

Overcoming Awkward: A Web 2.0 Wrinkle

I remember the first day of Jr. High like it was yesterday. My new t-shirt was neatly pressed, my only pair of Girbaud jeans cleaned. I carefully walked down the canyon-like halls of Bonneville Jr. High with my red Jansport backpack carefully hung on one shoulder as my older brother had instructed me. This was a NEW experience, and as the new kid, it was completely awkward. Many professionals face a similar dilemma when it comes to getting started with social media.

It isn't hard to convince professionals that using social media is a great idea. They get it. I have presented to attorneys all over the country, and I imagine that as they watch me shoot out messages on Twitter and engage users across the world- they feel a certain confidence that they can get home and do the same thing. Then they return to their busy lives, they start a Twitter account or a new blog, and they are confronted by something as terrifying as the first day at Bonneville Jr. High- a blank screen.

New users aren't following anybody, nobody is following them, and more importantly, they have no clue what to write and how to get started. This really isn't too different from your first day at a new school, with no friends and no idea where to get started - new social media users can't help but feel completely alone, and this awkwardness usually extinguishes any enthusiasm they originally had to get started using social media.

The idea for this post came from the Managing Partner Forum in Palm Beach, Florida where Dennis Snow, an ex- Disney World Exec turned consultant and author spoke about the challenges of implementing new initiatives within an organization. Mr. Snow broke it down into 3 stages that occur over time: acceptance is the easy part, then comes a certain awkwardness that prevents many from actually succeeding and implementing, and finally with enough effort, a certain percentage will assimilate the new process. It struck me as a fitting analogy for developing good social media habits.

Stage I: Acceptance

It is the prevailing wisdom that use of social media and networking through platforms like LinkedIN or Martindale Hubble Connected is a GOOD thing. We have seen tremendous growth with millions of new users joining these platforms. One challenge the owners of social media sites face is that only a small percentage of users are engaging, really using the site. A recent statistic showed that only 10% of Twitter users post on a regular basis. This is no surprise- in fact, it is human nature. How many people raise their hands to ask questions in large lectures? How many people call in to radio

shows? It is a very small percentage of the total group. The larger group, also referred to as “lurkers” online, can’t seem to get past the proverbial first base online. There is a certain shyness or awkwardness that inhibits engagement.

Stage II: Overcoming Awkward

How many of you have been in an awkward situation before? Whether it is starting at a new school, working out a gym for the first time, or even working in a new office- we all can relate to these awkward situations. It just isn’t easy starting a new habit or a new process.

This is the same trial faced by those trying to start out in social media communities. Whether they have a goal to write a blog, engage potential clients on Twitter, or even just identify prospects on LinkedIn- it takes time, and most are so discouraged by their first bad experience that they never make it back for a second try.

So how can you get past this awkward phase? Here are 3 easy steps:

1. Set measurable social media goals- groups joined, contacts added, phone conversations created. These can serve as benchmarks that will keep you motivated.
2. Make it a habit. Schedule time for social media each week. Schedule just a couple days a week at first, then ramp it up as you feel more comfortable. Social media has become part of the minutiae of my life. I check Twitter and blog posts like others check voice mail and email. As you set aside time each week or each day to do SOMETHING online- it becomes part of your routine. The more you do, the more comfortable you will feel.
3. Move conversations offline. I can’t emphasize this enough. Finding a new contact or client through social media is such a great feeling- and once you actually speak and create a real offline relationship, it gives you the feeling that you are making progress. This single item will, more than anything, help you feel like you are getting past the awkward phase.

Stage III: Assimilation

Stage three is a great feeling. For some people this happens after the first weeks of using social media, for others it takes months. The important thing is that it happens, that these social networks become a part of your routine.

I shared this idea with a Chief Marketing Officer this past week, and she asked me a very important question. “Why?” Why would she want her attorneys making social networking part of their lives?

The answer is simple, if they don’t- they are going to miss opportunities. Decision makers often go with the professional that is at the top of their mind- and social media

provides an easy way to gain that status. The secret is “touch touch touch” as Allen Fuqua said this past week as part of the Social Media panel at the Marketing Partner Forum. Lawyers are too busy to make it to every dinner and cocktail party their contacts attend- but they can find time to engage a few minutes online each day. Your competitors are most likely already online, and if they aren't- don't you think YOU should be?

Starting my second year of Junior High was a completely different experience than my terrifying first year. I walked in with a swagger through the front door of Junior High like I owned the place. My shirt was untucked, my backpack was confidently placed on both shoulders. I felt right at home. If you don't feel that way online, you will. It's just a matter of time before that nauseating sense of awkwardness passes. Don't give up before it does.

To hear how two UK Lawyers got over the awkwardness and started having success, listen in this Friday morning at 10:30 AM EST (15:30 GMT) as [Brian Inkster and Chris Sherliker](#) share their tips