

OPINION

Everyone can use social media



College Farmer

By KATIE MAUPIN

CELESTE Laurent, a junior at Western Kentucky University, did not like Twitter. It seemed silly that she had to keep a Twitter account and an online portfolio for a class she was taking.

Almost every day, she forced herself to go to the computer and “tweet.” Some days Laurent wrote about getting ice cream with her friends; other days, she talked about her show pigs. Laurent was sure that no one really wanted to know about her show pigs or a great ice cream place. Then a funny thing happened.

“After I started putting more and more stuff about my interests out there, the more people I found with similar interests,” Laurent says. “All of a sudden I wasn’t the lone ag kid in the journalism-communications world because there were all those people out there promoting ag.” Not only did Laurent find people with similar interests, but also thanks to her Twitter account required for class — she even found a job.

One day after being frustrated with her internship search, Laurent “tweeted” about needing a summer job involved with agriculture. Sara Long of the Michigan State University’s Agricultural Extension Office was “following” Laurent

Key Points

- Social media help you build valuable professional contacts.
- People of all ages, not just teenagers or college students, can use social media.
- Web sites allow you to reach out and educate the public about modern farming.

and saw the post. After Long checked her online portfolio, she offered Laurent an internship with the Extension.

If asked if that is the main reason she has Twitter, Laurent just laughs. “Whether or not you get a job online, it is still rewarding,” she says.

Not just for college kids

Aaron Perlut, managing partner of Elasticity, a social media strategy firm, recognizes a misconception that Twitter and other social media tools are only for teens or people in their 20s. However, according to Perlut, the fastest-growing Facebook demographic is women ages 55-65, and the smallest group of people on Twitter is individuals under age 20.

Perlut emphasizes that it’s a great way to network with people of similar interests, build a following to establish oneself as a thought leader, and share things such as weather conditions while in the field.

“Social media is simply word of mouth,” he says. “But using today’s tools

it gives you a far bigger, and potentially more influential, audience.”

Educate the public

Mike Haley, a farmer from Ohio, feels it’s important to educate people on where their food comes from; by using Twitter, he has connected with many people who feel the same way.

Bradley Schad, a Missouri producer, also uses Twitter to help connect with people not exposed to agriculture. His goal is to provide the public reliable ag information, because they often only hear “one side of the story. We have to get the facts out there somehow,” he says.

People often ask Haley ag questions on Twitter, which he answers to help bridge the “knowledge gap.” His biggest challenge has been wording responses and tweets simply. “We (agriculturalists) speak a different language than most people,” Haley says. His advice for crossing the “language barrier” between production terms and everyday words: listen. “Once you understand how they communicate and what they know it is easier to reach them,” he says.

Getting started

Perlut says there is a certain “fear factor” diving into new media, but he encourages everyone to open an account anyway “A great way to begin using tools is participating in a watchful way to get a sense of how to interact,” he says.

A ‘twictionary’

HERE are a few words you should know before you log in.

Blogsphere: (n.) Refers to all blogs, bloggers and the information they are discussing.

Facebook: (n.) Social networking site that allows its users to connect with over 200 million fellow users throughout the world.

LinkedIn: (n.) A professional social networking site that allows its users to network with other professionals within or outside their industries.

Micro-blog: (n.) Type of blog where the user can publish brief messages that are usually 140 characters or less, i.e. Twitter.

Tweet: (n.) A brief update, 140 characters or less, that is posted on Twitter. “Did you read my tweet?” (v.) The act of posting an update on Twitter. “I just tweeted about farming.”

Twitter: (n.) A micro-blogging service and social networking site that allows its users to send short updates and read other users’ updates.

Widget: (n.) A third-party application used to update a Web site, Web page or desktop.

Source: The glossary was adapted from Elasticity’s Glossary of Social Media Terms

“Just get out there,” adds Schad. “It is a great networking tool as well as a way to get agriculture’s true face out there.”

Maupin is a University of Missouri ag journalism student. E-mail her at kmmmpfd@mizzou.edu.

Big Red Demo Days. Call 800.332.0273 for your Dealer.

MULTI-PURPOSE UTILITY VEHICLES CAN BE HAZARDOUS TO OPERATE. FOR YOUR SAFETY, BE RESPONSIBLE. ALWAYS WEAR A HELMET, EYE PROTECTION AND APPROPRIATE CLOTHING. ALWAYS WEAR YOUR SEAT BELT, AND KEEP THE SIDE NETS AND DOORS CLOSED. AVOID EXCESSIVE SPEEDS, AND BE CAREFUL ON DIFFICULT TERRAIN. ALL MUV DRIVERS SHOULD WATCH THE SAFETY VIDEO “MULTIPURPOSE UTILITY VEHICLES: A GUIDE TO SAFE OPERATION” AND READ THE OWNER’S MANUAL BEFORE OPERATING THE VEHICLE. NEVER DRIVE UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF DRUGS OR ALCOHOL.