



Newsletter Article

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Twitter, Facebook: Practice Groups Discuss Why RiskProNet Members Should Care

Twitter. Facebook. LinkedIn. You've heard the names. (Definitions are at the end of this article.) The more relevant question is this: How they can help RiskProNet members? The Personal Lines practice group recently discussed the topic; the IT group will take a look at its conference call today (Oct. 8) at 3 p.m. Eastern (noon Pacific). This month's newsletter will discuss reports from the Personal Lines group. Next month we'll cover the IT group discussion and include exclusive RiskProNet interviews with companies with cutting-edge ideas across the United States and Canada. One mortgage broker, for example, has more than 9,000 followers.

But first, consider the statistics. Facebook's users are older and richer than they used to be, according to a recent study by The Nielsen Co. The study found that the more affluent members of the population (the upper two-thirds) are 25 percent more likely to use Facebook. In the past six months, the number of Facebook users 55 and older climbed 513 percent.

Twitter users are primarily working adults, not teens or college students. Nielsen earlier this year found that 62 percent of Twitter users access the site only from work.

The B2B market is taking advantage of the trend in record numbers, according to Nielsen findings. B2B advertising on social media network and online sites was up 184 percent over the previous year, even though overall B2B Internet advertising was down 8 percent.

And that's just paid advertising. It doesn't take into account the cost of staff time that B2B companies are devoting to social network sites and blogs. This past August, 17 percent of all time spent on the Internet was on social networking sites; a year ago it was 6 percent.

Reaching Younger "Gatekeepers"

Even when the target market is older, more affluent clients, it can be important to reach the younger generations. As one RiskProNet member of the Personal Lines Practice Group noted, the "gatekeepers" for high-net worth personal accounts usually are younger. It's important to communicate with them as well.

"We started using Twitter and LinkedIn because we realized

that times are changing," said one Personal Lines Practice Group member. "Clients come to you; you don't go to them. These are ways that prospective clients can find information on you and your company and what you have to offer." Her agency so far is primarily using Twitter, and opted not to use Facebook after a Facebook account for a trade association was compromised.

One agency conducted extensive research before setting up its accounts. It turned up an insurance agency that hired a fulltime staff member responsible for its blog and Twitter account. It watched for "tweets" (Twitter postings) about weddings, then contacted people directly to suggest wedding insurance. Wedding insurance buyers, of course, became prospects for homeowners and auto insurance.

At another agency, a producer used Facebook to obtain invitations to networking events. He looked for colleagues from previous jobs, then asked if he could join them at events in their industries.

Finding RiskProNet Members

Almost every RiskProNet member agency has at least one person on LinkedIn, which posts business profiles. One practice group member said her LinkedIn account has been very helpful. "I keep it very businesslike," she said. "There is no personal information other than where I work and the phone number. I probably get six or seven tips a day." LinkedIn also has a section where colleagues can post references and testimonials about their work with other LinkedIn members.

Monitoring client accounts on sites such as Facebook also can help increase business, said one RiskProNet member. For example, if you see that a client post photos of horses, you may want to suggest a check-up to be certain they have appropriate insurance.

AH&T Insurance has used its Facebook account to post a link to a *Rough Notes* article quoting an agency executive, as well as news of upcoming events. **J. Smith Lanier & Co.** has used Facebook to announce charitable events in which it is involved. **Dawson Companies** recently posted a tip about insurance for students going to college. **Watson Insurance** has used Twitter and Facebook reminding people to check their homeowners policies to see if they need updates, to tell about awards the agency has won, and to encourage people to attend company softball team games.

It is important, all agreed, to have a companywide policy on the use of social media sites and what should and should not be said on them.

Three Key Sites

Here's a brief description of the sites most often used by RiskProNet members:

LinkedIn.com. LinkedIn has more than 47 million members in more than 200 countries. Members post a profile summarizing professional expertise and accomplishments and share them with other people who are invited to join their "network." Members may give and receive professional recommendations. A key benefit is the ability to see whether you and a business prospect or prospective partner or client have common acquaintances, and check references with a trusted source.

Facebook.com. This is a global social networking website on which users can add friends, send them messages, post photos, and update their personal profiles to notify friends about themselves. Additionally, users can join networks organized by city, workplace, school, and region. The name of the website, founded by a Harvard student and his roommates, stems from the colloquial name of books given to incoming university students to help them get to know each other better. People can post personal pages, and businesses can have "Fan pages" for their followers. *Sample **Dawson Companies** posting: Do you have a student going to college? Check on gaps in your homeowners' policies. A link to an article on the topic follows.*

Twitter.com. Twitter is instant messaging service for short messages, limited to 140 characters, that answer the question, "What are you doing?" Messages can be received via Web pages or on mobile phones. *Sample **Watson Insurance** posting: Watson was named a "Hurricane Hugo Hometown Hero" for community service in the hurricane aftermath. 20 years later we're still glad to serve!*

Here are some examples of RiskProNet members' social networking sites. (We've used a service called "Tiny URL" to reduce the length of some of the URLs in the links below. For example, the URLs that Facebook assigned to AH&T and Dawson Companies are, respectively, 90 characters and 110 characters. Tiny URL reduced both to 26 characters. The service is very helpful in Twitter postings, or "Tweets," that link to articles on the Web. It's free and located at www.tinyurl.com.)

--**AH&T Facebook page:** <http://tinyurl.com/yc78l7o>

--**Dawson Companies** Facebook page:

<http://tinyurl.com/y8h7jq2>

--**Watson Insurance** Twitter page:

<http://twitter.com/WatsonIns>

You can find other RiskProNet members by going to the various sites and searching on their names.