



Tweets, Texts and Social Media!

By **David Brandenburg**, Golf Course Manager, Rolling Meadows Golf Course

As turf managers we are skilled and educated in the latest technology regarding agronomic practices, mowing equipment and plant protectants. Considering our busy jobs as managers of people and properties along with family and recreational activities we can sometimes lose touch with other industries when they do not directly affect our jobs or personal lives.

By now most of us can surf the web, read our e-mails and put together a professional looking budget spreadsheet in excel. Many of us are able to use our desktops and handheld PDA's to operate our irrigation systems and inventory programs. While we can do many things some of us are falling behind in the electronic age and the growing popularity of texting and social media.

The technology of communication is changing rapidly as the power of a desktop computer can now

be found on cell phones and instant communication is becoming the desire of all age groups. As turf managers we may be able to avoid these changes for the short term but most of us will need to adapt to the new ways to communicate with our families, employees and customers.

Texting, Facebook, MySpace and Twitter have replaced letters, telephone calls and even e-mails as the preferred way to communicate. E-mails are out? Believe it or not for people 25 and under e-mails are the old way and rarely used. Shorter bursts of information from cell phone texts or tweets and FaceBook posts that can show up on in-boxes or cell phones are the new way young adults want and expect their information to come. We can fight the change if we want, but we will give up communicating to a large segment

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of the population if we do. 96% of the Y Generation (generally born between 1977 and 1990) use social networks as their main method of communication.

Businesses are also adapting to the new communication methods and are joining the social media world. 80% of companies have used a site called LinkedIn to find or research potential employees. If you not there you may be left behind. Advertising in the new world of social media is changing as 70% of 18 to 35 year olds have watched TV on the internet, and 33% of all age groups TIVO or DVR shows to avoid the commercials. Businesses need to find new ways to reach their customers as traditional TV, radio and newspaper ads are becoming ineffective.

These new items can be overwhelming and seem unnecessary but if we want to communicate with our family and professional contacts we will need to learn the new lingo and methods. It is not easy to teach old dogs new tricks, however most social media products are easy to learn, which helps to explain their popularity. Of course having kids or grandkids to show you the way and force you to participate makes it easier to learn.

Cell phone texting is an easy way to communicate with a cell phone keyboard by typing short messages you can send around the world silently and quickly. Just a few years ago we did not allow our grounds employees to use their cell phones at work because of the interruption to players and productivity. In the past year texting has become our prime mode of communication after the crew has left the morning meeting. The crew will text managers to ask questions about their current or next job and to report unusual activities. The managers text the employees to convey changes in duties or to alert them of special instructions. It saves the time of shutting down noisy equipment to talk on walkie talkies or the time to drive in from across the 270 acre golf course to get an answer. For our maintenance operation, allowing cell phone texting while working has increased crew efficiency and accuracy.

Depending on your provider and cell phone plan, texting can be cost effective. For example I pay \$5 per month for an unlimited number of texts. As a warning to your checkbook; without an unlimited plan kids and adults can quickly run up a expensive texting bill when they lose track of the number of texts they send per month at .10 or .15 per text.

The language of text can be a challenge for adults as we try to learn the text abbreviations to communicate without typing in entire words. Most of the abbreviations are common sense but I am sure William Webster is rolling over in his grave as spelling and grammar have gone out the window in the name of efficiency.

The business world is embracing the low cost text technology and users or customers can sign up to receive text news alerts (local and national), sports scores, product information and even tee time specials. I receive

a text after every Brewer and Cubs baseball game along with breaking area news alerts and industry news.

Facebook is the fastest growing social media today with 300 million active users who share 2 billion photos and 14 million videos each month. Facebook is not just for kids as the fastest growing group of users is women 55 to 65 years old. Facebook is a communication tool and a way to announce to your friends, family or clients what is going on in your world. I would explain it as your own little website with the ability to post your history, beliefs, activities and photos. Over 285 million pieces of information are shared on Facebook every day.

Users are able to post the latest "news" or activity in their life in short statements that can include tags to pictures or websites. For an individual a typical post would include what they are doing that day, or what they have done, while a business would post news, new products or specials in order to attract business. A golf course main-



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tenance operation would be able to have a free Facebook page where members could access or be sent updates on course conditions and projects. The ability to post pictures quickly allows turf managers to show and tell the members what is going on.

On Facebook, individuals have friends that require mutual agreement to participate in information sharing while businesses and celebrities have fans that do not require mutual agreement in order to participate. If I post a message on my page it shows up on all my friends homepages and they can comment on it and vice-versa. Fans on the other hand receive posts from the business or individual they are a fan of and although they can post a comment back there is usually less interaction.

For our golf course we have pictures and basic information on our Facebook home page while we will send out periodic event announcements, sale information or just a reminder of great fall weather to our "fans".

Twitter is another communication tool for individuals or businesses to let others what is going on. On my twitter account I may "tweet" "I am going to the beach with the family today." Anyone can sign up to follow my account and receive my message on their cell phone as a text, in e-mail format or on their twitter account or all three venues. Facebook friends have to be approved by each party while Twitter accounts can be followed by anyone. Facebook allows interactive comments back and forth while Twitter is more of a single statement with no replies.

Our golf course uses Twitter to announce news, sales, or tee time specials to our fans.

LinkedIn is an online networking site for professionals to meet others with similar interests or business needs. I describe it as an online networking tool with similar


results to walking the GCSAA show floor and handing out business cards. Users post their work and education history and "link up" with other professionals. Others find you by your industry; place of education or employment and by your name. Similar to facebook everyone can see some of your information while users approve each other for full disclosure of information.

Although LinkedIn can be thought of as a job finding media it is also a connections media allowing you to find others in your industry and others to find you. It is truly an online rolodex of professional contacts.

A simple Google search of social media will provide you with a multitude of options for getting your information out there to share with family, friends, colleagues, employers and customers. Everything from YouTube for posting videos to Flickr for posting pictures is available to us and the list grows every day.

Where you start really depends on your goals and who you want to communicate with. Just remember any comment or picture that hits the internet cannot be recalled. Once you hit send or post that item is on the world wide web forever and could come back to haunt you if the wrong person finds it.

As professionals I would suggest keeping your personal accounts separate from your professional accounts. Two Facebook pages, one for your family and friends and the other for your maintenance department would allow you to have a life and a career.

Take some time this winter to see what is out there, or better yet ask your kids and grandkids. You may think you don't need to adapt to the new communication methods, but the rest of the world is changing so if you want to keep up your better get on the tidal wave and enjoy the ride! 



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