How to Leverage Social Media to Create Greater Credibility in Your Training Program

Strategies for Increasing Your Social Influence

by Tom Bunzel
Objective: This eBook describes in detail how leveraging today’s many social tools strategically--combined with a dedicated online training platform--can increase the scope and effectiveness of a company’s training initiatives.
Introduction: What Today’s Training Audiences Expect

Over the past few years, a number of bestselling books have been written about how social media is impacting business in terms of giving all consumers of information a voice and level of influence in the perception of brands and the impact of a corporate message.

Among these, Trust Agents: Using the Web to Build Influence, Improve Reputation, and Earn Trust by Chris Brogan and Julien Smith, Tribes: We Need You to Lead Us by Seth Godin, and Groundswell: Winning in a World Transformed by Social Technologies by Charlene Li and Josh Bernoff, offer keen insights into the need for all companies to participate in the social platforms that are affecting markets and perception.

The world of training is particularly impacted by social tools and changing dramatically—it used to be enough to have a podium or a position of acknowledged authority, so that audiences would pay attention.

Now audiences expect more—they want to connect prior to an event, continue a dialog after a session, and even continue to participate and comment as training takes place.

The trend is obvious in all areas of presentation that the “expert” is no longer taken for granted as an authority figure. Among other factors, the “Backchannel”—or chatter among attendees during an event that can impact the attention and respect afforded a speaker—speaks to the new ways that audiences expect to be engaged, involved and treated with respect.

As the authors mentioned above point out, the key component of any information transaction today is creating value and providing a real benefit within the social landscape. Those who provide insight, value and, in some cases entertainment, gain influence, even over those who have previously been deemed authority figures. In the numerous examples described by these social media experts an individual or group can become a “Trust Agent,” create a “Groundswell” or become a “Tribe” by creating significant value through its engagement and communication through social tools like blogs, private and public social networks, viral video (on sites YouTube or Vimeo) and popular platforms like Twitter, Facebook and Google+.
What is Social Influence?

As an example of how social tools can suddenly bring one to prominence, an unknown musician can have a video go viral that takes on a corporate giant like United Airlines, by lampooning the carrier for losing his luggage and not showing any remorse. Suddenly he has influenced millions of viewers. His real name is Dave Carroll and his story is real. An ordinary guy can suddenly generate a huge following on Twitter by posting the hilarious and sometimes inappropriate things that his dad says during the time they live together as adults. You can read the posts from this ordinary guy on Twitter @shitmydadsays -- Not to mention that William Shatner starred in a sitcom based on this story -- its title modified for TV as “Stuff My Dad Says.”

The effect of this democratization of influence is particularly pronounced in publishing. Trainers are not expected to just know important subjects and be able present them effectively to an audience. Publishers today are looking beyond content to a platform, which means that the following a training professional has in her field will determine whether her work finds its way into books and even periodicals.

Social Media Influence Increases the Reach of Training Content

To those who give their time, attention and perhaps money to hear what a trainer or speaker has to say, a title or a resume is no longer enough to warrant recognition and respect. Audiences want to have a connection with the authority figure and a sense of what value will be forthcoming in any training event.
This makes it critical that trainers understand how influence and reputation have become the new currency in the expanding social and training landscape.

As social media experts describe over and over again, quality trumps quantity—having something meaningful and valuable to contribute is the key element of expanding one’s reach.

The Training and Development field has gained prominence in the social landscape because one of the key values and benefits of a network, blog, video or other collaborative web site is education and personal growth. Technology companies like Dell and Best Buy realized this when they made tech support and customer service a focus of their social strategy, in order to provide their customers and employees the latest resources and information about their products and services.

For those offering training and education to the general public, for profit or philanthropy, or to increase awareness (branding and promotion), the groundwork for any potential event is even more critical. So organizations that offer training for public consumption must be even more strategic in how they engage and build trust with their potential audiences.

