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# NEW BUSINESS

## MINNESOTA

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### Social Networking has everyone a-Twitter

These Four Social Media Experts Know the Ropes for Getting Connected Through Online Networking: **Jim Robinson** of ITR Group, **Mike Ellsworth** of LinkedIn Solutions, **Tyler Olson** of Social Media Consulting, and **Mitch Hislop** of Code Name Lingo.



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# Social Networking has everyone a-Twitter

**NBM: What is social networking? And why should new business owners care about it? Take it away.**

**Tyler:** Social networking is a new, low-cost marketing channel for small business owners allowing them to communicate with clients, partners, prospects, and friends to further their relationships. With it they can complement their current business initiatives and communications with those who know them, like them, and want to know more about them.

**Jim:** I think social networking is a great

opportunity for companies and new businesses to socialize about their product, their brand, and monitor what customers and clients are saying about them in the real world.

**Mike:** Social networking is a way to make a one-to-one connection with your prospects and your customers and leverage that into them finding out more about your products and services. It also is a good way to track what your customers want. You can actually assemble a crowd of people that want to hear your message. There are very few other me-

dia that you can do that with.

**Mitch:** Social networking is a way to join the conversation happening about your brand. It's a way to take these one-to-one, or as Chris Brogan likes to call them, "café shaped conversations," these little groups of people talking, and to be present when they're having a conversation about your brand. They're still talking about your brand, whether or not you're in the room. For new business owners, it's a great way to join that conversation, start the conversation, and just take part in this world where all the us-

ers are generating content already. Why don't you join them?

**NBM: What are the social networking sites that new business owners should be using?**

**Jim:** New business owners should definitely have a Facebook presence, Twitter, and if it was a professional person, such as an accountant, lawyer, or somebody in that type of service industry, they might want to think about being in LinkedIn.

**Mike:** I think the social networking sites that new business owners should use would be the ones where their customers and prospects are, whatever those may be. So, if you're in a B2B type business, LinkedIn is a natural for you. If you're in a B2C, Facebook might be a little more of your target. But if you're targeting high schoolers and younger in B2C, you might be on MySpace. And there's dozens of others that you could go. Every new business owner should be on Twitter because it's a great way to assemble a mass following very easily and inexpensively to get your message out.

**Mitch:** I agree, they should be where their prospects, their clients, their friends, their – even their competitors are. For instance, Twitter is a great way to do competitive research. Who doesn't want to know what the other agency has cooking that they're talking about on Twitter? Some of them are natural, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn. Obviously everyone loves those. But how you implement them, I feel, is more important than necessarily where you are. I feel that implementation

is key and the voice that you take is key.

**Tyler:** Depending upon the business goals, there may be more effective uses of social networking for a business than just the big three: Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. For some purposes, a YouTube, Meetup, MySpace, etc. strategy may make more sense than one with just the big three. It depends on how an audience should or needs to be engaged for each particular business model.

**NBM: What tools and resources will I need to engage in social media and marketing?**

**Mike:** You don't really need a lot of web

can I get in touch with them, and how can I enlist them to be my evangelists?" That's the goal right now. It's a different goal than trying to get somebody who's going to receive a direct mail piece to call you. Instead, you want people to start re-tweeting you, to start posting on Facebook and saying, boy, I'm a fan of your business, and so on. It's a different conversion type of experience.

**Mitch:** The number one thing you need is a plan to be able to have organic conversations with people. The biggest thing that any company needs to do when entering social media is to be organic, to be themselves. All the tools in the world won't help you do this. And many of them can actually detract from that. My recommendation is to focus on what you're your message is going to be, what your plan is. Then move on to implementation.

