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Research Brief

Innovative Uses of Social Media in High Schools

Question: What are innovative uses of social media in high schools?

In a Nutshell

The use of social media is a phenomenon that is changing the way people communicate. Along with the Internet, social media provide unparalleled opportunity for schools to interact with students, families and community. They also provide incredible resources for improving curricular experiences and improving instruction. Because the growth of social media is a relatively new event, and because of the constantly changing and updating of technology, there are no clear patterns in how schools approach the use of social media. Some schools severely restrict the use by students and employees. Others openly embrace the possibilities and have begun to incorporate the use of social media as part of their curricula.

Summary

It is incredibly clear that high school students have access to and use social media. Online access by teens (12-17) is at 93% with 63% of teens reporting that they go online daily (Lenhart, 2009). Educators are now faced with the decision to possibly embrace the social media tools that are attracting teenagers. Some high schools are using social media tools in very innovative ways. These examples may provide a positive avenue for those educators still skeptical of media tools such as social networking sites.

What is Social Media?

Many definitions exist for this term, but social media is essentially a broad phrase to describe any form of media for use in social settings. It is shared freely and its value is often created through the group interactions surrounding the presented media.

Social media is comprised of seven main areas (Mayfield, 2008):

- **Social Networks-** Spaces that allow people to create web pages with personal information. The content can be shared and the owners are able to communicate.
- **Blogs-** Online journals that show the most recent entry first.
- **Wikis-** Websites that allow collaboration of multiple members to add and edit content.
- **Podcasts-** Audio and/or video files that can be accessed by subscription.
- **Forums-** Spaces designed for online community discussion that are most often grouped by similar topics.
- **Content Communities-** Groups of participants in a particular setting that organize and share specific kinds of information.
- **Microblogging-** Online and mobile networks where limited quantities of content can be distributed.

Synchronous Communication Tools

Although social media has primarily been considered a grouping of tools that work through asynchronous (not at the same time) communication, there are a variety of synchronous social media tools. These tools require participants to be available at the same time, but they may be in different locations.

What are high schools doing?

Social media has had mixed reviews when it comes to secondary education. Some tools, such as blogs and wikis, have been widely popular for educational purposes. However, there is real concern about privacy and social networks. Many schools are grappling with developing policy that addresses the use of social networks.



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Regardless of the stance, there are teachers and administrators taking innovative steps to use all forms of social media in high schools.

Social Networks

It has been reported that 65% of teens use some form of online social networking site (Lenhart, 2009). The popularity is undeniable. Typically, high schools have been able to utilize social networks to connect students and parents with current school district news. *Facebook* currently holds over 22,000 pages for high schools in the United States. *MySpace* also holds a number of pages. These networks are also often used to link alumni. However, innovative teachers have been able to utilize these networks to enhance instruction.

- **Chemistry**- Burrillville High School has a *Facebook* page specifically designed to help students taking AP Chemistry that have a summer assignment to complete. It not only allows members to communicate about questions, but it provides links to tutoring and due date reminders.
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Burrillville-High-School-AP-Chemistry-Summer-Assignment-Help-Page/109722542345>
- **Photography**- Students at Sammamish High School use a *Facebook* page to post photos, ask questions as well as share ideas. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Sammamish-High-School-Photography/276877409733>
- **Literature**- A few teachers have suggested an assignment that has students creating fictional *Facebook* and *MySpace* pages for literary characters. Students would complete the background information to fill in areas of interest, biographies, and photos. One substitute teacher discusses letting students create *MySpace* layouts for characters from *Romeo and Juliet*.
http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/294983/use_myspace_for_writing_projects_for.html?cat=4
- **Earth Science**- Second Life has an island called TerraWorld to teach high schools students about geology and earth science (Teen Second Life). <http://www.physorg.com/news159106306.html>
- **Science**- One science teacher at Hatboro-Horsham High School has developed a Teen Second Life island. There is a corresponding blog that chronicles the proposal, acquisition and development of the initial island of the on the Teen Grid Of Second Life. <http://hattersisland.blogspot.com/>
- **Literature** –Students identify the genre and audience of particular comments and messages on a social networking site.
- **Web Design**- Asking student to design basic *MySpace* layouts while considering aspects of information architecture.
- **Music**- A class page is used to consolidate music created by students in a fine arts class.
- **Chemistry**- Second Life has been used to show lab experiments and simulations, such as the Redi Experiment, that cannot easily be completed in a high school classroom.
http://www.kent.k12.wa.us/staff/timlynch/sci_class/chap01/redi.html or
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9YDyDEh254Y> or <http://vital.cs.ohiou.edu/redi.html>

