Discover a Career in Social Media

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One thing social media professionals have in common is that our jobs didn’t exist a decade ago. Now, social media professionals play a vital stakeholder-engagement role in marketing and communications across almost all industries, including oil and gas.

However, oil and gas social media professionals face challenges not all industries share.

Like other industries, we help build brand recognition and favorability in the online space. But we also have the difficult task of educating people about oil and gas and also of explaining how our company—and the industry—creates human prosperity and brings value to the communities where we operate around the Earth. We help our company connect with hard-to-reach influencers, and engage opinion leaders, policymakers, community stakeholders, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) on complex issues so our company—and the industry—can gain acceptance in order to operate within difficult political, sociopolitical, and/or geopolitical climates.

What Is Social Media?
Social media is the interaction between people (social) who use various electronic communication technologies (media—the plural of “medium”), any one of which enables the interaction to take place as fast as an instant, like a face-to-face conversation, across vast distances on Earth. Communication via social media sometimes reaches nobody, or can reach one, two, or potentially even a billion or more people. Using social media, people can communicate opinions, information, photos, video, Internet links, game moves, and experiences through email, instant messages, and texts; blogs and microblogs; forums, chat rooms, and networking sites; multi-player games; wikis; social bookmarking; and many other electronically enabled means.

New and ever-faster electronic communication technologies (e.g., cell phones, cameras, audio, video, tablets, laptops, servers, cables, satellites) and platforms (e.g., apps, operating systems, software programs, the Internet and its myriad types of sites) now allow instantaneous worldwide personal connection between human beings—something never experienced on such a huge scale by humanity. Social media allows human interaction to happen at lightning speed and continuous frequency through virtually simultaneous reach over vast distances among enormous and geographically scattered audiences. Social media is changing how we relate to other human beings—our friends, families, communities—and even how we experience ourselves. And it’s changing the relationships companies and industries have with their customers, stakeholders, employees, and others all over the world.

Why Social Media Matters
The global Internet population is made up of approximately 2.4 billion people, estimates data consulting firm Domo. According to Business Insider Intelligence, in the US alone, people spend more time on social media than on any other major Internet activity.

Congressional Management Foundation and Brunswick Group surveys indicate that the news media, investors, government officials and staffers, NGOs, academics, and opinion leaders are increasingly using social media platforms (e.g., blogs, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, Wikipedia) to conduct research, share information, and connect with their peers and constituents. These audiences are key stakeholders in the oil and gas industry. Social media thus allows oil and gas companies to engage with these influencers across multiple platforms whose value the influencers already understand.

For example, in ranking their top information sources, investors surveyed by four organizations (Brunswick Insight, Cogent Research, FTI Consulting, and Universtat Leipzig) said companies that directly communicate information matter more than any other source. Of investors surveyed by Brunswick Insight, 52% read blogs, 30% use Twitter, and

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73% say they use LinkedIn to research financial decisions.

Knowing this, oil and gas social media professionals can amplify and reinforce the information they normally provide investors through formal engagement channels by also using online channels. Social media gives its practitioners the ability to target their communications efforts online and, in today’s electronic world, be at the right place at the right time.

Not everyone understands the complexities of the oil and gas industry. Social media provides many avenues for bringing credible information to the online conversation. Through social media, we can help people understand not only the value the industry brings to millions of lives across the globe, but also all aspects of the business—from base exploration and production to our community relationships to how gasoline gets to their car’s tank. We can also leverage our social media platforms to confront misconceptions, correct inaccurate information, and participate in public discussion and debate about energy issues.

**How Do We Use Social Media?**

According to online statistics gathered by Domo, the following happens every minute of every day: 277,000 tweets are shared. 72 hours of new video are uploaded to YouTube, Google receives over 4 million search queries, and almost 2.5 million pieces of content are shared on Facebook—every minute of every day. This massive amount of social media data provides companies with two very valuable business opportunities. The first is the ability to “listen” to the online conversation in order gather digital intelligence relevant to the business. The other is to “engage” key stakeholders and influencers in a meaningful brand experience and dialogue.

**Listening**

A key component of the social media professional’s role is to monitor what is occurring in the online space; analyze what we encounter to determine what types of data or information relate most closely to our company’s concerns; and glean insights, examples, and recommendations that can affect business outcomes.

Individuals and organizations throughout the world discuss energy issues online. By “listening” to social media conversations, we are able to gather information that allows us to identify key influencers, trends, emerging issues, and potential threats to our operations. Listening enables us to make better-informed business decisions and develop more proactive overall communication strategies.

Moreover, online listening allows us to actually track behavior and stakeholder actions as opposed to formally using a poll or survey to measure public opinion or intent. As our ability to track actual behaviors grows, so too will our ability to better predict the actions of our key stakeholders.

**Engagement**

Embracing social media means more than just broadcasting corporate messages: It strengthens a company’s ability to build trust and favorability with its audiences. For example, according to the 2013 Trust Barometer, based on a global study by public relations firm Edelman, 82% of millennials said they would have more faith in a company or institution if they were involved in social media.

In our business, we engage with the goal of building relationships and communities that support our company and the industry. By listening across all our social media platforms to our audiences and understanding who they are, we’re able to create relevant, timely, and informative content that delivers key messages and that amplifies business information. We aim to use photos, infographics, articles, and facts to drive positive awareness and advance our company’s reputation.

During times of crisis, listening and engaging via social media is critical to understand what questions individuals have regarding the situation and also to convey status updates. Social media is also important when we’re sponsoring an event, publishing a press release, or making an announcement. The ability to engage with millions of people at a time on a personal level is powerful and unlike anything we’ve been able to do in years past.

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A Career in Social Media

Anyone considering a career in social media should keep in mind that it’s a very fast-moving, ever-emerging, and evolving space. It requires a passion for technology and data, a passion for storytelling, and a passion for connecting people—and connecting with people. It requires constant learning and the ability to adapt to change.

The job literally requires 24/7 management and attention because it is always daytime somewhere in the world and, therefore, social media can never sleep.

Because the work requires aptitude in a variety of disciplines, social media professionals come from a wide variety of communications backgrounds—marketing, media relations, public affairs, journalism, and interactive program management, to name a few. In turn, a career in the communications or marketing fields today requires an understanding of social media. Social media professionals have become critical business partners.

A career in social media is both challenging and rewarding. The challenges stem from the fact that this field is always changing. Time is spent daily to understand new functionality and emerging platforms for stakeholder engagement.

Understanding and implementing big data analytics and how we can best leverage “digital intelligence” to improve business outcomes are areas of great opportunity, but they are multifaceted and can be challenging to navigate.

It’s often challenging, too, to produce and curate the volume of rich and compelling content needed to feed all channels on a daily basis. Content creation and coordination can be a significant aspect of the social media community manager’s job.

But the challenges of these roles also feed into the rewards that make a career in social media exciting and make each day unique. To analyze data in a way that provides the greatest business value, or to tell a rich, compelling story online, we first have to understand how the information we glean can translate into business opportunities. While we are digital and social media specialists, we’re not subject-matter experts about the business and all its many facets. We therefore collaborate closely with team members throughout the company on a daily basis. Being at the center of external stakeholder communication allows us to work with subject-matter experts who provide insight into our company’s different lines of business and the value these various businesses bring to the company as well as the challenges they face.

Social media is constantly changing and we cannot predict the ways companies, including those in the oil and gas industry, will use digital tools and technology in the future. What we do know for now is that social media is vitally affecting the way we communicate and listen to the world community in which we live. TWA