

# Facebook in the factory

Some manufacturers look to connect via social media | BY MARYBETH MATZEK



**“Leaders need to understand social media is happening with or without them.”**

- Susan Finco  
Leonard & Finco

SOCIAL MEDIA APPEARS TO BE everywhere as people tweet about their day, update their Facebook status and get back in touch with old friends. But does social media have a place in manufacturing?

Chuck Rathmann of IFS of North America thinks it does, but not in the way many social media fans may recognize. A manufacturer of enterprise software for medium- and large-sized companies, IFS has embedded tools in its software that allows the easy sharing of ideas and information.

“Manufacturers are fascinated by the idea that their enterprise software that’s already running in their business could also capture knowledge of people working in a certain position,” says Rathmann, an analyst with IFS. “It’s all about collaboration in context.”

Reed’s RBI Interactive Research Group recently conducted a survey on behalf of IFS of more than 260 U.S. manufacturing executives about a number of topics, including social media. Fifty-two percent of respondents say they would be interested in acquiring integrated social media tools available to help with troubleshooting problems, training and other functions.

But while manufacturers may see the importance of a social media application in aiding their companies, it’s not likely top of mind when it comes to external relations.

Overall, manufacturers tend to be



more cautious when embracing social media, says Susan Finco, owner of Leonard & Finco, a Green Bay public relations company.

“For business-to-business manufacturers, the benefits of social media may be a bit harder to see, but once you show them the value of what can be done, there’s interest,” says Finco, who has done surveys in the past year to measure what area employers think regarding social media. “There’s a little bit more of a learning curve there, but there are things manufacturers can do regarding social media that can be productive.”

For example, a tool manufacturer could start a Facebook page where people who use the tools could interact with each other and the company, she says.

Most manufacturing leaders are aware that tomorrow’s employees communicate and will work differently than the employees currently in their roles. And one of the ways these younger workers communicate – at least in their private life – is through social media.

Businesses can make it more attractive for employees to become engaged by taking the qualities of social media programs and embedding them into a company's enterprise software, Rathmann says.

"That type of familiarity really helps with the implementation process," he says.

When developing its software, Rathmann says IFS looks at tools that mimic Facebook or Twitter to help make it easier for employees to use. One such tool is a sticky note function that allows an employee to add a specific note or comment about a process, order or customer. "It's a way for a company to document something that is going undocumented," Rathmann says.

Here's how it works: A sales manager with institutional knowledge about a particular client can write a sticky note on the file to share that knowledge with others in the company. "It's really about taking the way social media works and making it work inside a company," Rathmann says.

As for communicating outside of a company, many manufacturers are a bit hesitant to engage in social media, but Finco says that's not a wise move.

"Leaders need to understand social media is happening with or without them" she says.

Even if a company doesn't plan on having its own Facebook page or Twitter account, it should have policies in place regarding social media, since it's likely employees are participating, Finco says. She says HR departments need to make sure employees realize everything they say and do on Facebook, Twitter or YouTube reflects back on the company and themselves.

"You just need some framework or guidance there. Being restrictive and shutting out social media will only backfire," Finco says.



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9:30 am – 10:30 am	"Town Hall" Session with Congressmen Steve Kagen and Tom Petri
10:45 am – 11:45 am	Track Sessions
Noon – 1:30 pm	Luncheon and Keynote Presentation
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