**Tyler:** The number one resource a business owner needs is somebody to help guide them through the options and create

## It's important to not miss out on this low-cost marketing opportunity.

savvy if you get some help from a consultant. A lot of companies that I talk to are treating this as if it's something completely different than what they know. When you're using email – that's on the Internet. If you're using web browsing – that's on the Internet. This is just another way of using the Web. What you need, though, above all, is a marketing strategy that can get beyond just "push my message out there, and don't worry about who's reading it." Instead, you need to ask "where are the people that I want to touch and how

a battle plan to achieve their business objectives. There are many right now claiming to be good at social networking and it's tough to know who has the right experience that you'll need. Find resources with legitimate reputation in the industry and who were passionate about the topic before the recent media hype.

**Jim:** There's a lot of tools on the market that will help monitor what's being said about you or an organization in social media. But I think also you need to look at the

Jim Robinson, a Senior Consultant with the ITR Group in Minneapolis, has been implementing and educating people and companies on the use of social based media, mobile technology and customer engagement for the past 10 years. He has provided Technology and Marketing solutions for many Fortune 500 companies such as Visa, Capital One, GMAC, and Wells Fargo. He can be reached at [Jimr@itrgroupinc.com](mailto:Jimr@itrgroupinc.com) or (651) 757-4500.

Mike Ellsworth is the Owner and Managing Principal of StratVantage Consulting, whose latest subsidiary is Linked InSolutions, which does social networking consulting and training. A 24-year IT veteran, Mike helps business owners learn how to use social sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter to connect with customers, find and engage prospects, and transform their customer service. He can be reached at [mellsworth@stratvantage.com](mailto:mellsworth@stratvantage.com), [www.twitter.com/MikeEllsworth](http://www.twitter.com/MikeEllsworth) or (952) 525-1584.

Tyler Olson, owner and President of Social Media Consulting and HelpMeTy.com, has consulted on many technology-related topics and has been a speaker at numerous events on strategies to help people achieve more through web technologies. He regularly writes for the business technology section in PCWorld magazine on social networking. He can be reached at [tolson@smcpros.com](mailto:tolson@smcpros.com), [smcpros.com](http://smcpros.com) or [twitter.com/TyOlson](http://twitter.com/TyOlson).

Mitchell Hislop, the Online Marketing Rockstar for <codename> LINGO, an in-teractive agency, has always been an early adopter of social technology. <codename> LINGO offers turnkey solutions for companies to maximize their online presence, as well as services to get new businesses started off on the right foot. He can be reached at [Mitchell.Hislop@coolintl.com](mailto:Mitchell.Hislop@coolintl.com), [twitter.com/mitchellhislop](http://twitter.com/mitchellhislop) or (612) 418-4992.



Tyler Olson and Jim Robinson agree that social networking is not a fad and that it offers business a host of new opportunities.

resources of the people, especially of a new business, or a small organization. You might need someone, a community manager, to be the liaison between management and the community. But also having some form of crisis communication plan, or media plan, or ways to escalate. And know and be ready to engage or defend when it comes to social media marketing.

**NBM: How do businesses and business professionals make money from these social networks?**

**Mitch:** There are two models that have emerged as of late. One of them is the Dell model. Dell just announced that they've made over \$3 million off of Twitter between sales that are just on Twitter, or coupons sent out. The other model is to keep money from leaving them, which is to use it for customer relationships. Frank Eliason started the @comcastcares on Twitter. And he's used that to keep customers happy, to keep them from leaving Comcast, to get ideas from them, just any way possible of connecting with the customers on a different level. Because if someone has bad service, and they go online to rant, you're going to want to hear about that. And those are really the two main models that I've seen come through.

**Tyler:** What's great about social networking is that it is very relationship based. Thus, for relationship-based businesses, there's a phenomenal opportunity just to connect with people and to remind your clients, your friends, your neighbors, the people you know, the people you work with, and your family, of what you're doing in a non-

intrusive manner. To be able to talk to those people and provide them with resources about what you're doing is simply another form of PR. If your employees are trained on how to use these services to the benefit of the company, there's tremendous power there, allowing them to use their entire social networks to benefit the company.

