

"Once you put yourself out there on Facebook, Twitter, and all of these other sites, people are going to communicate with you using those tools, so you need to listen and respond," said Calvert. "A lot of people make the mistake of blasting out messages on social media like it is a press release. It is not just about one-way communication anymore – it is about two-way communication and you have to respond to people."

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And this advice does not only apply to the messages that you like. If someone makes a derogatory comment about your show, address it directly – especially if it is posted on your blog. This will show your readers how you handle negative feedback and give you the opportunity to put an end to any rumors in a very public way.

Give your audience something valuable. If you have a blog, do not just add entries for the sake of it because readers will feel like they are being spammed. When you give readers the feeling that you are trying to help them, your blog will become a regular part of their Web surfing. By offering your audience a tip of the day and telling them something that they do not already know, they will feel like you are making a connection with them – instead of just trying to sell them something.

Make a commitment. In order for social media to be effective, you must be committed to it. Posting

something on your blog or Facebook page at least once a week will keep your content fresh and your readers interested.

Fill in the gaps. When you develop a blog for your show, find out what the buzz is in the industry you serve. If there is a topic that no one is talking about, becoming well-versed in that area can attract attention to your blog and generate even more conversation among your colleagues.

"When you are creating a blog, it is like walking into a cocktail party. You want to come in first and get a feel for that party," said Schneider. "What are other people talking about? What communications are already going on? Where can you fit in and what can you add? If you can focus on one specific thing and become an expert in it, your blog will get a lot more traction."

Take it slow and keep it real. When you embark upon your social media efforts, remember that Rome was not built in a day. Start slow with the tools that you feel most at ease with – whether it is a blog, a Facebook page, or a Twitter account – and add tools to your arsenal as your comfort level increases. And do not forget to be yourself. Any form of disingenuousness will stick out like a sore thumb to your audience. Ultimately, you want to use your presence on social media to connect with your customers and have a little fun with the process – just as you do with the trade show itself.

"The goals of social media and the benefits of social media are exactly the same as the goals of trade shows," said Calvert. "It is important that trade show managers understand that social media was tailor-made for trade shows to make them better for their exhibitors and attendees. Show managers should embrace social media and not view it as competition." 