

Getting Started in Social Media

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Engineers can derive professional benefits from Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+, Twitter, and other social media. Here is some practical advice on using these tools effectively, whether you are a veteran or a relative novice.

When you think of social media, do you think of sharing photos on Facebook with your friends, watching a YouTube video, or checking Twitter for breaking news? While these are all enjoyable leisure-time uses for social media, social media can also be useful in your professional life — to help you solve technical problems, advance your career, follow industry developments, or build your reputation as a technical expert.

The simplest way to look at social media is as a collection of tools that allow people to connect, interact, and share with others online, often in real time. Blogs, for example, are commonly used to publish content — articles, photos, video or audio recordings — in a familiar web page format. Facebook, Twitter, Google+, and LinkedIn let you create a user profile, connect with others on the site, and share your content with your connections via short messages and links. Applications such as YouTube allow you to upload and share video content, while Reddit and Digg enable you to submit and vote on news articles.

Engineers responded to a recent AIChE LinkedIn Group discussion and to a questionnaire posted on AIChE's blog, ChEnected.com. This article (the first of a series) incorporates some of their comments and insights.

Connect and join the conversation

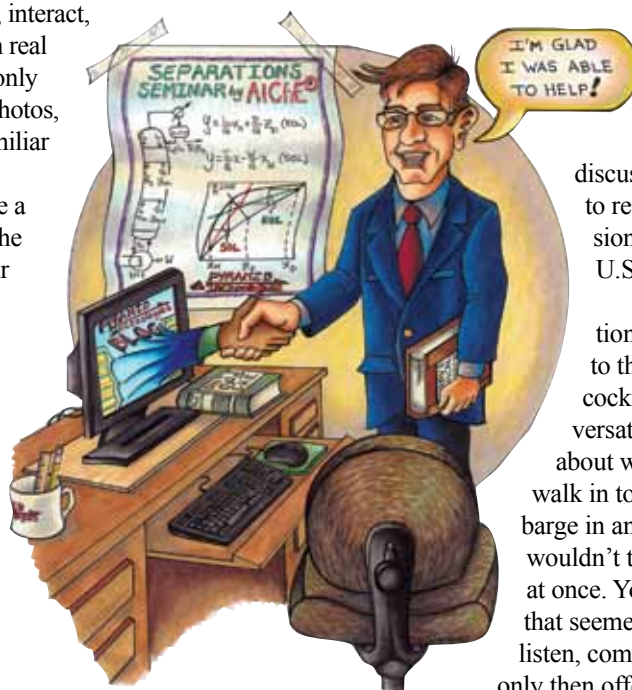
With social media tools such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Google+, and Twitter, you can easily keep track of friends, colleagues, and acquaintances. Who in your network just got promoted? Who is looking for employment? Who has the expertise you need for a new project your company was awarded? As many chemical engineers are discovering, social media puts this information at your fingertips.

"LinkedIn is a great tool to connect with professionals in

our field," says Richard Byrnes, Director of Engineering at King Industries (Norwalk, CT), in the AIChE LinkedIn Group discussion.

"It has also allowed me to reconnect with many professionals from my past with the U.S. Navy and DuPont."

To ensure that your interactions are meaningful, it helps to think of social media as a big cocktail party (1), with many conversations going on at once. Think about what you would do when you walk in to the party. You wouldn't just barge in and start blabbing, and you wouldn't try to join every conversation at once. You would find a conversation that seemed interesting, and you would listen, comment, ask a question — and only then offer your own opinion, story,



Illustrations by Rich Byrnes

Career Catalyst

or useful information. After you have done this a few times, others start to pay attention. People, some of whom you may not have even met yet, will join your conversation.

This process — participating in and initiating meaningful conversations — works well in social media, helping you build relationships and connect with a broad audience in your industry.

Career development and more

Gone are the days when an engineer could work at one company his or her entire career. “Many people will likely change jobs seven to ten times over the course of a 30- to 40-year career,” says Lisa Rangel, Managing Director at job-search consultancy Chameleon Resumes (Rutherford, NJ).

Faced with the prospect of so many job changes, you are wise to take responsibility for your own professional and career development. “Today, taking ownership means having an online presence with a LinkedIn profile or a blog, or on your professional association or alumni network,” Rangel advises. “Not only does this help recruiters find you, it establishes your professional reputation and allows you to be found by publications, project managers, and others who seek your area of expertise.”

AICHE members can network through the Institute’s website, www.aiche.org. AIChE also operates ChEnected.com, an online community where ChemEs can learn new skills, find mentors, engage with other chemical engineers, and increase their exposure to hiring companies. In addition, AIChE has a LinkedIn group that is open to both members and nonmembers.

Participating in social media provides an opportunity for you to present yourself or your firm as a thought-leader. You can do this by creating content that is useful to your social network. For example, you can prepare white papers, case studies, tip sheets, or how-to videos. When you share useful content, it helps you get known as the “go-to” expert.

Engineers have also benefited by tapping into the expertise of their peers on industry forums. These forums, notes Lionel Sheikboudhou, Department Head at the SARA Refinery in Martinique, in the AIChE LinkedIn Group discussion, “are full of experienced, talented engineers who are willing to help their peers. I use two

forums, www.cheresources.com and www.eng-tips.com, when I need feedback or help with specific issues, and to support others’ queries.”

