

developed a Social Media Director position in order to have one person manage all of an organization's Web 2.0 activities. But even if you are not in the position to create a new job at your company specifically to manage social media, chances are you already have an employee who is familiar with this type of communication and enjoys being part of it.

No matter who handles social media, it is important for your company to take control of your show's reputation management in this arena – because if you do not, someone outside of your company will undoubtedly do it for you.

"If you do not do it, your membership will. I hear more and more stories of organization members going out and creating 'an unofficial official' Facebook group for an organization. One group went so far as to use the organization's logo and would not let any staff from the actual organization into the group," said Paul Schneider, senior vice president of business development and marketing at Socious. "The reality is if your association does not use social media, your members do. Do you want your name being used in a way that you have absolutely nothing to do with?"

Control of your event's image is only one of the numerous benefits of social media. Other reasons for your event to get plugged into Web 2.0 include:

**Keeping the show's conversation going.** Social media is an excellent way for a show manager to extend the life of an event long after the exhibitors and attendees have packed up and gone home. You can update your audience about what is going on with your show, as well as give exhibitors and attendees a forum where they can connect prior to the next event.

**Greening up the show experience.** As more and more companies work to adopt environmentally conscious practices, social media has become an attractive way to broadcast their messages. Instead

of sending out direct mail campaigns that may end up in the trash unread, social media allows you to regularly stay in front of your audience in a greener way that will also save you money.

**Mobilizing an Internet-based sales force.** When you communicate with your customers through Web sites like Facebook or LinkedIn, you open your event up to people you may never have found otherwise. Your contacts on these sites can also send information about your event to their contacts and so on. This is the beauty of viral marketing – once your message resonates with an audience, it has the potential to spread like wildfire around the Web.

**Personalizing your event.** More formal communication, like a press release, has an air of formality that does not exist with social media. You can loosen your tie, put your feet up, and communicate more like one person to another – rather than like a company to a customer.

"That is one of the beautiful things about social media: It gives your big, faceless, nameless entity a personality and people identify with you on a personal level versus just a business level and that breeds loyalty," said BlogWorld and New Media Expo CEO Rick Calvert.

But social media can only breed this kind of loyalty when it is done right. No matter what kind of social medium you choose, there are certain rules of netiquette to which users are expected to adhere. The following tips can make your experience with social media more effective:

**Feedback is your friend.** People who use social media want to be part of a conversation with you. When users take the time to comment on a blog entry or send a message via Facebook or LinkedIn, they have a high level of interest in your event. If you respond to these messages from your audience, it makes them feel as though their feedback is valued and will further foster their interest and loyalty.