In the public space, the process also involves aspects of marketing to get the word out about an event, registering attendees effectively while researching their needs, developing and managing content effectively, delivering a quality product, maintaining follow-through with testing and reports, and monetizing the entire process effectively.

Building Engagement and Influence

Extending the reach of a brand or set of training concepts involves using the social tools available today to interact with potential audiences on an emotional not just intellectual level. Here is a summary of how some of these tools can be used:

Participate and Solicit Commentary on Blogs, Facebook, Google + and Other Networks

Effective blogs are more than just web pages—they are interactive conversations. Blogs, Facebook and Google + and other networks may help launch a set of ideas through a status update or blog entry, but the upshot is that a conversational thread is generated that may extend around the world, and over weeks, months or even years. A good blog or Facebook page can also feature music, audio or video, hosted on another site like YouTube or Vimeo on varying topics from current training content, a
webinar archive, a narrated PowerPoint slide show (hosted on AuthorStream or SlideShare) or even relevant videos from Youtube or Facebook posts.

Populating a Facebook page with images and building engagement through questions, updates and links to video and blogs can prepare the audience for an exciting training event.

Connect in Real Time with Twitter

While hosted video or audio is asynchronous (available any time), the appeal of Twitter is that it is a “real time” phenomenon. Trainers might dismiss Twitter as irrelevant but they do so at their peril; for one thing Twitter is the medium of the “Backchannel”—the real time chatter that takes place during a training session and other presentations. Experts on the Backchannel urge trainers and presenters to acknowledge and harness its power, and respond to “tweets” during webinars, for example, as they would live
Q&A. (This may necessitate a moderator). Twitter’s real time feed can also help “humanize” the trainer to her potential audience, giving followers an insight into other events where research is being conducted, other sources of information, and soliciting commentary that can help make the training event itself more responsive and interactive.

Hashtags are phrases preceded by the pound sign (#hashtag) in a Twitter feed that when placed in the search field filter all “Tweets” containing that hashtag, allowing users to see related posts on a single topic.

An example of the growing power of hashtag was a recent story on Mashable where “Mississippi State has painted “#HAILSTATE’’ in its north end zone at Scott Field, a gigantic Twitter hashtag thought to be the first of its kind in college football.” Mark Cuban, sports entrepreneur and owner of the Dallas Mavericks thinks this is a growing trend in sports and social media.

Hashtags are also a powerful part of the Backchannel where those who chatter during a live event on PDAs and Smartphones will use a hashtag to let others easily follow the discussion.

Experts on the Backchannel like Cliff Atkinson suggest that presenters and trainers set their own agenda by creating their own hashtags for the event facilitate communication before, during and afterward, and learn to use the Backchannel to build engagement with questions, discussions and responses to issues raised on the Twitter feed.

For example, prior to a software training event the hashtag #Oursoftware could be used in Twitter discussions preparing for the event with tweets along the lines of, “What features of the new software do you want to learn?” or “How can Our Software help you
with specific business tasks?” Because hashtags are so easy to create – simply add a “#” before your tag (ex: #TGIF) – create one that best fits your topic and cause. It’s also important to not space out the words in your hashtags. If you wanted to create a tag called “I love Fridays,” it would look like this: #ILoveFridays, not #I Love Fridays.

This helps developers target content for the event; during the event monitors of the Twitter feed could use the #OurSoftware hashtag to interact with participants on the Backchannel, respond to questions, and bring significant issues to the attention of the presenter. Finally, after the event the hashtag to be used to build a feedback document (using a tool like Tweetdoc.org to compile a PDF transcript of tweets) and gain more followers for a Facebook page and the Twitter accounts of the Trainer(s) to be used in subsequent training sessions.
With an integrated training platform, these connections could be used to distribute invitations and target new registrations for future events while again creating engagement to continue to develop content—some of which can be stored in a Central Content Library.

