



## All's Wellness

By Barbara Ruhs



# Necessity is the Mother of Invention

A supermarket dietitian's perspective on the value of social media.

I had less than two years under my belt in a new position as a supermarket dietitian when my company filed for bankruptcy. With a limited budget, I quickly discovered the value of social media in promoting health and nutrition, as well as a free tool to network with peers and enlist support from the vendor community.

If you're not using social media in some shape or form, you're missing out. Start with the most useful tool to help you reach the customers or information you're seeking. With so many social media tools to choose from, you don't need to use them all, and you don't need to devote more than a few hours per week, to be successful.

Here are some of the social media tools that I've found useful, along with their pros and cons:

### Facebook

Think of it as a virtual bulletin board. For retail, it's most useful for posting details about events, contests or promotions, and it allows me to monitor posts by the vendor community. This invaluable tool helps me stay abreast of promotions and contests that I can promote via social media, print and other marketing venues.

However, unless you're posting contests or other highly desirable information to attract new followers and maintain existing ones, growing an audience is a slow process. Managing comments and feedback is easy if you set up notifications directly to your e-mail. Unless you have thousands of followers, Facebook is a great way to get started in the social media arena.

### Twitter

Like a ticker-tape bulletin board with posts limited to 140 characters, Twitter is a great tool for retailers and vendors looking to blast short bursts of information. One of the best ways to use Twitter is by hosting scheduled forums or chats. Using hashtags

in front of key words is a great way to highlight tweets for topic searches. For example, I've participated in chats on #gluten-free diets, #produce and agriculture (#Agchat). Tweet on a consistent basis, and create a Twitter handle that's easy to find and promote; make it visible on your website and put it on your business cards.

If your goal is to reach a large audience (by attracting many followers), you'll need to be active on a daily basis by tweeting or re-tweeting (sharing others' tweets). If you simply want to see what others are tweeting about, it's easy to set up lists to follow similar tweets in one feed.

### Pinterest

Pinterest lets you "pin" images on personalized virtual bulletin boards. Pins are typically linked to more details on each image. For example, I just pinned "Chipotle Lime Shrimp and Guacamole Dip with Tomatoes and Charred Corn" on my "I'm Getting Hungry" board. The image links to a blogger's site where the recipe is posted along with step-by-step instructions. Pinterest also provides inspiration when I'm planning what's for dinner or seeking recipes to use in an upcoming publication. I've created a "Reading List" where I post cookbooks and other books I've read or want to read.

Pinterest is probably the most addictive of the social media tools because it doesn't require much thinking. I've found it useful for gathering recipe images to use in one of my wellness publications. Pinterest requires that you get "invited" to join by an existing user, so let me know if you want me to invite you to the party!

Whether you're using social media to connect with customers or learn what your competition is up to, there are many ways to use social media tools to reach your goals and maximize your impact. The best way to get started is to be part of the conversation — what are you waiting for? **PG**

  
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