

# facebook and twitter

## —and Glass? Oh My ...

### Social Networking Sites Provide Glass Companies with Greater Online Outreach

By Elizabeth Bodi

Online social networking tools have exploded in popularity since the early 2000s. Facebook alone has more than 200 million active users connecting with friends and family. But sites such as Facebook, Twitter and weblog sites such as Blogger are no longer restricted to personal communication uses alone. The business world is invading online networking sites at full speed, hoping to gain from the ability to keep in touch with not only customers, but other businesses as well. The glass industry is no exception, hopping onto the techno-savvy bandwagon with sheer enthusiasm. From typically youth-oriented Facebook to the business-only LinkedIn, glass businesses of all types are expanding their electronic reaches—by labeling themselves as

“friends,” Twitterers, bloggers and more.

#### Status Updates

At first glance, social media outlets seem utterly foreign, using coined terms such as “tweets” and “blogs.” But the world of online networking is primed for a business takeover. With hundreds of millions of potential customers and industry affiliates using these sites, glass businesses are finding it necessary to reach out to those consumers as the latest form of marketing.

“If you have a website and want to give people every opportunity to find you, then both Facebook and Twitter are a must-have,” says Richard Stelts of Superior Door and Glass in Denver. “We started using both Facebook and Twit-

ter as links to get people coming to our website and to educate ourselves on what the glass and local communities are doing.”

Facebook is one of the largest social networking sites available on the web. According to the website, founder Mark Zuckerberg created Facebook in 2004 as a social utility to help people communicate efficiently with friends, family and co-workers. Free to all users, www.facebook.com allows individuals, as well as groups, to give basic information about themselves through a simple profile page. A profile is divided into clearly labeled sections, each of which provides vital information such as name, location and general information such as interests. Users can upload photographs and share links. In addition, there is a space to share “what’s on your mind,” where users are able to post what they’re doing at a give moment or their thoughts on any topic.

Users can “friend” other profiles by clicking on a link that will add that person to their list of contacts (and in Facebook lingo, “friend” is in fact a verb, defined as adding someone to your contact list). Users can edit their security settings to only allow certain groups or people full access to their profile, giving them complete control over who can see what. Facebook also offers features such as event listings and groups to connect people with similar interests. Each event and group, as well as individual user, has its own separate page with its own “friends” list. Facebook users can “friend” everything from their favorite television shows or local events (i.e. NBC’s “The Insider”) to preferred manufacturers or products (i.e. Volkswagen) to most-visited stores or businesses (i.e. Home Depot).



Nancy Peterson keeps Azon “Linked In” on the web.

## Get Connected

If you're just getting started with any of the social media forms mentioned here, be sure to connect first with USGlass in the following places:

- Connect on LinkedIn with USGlass editor Megan Headley at <http://www.linkedin.com/in/meganheadley> or search for Key Communications.
- Follow USGlass on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/USGlass>.

## What Are You Tweeting?

Twitter, founded in 2006, focuses on allowing its users to communicate with others through the exchange of quick and frequent updates. Twitter is based around a simple question: What are you doing? Twitter's updates—or tweets—must be under 140 characters and can be sent via mobile phone texting, instant messaging or the web.

After logging in to [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com), users simply type in their "status"—what they're doing or thinking at that particular moment—press the update button, and the post will appear at the top of the list, while older tweets are archived below. Twitterers can regularly "follow" updates from other people with whom they want to keep in touch by simply visiting another individual's profile and clicking "follow." Twitter profiles contain much less personal information than Facebook and simply rely on a user's frequent status updates. Tweets can even be sent to a user's cell phone, keeping followers instantly updated as someone types a new tweet.

Marie Melsheimer of Bend, Ore.-based GlasWeld reports that Twitter helps the company to keep in touch with others in the field of glass repair.

"We have found that in the last year, more of our customers or potential customers are using social media to connect with others in their field," Melsheimer says. "We feel that it is important to become part of this conversation, provide information and participate in the glass repair dialog that is occurring within the social media networks."

GlasWeld tweets statistics about glass and repair, sales and specials and new industry developments to expand its customer base. The tool also allows the company to simply communicate with others in similar fields.

## Just Business

While social sites such as Facebook and Twitter may seem geared toward glass businesses with consumer-marketed products, LinkedIn is designed specifically for the business world. According to its website, LinkedIn has more than 42 million members in more than 200 countries and counts among its members executives from all Fortune 500 companies. A LinkedIn personal profile, more similar to Facebook's profile page than Twitter's short tweets, can be used to connect to other business professionals and represents work experience, education and even recommendations. Like Facebook, LinkedIn users can communicate with others by adding them to their list of "connections." LinkedIn can even be used to post and distribute job listings.

Pete Chojnacki of Peninsula, Ohio-based FabTech finds the "business application (of LinkedIn) to be much more robust than Facebook" and has even received quotes for work from companies he met through LinkedIn.

"I have solidified some connections made at trade shows and other events," Chojnacki adds.

Nancy Peterson of Azon USA, based in Kalamazoo, Mich., uses LinkedIn not only to communicate with other businesses in the field, but to help her own save money.

