

Administration and Supervision Specialty Section

The Uses of Social Media

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Social media is defined in the June 2011 NASW News quoting Wikipedia: “Social media is the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into interactive dialogue.” (NASW News, 2011) The Internet used to be a storage locker of information, but now it is dominated by more conversations than anyone could ever have imagined a few years ago. This unique “interactive dialogue” -- instant messaging (IM), blogging, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, email, Skype, Smart Phone Apps, and on and on – are just the current examples of communication tools most social work supervisors probably know about, or at least have heard of, but might not actively be using.

Facebook (www.facebook.com), Twitter (www.twitter.com), LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com), and blogging (www.blogspot.com) are used primarily for public relations, marketing and information sharing, and to push people to a website. Gabrielle Blue wrote a short, useful article on creating a company Facebook page for Inc. Magazine: (Blue, 2011). Social worker Merrily Orsini, an early adopter of internet marketing and social media, has written a number of articles for the National Association of Home Care’s Caring magazine (Orsini, 2011).

Email is being used extensively to send messages within organizations and between social service agencies and clients or supporters. If you use email in the course of doing your day to day business you will realize a significant drop in the number of phone calls

you make and receive. And Skype (www.skype.com) can be a very effective way to include a remote employee in a meeting at a central office – saving travel time and expense. It is increasingly being used to provide a channel of communication between clients/patients and professionals, particularly in the health care field.

The web has revolutionized advertising for employees – www.monster.com is just one example of a job posting site which has basically replaced traditional print employment ads. Speaking of employment – should agencies “google” individuals who have applied for work as an additional check when evaluating them for employment? Do you have a policy about this? The appropriateness of seeking insight into a potential employee through his/her Facebook or blogging postings may be something you want to discuss with legal counsel.

There are a myriad of other uses that can also be useful to a social work supervisor. For example, Dropbox (www.dropbox.com) or Google Docs (www.google.com) provides tools for a group of professionals to work on a project together, or use a calendar to schedule events or organize a group – all for free – but by password protected invitation only.

There are also websites with tools to invite a large number of people to an event, record responses, send reminders – either free or for minimum fees to get a suite of services (www.punchbowl.com). Using these websites can significantly reduce the cost of an event by saving on printing and mailing invitations, and on staff time to accept or track RSVPs plus making sending reminders concerning an event quick and easy.

So, if you are not yet social media savvy, or have resisted jumping into the pool because you are not sure if you will drown, I suggest you try it. Social media is not a fad – you really must learn how to use it and you may find out that not only do you like it, but it provides a great benefit to your agency.

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