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Social Media Networking: Quick Tips for Busy Directors

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from [First Quarter 2011](#)
Corporate Board Member
by [Winnie Yu](#)

Chances are, you've heard a great deal about social media. But if you haven't gotten online and joined the conversation, you may be falling behind professionally, not just technologically.

"It's very clear that social media have become part of the fabric of our professional life," says Lucy P. Marcus, CEO of Marcus Venture Consulting and the non-executive board chair of Mobius Life Sciences Fund. "It's a place where companies are talked about and where professional discussions are happening. As board directors, we ignore this at our peril."

Marcus, who sits on several boards, says social media help her stay informed about issues affecting the corporations she serves and changes in corporate governance. It's also a way to gather information. "A number of times I've posted queries, some of them fairly technical in nature, including in my capacity as chair of a board audit committee," she says. "The answers I've gotten back were exceptionally well researched and useful."

Of course, not all social media sites are suited to board directors. [Facebook](#), for instance, may be better used to track down high school friends. [MySpace](#) is geared to a younger crowd. But other sites such as [LinkedIn](#) are noteworthy if you're a board director.

Get Connected

Experts say that joining LinkedIn has become a virtual necessity. LinkedIn is a networking site that allows users to search for jobs, recruit new hires and board members, and converse with others in the same field. Not joining LinkedIn these days is a mistake, says Marc Meyer, digital and social media strategist for Ernst and Young in Naples, Florida, and a social media expert. "You should at the very least create a profile," he says.

Signing on doesn't mean you need to spend hours crafting a full-blown online CV. LinkedIn newcomers testing the water can begin with a basic profile, offering little more than a name, suggests Patricia Lenkov, president of Agility Executive Search. Lenkov often lectures on the use of social media and recommends that once you're a member, you should join a LinkedIn group that interests you. A search for "corporate governance" turned up 186 groups.

Follow the group for a while before deciding if it's something you want to participate in regularly. "The best way to determine whether the group is appropriate is to join and 'lurk' for a while to get a sense of the members, the types of conversations that take place, and the culture of the group," says Linda Pophal, owner and CEO of Strategic Communications and a frequent speaker on social media.

Another site to consider is [Twitter](#), the quick-hit information site that allows you to follow people or groups that interest you and invite others to follow you. The site delivers nuggets of information in 140 characters or less. "What I love about Twitter is that you get real-time quick hits by following people who are in the world of governance," Lenkov says.

While some people use Twitter to post what they ate for breakfast, others use it to disseminate important articles. The key, Lenkov says, is figuring out which ones are relevant to you (see below).

Divulge With Caution

Once you're logged on, it's important to post the right kinds of information. For instance, there's no need to get into the details of all your jobs and every responsibility. And you should never post anything you wouldn't want the world to know. "It's the old rule about not saying or doing anything you wouldn't want to see on the front page of The New York Times," Marcus says.

Pophal says board directors should check with a company's policies on public communications before posting anything about the corporation. "Board members should post information consistent with and supportive of company messages," she says. "They should not post information that is confidential, critical, or damaging to the organization. For instance, you wouldn't want to post any kind of personal, opinion-based criticism about your company, decisions made by its leaders, or inside information about issues under discussion."

And if you don't want an influx of e-mail, limit the way you receive e-mails and be choosy about your followers. "If you use these tools in an intelligent way, then it's pretty safe," Lenkov says.

"It's simply a way to get information."

Sweet Tweets

Want the latest on corporate governance news on Twitter? Lucy P. Marcus, CEO of Marcus Venture Consulting and a board director herself ([@lucymarcus](#)), recommends you follow these people:

- Douglas K. Chia: [@dougchia](#)
- Douglas Park: [@DougYPark](#)
- Eric Jackson: [@ericjackson](#)
- Fay Feeney: [@fayfeeney](#)
- Francine McKenna: [@retheauditors](#)
- Frank Aquila: [@faquila](#)
- Heidi N. Moore: [@moorehn](#)
- Jayne Juvan: [@JayneJuvan](#)
- James McRitchie: [@corpovnet](#)
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