



VIRTUAL **CHANNELS** **TOOLKIT**

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Support in the Virtual World

More and more we are asked to connect with people, gather information, and explore ideas virtually, via the Internet. The term "**Web 2.0**" describes this phenomenon. Web1.0 was about users coming to your space on the web: your website. Web2.0 is about engaging the users in their territory on the web: their blog, their facebook page, etc. It refers to the changing trends in the use of World Wide Web technology and web design. It refers to a viral approach to sharing information. It specifically refers to technologies that aim **to enhance creativity, communications, secure information sharing, collaboration and functionality** of the web. Since these are all things a leader needs to do, it makes sense that we should prepare them to take advantage of these opportunities. However, stepping into this world can be overwhelming. What follows is a breakdown of a few of the technologies available and ideas on how they might support your training and leadership development efforts. They are grouped by technology and include a definition of the technology, tips for how they might be used, and resources for accessing them. This is intended to be a living document. It will change as the technologies do, in other words, often. Our hope is it will reside where it is needed. Feel free to share it and give us your feedback at:

[OnLeadershipOnline](#)

A site of resources exploring leadership development opportunities in the virtual environment.

Another great resource to focus in on any one of these tools is:

[Social Media University Global \(SMUG\)](#)

A free online curriculum for people who want to understand and explore the virtual channels.

Podcast

Definition:

Podcast (noun): a digital file of audio or video information available to watch or listen to on demand, wherever or whenever you choose.

Podcasts are distributed over the Internet and captured by individuals to be watched or listened to later on a personal computer or some other gadget like an iPod or MP3 Player. A podcast is distinguished from other digital-media formats by its ability to be syndicated, subscribed to, and downloaded automatically when new content is added. Using a podcatcher, an application that subscribes or catches files you designate, such as iTunes. You can subscribe to a RSS Really Simple Syndication) feed that will automatically download new content as it is developed. You can then choose when and how to listen to or view it.

"I missed the president's weekly update but I've got it downloaded onto my iPod to catch on the train ride home."

Podcast (verb): to produce original content and make it available for syndication, subscription and download.

"I think if we podcast the progress of this project we'll get more people engaged and build a better case for funding."

For additional help with understanding podcasting:

www.wikipedia.org

<http://www.commoncraft.com/podcasting>

Ideas:

- Have your leaders podcast their values and how they align with the organizational values.
- Podcast stories that exemplify people living their values.
- Podcast stories of individual excellence that celebrate the vision and values of the organization.
- Have leaders do a podcast of their vision of the future of the team... of the company.

- Have individual members of a team podcast their vision of the team's success.
- Podcast small wins and updates on a project.
- Search for podcasts from external sources that will provide a different perspective. Use it to generate new ideas.
- Podcast a conversation between team members discussing how they have worked together on a project, what worked, and what didn't, how did they rely on each other.
- Have team members practice their storytelling but having them contribute stories about their fellow team members. (www.podference.com is a great tool for doing this.)
- Create a database of stories.
- Create your own collection of stories from your organization. (www.onleadershiponline.com for ideas and support)

Resources:

[Podcasting for Dummies](#)

A "how to" on receiving or creating podcasts

www.podference.com

A service for capturing audio content on the phone and placing it in iTunes as a podcast

Feedburner.com

A service for distributing your podcasts

InfiniteSkills.com

A training program with detailed direction on everything from finding and subscribing to podcasts to recording, editing and publishing your own podcasts.

Blog

Definition:

Blog (noun):

Put simply, a blog is a Web site. The term comes from a contraction of the words "Web" and "log". The "log" portion refers to the fact that this type of site is typically contains ongoing updated content. The blogger provides regular entries or "posts". These can be commentary or a description of an event and may include graphics, audio (as in podcasts) or video. They are usually displayed from the most recent post or reverse chronological order. Blogs usually contain a combination of text, images, and links to other sites. Many contain audio or video files.

Another feature that helps define blogs is the ability of readers to comment on the content in an interactive format. Whereas websites have traditionally been intended to "push" out information, blogs feature both "push" and "pull".