**Jim:** I think it's more of about preventing large amount of dollars from slipping out of the organization. Look at what happened with Domino Pizza [Unsavoury YouTube posts by employees]. It's been estimated that it will be \$50 million to the bottom line for Domino's to be able to clean up the "PR nightmare" they had, because they weren't ready, and engaged in social media. And so, I'm not sure about that, but a loss of \$50 million would be just as important as a gain of \$50 million in positive revenue. But I think it's also a way, again, for using social media to retain your customers, to have them communicate with you effectively, and possibly have that relationship so you have an opportunity to increase the share of wallet.

**Mike:** The opportunity for businesses to make money revolves around the impression that you're going to make on your social network. And if you can, for instance, turn hundreds of people into your advocates and your remote sales force, that will make you money no matter what you sell. Just selling more of what you already have is not a bad outcome. You can also think about how you can offer products and purchase opportunities or couponing for your business on your website and also in the social media,

for example, as a promotion vehicle to drive traffic to an ecommerce site.

**NBM: What can I do if I'm not tech savvy? Do I need special training?**

**Tyler:** Just remember that there are people out there who want to help you, who are in this every day, and love it. And it's important to not miss out on this low-cost marketing opportunity. There are companies who will completely manage your profiles, accounts, and campaigns if you want to take advantage of opportunities in social networking but not have the headaches that naturally come along with technology.

**Jim:** If you're not tech savvy, you can still be part of the conversation. You can still be part of the community, and you can be someone that writes good content, somebody that cares. You can always go onto somebody's blog, be a guest column person to get engaged in terms of social media. Even if you wanted to talk about products and services, there are even Social Based Posting Boards on the Internet out there that could assist you in doing so. You do need to be tech savvy and create your own blog, or create your own community. Those should be done by the experts. But in terms of joining a community, or getting involved — if you can write an email, you can engage in social media.

**Mike:** I don't view the tech part of it as a barrier. I think the barrier is changing the way you're thinking about your products, your services, the markets and your prospects. You could learn how to post on Twitter in 30 seconds. You could learn how to create a decent Facebook site in a few days. There's plenty of self help out there. Tech savviness is not the problem. The problem is in determining what you say, and fundamentally changing the way you're approaching sales and marketing. And that is where you might want to have some help from people who can advise you on that.

**Mitch:** While we were talking, I threw that question out to my Twitter followers. And one response I just got, which I really liked, is that social media requires very, very little tech savvy. Almost all these things have a web interface that walks you through every step. And if you hate the Internet and you totally don't want to have anything to do with this, ask around. There's going to be someone you know or have contact with that you can leverage their skills and abilities and make sure you're not missing the boat on this. Almost every site is really easy to learn. Twitter's probably the easiest to do the web interface. There's a question: What are you doing? You put an answer, an update,

and you just posted on Twitter.

**Tyler:** What a great example of Twitter. We asked a question and in a minute or two you got an answer. That is awesome. Immediate feedback. That's what's awesome about Twitter and Facebook, you can ask a business related question, such as "I'm trying to hire somebody," and "this is the type of person I'm trying to hire." And you're going to get feedback. And whether you're a business owner, or a manager level, or anybody in the organization, there are instant feedback opportunities.

**NBM: What is the cost to get in the social media? And doesn't it take a lot of time?**

**Jim:** It's free, or near free. It does take time, it takes commitment. I can quote community managers that think they should be online 18 hours a day. I don't think that was the original intent with people built Social Based Media Software applications to use on your computers. What's the cost of not being there? You need to know what's being said about your company, your products, and being engaged with your brand. It does take time, but the work load and time commitment can be spread around. It doesn't have to be a one man show.

**Mike:** I think you could spend as little or as much as you want on social media. If you can educate yourself, and you want to take the time, you can do it yourself. If you wanted, say, assign some of your employees to monitor certain Twitter searches, for example, it's easy to do. That would take someone an hour or so out of their day to do. But, if you want to really get into it big, you're going to have to assign the kinds of resources you'd assign any other kind of marketing. If you want to track what people are saying about you, if you're large enough to have many different people who are interested in your product, just start by monitoring Twitter and searching for your brand name, or company name.

