

How Social Media and GOV 2.0 are Public/Private Sector Collaboration

By John Westra

Ask any small business owner about their "relationship" with government and you are likely to get an earful. Listen to small business owners carefully and you will hear one key complaint repeated over and over: "government doesn't pay attention to us or listen to our needs."

In fact, if it were not for the well-organized

on the golf course or a cup of coffee at the local diner. But to the more than 142 million Social Media users of Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and various blogs, it means spending "an average of six plus hours per month, connecting with and expanding their online community of "friends." (Nielsen, June 2010)

Social media can be defined as:

"The social interaction, creation and distribution of content, including text, photos, audio and video, via highly accessible Internet-based applications."

The main catalyst for the adoption of

communicate with citizens and involve them with the day to day operations of the state, offering opportunities to have their voices and feedback heard...Effectively communicating with citizens is an essential aspect of customer service government."

So how does this translate into a value proposition for small businesses? The answer to this question can be summed up in three words: Access, Engagement and Influence.

ACCESS to the people we've elected to represent us is the holy grail of representative democracy. In years past, campaign communication was one way. Elected officials could simply dismantle their campaign centers and walk away, effectively putting a "Do Not Disturb" sign on their office doors. Social media has made that impossible. Politicians who walk away from their social media network(s) would face an instant negative backlash.

An ongoing commitment to maintaining their connections to citizens and stakeholders (small business), translates into a defacto "open door" policy that benefits everyone. This is the type of access that previously cost thousands or even tens of thousands of dollars in lobbying to maintain.

ENGAGEMENT is the "secret" ingredient for any effective communication and another reason why social media and Government 2.0 (GOV 2.0) applications are growing so rapidly. Before I talk about the importance of engagement, let's first define what GOV 2.0 is.

"Government 2.0 or "e-government" is the philosophy of transparent, efficient and accountable governance, facilitated by





advocacy efforts of SBAM, the voices of Michigan's small businesses would be a whisper in comparison to the deep pocketed lobbying efforts and slick PR and marketing campaigns of national and international corporations. The good news; the explosive growth of Social Media, coupled with a push for government to use the Internet to be more open, responsive and accountable (GOV 2.0) is leveling the playing field and revolutionizing Public/Private Sector collaboration!

Social Networking is a phrase that for many brings to mind an afternoon

social media by government is politics. After the press credited social media for helping President Obama win, the flood gates of social media adoption by politicians opened wide. Although not all of them "get it," virtually all current and would-be elected officials now have a Facebook page, with many having a presence on all the major social media platforms.

Rick Snyder, who SBAM has endorsed for Governor, with his Reinvent Michigan campaign, is a great example of someone who understands the power of social media. Rick, who admittedly bills himself as "One Tough Nerd," has seen his Facebook following go from a few hundred to over 31,000 followers in a matter of months.

Rick Snyder was quoted as saying "Social media provides new and more effective ways for government to directly

Revolutionizing

the use of ubiquitous, easy to access and interactive Internet-enabled applications."

Although businesses are certainly benefiting from efficiencies offered by GOV 2.0 applications like e-permitting, e-bidding or electronic payment processing, it's the GOV 2.0 social media applications that provide real engagement opportunities. For the first time in history, business owners have a wdirect, public, two-way communication channel with their representatives.

As both a businessman and locally elected official in West Michigan, I have witnessed firsthand how effective social media applications can be for engaging the community. A group of people on Facebook or Twitter can quickly make a large number of people aware of important issues, offer up and debate alternatives and provide constructive criticism when necessary. When used to come up with ideas and possible solutions, the process is called "Crowd Sourcing." When used to express displeasure about something the community doesn't like, it can be the digital equivalent of torches and pitchforks!

INFLUENCE is the most important outcome of the social media and GOV 2.0 revolution. Every business owner now has

the ability, either individually or as part of a group like SBAM, to have their voice heard on important issues. Mainstream Media's full-on engagement, coupled with how quickly social media stories can grow virally (spread from person to person), means the influence of even a single voice can be amazing.

Numbers still matter. The old adage, "there is strength in numbers," still holds true. The larger the social network of individual small business voices, the less government or big business will be able to ignore them or drown them out! For the "revolution" to be successful in Michigan, SBAM members should actively develop their own social networks, join SBAM's and other business advocacy networks and become part of the networks of those in government they seek to engage and influence.

The end goal for increasing access, engagement and influence is collabora-

tion. Government doesn't have all the answers. It is going to take a combined effort of both government and businesses working together. Let's start/keep building a network of passionate people who want to Reinvent Michigan and get the job done! — **SBAM**



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