**Get Personal with Programs like Posterous and PinInterest**

Top trainers know that whether for a live or online event, they need to build rapport with an audience—and the audience is *human*.

In the new social world this means sharing experiences based on one’s personal passions, like travel, hobbies, sports, music and so on. Many of these stories can be told through “multi-media”—comprised mainly of images and text, and perhaps audio and video. The trainer who waits until the event to connect on this level misses an important opportunity—by linking from a blog, Twitter feed or Facebook page to stories on personal interest sites like Posterous and PinInterest, and perhaps tying these shared experiences to the training topic itself ("In Grand Cayman, while scuba diving, I observed how sharks behaved like tax attorneys...")—a connection to the audience can be achieved and light bulbs or understanding can go off in their heads.

These and similar sites allow users to share locations, images, stories, and other content to personalize their web presence.
Humanizing a topic with images and feedback on Posterous

Distribute Value with Linked or Embedded Video

Video is a powerful training tool—it can feature testimonials, examples, demonstrations or powerful graphics (like in PowerPoint or Keynote) narrated by the trainer. Online video can be hosted on a YouTube channel with subscribers and commentary directly on that site, or the embed code or link code from YouTube (or any video hosting service) can make the content available in other social media—blogs, Facebook pages, Twitter feeds or personal interest sites. The wider it is distributed the greater its chance of becoming “viral”. Trainers should investigate the use of embedded PowerPoint narration to post their content on AuthorStream (with the same embed/linking features as YouTube has for video—and a direct connection and conversion to YouTube).
Pasting embed code into the HTML tab of your blog (or any other web page) allows the video to be played within your blog site rather than on an external site like Youtube.

Targeted snippets for important potential topics, testimonials by attendees and similar footage can help establish rapport and build engagement prior to an event, and continue the conversation through follow-up after it is over.

Recording a webinar or training event allows those who missed it to catch up—but it can be re-edited and/or hosted on a site like YouTube, where it can be linked and embedded into other websites and blogs, and build engagement with interaction on Facebook, Twitter, Google + and so on.
When you record a webinar, the video is archived online and can be redistributed and edited – cutting a small portion of the video and posting it online, and linking it on social sites, can build engagement by getting feedback and starting an online conversation.

Previewing content in a video embedded in a web page or blog
Focus on your Brand or Content

While a burgeoning and growing social strategy can certainly help a trainer find an audience, or connect more directly with an internal base of attendees, frequently those who could benefit most from the information will need to locate the event or authority themselves—either through search or referral.

While the issue of SEO (search engine optimization) is beyond the scope of this eBook, it is helpful to target one’s message with key words and phrases for two reasons: a) first to focus one’s content and organize it in ways that will make sense to an audience and b) to use the most significant terms and concepts as “tags” in search fields, meta data, page titles or bookmarks to let those who use Google, Bing, Yahoo or other search engines to locate their content effectively.

Stacey Soleil, Principal for ShareUrVision, specializing in branding for startups and entertainment industry uses a system of brainstorming keywords for search and focus to build a “Wordle” (Wordle.com) or a cloud of words that demonstrates visually which words are used most prominently on a given webpage or document. She suggests that clients generate a Wordle from a blog or web site to see which (SEO) key words are most prevalent and powerful – and then even to use it as a background on Twitter or in a PowerPoint slide or other graphic. Here’s an example of a “word map” or brainstormed Wordle based on a presentation web site (notice how the words are graphically accentuated according to their prominence on the blog or web site):
Brainstorming Process

1. Brainstorm associating key words and phrases from your website or content
2. Generate a Wordle from your blog or web site to see which (SEO) keywords are most powerful
3. Use it as a background for Twitter and Web graphics
4. Focus communications strategy on the main concepts and phrases you identify.
5. Expand your reach with your strengths using online tools and conferences