Engage effectively in social media

You don’t need to be on every social networking site. “Decide what you want to accomplish using social media. Then select a service that best suits your purpose, whether it’s social, professional development, promotion, or collaboration,” advises ChEnected.com survey respondent R. Maqbool Qadir, P.E., President of Enpro Solutions (Dublin, CA).

Engineers who answered the ChEnected.com questionnaire say that LinkedIn is their preferred platform for:

- looking for a job or business opportunity
- building a professional reputation
- learning from and collaborating with other professionals
- tracking industry developments.

They use Twitter mostly to follow news stories, and prefer Facebook for connecting with family and friends.

Whatever social media platform you use, keep in mind that most of what you publish becomes public and searchable content, so potential clients and hiring managers will likely find it. “Be careful what information you share. Most sites have really good privacy settings, it’s just important to know how to use them,” says Jared Cocke, a process engineering student in Berlin, Germany. Regardless of a site’s privacy settings, the photos from last Friday’s bar crawl do not belong on any of your social sites.

Before engaging in social media, find out if your employer has a social media policy. Many companies are formulating such guidelines to enable employees to use social media effectively, while

protecting corporate brand reputations and confidential and proprietary information (2).

Meet three social-media-savvy ChemEs

This series of articles will follow three chemical engineers who use a variety of social media tools to accomplish very different goals. (These characters and companies are fictional and are not intended to represent any actual individuals or organizations.)

Marissa, age 27 and a BChE, is a process development engineer at an alternative fuels company. Although she is comfortable with social media, she is careful to keep her personal and professional lives



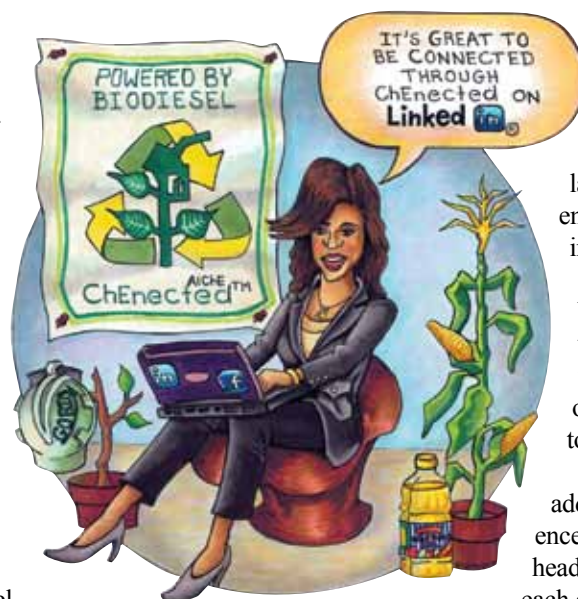
separate. She uses Facebook to keep up with her friends and family. She created a LinkedIn profile for professional purposes and through it has connected with other young engineers as well as potential hiring managers. Marissa follows several alternative fuel companies on LinkedIn and tracks alternative fuel news on Twitter; both of these activities could help her spot job opportunities.

Joel is 49 years old with a doctorate in chemical engineering. He has run his own engineering consulting firm, Pyramid Separation Technologies, for 15 years. Joel set up a Pyramid Technologies blog, and connected it to his LinkedIn and Twitter accounts. His goal is to establish Pyramid as the premier separation technology firm in the Northeast. He knows that in the social media world, you have to give to get, so he also actively participates in several LinkedIn industry groups, where he answers questions and comments on others' discussions.

Parker, MChE, is a 37-year-old business development manager at a specialty chemicals company. His LinkedIn and Twitter profiles give him a professional presence, and he often tweets and posts updates with news about his company. He follows several industry blogs, and also uses Twitter to keep up with industry trends and track the buzz on companies on his "A" list of business prospects. Once a week, he reviews his LinkedIn connections, and sends direct messages — often with a link to an interesting article — to those in his network he hasn't spoken to recently.

Tips for getting started

If you are comfortable using email and the Internet in general, then you should have no problem learning the basics of LinkedIn, Twitter, and other social media platforms. On most sites, setting up an account is free, and online help, FAQs, and/or tutorials are available to make learning them a bit easier. The following tips can help you establish a



professional presence online:

- Sign up at Twitter.com or LinkedIn.com by clicking on “join” or “register” on the site’s landing page. Enter your name and email and then follow the on-screen instructions.
- Set up your profile. In your bio, include key words that describe what you do professionally. Parker, for example, added “business development” and “specialty chemicals” to his LinkedIn and Twitter profiles.
- Upload a professional photo to add credibility to your online presence. Marissa, for example, added a head shot of herself in business attire to each of her profiles.
- On LinkedIn, add connections from among your professional colleagues and acquaintances. Joel had several business cards from a recent industry conference, and he sent LinkedIn invitations to those with whom he wanted to keep in touch.
- On Twitter, search for industry keywords to find relevant people or companies to follow. Marissa searched for “alternative fuels” and selected several companies, individuals, and industry publications to follow that were tweeting about this topic.
- Add a link to your Twitter and LinkedIn profiles to your email signature. (Check first to make sure doing so is not against company policy.)

Looking ahead

The next article in *CEP*’s social media series will discuss how engineers can use LinkedIn to grow their professional networks, build thought-leadership, and find professional and business opportunities. Future articles will explore how engineers can use and benefit from blogging and other social media tools such as the new Google+.

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