

# The Agenda

We ask GCI's 2012 Social Media Award recipients to provide some clarity on whether it's personal, professional or both.

## What makes for a successful social media strategy?

### Stay connected



#### Darren Davis

The Kaminski Award for Outstanding Social Media Leadership  
Superintendent  
Olde Florida Golf Club  
Naples, Fla.

### Information center



#### Chris Tritabaugh

Best of the Blogs  
Superintendent  
Northland Country Club  
Duluth, Minn.

“Social networking is not a fad; it’s a way of communicating that’s here to stay. I feel I’m embracing technology that younger generations have grown up with and accepted as a normal and customary way to communicate. It’s the way of the future, and I certainly want to be ahead of that curve.

“One of the things I love about our industry is that even though we compete for members and play, as superintendents, we’re always there to help each other. One thing I feel that has made me more successful in life than I would have been is my network of friends. I’ve worked for 20 years to develop that network and communicate with it in many ways, and social media has allowed me to expand my network not only to the people already in it but people I haven’t met personally yet. I’ve embraced all the social media outlets out there, and each has a different group with different personalities and I enjoy them all.

“I have a bad habit of my living my life through my work, so my social networking is geared more toward my peers: superintendents and turfgrass professionals. But I do show a little of my personal side through social networking, too. Some of our members have embraced social media, in particular “liking” my old Florida Facebook page, so they see my postings and it’s a great to communicate with them, too.

“In many industries, being successful is often a function of who you know and how connected you are. I pride myself on that. Having met so many people by getting out there at chapter meetings or being online certainly is good. It’s a good thing when people are talking about you, and it never hurts to be seen and visible.”

“The main goal of my blog is to provide a source of information for the members, and so I write it with them in mind. But at the same time, I think it has the secondary purpose of making myself more visible within the industry. That wasn’t my original intent, but I would be lying if I said it wasn’t a huge advantage. But the primary purpose is to keep our membership up to date and educate them on what we’re doing.

“We’ve done some different things in my five years at the golf course, and, as a result of the blog, they were more well-received and well-understood by our membership and therefore able to be implemented. For example, we really made a push to increase bentgrass populations two years ago, and I think we got a little too aggressive. As a result, we had some dead grass on the greens. I was very forward in telling the members what was happening via my blog and posting pictures. I told them we were trying to figure out the best way to do this because we knew we could provide them with a better product at a better price, but we might make some mistakes along the way. As a whole, members got it, and the blog helped them.

“I write my blog as if every single member is reading it every day. The reason is because I feel that we don’t have to have everybody reading it, but if a certain percentage are, it will help keep the rest of the membership updated and informed. If one out of the four people in a foursome is an avid or regular reader of my blog, then I feel it’s doing its job.

Even though my blog was intended for members, the majority of the audience reading it are my peers. So I do try to include stuff for them, but I try not to write over the heads of those who aren’t turf people.

“I’m kind of on the edge of that generation of people who sort of use their computer but it’s not their life. I immediately saw the benefit the blog could have and didn’t fear it whatsoever. More and more, I see people realizing the benefits and advantages it could have.”

## Educational tool



**Steve Cook, CGCS, MG**  
Best of the Blogs  
Oakland Hills Country Club  
Bloomfield Hills, Mich.

## Entrepreneurship



**Bill Brown, CGCS**  
Best of the Blogs  
Hartefield National Golf Club  
Avondale, Pa.

**I** started my blog specifically to reach more members, but since then it has morphed into more than that. It has become an education for me, too, because when I post something about agronomy, it actually causes me to pull out the books and investigate to make sure I get it right. So it takes me back to Agronomy 101 and reminds me of the basics.

“Most of what I post, however, is for the members: what’s happening on the golf course, whether it’s hot-button issues or that we’re aerifying or whatever. My goal was to reach 50 to 100 members, and right now I probably have 50, with 25 who are pretty religious about reading my blog on a regular basis. But the good news is that two of those 25 are board members, and one is a greens committee member, so when another member asks them something, they’ll say go look at the blog. Or they’ll be armed with the information to answer their questions.

“Overall, it has been a big positive for me. I don’t want to be 60 years old and have the members say this guy isn’t up to speed. I don’t want to be one of those people who is 52 and acts like they’re 70. This dawned on me several years ago when I was trying to get a hold of my greens committee chairman, who is 10 years younger than me, by phone. He wouldn’t return my calls or e-mails, but he started texting me. I thought, well, if my greens committee chairman prefers to communicate by text, then I should be doing it, too. When I started my job at Oak Hill, I probably went through 10 phone messages a day. Now, if I get 10 a week, that would be a lot. About 90 percent of my communication with members happens at either the first tee, the pro shop or the men’s grill, and that will always be the case. But my blog is just an add-on for those younger members who want that style of communication.

