research on how your target audience is using social media.

- Poll your customers and/or your target audience to find out what tools they are using, how they use them, what information and resources they are looking for.

- Look at how other companies/organizations are using the same tools that your customers are using.

- Review your content assets and identify information and resources that your customers and audience would find valuable: authors, experts, webinars, e-newsletters, case studies, research, and industry news and information.

- Tap a member of your organization to be the "hub" for your social media guidelines and activities. This needs to be a person with great communication skills, company knowledge, and the ability to recruit and motivate a team of internal ambassadors.

- Think about how to use a collection of social media tools as part of a multi-channel effort, then link these social media efforts to the full-spectrum of all of your print, digital, and in-person efforts to get the word out in as many of your communication vehicles as possible.

- Measure your success. Go beyond counting leads and measuring ROI. Think about all the ways social media can support your organization then think of ways to measure those results. Take a customer survey as a starting benchmark. Take an internal survey of the team involved in managing your program. Identify new ideas and initiatives that have come from social media input.

Here is a parting quote from one of the survey respondents who summarized the internal vision for their organization.

"Social media gives our company the opportunity to be a part of a community of educators and participate in the conversation. Just like attending a tradeshow or industry event, social media allows us to move beyond time and location to develop meaningful relationships with customers, prospects, and industry experts. I believe it's an invaluable tool for the future, and the education industry MUST embrace it. Social technology isn't going anywhere; the tools may change, but the idea of social networking will continue to evolve to meet the needs of its users. Our organization has the opportunity to engage customers in a unique way and solicit ideas, feedback, criticism, and advocacy on a totally open and accessible set of platforms. In addition, understanding the technology and how it works is critical for the future of our products; they must work and integrate with these platforms. It's critical to our future."

Acknowledgements

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About the Sponsors

The Software & Information Industry Association (SIIA) is the principal trade association for the software and digital content industries. SIIA provides global services in government relations, business development, corporate education, and intellectual property protection to the leading companies that are setting the pace for the digital age. SIIA's Education Division serves and represents more than 180 member companies that provide software, digital content, and other technologies that address educational needs. The Division shapes and supports the industry by providing leadership, advocacy, business development opportunities, and critical market information. SIIA provides a neutral business forum for its members to understand business models, technological advancements, market trends, and best practices. With the leadership of the Division Board and collaborative efforts with educators and other stakeholders, the Division undertakes initiatives to enhance the use of educational technology and the success of SIIA members. For more information, contact Karen Billings, Vice President of the Education Division of SIIA at 202-789-4487, or by email at kbillings@siia.net. Visit the SIIA website at www.siia.net.

edWeb.net is a professional social network for the education community that makes it easy to connect with peers, share information and best practices, spread innovative ideas, and create professional learning communities. The user-friendly interface includes a wide range of Web 2.0 tools that support online collaboration and professional development. edWeb members are developing new models and best practices for integrating social networking into education. edWeb.net is free for all individuals and educational institutions. Sponsorship opportunities are available for other organizations involved in education. edWeb.net was founded in 2008 by Lisa Schmucki, CEO, and is located in Princeton, NJ. For more information, call 800-575-6015 ext 100 or email info@edweb.net.

MCH Strategic Data is a leading source of compiled data on education, health, and government institutions in the United States. MCH is a privately-owned company that has been in the education market for over 80 years. MCH is a strategic partner of edWeb.net and is helping to spread the word about the edWeb to the preK-12 education community. For more information, contact John Hood, president, at 800-776-6373 or by email at johnh@mchdata.com. Visit the MCH Strategic Data website at www.mchdata.com.

Appendix: Participant Comments

Please tell us in your own words what you hope social media might be able to do for your organization.

Note: these comments are unedited

Maintain or increase our loyalty and recognition for our education efforts to transform the K-12 classroom.

Lead generation is important and having a community for teachers to correspond with each other

"Brand Awareness, generate interest in testing product...sales"

Share relevant content and information with our customers. Develop customer intimacy.

Significantly extend our communications with all of our audiences

Generate website traffic and increase general awareness of company and product

We hope social media will elevate awareness of our company and its products. We also hope it will help us build a community of practice that will improve teaching and learning.

product awareness

a forum to share the best practices of product users. a way to launch our products to the broader market - beyond the usual sales calls our reps make. a way to gather information about the products getting the most buzz in the market. a way to gain access to needs of the teaching community.