Example:

"The school created a blog for the fundraiser this year. There was a post asking for ideas on ways to raise money so I left a comment describing what we did at the bake sale last year."

Many blogs are created to provide information, commentary or news on a specific topic. Some blogs focus on a particular genre, such as a fashion blog, a political blog or a travel blog. Others are created to feature the perspectives of the "blogger" themselves, more of a personal online diary. Organizations may create a blog to enhance internal communications or for external purposes such as marketing or public relations. These may be referred to as corporate blogs.

Blog (verb): to create, maintain, or add content to a blog

For additional help with understanding blogging:

www.wikipedia.org

<http://www.commoncraft.com/blogs>

Ideas:

- Have your leaders create a blog that asks for feedback on how their actions affect others performance.
- Publish the commitments made and regularly give updates on progress towards meeting those commitments.
- Have leaders create a blog around their vision. Use it as a way to help constituents stay connected to the vision.
- Build a blog that is focused on "out-of-the-box" thinking... a "No Box Blog" Request ideas and respond affirmatively when ideas are contributed.
- Use the blog to bring in fresh ideas from external sources. Add commentary about the potential you see for these ideas and ask for feedback.
- Use a blog to highlight and foster collaboration by creating a space where it's requested, encouraging connection and building trust, i.e. "Our group is exploring 2 options for the new school building site. Please give us your thoughts."
- Use a blog to house the stories of individual excellence that celebrate the vision and values of the organization and generate commentary. Use it as a vehicle to impact the culture of your organization through shared stories.
- Highlight individual excellence and gather feedback for the individual. Make it public.

Resources:

www.wordpress.com or www.typepad.com

Two competing blog creation tools

www.godaddy.com

A service for buying domain names (i.e. a web address), creating a blog, and publishing it.

www.problogger.com

Everything you need to know about blogging

Microblogs (Twitter)

Definition:

Micro-blog (noun):

Miniature blogs typically consisting of brief text messages, 140 characters or fewer. They are frequently intended to be viewed by a restricted group. This type of blog serves a slightly different purpose than traditional blog. It allows users to stay connected minute to minute between blog posts and emails. If you think of the old commercial that featured friends calling each other and saying "Wasssuuup?" you get it. It's a way to check in on day-to-day activities through short bite sized messages. These messages can be submitted and received by a variety of means, most often text messaging on a cell phone and instant messaging, but also by email, MP3 or the web. Although the published messages are typically text messages, they can also be micro-media such as photos or audio clips or links to other sites (like a new blog post).

Twitter is a free service that supports micro-blogging. It allows its users to send and read other users' updates (otherwise known as "tweets"). Once you sign up to receive "tweets" from someone, updates are displayed on that user's profile page and delivered to you. You become a "follower" of them.

Example:

"The Department of Transportation is using Twitter to help customers get the very latest updates on the road conditions during the ice storm."

Micro-blogs are used for both business and individual reasons. You may choose to follow your friends and family as they go through their day. Many provide this short commentary on a person-to-person level, or share news about a company's products and services.

Example:

"We are following our son's trip abroad on Twitter. We get tweets whenever he's doing something fun or moving to a new location."

Example:

"During the negotiations with our partners we will send updates to our corporate family using Twitter."

Ideas:

- If leaders have made a commitment to keep people updated on progress of a project or situation, they can twitter the updates.
- Have your leaders twitter examples of actions they observe that will help achieve the vision.
- Different groups attacking a similar problem can twitter each other with ideas to create extended brainstorming.
- Twitter each other with small wins. It helps keep momentum going and encourages innovative thinking.
- Use twitter to build connections between people who can learn from each other. Use it as a "virtual" mentoring tool.
- Use twitter to support someone a person who is taking a risk. Be just "a tweet away", offering support yet letting them fly solo.
- When you catch someone in the act of doing things well, use twitter to communicate the moment of individual excellence.
- Send a message of gratitude. After the election, President Obama sent a message to 234,098 followers saying "All of this happened because you gave your time, talent and passion. All of this happened because of you."
- If you attend a conference that others are unable to attend, use twitter to give them updates. Use it to build community.