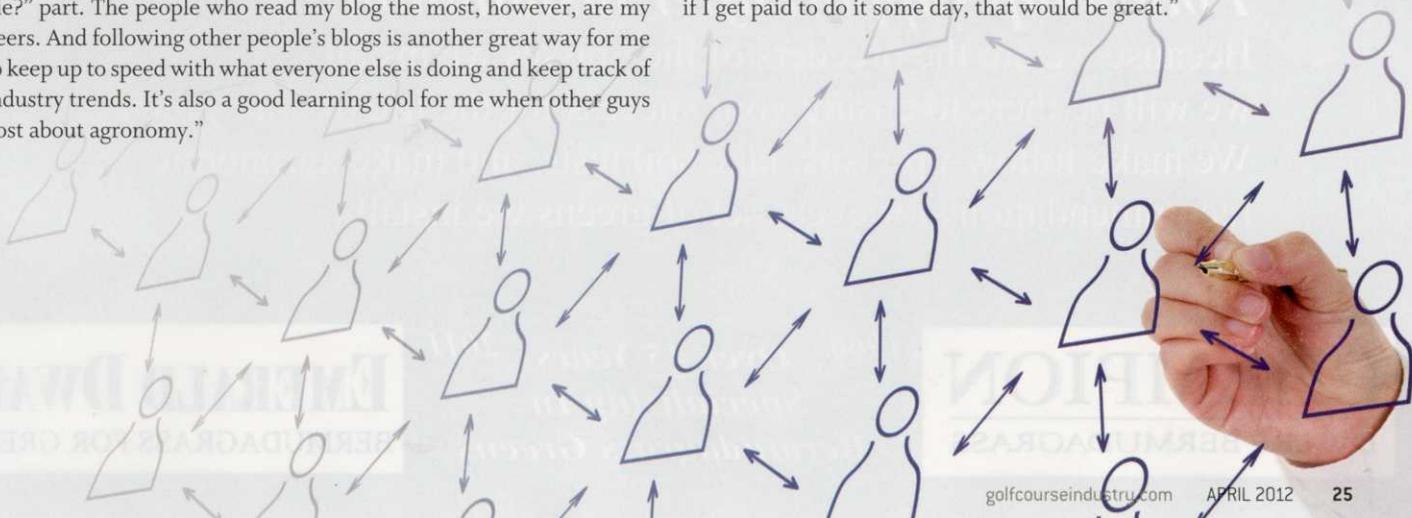
“The members really like my blog. Every once in awhile, someone will say, “I saw it on your blog!” But they really like the “Where’s Sadie?” part. The people who read my blog the most, however, are my peers. And following other people’s blogs is another great way for me to keep up to speed with what everyone else is doing and keep track of industry trends. It’s also a good learning tool for me when other guys post about agronomy.”

**M**y goal with social media and technology is definitely a professional one. I started my own business, iTurf Apps, realizing there was a void in the industry and the interest in technology was overwhelming. I’ve always said if I could marry my love of turf with technology, I would have the perfect job. And I’m hoping it goes in that direction.

“I started my blog in 2009, recognizing that the industry needed a go-to technology person. So I wrote about how to best utilize technology in the industry, and so far a lot of the content has been about iPhones and iPads and using those apps and technologies on the golf course. People’s excitement really started picking up in 2011 right after GIS. I got slammed with people asking how do I set up my iPhone, so I started writing more about that in my blog. After GIS this year, it was even more overwhelming. I was up every night till 11:30 p.m. answering emails, Tweets and phone calls. The blog and technology consulting has almost become a second job at this point. I’ve become a conduit to help people build blogs and websites and integrate mobile technology into their businesses.

“The neatest part was that a superintendent from Oregon called me recently to ask how he could stream his son’s baseball games to his parents live. I set him up on how to do that, and I thought that was really awesome.

“iTurf apps has gone professional now, and I was recently picked to redo one of the GCSAA affiliate chapter’s websites, which will relaunch shortly. I have a whole list of services we’re going to start offering, and the best part of iTurf Apps is it doesn’t cost a lot. Technology doesn’t need to cost a fortune anymore. And now I’m branching into doing demos of Rainbird’s MI controller and ISS soil monitoring system. My ultimate goal is to make iTurf Apps the destination for people who want to know about Toro, Rainbird, Jacobsen or fertilizer technologies. And if I get paid to do it some day, that would be great.”