**Mitch:** Silicon Valley came up with this "freemium" pricing model where you can use their stuff for free, and you can use it more, get more stuff if you pay a little. That combined with the just very low barrier of entry means that the real cost is almost always man hours. To get started, there are training classes available. You can ask around. Or do what I did and dive in head first. I started asking people on Twitter. Luckily Minneapolis is number four or five for interactive marketing. So, it's real easy to find people who know this stuff.

**Tyler:** People often ask "How much time should I spend on Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn? And don't I really need to be

on it all day to get any use?" You can receive tremendous amount of value on a few minutes a day. In a few minutes, you can engage those following you, you can become updated on the day's events, and you can receive value. Additionally, if you can automate it and make it ultra simple, which sometimes requires some extra help, it makes it so the cost of your time and your dollars is much lower.

**NBM: What do you see is the future of the social media? Is it a fad? Or is it here to stay?**

**Mike:** I don't really think it's a fad. But I don't think it will be here forever, because it will just become part of marketing. It'll just

be a jor takeaway. You can do things quickly, you can do things simply. You can very easily leverage one person, or your entire following, your entire tribe, built up around your brand; you can very easily get feedback, very quickly deal with issues. I think that the real time aspect of it and the one-to-one aspect of it are here to stay.

**Tyler:** Twitter started roughly three years ago. YouTube started not much before it. Facebook started about five years ago. The term social media hardly existed five years ago. Five years before that the term blog hardly existed. Five years before that, websites were a term that was kind of "what's a website again?" And five years before that,



Mike Ellsworth and Mitch Hislop said that cost and technical knowledge aren't really barriers for participating in Twitter and other social networking technologies. It can be as easy or as challenging as you want to be.

become part of customer service. It'll just become part of the everyday operation of every business, kind of like email. There are sites that are fads, and there are sites that will fade away. But if LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter all went away tomorrow, somebody else would be stepping in to replace them. And it's likely something new will come along and eat their lunch in the future.

**Mitch:** I think that as Mike says, the sites may be a fad, Twitter may be a fad. I mean, who really wants to talk in 140 characters. That gets annoying after a while. I like it from time to time, but I think that the paradigm shift caused by social media, namely the real time instant gratification, is the ma-

what's email? There has been so much transition, but yet, all of those still exist. Social media will always exist, but technology will continue to evolve. For example, Google Wave is coming later this year – it has the power to completely revolutionize how we use computers, the Internet, and social networking all in one.

**Jim:** No, it's not a fad, it's here to stay. It definitely will be accepted as a way of the world, now and in the future. It just might have a different twist.

NBM

# NEW BUSINESS MINNESOTA

Presents

## Social Networking Workshop:

*Our Team of Experts Will Get You Up to Speed on the Latest Information About Social Media, from Twitter to LinkedIn and beyond.*

**Mike Ellsworth**

*LinkedIn Solutions*

**Jim Robinson**

*ITR Group*



**Tyler Olson,**  
*Social Media  
Consulting*

**Mitch Hislop,**  
*<Code Name> Lingo*

**When: Aug. 12, 2009**

**Where: Burnsville Performing Arts Center**

**Time: 3:00 p.m.**

*Join us for a FREE workshop with four experts in the area of marketing using Social Media. You are invited to learn more about Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, and others you may not have even heard of.*

*This is "the buzz around town" and if you are late getting on the bus, this is great chance to get caught up and rejoin the herd of hipsters, tweets, geeks, and get with the beat. These guys are up to date with the latest tactics of using social media to connect your business with revenue – in untraditional ways.*

*Then at 5 p.m. we will present our famous Startup Meetup networking event at the same location. Meet other local business startups! Come to the official "Startup Meetup" to network, meet other entrepreneurs, share ideas and resources, get advice and avoid costly mistakes.*

*Hear how others have overcome hurdles and are achieving success.*

**Register at [www.newstartupmeetup.com](http://www.newstartupmeetup.com)**

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