Blogs

Many teachers have used these online journals as a place for student and teacher reflection. Blogs are able to hold photos, video and audio files. Many high schools have used blogs to track their sports teams. Recently, however, the use of blogs has expanded.

- **Poetry**- This blog from Ingraham High School focuses on Internet publishing of poetry and the development of constructive criticism. <http://msdahlstrom.edublogs.org/>
- **Literature**- Here is a blog with literary figure biographies created by a group of students. Each entry is a Voicethread slideshow with students commenting on the author. In this case, a content community tool is used within each blog entry. <http://vtgallery.blogspot.com/>



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- **Literature-** Book review blogs that include adding tags of author information and genre. <http://blogs.seattleschools.org/whitmanstudents/>
- **Research-** Eleanor Roosevelt High School in New York had students lead a staff development workshop on how to use Google Reader, which is a reading blog that consolidates multiple RSS feeds. Participants are able to access the most up to date blog postings in one space. http://www.erhsnyc.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=27969&type=d&termREC_ID=&id=8&rn=5105972
- **Geography-** Students create a blog to record field journal entries.
- **Mathematics-** Allow students to create video blog posts for common homework issues.
- **Teacher Tools-** Teachers may want a blog to post materials, showcase student work, or create a space for discussion. *Palm Springs High School English Department:* <http://askstanford.wordpress.com/about/>
- **Teacher Collaboration-** Using a blog space to consolidate best practices. *Technology in the English Classroom:* <http://enhancedenglishteachertseale.edublogs.org/>

Wikis

Wikipedia contains many entries with information about high schools across the United States. Those high schools are now seeing what can happen with wiki use inside the classroom. Teachers are starting to explore this area in some very creative ways.

- **History-** Connect with the Burlington High School “historyfacebook” wiki to learn about famous empires and leaders. This wiki was so successful that it is now open to the public. <http://historyfacebook.wikispaces.com/>
- **English-** Branford High School used a wiki to connect classroom learning about two famous books with the views of the outside community. Students were able to pose questions for the upcoming face-to-face meeting with the community. <http://bhsenglish10.wikispaces.com/>
- **Geography-** Seattle Public Schools use a multilevel approach with Social Studies field trips that includes a wiki with itinerary information and blog of student experiences. <http://it.seattleschools.org/blog/2010/05/fieldtrip/>
- **Geography/Civics-** The wiki at Bullitt Central High School not only provides content, but also tracks the location of the visitors from six continents to this classroom wiki. <http://iclassroom.pbworks.com/>
- **Business/Law-** The Fontbonne Academy uses Wikispaces to explore “credibility” to explore the topic of credit. <http://credibility.wikispaces.com/>
- **Communication-** Become part of the Flat Classroom Project to use blogs, wikis, and other tools to connect with other classrooms around the world. <http://www.flatclassroomproject.org/About>
- **School Information-** Instead of a standard webpage, Mayfield High School uses WetPaint to provide school information. Faculty members are welcome to become contributors for frequent updates. <http://mayfieldhighschoolweb.wetpaint.com/>

Content Communities

The field of content communities is so vast that numerous tools exist in this category. High schools can use a small set of items from this group and still find great innovative ideas. Common uses of content communities are Picasa, Flickr, or Vimeo accounts that display high school event photos or videos. This might consist of sports, chorus, ROTC, or commencement. Another example might be the use of social bookmarking tools like Diigo or Delicious. Below is just a small cross section of other creative possibilities.