Keep our members more involved with the Association

provide effective inexpensive marketing

Increase awareness/demand and customer loyalty.

"push out key information to the right people better, faster, cheaper. Take in key information from various people better, faster, cheaper. Build better dialogue paths that assist but don't overwhelm"

better connect us with our audience in real time and then be able to leverage that presence for clients

Raise awareness of our companies value.

"Create strong brand awareness, brand loyalty and a community of customers for new sales and for product input."

We hope to reach our students directly where they already are active.

Synergies for learning

"Further brand recognition, ultimately bringing people in through the front door."

create awarness

Spread the word about what we do. Allow members to express themselves in an open forum

"Present us as a socially aware, modern group; keep us in touch with our customers; allow us to update customers on a daily basis; allow our customers to interact; make us seem more omnipresent and attentive."

Build brand awareness

It's an opportunity to connect. We'd like to connect with our customers and help them connect with each other for professional collaboration to benefit students.

build loyal customer community

Create a community.

Build brand awareness. Establish Brand Position and unique selling proposition.

Increase awareness and serve outreach needs

Increase customer engagement. Start conversations about best practices and energize people using our products.

Help us gain credit for the brands we've built and delivered through our dealer base.

Retain customers

"In a broad sense, to grow business. But in a narrower sense, we feel this will be the new strategy in acquiring and retaining customers and their loyalty to our brand."

"generate leads for enrollment, retention, reduce operational costs, corporate image"

"We expect that social media will become so much a part of the lifestyle of our customers that not being part of it will negatively affect our ability to market, period."

"Build awareness/branding, generate loyalty among existing customers."

"Increase brand awareness, generate new business, build customer loyalty, develop support groups"

Began as a way to stay connected to the members. It has now become an active marketing outlet to announce new resources or general announcements. Also allows to hear directly from the field.

"Be a listening post to gauge market / customer sentiment, trends, needs, etc."

first and foremost is brand awareness

Raise awareness of our education offerings and be knowledgeable about the needs of educators and those in the education community.

Raise awareness; develop brand loyalty

Brand awareness lead generatio n

Build brand awareness and create a loyalty of existing customers and leverage our digital expansion

"better engagement with customers, increased visibility via influencers, ability to increase participation in our own community space, lead generation, customer service improvements"

create brand and product awareness; get feedback from educators

"Increase brand awareness, customers, and sales while providing valuable information to our customers"

Build a community for the teachers who use our software.

Doesn't really drive revenue. May increase brand awareness sliightly.

"Create a community, educate customers about upgrades and new products, help customers use the features of our products, receive feedback from customers."

Have richer conversations with teachers to help us design more effective products & sell them more effectively

Engage our customers/fans to create interest in others that then turns into business.

"product branding, lead generation"

"Extend the brand and make it more top of mind for customers. Create deeper loyalty thru regular, meaningful interaction."

"Rather than generate new leads, it is proving very effective at turning our existing customers into a community that educates us as a company and in turn markets us to their personal networks."

Keep the buzz going about our company with a new generation of clients. Reach out to new clients in new markets. Support existing clients in ways that mirror changing classrooms.

Gain awareness of products and services.

Extend branding and awareness.

Attract younger more tech savy customers with improved communications

Get the info.out that is important to the end user

Greater Product Exposure and Development

"Increase awareness, build better products because we will have the voice of the customer readily available to us."

Make students and teachers aware of the educational opportunities that exist within our organization.

"We want to gain leads from a younger audience, build brand awareness, and ultimately sell more materials."

get more leads and create relationships between school and students.

We hope social media will give us better communication with our customers and enable us to be part of their conversation; we also hope to influence our customer's thinking in ways that will increase our business.

We've struggled to define the end game. We're now working with a firm to align social media to impact on sales pipeline.

"Expand our customer base, increase awareness, provide additional insight into customer needs and response to our services"

It would be terrific to effectively/confidentially generate leads from SM.

Continually engage our customers on a deeper level.

We hope that we will be able to create a community that encourages current customers to voice their opinions about educational while enticing new leads.

"increase awareness and usage of our technology, create a user group forum"

Gain industry insights

(For clients) Create brand awareness and leads by building a community around a product or service.

