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Leveraging Social Media

Social media sites like LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter now play a significant role in the way people communicate. For internal auditors, these tools provide a new way to expand networks and to keep abreast of issues affecting the profession.

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Social media is everywhere. One would be hard pressed to find someone who does not have a Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter profile. Though first used recreationally as a means of reconnecting with others online, social media sites are becoming increasingly popular among professionals for networking, recruiting, training, and staying in touch with colleagues and potential employers. Whatever the reason, having an active presence on social media sites is imperative for anyone who does not want to be — or look — out of touch. And the way you present yourself is equally, if not more, important.

According to The Nielsen Co., users spent an average of six hours on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter in December 2009, which is an 82-percent increase from 2008. As internal auditors, it is important to embrace social media for networking and knowledge sharing — those who choose not to may be perceived as being out of touch, which can put them at a professional disadvantage. By linking people all over the world, social media is making it easier for people to share news and knowledge, as well as network and search for jobs.

GATHER AND SHARE INFORMATION

Most major newspapers, networks, organizations, and federal agencies use social media sites to post daily news updates. With so many Web sites and news outlets from which to choose, using sites like LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter can decrease the amount of time spent scouring the Web for news or information relevant to internal auditing. And fortunately, internal auditors can tailor their preferences on these sites to receive only the news that interests them.

Two of the most used — and popular — sites are Facebook and LinkedIn, which give users the opportunity to discuss topics of interest, current events, and trends with their peers. “I am trying to enhance my knowledge about risk assessment, and LinkedIn has proven to be a wonderful place to do that,” says Sanjay Mehta, a Sarbanes-Oxley consultant at Showa Canada Inc. in Toronto. “People have so much in-depth knowledge about the subject that I don’t feel the need to refer to any books or other material.”

Paul Steele, internal audit manager at Hologic Inc. in Bedford, Mass., mainly uses social media sites for two purposes — knowledge sharing and networking. “Through LinkedIn, I’m connected with people just to gain their insight and see their comments. I’ve also joined several groups with the idea of learning from, and sharing with, other internal auditors working under similar conditions.”

GET CONNECTED

Social media sites allow interactions to occur in real time and people can maintain and forge relationships quickly, making this type of communication a viable method to nurture already-established professional relationships and to make new connections. Social media sites also allow users to connect with people who normally would be out of reach and interact in a low pressure, “non-sales” environment. By becoming part of the natural conversation, or getting introduced by a mutual contact, users can make new connections and gain new introductions.

Fast Facts

- More than 55 million users have LinkedIn profiles and someone new joins every second.
- Currently, there are more than 350 million active Facebook users.
- Executives from every Fortune 500 Company participate on LinkedIn.
- More than 700,000 local businesses have active

Since 2008, more than 12,000 people have joined The IIA's professional LinkedIn group, where on any given day there are several discussions taking place on different topics of interest to internal auditors and practitioners who are looking for advice or job openings. "I started a group on [LinkedIn](#) for small internal audit shops to provide a networking and thought-sharing outlet for internal audit directors and managers with small departments," says Alice Mariano, internal audit director at North Carolina Farm Bureau Mutual Insurance Co. Inc. in Raleigh, N.C. "Initial feedback indicates the group is appreciated because those responding to questions and sharing their ideas are coming from a narrowed group of people in similar circumstances."

- Nineteen percent — and counting — of Internet users say they use Twitter.

In a recent Pew Internet and American Life Project survey, 19 percent of Internet users said they use Twitter, a real-time microblogging site. That number represents an increase from the previous year when 11 percent said they use Twitter. Why the growing numbers? Twitter allows users to follow and connect with people based on common interests. Often, the people who users choose to follow will in turn follow them, even if they are not acquainted. Internal auditors can engage people with common interests by posting timely and relevant information, such as links to online resources and blogs or feedback on events or important trends. The more that Twitter users interact with others, the more likely they are to attract followers.

RECRUIT QUALITY TALENT

When it comes to screening potential employees, more than half (53 percent) of employers reported in a December 2009 CareerBuilder UK survey that they use social media sites to gain insight. Of those who conduct online searches and background checks of prospective employees, 43 percent use search engines, 12 percent use Facebook, 12 percent use LinkedIn, and 4 percent follow candidates on Twitter. Hence, internal auditors should be mindful of the information they share online.

In the same survey, 43 percent of employers reported they found information on social networking sites that led them to disqualify a candidate for employment. Some examples include: lying about qualifications (38 percent); poor communication skills (31 percent); discriminatory comments (13 percent); content about drinking or using drugs (10 percent); provocative or inappropriate photographs or information (9 percent); bad-mouthing their previous employer, co-workers, or clients (9 percent); and sharing confidential information from a previous employer (8 percent).

Even if internal auditors are not actively using social media sites to search for jobs, they should remember that potential employers often look at passive profiles — those people who are not actively looking for work. Keeping your profile up to date, personalized, and professional gives candidates an advantage over those who post only basic information, which is not enough for potential contacts to decide whether the candidate would be appropriate or add value to their network. With that in mind, auditors should use good judgment when posting updates, photos, and other information.

THINK, THEN JUMP IN

Social networking can be a rewarding experience, both personally and professionally. It provides a means to stay up to date on current news, take part in discussions, build a professional network, and find employment. More importantly, embracing social media helps professionals stay relevant. As social networking continues to grow by leaps and bounds, connecting the global internal audit community, it ultimately will benefit the profession as a whole.

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