

On the Road to the 2009 Ed Tech Business Forum: Webcast Series

Webcast on Social Media: Reaching the Connected Customer and End User

Monday, 26 October 2009

Description:

Today's social media technology enables users to form and join communities of common interest to learn and share information. As a prelude to the Social Media seminar at SIIA's upcoming Ed Tech Business Forum, this webcast provided information on different social media technologies and their uses in education. Participants heard how companies can leverage these sites to learn more about their customers including tips and tactics for using social media to build their brand and promote their business to target customers.

Moderator:

Charlene Blohm, President, C. Blohm & Associates, Inc.

Presenters:

- Sandra Fivecoat, Founder and CEO, WeAreTeachers.com, LLC
 - Robert Iskander, Founder and CEO, VIP Tone, Inc.
 - Lisa Schmucki, Founder and CEO, edWeb.net
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Summary:

In an effort to get the conversation started before the Social Media seminar at SIIA's upcoming Ed Tech Business Forum, this webcast sought to inform audience members about different social media technologies and their uses in education and the ed tech marketplace.

Moderator, Charlene Blohm was joined by three knowledgeable presenters who have experienced success in the social media realm. Sandra Fivecoat is the CEO and founder of WeAreTeachers.com, a community built to connect educators and what has become a portal for selling and transferring of teacher-created content. Robert Iskander is the founder and CEO of VIP Tone, Inc and the company's accidental success, WeTheTeachers.com, a content repository for teachers around the globe. The third presenter was Lisa Schmucki, founder and CEO of edWeb.net, a site she created after seeing her daughter's activity on Facebook. edWeb, Lisa said, was her attempt to breakdown the isolation that teachers often experience in the classroom and allow the spread of ideas amongst the education community.

Charlene first asked panelists to describe their own social media networks with information on the frequent visitors, what they are doing, and how each platform is unique compared to the social media realm in general. Teachers are an important contingent of users, however each of the presenters reported a rising user rate by

principals and librarians, a group they said, should not be neglected. Schmucki reported that in the k-12 community, elementary professionals make up the highest percentage of active users on her site edWeb.net.

Social networking is relatively new to the education world and each of these three sites has different goals for the activity of users online. WeTheTeachers gives teachers a community in which they can form partnerships not only with each other but also with companies. WeTheTeachers is doing a lot in the way of education applications that serve the needs of the consumer. Fivecoat and Schmucki say their sites really aim to connect education professionals and offer an open place for the transfer of ideas and content. Fivecoat said it is of utmost importance to give users tools that are purposeful and intentional, rather than flooding the site with unnecessary items.

A common question for those considering social media is: how much time and effort does it take? All three presenters agreed that the benefits of a good social media campaign are worth the time and money spent. Fivecoat considers social media one leg of the three-legged marketing stool. Social media, she said, is a way to add a viral component to your regular marketing. Iskander took it further by commenting that social media is here to stay and those who are not involved are simply missing out. Schmucki hears people contribute a scarcity of time to a lack of social media activity, but said once you get the hang of it, the process is very easy, and addictive. On top of the fun one can have with social media, Schmucki also said it is quite satisfying to hear directly from educators, something Fivecoat also agreed on. Fivecoat reported using client feedback in the creation and alterations of WeAreTeachers.

One of the subjects addressed in the question and answer segment was how to measure your ROI when it comes to social media. Companies must first decide what represents their personal success. This can be raw traffic, or how many visitors the site gets per month, or it could be how much the company is discussed on other social media platforms. There are numerous simple, and often free, tools to track each goal including Google Tracker, which counts visitors, and Tweetdeck, which follows every Twitter message that mentions your company. Fivecoat also suggested Forrester data which gathers information on particular target audiences, and reports how that audience will act in social media. Ultimately, it is your choice what to measure and how to measure your investments.

To conclude the webcast, panelists responded to a question about why educators are such an active social media market. Iskander answered that social media is all about sharing with a 10-1 ratio of active participants (those who share information) and passive participants (those who take). As a community, teachers are very giving and through these social media networks educators can share freely, and with fervor.