

BOOK REVIEW

Social Media for Educators: Strategies and Best Practices

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*Social Media for Educators:
Strategies and Best Practices*
Tanya Joosten
© 2012 by Jossey-Bass
144 pp.
\$30
ISBN: 978-1118118283

“A virtual place where people share; everybody and anybody can share anything anywhere anytime.” This is the definition for social media that author Tanya Joosten chose to highlight in her book, *Social Media for Educators: Strategies and Best Practices*. The definition she chose is appropriate for the topic and captures the primary reason why educators spend countless hours discussing the powerful potential of social media with a mixture of excitement and apprehension. Joosten provides a clear and concise instructional guide that both administrators and professors can utilize to develop policy and pedagogy.

Social media is an area within technology that often creates a great divide within educators. Most of us have heard the horror stories about

inappropriate relationships, identity theft, improper conduct, and controversy that have been conceived through social media. Joosten’s book does an excellent job of breaking down social media to its fundamental roots as a computer mediated communication tool. While people often blame the technology for the behavior, Joosten creates an environment in her text that helps ease the trepidations of any inexperienced social media consumer.

While social media is changing at a rapid pace, many of the fundamentals and creative uses of these technologies shared by Joosten can serve as a reference tool for practitioners for years to come. The text is expertly organized and makes use of tables and graphics that provide step-by-step instruction for innovative methods for implementing social media into higher education instruction. With the technological divide that exists across faculty, Joosten creates an excellent balance to reach a wide audience of users. *Social Media for Educators* offers a good foundation for social media beginners, providing tips for building a social network, developing a social media profile, and how to

leverage university social media accounts with personal ones. Furthermore, Joosten's lessons on self-disclosure and relationship development through social media are relevant for even the most seasoned social media expert.

Joosten provides a level of credibility not only with her research, but her immersion in the field. I found her Chapter 3 on increasing communication and encouraging contact to be most insightful. She has found through surveying her own students that course management systems such as blackboard, and email communication still leaves gaps in the overall classroom discussion. It is her assertion that the massive platforms of Facebook and Twitter provide that missing piece of the communication puzzle, by providing real time updates that can be seen by the entire group. It is through social media, that Joosten has found her classrooms have been connected more closely with both the instructor and their classmates, all while providing enhanced instructor feedback.

Joosten's proven track record of successful use of Twitter and Facebook develops a blueprint for those intimidated by the expansive platforms, which counted over a billion combined users at the time of her publication. An important feature that Joosten spends a great deal of time explaining is the concept of hashtags (#). By placing a hashtag before a word, such as the viral campaign (#edusocmedia) she helped champion at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, an in-

structor is able to filter a conversation geared towards their classroom, while also creating an online marketing in a sense. Joosten explains this section on key symbols in social media flawlessly so that the language can easily be deciphered by beginner users.

An interesting assertion that Joosten makes in her argument for the utilization of social media is that it reduces an instructor's workload. This concept would be surprising to anyone who has taught an online class and found the workload to be increased greatly. Joosten's claim is based on the ability to disseminate video through social media quickly and easily, which reduces the burden on instructors to create their own rich media and find somewhere to store final products. I believe this contention to be true on one hand, but misleading to some extent. While the technology is convenient and effective, it should be noted that any course incorporating social media would need some level of content monitoring from the instructor. The ongoing effort to facilitate communication through social media should be considered a worthy task for an instructor to endure.

As social media becomes part of the fabric of our lives, it is no longer an option to ignore its potential in higher education. Teacher development programs and Centers for Teacher Excellence across the country should not only address best practices, but also consider courses dedicated towards its implementation.