

TECH TALK

Bob Appleby

The New Social Hot Spot – Your Computer

Whatever happened to meeting your friends on a Friday evening for a few drinks to catch up on what happened that week? This probably still happens but more often than not, you are probably doing a lot of the catch up with friends on the fly with email or one or more of the many on-line social networking sites that are available. You have probably heard of sites like: MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, FriendFeed, LiveSpaces, Plaxo and LinkedIn. When considering if you want to join one or more of these social scenes you will want to consider the information you want to share, and the audience that you want to communicate with. Since I am in the computer industry, I find myself dabbling in many of these venues, but I am only active in a few. In fact, most of my postings have nothing to do with the social networking. Most of my posts announce a new blog entry that I want to drive my audience to. So in my case, I am not really spending a lot of time in the social sites to have ongoing conversations like many people do.

What I want to do in the rest of this article is talk a little about some of the better known social sites and what many of the people who have set up accounts are using them for. There are some really good niches that are filled by some of them as you will see.

MySpace caught the world on fire with this social networking phenomenon that allowed you to present yourself and your thoughts to the world. It gives you a way to present the things that you are interested in to your friends and family and the world at large. If you have looked at it recently you may find that it is cluttered and not at all user friendly. It has many promotional ads as part of the site, and you may find this too busy for your taste. MySpace has become a haven for our younger generations (like my granddaughter). I think my age is showing. It provides the site owner with email, blogging, picture galleries, video galleries and much more. It is a very rich environment that you can make into a very personal statement. There are many special interest groups

you can join and meet up with people that have your same interests.

Facebook has made this type of self portrait and life presentation into a much simpler and more enjoyable experience. I guess as I get older I need the simplicity that a clean, simple interface provides. I go back to the question: "What do you want to say, show and share?" It's so simple to put it out there and move on. There are also some nice controls that let you publish to more than one site at the same time. In fact, I have begun using a site called FriendFeed that posts to its site as well as Facebook and Twitter at the same time. When you are trying to get your message out it makes it nice to keep the publishing aspect as simple and fast as



possible. This way, no matter where people are following you the message you are trying to get out gets to them.

Blogging is a more controlled method of getting your message out. The word Blog comes from the term Web Log which is a web interface for your personal or business journaling. Depending on where you host your Blog you can have many different additional pieces of information that you provide the visitors to your site. Where MySpace and Facebook are more about social interaction, Blogs traditionally are more one sided, though most have the ability to allow visitors to comment your postings. Most Hosting Blog sites provide on line tools to add, edit and manage your Blog Page. I like to use a Microsoft product called Live Writer that allows you to write your articles offline and publish them to the blogs sites that you have defined in application. One of the nice things this program provides is the ability to see the website preview so you can tweak your article before publishing it to the website.

There are many free or low cost blog host sites. Google, Yahoo and Microsoft's Live Spaces are a few of the free sites you can take advantage of. The problem with most of the free sites is that they will show advertising, usually above your header to pay for the hosting. If you don't want the advertising or want to control what is advertised on your site so you get the money, you will need to pay for the services. Microsoft's Live Spaces can

be updated for this but if you really want a lot of control consider one of the primary website hosting services like GoDaddy who can do it all for you.

Twitter has been getting a lot of press over the past year because of the number of celebrities that have discovered it. Twitter is a simple way to push out a message (no more than 140 characters allowed) that can be accessed by all of the people that are following you. It has been called a mini-blog and you will find that there are some people who are worth following and others that are not. Many of the people I follow are technical pundits and they are using this as a quick way to drop a note about something that has peaked their interest and want to share. Others are just clogging up the messaging with nonsense though. Sounds like some of the parties I have attended. There are some real benefits in this kind of application but like so many things people tend to abuse a service rather than share real information as it was originally designed to do. You will find some people posting a TWEET about every little thing that they do. This is not something most of would care about. But some groups have figured out some really interesting ways to make use of it. There has been some news where emergency workers use the service to keep everyone in their team up to date on their location and what they are doing or what they need. This is especially helpful for emergency workers like forest firefighters.

Social Sites can be used for business connections as well. Facebook can be used as a way to present your business. You can use it to present new products, ideas and it can be used as a forum for communication from your customers as well. There are other social sites that are more geared to keep in touch, share leads, product ideas and more. Sites like **LinkedIn** and **Plaxo** allow you to create a professional relationship on line with the people that you do business with and those that you hope to do business with in the future. You can enter all of your pertinent business data in and setup your contact lists to make it easy to communicate using email or just journaling as you would on a regular website. These sites allow you to create a resume of your career both past and present. This can help solidify your expertise in the products that you offer your clients. LinkedIn has a less personal nature to its presentation of your data where Plaxo provides some personal touches that include postings from Facebook or other sites that allow for RSS feed links. This can give you a more human side as well as get your message out as well.

Well that's it for this issue. Be sure to visit www.bobstechtalk.com on line to see more information like what you



have found in this article and more. You will also find a supplemental post to this article that will give you pointers to the sites that I have mentioned. Have a wonderful 4th of July Holiday and I hope to see you again at the end of summer.

Bob has been working in the computer field since 1975 and started Computer Connections with his partner Jude Daigle in 1981 at the beginning of the personal computer revolution. Bob grew up in Ligonier and graduated from Ligonier H.S. in 1972. Bob graduated from George Washington Medical University in 1978 and he is currently living in the Greensburg area. You can see more tech tips and product reviews in Bob's Blog pages at <http://www.bobstechtalk.com> and you can contact him at bobstechtalk@comcast.net.

KEYSTONE, continued from page 24

magnifying glass, a bird I.D. book, and an animal tracks guide. All of these items can be signed out at the beach house by anyone over 16 with a valid driver's license or state ID card. All items must be returned no later than 6:00 pm the day they are signed out.

For general information call the Park office at 1-724-668-2939, or try the toll-free State Parks number 1-888-PA-PARKS. Visit us on the web at www.visitPAparks.com/parks/keystone.aspx or visit DCNR at www.dcnr.state.pa.us. If you need an accommodation to participate in park activities due to a disability, please contact the park office or the Pennsylvania Bureau of State Parks at: 1-888-PA-PARKS (Voice), 1-888-537-7294 (TTY), 1-888-558-2711 (international TTY), or 1-800-654-5984 (PA AT&T Relay Service). The Pennsylvania Bureau of State Parks will gladly discuss how to accommodate your needs.

