



A LITTLE BIRDIE TOLD ME

Taos and social media in the 21st century
By Melody Romancito

Surprisingly, for a community that prides itself on its spirituality, cultural heritage, rural roots and physical-world art, Taos has embraced social media platforms like Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and YouTube with growing enthusiasm.

No, it's not the end of face-to-face communication, but it certainly seems to enhance it because so many users are in it to connect with their friends, acquaintances, business contacts, fans or simply folks they'd like to impress. Social media allows a level of instant contact to dozens of people that once was available via the old telephone party lines without the stigma of eavesdropping.

Laid up sick with a bad cold and need someone to bring you some chicken soup? Put out a plea on Facebook or Twitter and within minutes you'll probably hear a knock at your door. Your kid is stranded and needs a ride? FB to the rescue. And Taos is right in the middle of all that.

Still, some people who are pathologically afraid of anything computer-related see social media as an accident waiting to happen. TV network news is rife with stories about cyber stalkers and the use of resources by

law enforcement, hard-nosed employers and even school administrators to look in on the online antics of those they rely on or for whom they are responsible.

To luddites who are unable make the transition to the new way of engaging and influencing their world, social media may seem exceedingly shallow and fleeting. Shopping at amazon.com is totally out of the question — let alone posting the results of their "If I were a movie actress, who would I be quiz" on Facebook.

And yes, when it comes to weightiness, poll and quiz results, comment threads and postings of cat pictures, it's like so much thistledown. It's downright float-y compared to the way we've been used to serving up our ideas, musings and obsessions via heavy books, obscure movies and music, which was very nearly lost for all time if it weren't for the Internet. Even the most obscure footnotes of musical history have been digitized and posted on YouTube before they melted away like the snows of yesteryear — or more like vinyl melting in millions of hot garages over decades of summers.

I remember the Twitter timeline wailing about the death of Michael Jackson a good 20-30 minutes before it was confirmed on CNN.

MySpace also has a large local following, but mostly

among young people where touting favorite bands, angst blogs and opinions about frenemies is common.

Even though some people don't like it, there have been cases where Twitter and Facebook participation has actually swayed politicians, and changed the opinions and actions of major corporations.

I personally got refunded the cost of a hotel room stay with a major chain, even when I had clearly not met the requirements of their refund policy. That was because I knew where to complain after I had zero results on the phone, namely Twitter. I knew the major chain was probably monitoring the comment stream about their brand, and sure enough, once I had tweeted my complaint using the appropriate keywords, I was contacted by their customer support division and refunded immediately.

Vaughn Dearing, an associate broker with High Country Real Estate Services, is a constant and consistently positive voice on the Twitter landscape for Taos. We've never met in person, but have exchanged e-mails and tweets about Taos. He tells me he tweets the way he does because he believes in the Taos lifestyle.

"I have experimented with social media and my main focus now is on Twitter. This is because I see it as one of the best venues for promoting. I decided to promote "Taos"

and our culturally diverse lifestyle.

"This style of promotion I feel is key and the options are endless. Each tweet is a snapshot of everything we have available to those of us who either live or, will someday visit Taos!

"I do this for several reasons. One reason is that by advocating everything I can find about Taos, I actually learn more about this amazing place myself! This while giving others the chance to do the same. I've repeatedly surprised myself with new things that I never knew existed and have enhanced my own life just by doing a little digging.

"Another is that I firmly believe in the benefits of a supportive, networking business environment. But most of all, I believe in the "Taos Lifestyle" hence my twitter account name. I am striving to attract those with that same inclination. Obviously, to find this information someone would have to be interested in twitter. I have no idea where an individual's interests in Taos lie so, by casting the broadest net, and mentioning everything I find fascinating about this place and its surroundings, I hopefully attract a broader audience and catch a variety of persons.

"In closing, it is kind of funny because 99 percent of the venues mentioned never know I'm doing it. So, it's really a very simple

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concept; I believe by promoting others, I also somehow promote myself.”

Dearing's website is www.taosrealestatebroker.com. You can follow him on Twitter at twitter.com/taoslifestyle

John Hamilton Farr, a writer, webmaster and musician, is also a voice on the virtual landscape. Though our contact has been primarily online, I did manage to pry him away from his computer and get him to visit me while I sat in front of mine. He shared some of his insights about social media in an e-mail.

“I joined Twitter and Facebook over a year ago. I quit Facebook this spring for more reasons than I can count, but mainly because it made me feel like I was in high school again, and I hated high school. Facebook is like AOL for people who don't know how to blog or tweet — they go there and never come out. It's very sad. The membership figures are obviously inflated to set higher ad rates. Everything about Facebook feels dirty and corrupt. My spirits are immeasurably lifted as a result of leaving that small world.