Measuring Social Influence

The most basic measure of one’s social reach is the number of interactions that take place through your social sites. So it’s not just the number of fans and followers you have on Facebook and Twitter, but the amount of comments, likes and retweets that your social content receives. Unsurprisingly companies have created metrics and algorithms that promise to accurately rate the amount of social “capital” an individual or company possesses have started popping up to help you track your social influence.
Klout – a Program that Scores Influence

How do you use it? Gauge your own Klout score (like an online credit score)
The Klout Plug-in for Twitter in Chrome lets you see Klout scores directly on Twitter

Another site that helps you track your social influence is Empire Avenue, a web site based on a Wall Street model that lets users buy “shares” of social sites and thereby assess their value. Neither Klout nor Empire Avenue is foolproof, and their algorithms and judgments can change quickly. However they do provide a general metric to gauge influence and locate individuals who may provide further connections to larger numbers of people and organizations, and whose opinions and insights are particularly valued by their followers.
QR Codes Can Increase Your Reach with Immediate Click Through on Smart Devices

QR codes are graphic images (see below) that when scanned by an application on a Smartphone or PDA will open the unique web page that the code is pointed to. So, Trainers can place QR codes in promotional literature or handouts that when scanned, go to a web site with more information, or to purchase related items. In the screenshot here, scanning this image in a Smartphone or PDA will open a blog. You can use the URL shortener Bit.ly to create your own QR code. Adding a + “.qr” to a bit.ly shortened URL opens a web page with an image with the QR code for the shortened web page.

You can use the QR codes in handouts, on screen during events, or even print them on T-Shirts as promotional giveaways.
Eight Steps to Promote Your Online Event Socially

1. Establish at least one social channel – either a blog, Facebook page or Twitter account – and use your posts to start a conversation around a particular topic. Pay attention to what your respondents say; look for pain points. Participate in online blogs, forums, Facebook and Twitter to build a following or platform and research audience needs.

2. Use your online presence to engage with “Influencers” – people who have an established a significant following on social channels – compiled from sites like Klout, LinkedIn and Empire Avenue which gauge levels of influence.

3. Create a Twitter hashtag in harmony with the session topic and begin status updates to build interest in the topic(s); post preview PowerPoint with narration on AuthorStream/YouTube – link in email, on Facebook (Google +) and embed in your blog – to prepare for webinar (with hashtag on Twitter).

4. Using an online platform like GoToTraining, set up a RevStream link to PayPal and set up other payment options for registrants (establish refund policy). Announce the event with a powerful “what you will learn/who should attend” agenda, linked to a Registration Page – post video snippets, photos and other “cool” content on Facebook and complementary blogs that build excitement and engagement around your topic.

5. Create a hashtag and publicize Twitter and Facebook IDs for the speaker(s) to the audience – solicit feedback on subtopics of value to attendees and share personal background on the speaker(s) to build rapport. Use a centralized repository of content or library to create graphics and supporting materials for the event – share some of these materials using personal sites like Pinterest, Posterous and Whrrl to build engagement and get feedback.

6. Deliver the online event with monitor(s) for the Backchannel and refer to pertinent tweets in the program (Q&A or commentary) to show interest in audience participation – using polling slides to get instant feedback.

7. Record the event on video and use embed code and links to distribute content to new potential attendees and those who missed event – monetize replay with RevStream.

8. Use your online training platform to create reports and do testing on attendees to gauge effectiveness of training and retention – publish the results and continue engagement through a Facebook Page, Twitter and other social sites for future events using the same steps and scenario.
Because the public receives so many solicitations for “informational webinars”, Jim Endicott of Distinction-Services, a presentation consulting expert, notes that many potential attendees are suspicious of potential sales pitches and ulterior motives. Therefore, Endicott says,

“Trust is a very tough thing to forge in a virtual environment. If your audiences feel for a moment like trust has been broken because of a perceived deception, they not only will exit your webinar but tell ten other people. I’m not saying these types of informational webinars are a bad idea but far too many treat their audiences like naive sheep waiting to be sheered (and dumped into a contact database). That is never respectful and you run the very real risk of audience alienation.”