Resources:

www.twitter.com

www.mrtweet.net

"A personal networking assistant" for twitter, the program that analyzes the relationships formed in the twitter universe and makes recommendations

www.tweetdeck.com

An application that takes an abundance of information and organizes into bite size pieces

Wikis:

Definition:

(From the Hawaiian word meaning "fast")

A webpage (or pages) used to coordinate and organize a group's input. It enables anyone who accesses it to contribute or modify content. We've probably all experienced a long string of emails that results when a group is trying to gather information in order to make the best decision. It might be gathering input on the next product launch, or planning the agenda for an important meeting, or planning a family reunion. In all of these situations, emails become cumbersome.

A wiki gathers input in one place on a dynamic changing webpage. Users go to the webpage and click "edit". This makes the page available to edit just like a document. Once the user adds their information, they click "save", and the content is saved with the author noted and published for other users to access. Users can also use the "link" feature to create other pages that relate to the first one. It creates a community by virtue of the fact that it is a self-governed, self-regulating body of users, as opposed to a newspaper model, which is edited and published by a given set of people.

For a demo of how a wiki works, go to

<http://www.commoncraft.com/video-wikis-plain-english>

For additional help with understanding wikis, go to one of the most popular wikis:

www.wikipedia.org

Ideas:

- Create a wiki to hold the expression of your organizations values. We know it is critical to be clear on the organizational values. What better way to insure that than to have the organization's members create the statement?
- Create a wiki with your vision of the future and encourage those you hope will share your aspirations to declare theirs and how they align.

- Use a wiki format to encourage others to always be thinking of new and better ways to do something. Challenge people to contribute to the wiki with insights and ideas.
- Create a wiki that moves a team from "Lessons Learned" to "Best Practices".
- When you create a space where the community creates the content, you foster collaboration and strengthen others.
- Use a wiki to document a process. Instead of one person owning the documentation, all participating parties can share ownership and accountability for its accuracy.
- Build a wiki to celebrate someone's action. Using this format will let others participate and define the significance of the role the person plays more fully. This also helps build community and a set of shared values.

Resources:

<http://www.pbwiki.com/>

An application for creating your own wiki

<http://www.wikispaces.com/>

Wikis for everyone

Social Network sites:

Definition:

Facebook? LinkedIn? MySpace? You've probably had exposure to at least one of these sites. All are social network sites. One of the best definitions I've read [follows](#): Social Network sites are web based services that allow individuals to 1) create a public or semipublic profile within a bounded system and 2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection 3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. Social networks play a significant role in how people connect on the Internet today. They reflect the connection and networking needs and desires of the users. There is great potential for using them in leadership development.

For more information on understanding social networks go to:

[Common Craft](#)

Ideas:

- Do your actions line up with your values? Creating a profile and engaging in a social network can give you insight into that question. Does your social network profile line up with what you say you value most? Try it out; it will help you find your voice.
- A social network can extend the reach of your vision. If you can articulate your vision to your network, as the network expands, so will the potential audience for your vision.
- Create a social network of developing leaders. Help them create a forum for new and innovative ideas. Encourage them to find their voice by creating their own blog with the network, or to start a forum. [Ning](#) is an easy tool for building a social network.
- Put your challenges out for consideration. The reach of social networks can mean you get lots of possible solutions from places you might never have thought to look.

- Use forums in your network to raise issues and solicit ideas. This fosters collaboration and encourages feedback.
- A social network is a great platform to celebrate someone's actions. It allows others to participate and extends the circle of those who hear about the contribution the person made. You can embed video or audio and tell a compelling story. This also helps build community and a set of shared values.

Resources

www.facebook.com

<http://www.linkedin.com/>

Focused on professional networking

www.ning.com

Application for creating a social network

More help and inspiration:

There are so many wonderful resources popping up all the time. We will try to keep up to date with ones we find that are particularly useful and post them. Help us with this by connecting at OnLeadershipOnline.