

Oh, the horror...

Social media might not be all it's all cracked up to be.

By now you've heard the horror stories about improper use of social media.

John Ausen, superintendent at Hyperion Field Club in Johnston, Iowa, warns, "It's amazing what people will put on social media not realizing that anyone can view it. Don't say anything that you don't want your superior to see."

Sound words of advice.

David Smith, superintendent at Abbey Springs Golf Club in Fontana, Wis., says there is a temptation to play to a specific audience, which may water down the message.

"It takes discipline for me to limit my Twitter account to course-related information because I really have lots of opinions about all kinds of current events and matters not related to the golf course," Smith says. "Using this type of communication for those areas of discussions could be perilous for your career. You must remember your audience. When starting a Twitter account, other superintendents quickly find you and become part of your audience.

"There can be a temptation to play to the superintendent audience," Smith adds. "I feel that there is the potential for problems if you start to Tweet for your superintendent audience. Giving the type of details regarding daily (golf course maintenance practices) may expose you to criticism by members."

Ralph Kepple, superintendent at East Lake Golf Club in Atlanta, Ga., says with Facebook it is easy to get drawn into more social/friendly uses than for business.

"It takes a lot of focus to keep from doing that," Kepple says. "With LinkedIn, as you build-up contacts, you get more and more requests to connect. Sometimes it becomes almost overwhelming how many requests you may receive, and you start to question if it is worth staying involved in LinkedIn. I know of at least one superintendent who recently closed his profile because of how much time it was taking to accept/reject requests to connect."

He advises superintendent to fully think through what they post on a social media site. "Once it is out there you cannot retract it," he says. "Also be careful that you don't become 'addicted' to the social media outlets. Some people end up spending far too much time on social media that could be better spent on other phases of their job or with their family."

Sean Flynn, superintendent at Great River Golf Club in Milford, Conn., is a proponent of blogging as a way to get information out. But, he says, technology can take you only so far in the industry.

"I started using Facebook about three years ago," Flynn says. "I find it somewhat useful. However, to have it help the business of a golf course superintendent you need to invest time

filtering through nonsense to gather information you are looking for. I have found Facebook to be more personal than business-related. Facebook forces us to be more 'in touch' with people we are usually not in contact with, and conversely out of touch with people we are close to."

To be successful at a blog you need to be constantly updating and informing. "Although communication is the most important role in our success as superintendents, blogs take time," he adds.

Flynn prefers to hold informational sessions with members on the first tee on Saturday mornings. It is much more personal, he adds, and gives members the opportunity to ask questions face to face. "Members would rather talk to us about issues or problems on the golf course directly, not have to read them on a blog," he says.

While useful, social media hasn't made a dramatic pact on the way Flynn does his job.

"Social media, as of now, has not helped me do my job better," he says. "We must be on the golf course as much as possible to be successful.

"Sitting behind a computer does not make us better superintendents," Flynn adds. "Continuing education, trade publications, research and networking (to a degree) make us better superintendents." **GCI**



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