“Twitter is quite different. Twitter is an infinitely customizable networking tool. I've barely tapped its potential. I joined because I wanted to see how it worked, and my first mistake was in following the first few dozen people who showed up because they were friends of a friend, etc. but I have little in common with most of them. I'm not in this for social reasons! That was never my intention.

“I've had much greater success and satisfaction this year in choosing a limited number of people to follow who are engaged in creative, business, philosophical, or journalistic activities that mesh with my own interests. Right now that would be digital publishing, resilient communities, news about the Earth, and following the financial meltdown.

“Twitter is fantastic as a news and information source in this way. In fact, I get 90 percent of my news from Twitter now, by following links people post. So in those respects, it's a tremendous plus. The medium is also extremely addictive, and that's a concern for me. I have to turn off my desktop Twitter apps to get anything done.

“I also have serious misgivings about the entire social media environment. In my opinion, most of the problems we face today are the result of people being disconnected from the Earth and having no spiritual center — denying their own inner lives, you might say. We pretty much deny all things spiritual in our mass culture, and social media isn't helping. Tweets, updates, blog posts, and e-mail are basically 'noise,' more distracting thoughts, stimulating even greater fragmentation of our sense of self and well-being.

“The temptation to instantly publish one's



Vaughn Dearing



John H. Farr

intuition are givens with humans, if not fully understood or developed. Supposedly we aren't using 90 percent of our brains. Something tells me that we already have all we need to be able to accomplish anything we want, but we're just not using it.

“Bottom line: I'm a big Twitter fan, but don't forget that all of this disappears in an eye-blink when the electricity goes. Social media isn't our destiny, just a misunderstood contemporary tool.”

Farr's new e-book, “Taos Soul: Love Stories, Heroes, and Wild Adventure,” is available at www.amazon.com/Taos-Soul-Stories-Adventure-ebook/dp/B003UV8NK0/ and www.farrfeed.com/taos-soul/.

He also maintains several blogs, including www.farrfeed.com, www.fotofeed.com. You can follow him on Twitter at twitter.com/taosjohn.

If you want to join the virtual conversation that heats up every day on Facebook, just type in the name of someone you visit with in real life. Chances are, they're on Facebook. Press that friend request button and you'll be surprised at the world that opens up for you. Getting to know the day-to-day triumphs and setbacks we all experience can only bring us closer. Once we realize we're all in it together, getting along is easy.

And remember don't put anything on Facebook or tweet anything you wouldn't want your mother or grandmother to see. It's just a matter of time before they get their own accounts anyway.

thoughts on any issue is dangerous, too. I honestly think it knee-caps effective political and social action, so much so that I've always said that if blogging didn't exist, our 'masters' would have invented it.

“Ultimately and in evolutionary terms, our entire fixation with digital media in general and social networking in particular will probably be seen as a joke. Indigenous cultures have always communicated organically in dreams and visions.

Telepathy and

Getting your feet wet

Twitter is probably the least understood of all the social media tools out there. That's no surprise when it doesn't really come with instructions and the public timeline is so overwhelming it swallows up your initial 140-character tweets like your voice on a windy day on the mesa.

One hundred and forty characters, including punctuation and spaces doesn't seem like a whole lot of real estate to express yourself. Some people have said Twitter wouldn't do them any favors, making them poorer writers. I have actually found the opposite to be true. Having to hone your message down to 140 characters teaches you to be concise.

The best way to get something out of Twitter is to not use your web browser interface to tweet. It's OK for getting set up, changing your profile and things like that, but it's not a good place to experience the communication power that Twitter actually has.

My Twitter experience has been enhanced by using TweetDeck. It's a free program that works on both PC and Mac platforms (www.tweetdeck.com).

After you set up your Twitter account (just use your real name, if possible, so no one else can nab it. You can always set up other accounts later if you get the hankering to make anonymous tweets, but until you get your sea legs you might as well sew up your username/realname).

Then download and crank up TweetDeck. Follow the directions for setting up a couple of columns, like one for the people you follow, one for mentions of you and one for the search phrase “Taos,” just for fun.

To get started you can follow a friend or someone you know is already on Twitter or you can follow me (<http://twitter.com/melodyromancito>) or one of the other people or businesses mentioned in the article. This will give you someone to follow and something to look at in those columns.

Make comments or share information about something you're interested in, and before you know it, you'll be engaging in the larger conversation that is going on all the time in the virtual world.

Another plus for TweetDeck or other dedicated social media browser is you can tie in your contacts across Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Google Buzz and more.

— Melody Romancito