- **Art, History, or Science-** Voicethread is a collaborative slideshow tool with many uses at the high school level. Students and teachers can create and discuss photographs and presentations in an asynchronous environment. It is incredibly popular and examples of its innovative uses are available at the Voicethread Education Wiki <http://Voicethread4education.wikispaces.com/9-12>



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- **English-** Digital storytelling stems from a number of content community tools. One example from Mount Si High School has the students create a story about their personal background. This might include audio and video to enhance a storytelling tool.
http://www.mountsihighschool.com/directory/_dockeryj/conferences/storytelling/storytelling.html
- **Literacy-** The New Jersey Education Association promotes storytelling in the classroom through utilizing outside resources, storyboard templates, a blog as well as Voicethread.
<http://www.njea.org/page.aspx?a=3860>
- **Art-** A digital storytelling workshop was held for secondary teachers in Scott County, Kentucky. This session led to a successful ongoing project that inspired countless Mid-western school districts to explore applications for digital storytelling within multiple curricular areas.
http://www.storycenter.org/cs_education.html
- **Video Production-** YouTube is a collection of videos. Shorewood and Shorecrest High Schools were able to create dueling videos. It has inspired other high schools across the nation.
http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/34511834/ns/technology_and_science-tech_and_gadgets/
- **Computer Science-** West Point High School uses Google applications for assignments, including the document feature, that allows teachers to view work of individual students or collaborative papers.
<http://sites.google.com/site/mrwaddellsite/computer-class>
- **Journalism-** In one high school journalism class, every student keeps their entire writing portfolio on Google Docs. The teacher checks and verifies which assignments have been turned on a daily basis, and easily monitors student progress over time by having everything centrally located.
- **Foreign Language-** State College Area High School uses Google Docs for its calendar feature to create a space for all students to be reminded of dues dates and other notifications.
<http://www.scasd.org/254720828125114747/site/default.asp>
- **Music-** Torrington High School provides a music technology class that utilizes many online functions. This includes having a TeacherTube website for the student to access the video and audio that will be used in the listening assignments in a given semester.
<http://www.thsmusic.net/Assignments%20Tech%20II.htm>
- **Math-** Teachers can share ideas with other Math teachers through the Diigo group site provided by the Apollo High School Math Department. <http://groups.diigo.com/group/apollo-high-school-math-department>
- **History-** This Jeopardy game provided by a teacher from Chula Vista High School through Slideshare displays just how easy it is to present information. This presentation can be shared to *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *Blogger*, and many other tools with the click of a button. <http://www.slideshare.net/mrghistory/ap-united-states-history-jeopardy-unit-one>

Microblogging-

Although this type of social media restricts the quantity of information passed from one participant to another at a given time, that does not mean high schools have passed it over. The most common tool for Microblogging is *Twitter* and has been providing some interesting educational uses.

A number of technology blogs have outlined some suggested academic uses for *Twitter* which include:

- Simple grammar checking
- Writing exercises with students at different schools
- Writing clear and concise information
- Class conversations outside of school hours
- Track a specific word
- Follow a professional that uses the tool and report on the findings



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<http://academhack.outsidethetext.com/home/2008/twitter-for-academia/>
<http://www.onlinecolleges.net/2009/08/10/25-twitter-projects-for-the-college-classroom/>

- Bishop McDevitt High School has decided to keep its student body and parents up to date with school information by providing a Twitter account. <http://www.bishopmcdevitt.org/academics>