"Through LinkedIn, I follow the travel schedules of architectural photographers who specialize in the types of photo work that might include Azon products," says Peterson, Azon's market communication manager. "We might be looking to include photos in our project gallery or brochures and if the photographers are traveling to a particular city or location ... we can arrange to have photos taken of our products in-

## The Dos and Don'ts of Social Networking

### Do...

- **Update frequently:** if you lose interest in your social networks, so will your followers.
- **Moderate comments:** anonymity can loosen the fingers, so make sure to edit out anything that may be offensive to other readers.
- **Make sure you get your information right:** with instantaneous updates, editing can be left by the wayside, but typos and false info can look unprofessional.
- **Keep it strictly business:** potential customers do not want to read tweets about a coworker's and your lunch plans.

### Don't...

- **Post personal information:** never give out things like home numbers or email addresses.
- **Get distracted with your own account:** logging onto Facebook during work hours can tempt you to check the status of that friend request on your own personal account; refrain.
- **Forget to link your various profiles to your main website and vice versa:** blogging about your awesome glass company doesn't help if you don't provide essential contact information.
- **Be passive:** join communities or groups with similar interests and make sure to get your name out there.

use as a tie-in to save on travel costs."

## Now Entering the Blogosphere

One strong presence on the internet is the weblog, or blog, a journal-type commentary on every subject imaginable. Businesses can either create a blog as a part of their own websites with help of their technical gurus, or can simply sign up for a free piece of internet space through sites like Blogger.

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## Social Media continued

Such free sites give first-time bloggers a simple way of sharing information. After signing up, an easy-to-use template, similar to an email form, allows users to type and communicate whatever they want. Once satisfied with your entry, a new entry will be published onto the web with a simple click of a button.

Glass businesses are now incorporating blogs into their own internet expanses to share information with associates and customers. In early July, Norcross, Ga.-based Kawneer launched its own "Kawneerosphere" blog as a part of its website. According to a recent press release, the blog was created by a team of Kawneer employees to share information and will contain original content written by different experts on varying topics.

Karen Zipfel, director of marketing for Kawneer, explains the benefits: "Many younger professionals in our industry are coming to the market with a firmer grasp on technology as a driver for getting information and building their businesses. Budget constraints, especially in a challenging market climate, make social media and other forms of digital marketing incrementally more appealing because of their low cost and broad reach."

"Social media is an increasingly effective way to reach, and interact with, our target audience," adds Kimberly Ferro, vice president of marketing and product development. "Kawneer believes that Kawneerosphere will give the company a face and a voice to share our ethos with architects and customers."

Kawneer rotates its authors, an effective way to keep updates regular and provide a broad stream of information.

"Each of our different blog authors brings a unique expertise and perspective that can actively engage glazing contractors and architects," Zipfel says. "By alternating authors, we can

discuss a wider range of topics through a more visible and informal two-way exchange."

### Connecting the Dots

Though online media tools create a strong support network of potential customers and associates, it's difficult to track how much impact these tools have on sales.

"Right now, [return on investment] from social media is very hard to measure," says Melsheimer. "More than anything, it provides a great place for us to 'listen' to the buzz and conversation that is out there among our target audience."

Stelts also concedes that gaining direct business through using Twitter and Facebook is not as easy as signing up for a free account. But he does note that using outlets that allow customers anonymity can help develop a business.

"Feedback is a key factor in growing a successful business and some customers may not want to tell you how they felt about your services directly [but] Twitter gives them that opportunity," Stelts adds.

Zipfel says that such digital marketing can also help when it comes to budget constraints, since these tools are typically free.

"Blogs rank well for highly targeted and highly coveted keywords and, if updated somewhat regularly, will draw significantly more traffic to our website," she adds.

Despite the fact that social tools online may not boost direct sales, it does allow a community and forum for the customer base to grow. Through a budding network, glass businesses can keep up-to-date and connected not only with each other, but also with past and potential consumers.

### Facebook Fallout

While reaching out to others can help improve businesses, opening

the floodgates can also wet the feet.

Many more of the companies using social media outlets are allowing users to comment on their social posts. Many blogs, including the new Kawneerosphere, let readers leave their remarks on individual posts. This allows not only other customers, but businesses as well, to read all the responses—whether it be negative or positive.

Since Superior Glass allows customers to leave feedback and comments about the company on its Twitter feed, the responses are open for everyone to see. "The one thing that makes me nervous is that our competition may have access to our business on an exclusive level," Stelts says.

In addition, Peterson notes that since social sites such as Facebook are directed for personal uses, they could distract employees who have their own accounts. "I think other networks offer too much temptation for users (or employees) to waste time during the day on non-work related activities," she says.

Zipfel advises that, before tying your business to any form of social media, "It's important to develop a plan and a firm, clear objective and define what your expectations are. It's also important to do some upfront research to determine where your audience is actively engaged."

Despite the negatives, the glass industry continues to build its influence over the web. Stelts concedes, "I guess one just has to weigh the good versus the bad when choosing to use ... open media."

## the author

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