Endicott has put out a white paper on delivering online content, “The 5 Most Common Mistakes and How to Avoid Them”; his main focus is on the following five strategic areas:

1. Failure to Build Trust: Audiences must trust you before they trust your message
2. Failure to Establish Relevancy: You win or lose that battle in the first few minutes
3. Marginal Quality Visuals Degrade Good Messaging: How you "package" your message matters
4. Failure to Embrace the Limitations of Virtual Communication: You’re not in Kansas anymore!
5. Underestimating Your Audience: Be honest about your motives and intentions

In drilling down into these five areas, Endicott inevitably touches on the key features of any effective online training platform and its ability to leverage social integration. For example, directly under Building Trust, Endicott emphasizes six main points:
Building Trust in a Virtual Environment

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<tr>
<th>The Trusted Introducer</th>
<th>Use a Dedicated Training Platform with Social Integration</th>
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<tr>
<td>Registration Page with details and branding linked to blog and other social presence – <strong>seamless payment integration</strong></td>
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<th>The Shared Experience Story</th>
<th>Pre-Engagement Interaction</th>
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<td>Presenter personalizes experience through videos, sites like PinInterest and Posterous -- and on Facebook and Twitter</td>
<td>Linking to previews in a Content Library and asking questions on social sites like Facebook and Twitter to address audience issues</td>
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<th>Get Off the Prepared Script – Talk Naturally</th>
<th>Get a Picture of Yourself on the Title Slide</th>
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<td>Establish rapport without jargon or condescension during pre-event engagement and sustain informality during and after event</td>
<td>Use pictures and graphics freely in pre-event interaction and effectively during and after the event to sustain interest</td>
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<th>Bring Your Sense of Humor</th>
<th>Benefits of Monetization</th>
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<tr>
<td>Coordinate personal insights from social sites with newsletters and invitations on Registration page, branded accordingly</td>
<td>As Jim Endicott pointed out previously, building trust and credibility is a key component of a successful training program, especially online. In addition to social media initiatives, integrating a payment method seamlessly into your program emphasizes the value proposition of what you offer; potential attendees will associate a simple and straightforward payment system with a credible content provider, and assume that what you are offering is polished, professional and credible.</td>
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For example, GoToTraining now includes direct integration with PayPal within a payment system called RevStream. RevStream features easily let trainers charge, collect and keep track of payments for training sessions. All the trainer needs to do is:

- Create a PayPal account and link it to your GoToTraining account
  - Trainers can also establish a dedicated Premier or Business PayPal account directly for GoToTraining events and services
- Create a training session by logging into your account at GoToTraining.com and selecting My Trainings → Schedule a Training

- Choose to charge for a training session by selecting Payments under My Trainings
- Set a reasonable price
- Publish your course on your own web site or a Facebook page, or through Go To Training’s online course catalog
- Set up PayPal and alternative methods of payment for your customer
- When a payment is processed, the customer receives a confirmation and the information she needs to attend the session
- It is also important to institute a detailed and fair return policy.
Online Training Event Checklist

When assessing an online training solution for its effectiveness and social integration features here are some key points:

- Customized self-service registration pages and automated email reminders—linked to social sites like blogs, Facebook
- Invite attendees “on the fly” during an event—especially if excitement has been generated through social sites
- A centralized administration center provides a calendar of available events in catalog form, with tabs for upcoming trainings and archived (recorded) events
- Configurable class sizes and the ability to perform pre-session tests and surveys
- Participant audio options for phone conferencing, including toll free and VoIP
- Access to a full range of subject matter experts regardless of physical location—connect using metrics of social influence
- Instructor-participant communication functions to ensure the transfer of skills from the training to the real world (e.g., chat, hand raising, presenter control, etc.)—integrate with monitor of Backchannel and plans based on social engagement
- Maintain a library of content, including graphics, web pages, presentations, demo files, surveys, polling questions, training manuals and materials, reusable tests, and evaluations that can be (re)accessed for all of the organization’s events
  Use these materials to continue engagement on social sites with blog posts, Facebook updates, Tweets, etc.
- A full service control console during the event, including drawing and annotation tools to highlight key points and maintain participant attention
- Desktop and application sharing demonstrate procedures, highlight key points, allow access to Web pages and PowerPoint presentation; change presenters for maximum subject matter resources and change the pace of the training; transfer keyboard and mouse control for demos and joint form fill gets everyone into the act
- Multiple monitors that enable trainers to watch the dashboard and participant view as they deliver content
- Audio conferencing and chat dialogue maintain interactivity and connection with students
- Video recording and archiving make content available for review and to those who missed the session—and on video hosting sites
- Timer for tests and breaks keeps attendees alert and on task, as well as simulates a conventional classroom
✓ Record, archive and make classes available for review and attendance after the live event – with detailed reporting
  (Monetize archived webinars with integrated registration and database tools)
✓ Analyze the tests and reports to allow organizers to evaluate the event and gauge retention of information and skill levels in order to make necessary adjustments
✓ Database tools to analyze and adapt to the results of evaluations and tests to keep the training effective
✓ Surveying participants for feedback and to monitor effectiveness of training to real-world situations
✓ A system for integrating and monetizing your training with PayPal, credit card and refund policies
Examples of Dedicated Online Training Platform and Development Features – GoToTraining

Trainers can schedule new events with customized registration pages or copy existing events, and send invitations to participants.
Besides Email, Invitations and notices can be distributed directly through social tools.
By integrating with Facebook and Twitter status updates and “tweets” can be generated automatically.
The centralized administration center provides a calendar of available events in catalog form, with tabs for upcoming trainings and archived (recorded) events.
A content library makes training materials, tests and evaluations available for reuse, editing and allows trainers to upload and deliver dynamic content and analyze results with detailed reporting.
Audio conferencing and live chat dialogs maintain a stream of direct communication between participants and organizer to report issues and pose questions for the moderator and speaker.
Reports provide a way to evaluate all phases of the training by detailing who attended, how they tested, and the feedback provided about training sessions.
Closing Summary

Live online training has been shown to be a uniquely powerful way to engage learners and ensure retention of information. In today’s complex Internet-centered environment audiences expect more from live events and they want to understand and get to know online leaders before the official engagement. Social media is a great way to gain and engage your audiences’ interest and respect. A comprehensive strategy of development in harmony with social tools, including archived video, graphics, training handouts and materials can set up more effective training sessions.

A full-scale dedicated training platform will also include custom registration, a library of content including tests and reports along with materials that can be shared on social sites and used for previews and follow-up, a full range of demonstration and audio/visual and annotation tools along with screen-sharing, and a system for monetizing the event(s) using PayPal, credit cards and other payment methods along with a refund system.

GoToTraining is a tool set specifically designed to address these issues in one comprehensive suite.
Additional Resources and References

Cliff Atkinson - www.backchannelbook.com


Dr. Carmen Taran, Better Beginnings, How to capture your audience in 30 seconds, principal, Rexi Media – www.reximedia.com

Geetesh Bajaj, Indezine Presentation web site and blog, http://www.indezine.com


Particia Fripp - www.fripp.com

Robert Pike - www.bobpikegroup.com

ShareUrVision, @StaceySoleil, Principal, specializing in branding for startups and entertainment industry - http://www.shareurvision.com/

About the Author

Tom Bunzel specializes in knowing what presenters need and how to make technology work. He has appeared on Tech TV’s Call for Help and spoken at InfoComm and PowerPoint LIVE. He was a “technology coach” for Iomega, MTA Films, Nurses in Partnership and the Neuroscience Education Institute. He has taught regularly at Learning Tree International, West LA College Extension and does presentation and video consulting in Southern California.