Synchronous Tools

- **Journalism-** Howe High School offers students the chance to conduct off-campus interviews using *Skype*. It allows each student to videoconference someone at another location to complete a journalism assignment. <http://www.schooltube.com/video/54444f1e7b61422da4ee/Skype-in-the-Classroom-Howe-High-School>
- **Literature-** Femd High School has used *Skype* to interview the Executive Director of Mark Twain's Boyhood Home. <http://fremdamericanstudies.ning.com/forum/topics/skypeing-mark-twain-with-dr>
- **Teacher Collaboration-** The Los Angeles Unified School District has employed *Illuminate Live!* to provide help to individual and groups of students. This allows instructors to host live learning sessions and record them as needed. This also can be used for tutoring, missed classes, guest speakers, group study sessions, and student orientations.
 - http://www.redorbit.com/news/education/320997/illuminate_enables_online_education_and_collaboration_for_los_angeles_unified/
 - <http://www.marketwire.com/press-release/Elluminate-Announces-Continued-Momentum-K-12-Traditional-Virtual-School-Markets-855890.htm>
 - <http://onlineteachers.info/iserseakaplan/2010/03/08/march-8-2009-illuminate-group-study-session/>
 - <http://www.paec.org/newsletterdetail.asp?ID=106&sID=S1>

Teacher Resources

Teachers that want to enhance their use of social media can choose from a number of resources. The resources listed below are primarily collaborative projects with teachers in other districts and states. Often times the social networking tool *Ning* is used. It works as a place to provide examples of collaborations, host discussion forums as well as provide direction to other sources.

- Web 2.0 application index- This directory contains all web 2.0 tools that are available. Each is tagged by use and application. <http://www.go2web20.net/>
- Teachers using technology: For teachers interested in learning and sharing. <http://teachustech.ning.com/>
- Web 2.0 for Teachers- This network is for teachers and administrators who have attended presentations that highlight the use of Web 2.0 tools. <http://web2oh4teachers.ning.com>
- English companion: Where English teachers go to help each other- <http://englishcompanion.ning.com>
- Use *Ning* in conjunction with *Skype* to connect with instructors across the country and create high school student collaboration projects.
- 100 Inspiring Ways to Use Social Media in the Classroom
<http://www.onlineuniversities.com/blog/2010/05/100-inspiring-ways-to-use-social-media-in-the-classroom/>
- Social Media Policy Example from Bishop Lynch High School
<http://www.bishoplynch.org/netcommunity/page.aspx?pid=1771>
- Google Docs for Educators- http://www.google.com/educators/p_docs.html
- Lesson Plans for Social Bookmarking- <http://wiki.classroom20.com/Social+Bookmarks+Lesson+Plans>



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Conclusion

The academic uses of social media seem limitless. This must be combined with the fact that the longevity of each social media tool is unknown. However, the use by teenagers is undeniably high and educators should understand a few innovative ways to incorporate social media into their high school program.

Online Resources:

What is Social Media? – An e-Book (Mayfield, 2008)

www.icrossing.co.uk/.../What_is_Social_Media_iCrossing_ebook.pdf

Teens, Social Media and Health -

[Teens and Social Media](#) (Lenhart, 2009)

Social Networks – Sites where individuals or schools, departments and programs share information with “friends”

www.facebook.com

www.myspace.com

www.secondlife.com

www.ning.com

Blogs – A site that functions as a personal or school, department, program journal

www.livejournal.com

www.blogger.com

www.wordpress.com

www.reader.google.com

www.blogspot.com

Wikis – Websites that allow multiple users to add or edit content. Good for collaborative work.

www.wikispaces.com

www.wetpaint.com

www.wikipedia.com

Content Communities – Sites for retrieving or creating content

www.Voicethread.com

www.delicious.com

www.diigo.com

www.flickr.com

www.picasa.com

www.youtube.com

www.teachertube.com

www.docs.google.com

www.smugmug.com

www.shutterfly.com

www.animoto.com

Microblogging – Short, concise text messages

www.twitter.com



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Synchronous – Participants online at the same time

www.illuminate.com

www.skype.com

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