## Just because it's fun

### Greg Shaffer

Innovative Use of Twitter  
Superintendent  
Elcona Country Club  
Briston, Ind.

“I started off using Twitter about a year and a half ago to interact with fellow superintendents and build a network where we could have quick-hit question and answer sessions on turf diseases, topdressing strategies and other topics. Then, throughout the course of the summer when everyone was struggling with the heat and humidity and everyone’s moods were down, it kind of took a little bit of a turn. I thought, hey, maybe we can not only use social media to build relationships but have a little fun by throwing some humor in there and putting some smiles on people’s faces. It evolved into a thing of its own with this group, and it seems to be getting larger and larger. Not only do we banter back and forth about what’s going on around the golf courses, but we beat the snot out of each other, too, just because it’s fun.

“In the winter, when nobody really has a lot going on, it’s geared more to the personal side. But then come spring it’s boom, like a light switch, everyone is asking, hey, is your course open? What applications are you putting out? What are you seeing? But still we manage to have fun with it. I’ve met a number of these guys I’ve built relationships with at GIS or at a seminar somewhere, and it feels like you already know them.

“Twitter has been an incredible tool to get to know people, 140 characters at a time and then also when you meet them face-to-face. A separate account I just opened up is geared strictly to members. It makes it that much easier to tell them, hey, we have a frost delay today so the first tee time will be 9 a.m., or we’re aerifying some tees or fertilizing roughs today. It serves as a daily update on stuff that’s happening that’s atypical from a normal day.”



## The snowball effect

### David Phipps

Innovative Use of Twitter  
Superintendent  
Stone Creek Golf Club  
Oregon City, Ore.

“I started Tweeting as a way to promote my blog. I use Twitterfeed as a link to my blog post, so when I make a post it automatically goes out to the Twitter world. It’s a great way for people to see what I’m writing in my blog on a daily basis. I started writing my blog as a weekly report to my stakeholders. Originally, I was writing a Word document and sending it to them every week. Then, in 2009, I saw someone writing a blog and thought that would be a great way to do this weekly report. Now, every time I post it goes directly to their inboxes. If I didn’t do this, they wouldn’t know what I do on a daily basis. Then more and more people began reading my blog, and not just people from my golf course but from all over the country. I’m seeing that they’re really interested in what I’m writing, and they also enjoy seeing what kind of photos I’m putting on there weekly. It’s just a great way to share what I do.

“My pageviews and hits have greatly increased because of Twitter. My blog post also goes to Facebook now. I joined Facebook in 2007 as a way to find a friend of mine in Finland who had lived with me as an exchange student during my junior year in high school. Then I started getting friend requests from old high-school buddies and things snowballed. Now, it’s 50-50 work-related and friend-related. Social networking is not a full-time job, but once in awhile I’ll want to say something and I’ll put it out there if I think people can benefit from it.

“Social networking has also been a great way for me to network with my peers. This is a whole new arena that has come up in the last five years that we never had before, and now guys are talking about what they’re doing and sharing ideas. I’ve gotten to know guys that I might not have otherwise, and now I recognize them when I see them at shows. It’s kind of cool.”



## 360-degree strategy

### Justin Ruiz, CGCS, MG

Excellence in Video  
Indian Summer Golf & Country Club  
Olympia, Wash.

“My biggest objective in using social media is to communicate with members. I feel like even on my blog, photos and video can say so much more than just a written explanation of what’s going on with the golf course. You can tell them that you’re doing a project on the No. 5 hole, but show them a photo and they understand it better. If you show them a video of the project actually happening or the piece of machinery actually doing the work, it explains it in more detail so people can understand what it looks like when we’re aerifying greens. When they actually see that machine going across the green and punching holes, it kind of gives them a third dimension.

“It seems like the videos and photos get commented on more than what I write. They catch members’ attention more. The way people are these days, it seems like they want instant information on the go rather than sitting down to read something. They can look at a photo and quickly get the gist of what’s going on out there.

“I also have the professional goal of networking. It seems like making relationships with other superintendents through blogging, Twitter and Google+ are valuable when dealing with certain issues on the golf course. You send out a Tweet on an issue and, nine times out of 10, someone Tweets back and says, hey, this is what I did to solve that issue. Plus, just seeing how other people do things by reading the blogs can really give you some great ideas. On one blog, I read how they put a wetting agent pellet inside a sprinkler head in an area that was dry, and it was just a unique idea I had never thought of. Hopefully, the things I have on my blog or my Tweets will also give someone a little nugget of information they can use.”