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**Title:** Digital Dialogue: Pulse Rate: Assess your social media channels regularly

Public Relations Tactics

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Digital Dialogue

**Summary:** Checking the pulse of social media channels every few months helps evaluate your use of each toward achieving audience engagement, brand awareness, sales, customer satisfaction and the many other rewards that sound social strategies can deliver.

**Full Text:** Social media continue to grow rapidly in 2009, showing its further expanding influence. Facebook surpassed 300 million users and Twitter closed an additional \$100 million in venture capital, to reach a \$1 billion valuation. Meanwhile, viral videos permeate the Web. Two videos — concerning Domino's and United Airlines — were among the year's most notable crisis communication studies.

Heavyweight social media channels garner most of our attention. However, we should also take interest in emerging tools and consider unsuccessful platforms.

Checking the pulse of social media channels every few months helps evaluate your use of each toward achieving audience engagement, brand awareness, sales, customer satisfaction and the many other rewards that sound social strategies can deliver.

Evaluate social channels as you would technology vendors. Gauge their financial viability. Read media coverage and analyst reports about usage trends, support and customer satisfaction. And examine each provider's expansion plans.

Consider the following social media channel categories:

#### Cornerstones

The Facebooks, LinkedIns, Twitters, YouTubes and Flickr's of the world are frequently discussed, making them relatively easy to monitor. Don't use cornerstone channels just for the sake of it, but think about how each can help anchor and maintain audience engagement.

Also look at your blogging and online community initiatives. Do these function as central hubs for your brand, business or client — or do they dilute your social Web presence?

#### Consolidations

Most industries and technologies experience consolidation — and social media is no exception. Examples include Facebook's acquisition of FriendFeed in August and Six Apart's acquisition of Pownce, a Twitter-like microblogging platform, last December. The former merged like-minded FriendFeed content sharing features into Facebook, while the latter shut down Pownce altogether.

Think about how you would mitigate the aftermath of such a shutdown by transitioning followers to existing channels or short-listing replacements.

#### Contenders

We owe it to ourselves as communicators who are serious about social media — and to our target audiences — to investigate variations of existing channels and new tools as they emerge. Prioritize new or enhanced social networking tools over me-too varieties, although these versions may be applicable for your contingency list noted above.

If you commit to a new social channel, you should justify how it improves your strategy. Maybe it helps you reach an entirely new audience or attracts more followers to your social hub. Or maybe it just isn't worth pursuing.

Posterous is a relatively new e-mail- based microblogging channel I recommend. Well-established Twitter and Facebook users are surfacing as early Posterous adopters, praising its ease of use with multimedia content and potential as an alternative to long-form blogging.

The Google Wave real-time communication and collaboration tool — touted as equal parts conversation and document —is an emerging tool to evaluate, as it may help users consolidate content from various channels into a single view for some audiences.

A best practice for evaluating social media channels, as suggested here in March, is to assign team members to specialize in individual channels. This approach can help organizations more rapidly and thoroughly understand each channel, keep up with trends and stay ahead of the social media curve.

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