

What Do Web 2.0 and Social Media Mean to Aged Care?

In the last issue of IT Informer, Sonja Bernhardt and Walter Adamson explained to us the phenomenon “Web 2.0”, “Social Media” or “New Media (hereafter called “Social Media”). People in all industries are currently trying to get their head around what this new technology means to them and how they can use it to benefit their organisation.

It is therefore important that we look at Social Media specifically in relation to the Aged Care industry and explore its potential uses and pitfalls. Anyone in the industry currently planning to use Social Media is going to be breaking new ground and therefore opening up a whole new world of opportunity AND risk!

So can Social Media be useful for the aged care industry? Of course it can, however your successful use of Social Media will be dependent on your understanding of some key points:

- Determine who your audience will be and which tools you will use to engage them.
- Know what you want to achieve through Social Media.
- Know the risks involved in using Social Media.
- Use Social Media for a reason, not just because everyone else is.
- Understand that Social Media is hard work when done properly, not a magic wand.

If we look at the Aged Care industry as encompassing Associations, Care Providing organisations, Product and Service providers, Care recipients and their families and interested community members then we can begin to think about who our potential audience/s could be.

Obviously depending on which category I fall into, my approach would be very different. However as an exercise, let's use the example of an aged care organisation who wishes to build on their recent website overhaul with the addition of social media to engage both their care recipient's families and also the local community.

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Why would we choose these two groups as our audience? These are two groups that we can effectively communicate and market to via social media, as they are online – there would be no point engaging a group that aren't online! As opposed to other industries that can go online and seek out their audience, the aged care industry is yet to substantially engage in social media therefore it is more a case of doing your research and then bringing the audience to you.

Next is to choose the social media tools that will help us reach our audience. Will we build a blog or use a forum? How about developing educational material with video and delivering it on YouTube? Will we use Twitter, Facebook, or LinkedIn as social media tools? There are many to choose from, and we aren't limited to just one, often they can be linked and used to compliment each other. It is important to research and understand which tool will best help you achieve your goals and objectives.

Considering that our fictional aged care facility has a strong website to build our social media onto and that we will be using our new functionality to engage with care recipients families and the local community, it would make sense to implement a blog which one of our senior managers or CEO can use to communicate with these groups and receive feedback from them. We will be aiming to achieve a connection with the local community through the blog which will facilitate understanding and marketing opportunities directly to this audience.

The open nature of Social Media means that our captivated audience will be able to provide feedback on our new blog which means that not only can we connect and

communicate easily with the community, but we are also now very open to any type of feedback, including criticism. The nature in which the organisation deals with this two way communication will ultimately determine whether their use of Social Media will be a success, or a disaster.

This simplified example shows us that if new technologies are used correctly and given the planning and preparation efforts that would be put into any other critical business process, then they can provide us with opportunities that previously did not exist. It is also important to understand that with any new technology if we jump on the bandwagon without a real understanding of what we are trying to achieve, it is possible to do irreparable damage.

The Aged Care industry encompasses numerous innovative people, and I am sure that it will not be long before some are taking the leap of faith into Social Media or Web 2.0. I personally believe that if used correctly, this may be a key tool that the industry can use to reconnect with the broader community and break down long standing stereotypes. **IT**



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