

WESTERN REPORT

Social Media in Trucking

BY MICHAEL HOWE

Social media has, until recently, largely been considered a fad of the internet. Times have changed though and more and more individuals, businesses, and organizations are utilizing a variety of social media outlets to deliver their messaging. Interestingly, the trucking industry has a heavy presence on social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, and more. Social media, or Web 2.0, has become just another device in the toolbox for effective communication.

The Manitoba Trucking Association (MTA) is one such organization that relies on the social media community. MTA is a relative newcomer to the social media scene though, having been using it for just under two years now. You can find them on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

Laura LaPalme, Marketing & Business Development Manager for MTA, indicates the Association has found social media to be an effective way to communicate. "We engage with our members and non-members of the MTA, but even those who are not even in the trucking industry leave comments, or "likes," on industry news we post, or they will re-tweet the information," says LaPalme. MTA is cognizant, however, of the need to be cautious about what is posted - just as one would be with any other means of communication. "We are very careful not to post anything that may offend anyone or start a negative discussion, but at the same time we also welcome opinions and feedback, which we always respond to," says LaPalme.

Those concerned about what others might post to their sites shouldn't be too worried, says the MTA. "From time to time

we have had some weird comments or something posted on our Facebook wall in poor taste that we have removed, but so far we have not had to go to the extent of blocking anyone from our sites," explains LaPalme.

Even companies that service the trucking industry are actively working to communicate with the industry via social media. Shell Rotella, for example, launched a Facebook and Twitter page in 2011. The launch was during the Shell Rotella SuperRigs competition, which is the premier truck beauty contest for actively working trucks. This event drew a lot of interest to their social media efforts.

Chris Guerrero, Rotella Brand Marketing Manager, says, "Both Facebook and Twitter are effective ways to reach our customers and to keep in touch with the trucking industry." For Shell Rotella, Facebook is more conversational and allows the brand to interact with truckers. Twitter helps Shell Rotella share news and connects with the industry as a whole. "There, we provide updates about our attendance at trade shows and other industry events or provide links to news on Rotella.com and information about the MyMilesMatter rewards program," says Guerrero.

"Facebook is the primary way we interact with hard working truckers and others interested in the brand," says Guerrero. Information and pictures about the travels of the Shell Rotella Road Show are updated along with other events and trade shows. The primary event for Shell Rotella, which generates the most attention and conversation, is Shell Rotella SuperRigs. "We post news leading up to the event and post galleries of photos each day during SuperRigs," says Guerrero. "The number of likes for the page

increased dramatically leading up to and during the 2012 SuperRigs."

Of course, some commentators and other trucking advocates use social media to get their message out quite effectively. Allen Smith of AskTheTrucker.com has been blogging since 2006, and then in 2010 began using Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn.

"We use Facebook extensively as a way to communicate with others in the industry," says Smith. "We create relationships with people and by doing so express concerns and share messages on a personal level. Relationships promote sharing of ideas and create camaraderie among individuals who would otherwise be strangers." Many times social media is a source of information by others which can easily be shared, creating awareness and sharing knowledge throughout the internet.

Smith finds social media to be very effective, and he states that with emphasis, "The key to using Facebook is to get a message out, wording it so

that others will want to share it; and this is how it will go viral," says Smith. "I see so many people who will have a great point to make or a message that needs to be shared, and they will just post a link. What you want to do is say something about the article/link to create interest enough for others to either comment, "Like" or "Share."

Interestingly, Allen started a convention in the U.S. devoted to social media in 2011 and is holding it again in 2013. "It was a vision I had years ago, to see truck drivers uniting together, being informed and having a voice with one another and the industry," says Smith. "It wasn't until Social Media became popular that the vision was all of a sudden a possibility and then, of course, eventually a reality. Hence, it became the Truck Driver Social Media Convention. The proof of the power of social media is the success of the convention itself."

The 3rd Annual Truck Driver Social Media Convention will be held October 11-13 in Kansas City, Missouri this year. Learn

more at <http://trucking-socialmedia.com/>.

The future of social media appears to be on solid footing, but that does not mean there won't be changes. "Social Media will continue to grow as long as there are people who have: A passionate message, a product, or service for others. It is the quickest and least expensive way to network and connect with a targeted group of individuals," says Smith. "Social Media will continue to grow because of those who have a need to stay connected with one another, and there are millions who fit this - drivers being a large part of this group."

On using social media, there are wide arrays or resources to find tips. The key is to get started.

"Truckers and the industry are becoming very active with social media and it is a great way to have a conversation with them and learn about your customers," says Guerrero. And from LaPalme of MTA, "I suggest if your company or organization is not on with social media yet, do so and do it quickly. I witnessed it these past two days at the career fair. There was not one person that came through that convention that did not have a mobile device. We even had kids come tell us that they follow us on Facebook and reminded us of some of the past posts we had that they enjoyed."

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