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Social Media & the Supply Chain

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A survey conducted by Kemp Goldberg Partners and IDG Research Services in late 2011 reflects that supply chain professionals are resistant to participating in social media. The survey reveals that 60 percent supply chain professionals, as of late 2011, were not using social media sites/services at all, and that 26 percent of the same respondents didn't see the benefit of leveraging social media.

Why should supply chain professionals reconsider the value of social media? If you think about social media objectively rather than dismiss it as something that really doesn't apply to your business, sector, or company division, you'll probably come up with some compelling answers.

Social media makes you more visible, period. It's also an opportunity to market what it is you have to offer to everyone from suppliers and customers to followers, fans, and anyone else who finds your enterprise of interest.

Social media allows you to interact easily with your audience. It also gives you an opportunity to convey your integrity, prove your responsiveness, and show that you care about your products and services and the people who use them. It helps to legitimize your company or division. No matter who you are or what you do, chances are you can use social media to confirm the marketing claims you make and provide prospective customers, partners, and other interested parties with rapid responses to questions and concerns.

Another reason to reconsider engaging in social media is that by not engaging in it, you could not only be missing out on branding and marketing opportunities, but on direct revenue.

Not all prospects want to communicate with you through your company's website or by picking up the phone and calling. Ask yourself: What percentage of prospects who can't find the information they want on my website are simply searching for another company that can answer their questions more conveniently?

Social media gives people an easy, informal way to reach you. A prospect that doesn't want to hunt around your website for answers or call your company and spend a considerable amount of time trying to reach the right person in the right department may be more comfortable turning to your company's Facebook or other social media profile page for guidance.

Let's say a prospect goes to your website, can't find an answer to their question, and therefore clicks on your Facebook icon. Once on Facebook, a site they probably use in their personal lives on a regular basis, the prospect feels comfortable leaving a comment such as, "I couldn't find anything on your website about shipping your medical supplies to Canada. Do you ship to Canada, or just within the US?"

How easy would it be for you to respond to that person on Facebook and direct them to the page or pages on your website that will give them the information they need? Give them the right answer and—boom! You've just saved your company from missing out on a sale.

Facebook currently has more than 900 million active monthly users. Linked has more than 161 million members. Twitter has more than 140 active users, and foursquare, more than 10 million user accounts.

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If the numbers above aren't enough to persuade you to create social media pages for your supply chain, consider this: In addition to being social networking and marketing tools, several social media sites now provide apps and other tools can enable you to sell products and services directly through profile pages. Facebook users, for instance, can now engage in what is being called F-commerce. The company, Chirpify, has developed an e-commerce platform that enables Twitter users to reply to tweets about sales items and consequently buy the items through PayPal. We have only just begun to see the ways in which social media will engage directly with commerce. If you aren't up to speed on the many social media commerce advances, chances are you're already missing out on revenue you could be gaining.

The longer it takes for more supply chain and logistics professionals to begin engaging in social media at the professional level, the longer it will take for the supply chain industry at large to determine how the medium might be used to further its aims. While you do need someone to maintain your social media pages, your ROI in the medium should far exceed maintenance costs. It may take some time to determine how to use social media to support your company's supply chain goals, but the bottom line is that you've got more to gain by trying to make social media work for you than by not trying.

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