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## Social Media for Small Businesses

By Sophie Braccini



Robin S. Fox presenting at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center Photo Sophie Braccini

for the terms, "what is 'flash' used for," and her company's blog showed up in fourth position in the Google listing, way before some much larger companies. "We use our blog to constantly offer tips to the public," she says, "a blog is not a tool to sell things, it's a place to increase your presence in people's minds."

Robin S. Fox, the Social Media Coach invited by the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce to talk about Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, sought to demystify the electronic tools for the audience.

Fox, an entertaining speaker, offered a snappy and fun presentation. During the short hour she delivered three messages: Social media is an opportunity with a low cost factor; you can do this; and small steps are okay. Fox explained that social media is all about communicating your story, creating your social network, and building awareness.

Several Lamorinda businesses have been using social media tools very successfully. "We definitely use Facebook for advertising our events," says New Rheem Theatre manager Beau Behan, "we have a following of fans on our Facebook page, where we post updates about tickets and events."

Teenagers are certainly big Facebook users but they are not the only ones. New restaurant Table 24, in Orinda, had over 200 fans before it even opened - and not all of them were Miramonte students. According to restaurant co-founder Michael Karp, the restaurant will use Twits to send 'specials' to kids in the area and attract them to the restaurant.

But Twitter is not everybody's tool of choice. "I am not very active on Twitter, it is very momentary news," says Dave Simpson, owner of the Lafayette Bookmobile, "Facebook is good to indicate what we will be doing the next week." Simpson says that he has about 400 'fans' of his business on Facebook, which he uses to inform people of where the bookmobile will next be located.

For these business owners, becoming good at using this media had a learning curve. "Like anything else there are trials and tribulations at the beginning," says Behan, "it's just a matter of finding out how to entice your customers; you have to have the pulse of your market."

"I did not get Facebook marketing at first," adds Simpson, "the power of Facebook is when people interact with it, so your postings have to ask a question or be provocative or fun, and then people will comment."

For Behan, Facebook is a tool to reach the younger market segment that does not read newspapers or newsletters, "it's allowed us to cover all our bases," he concluded.

The Orinda Chamber of Commerce says it may repeat the 'Blogging for Business' presentation because of its very informational content. Fox will offer a class, called Facebook for Business 101, during two Wednesday sessions on October 20 and 27 from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the Lafayette Community Center, 500 Saint Mary's Road. The cost is \$42 for both days. Sign-up are through the Lafayette Parks and Recreation Department, [www.lafayetterec.org](http://www.lafayetterec.org).

Last month the Lafayette and Orinda Chambers of Commerce sponsored lectures on new electronic ways for small businesses to reach their customers. Orinda offered a 'brown bag lunch' presentation on blogging with Marissa Berger, and Lafayette invited the community to a morning presentation on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn given by Robin S. Fox. Some local success stories are indicative of a trend that is likely to grow.

According to Marissa Berger, a consultant with MB/I, blogs for businesses can have different spins. It can be a product blog; "That type has soft sale spin, answering questions about the product," said Berger. Other types of blogs can get visibility for the brand. "Microsoft, on the community part of their web site, has hundreds of blogs," she said, "It helps to interact with the market, raises the awareness in the community." Blogs can also serve as an after-sale tool or knowledge base. Berger believes that a blog can be a real plus in term of credibility. "If a company has a blog with a lot of interaction and interesting information, it gives it an edge," she said.

Berger demonstrated that blogs appear at the top of the list in a Google search. "Google loves blogs," she said, "it's content that's fresh, updated frequently and relevant." For example, she searched

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