"Social media gives our company the opportunity to be a part of a community of educators and participate in the conversation. Just like attending a tradeshow or industry event, social media allows us to move beyond time and location to develop meaningful relationships with customers, prospects, and industry experts. I believe it's an invaluable tool for the future, and the education industry MUST embrace it. Social technology isn't going anywhere; the tools may change, but the idea of social networking will continue to evolve to meet the needs of its users. Our organization has the opportunity to engage customers in a unique way and solicit ideas, feedback, criticism, and advocacy on a totally open and accessible set of platforms. In addition, understanding the technology and how it works is critical for the future of our products; they must work and integrate with these platforms. It's critical to our future."

"A content marketing strategy would allow our company to create and participate in conversations with our current and future client-base, generating a more personal connection rather than basing our interactions on interruption-based (or traditional) marketing."

Better connect with users -- to understand how they are using products/and misunderstandings.

Generate eWOM effects for our company.

Brand awareness and customer support.

Create more fan base and to share best practices

"Increase the "push" and "pull" responses from customers and the organization and make the responses more targeted and swift."

Reduce cost of traditional direct marketing by having networked individuals work for us. Bring our company closer to our customers -- reduce the distance.

"Build a devout following, establish our tool as the platform of choice for the special education community"

Create more leads and build our credibility

Build brand and connect to customer voice.

build awareness; help us to connect to prospects; strengthen relationships

Communicate more regularly with customers and share information more quickly. It also allows us to communicate with customers in the ways they are requesting.

build a movement

Create a connections between the eGenio fans and our company

maintain a quality reputation and facilitate the sharing of ideas and information that benefits many

"We have just hired a tech consultant to help us carve out a plan to better understand how social media can extend our market reach, strengthen our customer relations, and enhance our products."

Our goal is to create a community around our products to generate sales.

"Stay connected to customers for feedback, support, needs, concerns, ... And to provide a means for our customers to connect to share commons pains, solutions, best practices, brainstorming,... And to provide a just in time opportunity to train, assist and support customers"

CONNECT WITH CUSTOMERS TO CONTINUALLY IMPROVE PRODUCT AND SERVICES AND PARTNERSHIP

"Raise awareness, develop audience"

I believe that Social Media is changing the way customers find out about products. I would be interested in learning to use social media tools effectively.

"Amplify our voice. Build our thought leadership position, and brand awareness."

Drive brand awareness and credibility. Connect with the market. understand and survey the market. Drive leads.

Exposure and drive the market

"Reach audiences that our traditional print marterials fail to reach; ensure the organization remains relevant, in spite of an older membership that is slower to embrace new tools"

"Bring us closer to our audience, create two-way conversations."

"Get us to connect with a greater number of teachers, in a way that is not top-down, but more democratic and 'horizontal'"

"build business, generate leads, networking stay in touch with customers--provide reason for them to come back to us product development research market research, testing content ideas"

Keeps us relevant and helps us build our brand

"Connect and interact with the educators in this space, while reinforcing and building our product messages with existing and new customers."

"If we had staff and a plan, I think we could generate enough lead gen that we could measure ROI to justify the investment....qualified lead gen, would be the primary goal."

We look to social media to engergize our customers.

1) market research 2) building network and brand 3) lead generation

1. Connect with our current users and support our user community. 2. Position our company as a thought leader in the conversations in the ed tech industry that are going on within social media world.

"With consumers, it promotes brand awareness. With education industry it builds relationship and credibility and occasional lead gen."

Gaining insight from educators for product development and market research.

Increase brand awareness and buzz about our new programs.

"Social media has helped and continues to help each day our editors get in front of our readers who are the District Leaders, Superintendents and Asst. Superintendents."

"Increase awareness, build client loyalty, crush the competition."

We hope to have social media allow us to connect directly with customers and build excitement about our brand.

We hope to use Social Media for customer Service. Creating a network of users will also help in Product Development.

Raise our profile. Interact with our customers. Understand their concerns.

"Create a dialog among my customers to help them overcome obstacles to implementation, share what is working, and share success stories that encourage folks to use the product more."

Competitive edge. We embed social media infrastructure in our products.

"increase awareness of company offerings, bring people to sign up for webinars or pilot offerings, answer questions/concerns raised, share information valued by educators and district leaders, increase market share, increase revenue stream, increase user base, increase brand value"

"Provide consistent interaction with educators, while generating revenue to support it."

"Build Brand, extend our messaging, continue to spread the loyalty and bring in more readers"

"Brand awareness, event marketing, lead generation"

Increase customer communication and encourage users to look to us as their soucre for educational updates and information that is relevant to them

Brand awareness Build/maintain customer loyalty Market research

Bridge the gap between business and consumers. Become closer to our customers and develop relationships.