The mainstream adoption of social networking has had a profound impact on radio, but while some stations and jocks leveraging social tools to build and engage an audience, others have wasted their time and money by jumping into social networking with little or no strategic planning.

Facebook and Twitter are two of the largest social networks, and unsurprisingly they are the top choices for stations and jocks alike when creating social properties, with 96 percent of news rooms utilizing Twitter feeds and over 80 percent of programmers using some form of Facebook to employ communications. It is important to consider both when determining how to reach a target market and retain them as fans or followers. Facebook and Twitter offer their own unique sets of features, but the best way to build a social presence is to make them work together and get the best of both worlds.

Twitter, although not nearly as ubiquitous as Facebook, has become a popular tool for traditional media outlets of all shapes and sizes to communicate and interact with their market. Many of the media personalities on Twitter are directly tied to their employers, and operate under company policies that pertain specifically to their use of social media. It is certainly tricky to attempt to impose regulations as the use of social tools continues to evolve so quickly, but in order for a station or any other media outlet to get the most out of social networking there must be enforceable policies in place and they need to be under constant review to avoid becoming outdated. A simple policy implemented station wide is essential to the success of social media, with sites like policytool.net being valuable to creating a policy with little hassle (and for free).

Most stations tweet multiple times a day using relevant content such as breaking news, in-studio happenings, promotions and contests. Without driving engagement, however, all it amounts to is “noise” that is being blasted out to a semi-interested community at best. Engaging followers through conversation builds trust between the listener and the jock or station.

For jocks, tweets should be more personal even if they are covering similar content to the station. Mixing in some non-work-related posts can help to differentiate a jock’s profile from the station they represent and establish a more individual personality that effectively expands the station’s social reach. Tweeting a funny joke, using “lists” or a running story are just some examples – the trick is keeping them under 140 characters! Followers often “re-tweet” things that resonate with them, exposing the jock or station’s tweet to an even wider potential fan base. #hashtags are critical, as well as external links.

Lastly, many people are unaware of just how powerful Twitter’s built-in search function is. A simple search on a keyword that pertains to a jock and/or station can provide some very beneficial (and timely) information. Searching trending topics, what people are listening to and what people are talking about can truly give stations and jocks the knowledge they need to make posts that are relevant and to interact with their followers in a way that is meaningful and informed. Twitter should not just be reactionary, but can be a great way to generate ideas for on-air content as well as off-air communications.

Recent social trends have essentially spawned the philosophy that if you have a business, you should have a Facebook page which the same can said about a station or a jock. It is recommended that jocks use Public Profiles (FanPages) over Personal Profiles, as they are limited to 5000 friends and have a lot less functionality. Page owners can post status updates, photos, videos, links, events, etc., which will then come up on a number of News Feeds of Facebook users that already “like” the page. When a user
likes, comments on, or shares a post the action will show up on some of the user’s friends’ News Feeds (even if they aren’t a fan of that particular Public Profile). This functions as a credible recommendation by the user to their friends, which significantly adds to the strength and perceived legitimacy of the message. However, Facebook’s latest adjustments to FanPages (which reduces the amount of updates that actually reach a personal of News Feeds), reminds stations that they must be on-top of changes in social media policy, and as a result a single “guru” should be established to take the lead in social media development and management/maintenance from support sites like mashables.com.

Unlike Twitter, where posting multiple times a day is generally accepted, Facebook is most effective when the focus of the page is on building brand loyalty rather than acting as a news outlet. Posting strategically, rather than just for the sake of posting, can make all the difference when attempting to build and maintain an audience. According to a study conducted in 2011, it is optimal to make Facebook posts 80 characters or less, every 18 hours or so in order to get maximum engagement. It is recommended that jocks do not post about upcoming artists or songs to be aired over the next hour (or during the shift), unless it is specifically related to a new premier or special event.

The use of Facebook Applications has proven to be another successful way to drive engagement and exposure. There are many third-party apps available that allow for varying levels of customization by the administrator, and fully customized apps can also be developed to achieve almost any purpose as long as Facebook’s Promotional Guidelines and Platform Policies are adhered to. For stations and jocks, apps can be extremely helpful for replacing the antiquated method of using listener call-ins to enter contests and make song requests while at the same time collecting more useful data about listeners. There is lots of room to get creative with apps – no need to stick to the status quo, just be very mindful not to abuse the relationships that are being

A website screen capture from a socially-enabled radio station website typifies some of the online features used to engage listeners: customized music playlists; social network connectivity and sharing tools; even geo-located relevant ad placement.
Lastly, Facebook's new Timeline for pages (officially launched across the site on March 30, 2012) provides several new tools to improve page moderation, organization and management. The new layout mimics the Timeline for Personal Profiles that has been rolling out since late 2011, but the new functionality for Public Profiles is a much larger factor. Fans can now message page admins directly and receive a private response, and fan posts can be screened before publishing – two features that certainly help mitigate negative or abusive engagement.

In terms of organization, admins can now “pin” important posts to the top of the page for a week at a time to make sure all visitors are exposed to a particular campaign or initiative. The new Admin Panel aggregates all of a page's activity together in one view that only admins can see, making management easier and more efficient. Although Timeline for pages was launched with very little advance notice, it is important for any jock or station to be aware of changes in the networks that are being leveraged and to adapt as quickly as possible to avoid being left behind by more forward-thinking competition.

When building a social strategy for a station or a jock, both of these major networks should be considered as part of the bigger picture. Twitter and Facebook have individual properties that can be utilized in different ways to help promote your message, but the best way to build an online presence is to leverage the best aspects of both by making them work together.

There are several ways to achieve this.

Many applications exist that help share tweets/status updates between both platforms, keeping both fans and followers up-to-date through whichever platform they prefer and efficiently maintaining consistency for a brand's messaging across its social properties. It is recommended that stations and jocks push Facebook posts to Twitter as opposed to the other way around – Facebook posts can be longer and they can have media embedded within them (posts longer than 140 characters will automatically generate a short link allowing someone on Twitter to surf to the full post) If the decision is to link the platforms together. Also, tweets can only be pushed to a Personal Profile on Facebook, not to a Public Profile, and as mentioned above it is not recommended that stations or jocks use Personal Profiles over Public Profiles as they are too limiting. Another thing to consider is that it is not necessarily detrimental to create content or promotions that specific to only one of the two networks; both can and should be used to drive awareness for each other, but using the available functionality to its fullest sometimes means containing an initiative to only one of the networks.

Furthermore, the terms of use for both networks differ quite significantly from each other, which can be an advantage to the marketer that fully understands what is and is not allowed on each and where the rules overlap.

Social networks are built to spread engagement virally, so remember first and foremost to always focus on eliciting responses from fans/followers and providing content that users will naturally want to share with their friends, and not to attempt to monetize the station's social platforms.

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