

Social lights

RIT grads show how
Facebook, Twitter, blogs
and the full range of online
media are being used to
promote the university's
mission and serve the
business world

Consumer-generated media. Web 2.0. Social media. A conversation.

👍 an unbelievable number of people like this.

🗨️ read the story below

These are phrases that describe the realm of new media encompassing – but not limited to – popular online applications such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn, along with activities such as blogging and podcasting.

The explosive growth of social media has left even “power users” trying to figure it all out: How do they harness its vast potential?

RIT alumni – on and off campus – are among those jumping in and using new channels to connect with new (and established) audiences in innovative ways.

Admissions: Online and face-to-face

Ashley Hennigan '07 (fine art studio) reaches out to prospective RIT students in both new and traditional ways. An admissions counselor for RIT's Office of Undergraduate Admissions, Hennigan uses social media to connect with newly accepted students – including those still on the fence about whether or not to attend the university – and she spends about half her time on the road.

While making tried-and-true face-to-face connections with would-be RIT students in New York City and Long Island, she simultaneously uses Facebook and Twitter to connect with students anytime, anyplace. And, on occasion, she helps resolve problems.

“I've been able to triage problems via Twitter,” Hennigan recounts. “A student posted,

‘Oh no, RIT never received my deposit’ – and I caught it the second he posted it and ran over to finance.”

Due largely to Hennigan's efforts, RIT was recently recognized by bluefuego.com (a Web site devoted to helping colleges and universities use Web-based tools in admissions and marketing) as one of the most “conversational” college admissions “tweeps” (Twitter-speak for people and organizations using the microblogging application).

Hennigan notes that many Twitter “followers” of RIT Admissions are older than traditional pre-college or college-aged students (something true of Twitter users generally) – making the use of multiple social-media channels crucial for connecting with incoming students.

The always-connected Hennigan – an artist by trade, originally from Saratoga Springs, N.Y., and now studying in RIT's communication and media technologies graduate program – hopes to see student experiences enhanced through social media by offering easier, quicker and more enjoyable interactions and value-added offerings.

“I would like to see us – at RIT – being even



Ashley Hennigan '07 (left) and Rachel Pikus '06

According to Nielsen Online, Facebook is the fourth most popular Web site in the United States and Twitter's popularity has grown 1,500 percent in the past year. iStrategyLabs reports that users ages 55 and up comprise Facebook's fastest growing-demographic.

more connected in these spaces,” she says, predicting growth in real-time applications aggregated and accessible from a single source.

Her advice: Stay in touch with the ever-changing social-media landscape by following such sites as Mashable.com (self-described as “the world's largest blog focused exclusively on Web 2.0 and social media news”), and become familiar with applications' privacy settings.

“I think interactive social media is definitely here for the long haul,” she adds. “Personally, I can't get away from it – I'm attached to my iPhone.”

Alumni Relations: Staying connected

While RIT Admissions uses social media to target arriving students, the focus of an RIT employee across campus is on those who've departed Brick City: alumni.

A primary task of Rachel Pikus '06 (professional and technical communication) – an e-communications specialist in RIT's alumni relations office – is engaging RIT alumni through Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube.

"I try to put myself – as an alum – in 'alumni-outside-of-the-university' shoes," says Pikus, a Buffalo native who joined alumni relations in January 2009. "What would interest me? What would I want to know about what's going on at my alma mater?"

In those shoes, Pikus has gone an extra step by creating a tutorial and training colleagues about using social media on the job. She offers simple but important tips: Show enthusiasm, be honest and respond quickly to

other users.

Before joining alumni relations, Pikus honed her social-media skills as a Web content manager and communications assistant at George Eastman House in Rochester. She is currently pursuing a master's in information technology at RIT.

She believes next-generation mobile technologies are the next big thing.

"My main focus right now, for this year, is to develop a system to communicate with alumni via their mobile devices," Pikus says.

"With RIT grads especially, many are more comfortable communicating via Web and e-mail – so, I think electronically is a great way to broaden our reach to the more than 100,00 alumni," she adds. "We want people to connect and benefit from communicating with RIT and their fellow classmates. My main goal is to keep alumni informed that your relationship with RIT doesn't stop when you graduate."

But while social media and mobile technologies are vital tools, even she needs an occasional break. After spending most of her workday "connected," Pikus enjoys using traditional communication vehicles – such as the magazine you're holding.

"The combination of all of them – even print – is really important," she says.

Predicting that social media's "big hitters" – Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn – are here to stay, Pikus offers advice to anyone hesitant about using social media: "Social networking is just an offshoot of your real social network, your real people who you talk to, real people who you communicate with. It's nothing to be intimidated by."

Fifty-five to 65-year-old females represent the fastest growing segment of Facebook users (socialnomics.net)

Kodak blogger is a 'woman to watch'

When Jenny Cisney '99 (computer graphics design) was named chief blogger for Eastman Kodak Co. in 2008, she likely became one of the first – if not the first person – to hold that title with a major U.S. corporation.

"Yes, it really says 'chief blogger' on my business cards," remarks Cisney, whose full title is chief blogger and social media manager. She's one of four RIT grads – Tina Clark '98 (interactive media design), Tom Hoehn '82 (graphic communications) and Joel Rosen '00 (computer graphics design) are the others



Jenny Cisney '99 is Kodak's chief blogger.

– actively involved with Kodak's brand communications, including the company Web site and new-media initiatives.

Cisney, who has been with Kodak for more than a decade, uses social media similarly on and off the job.

"Personally, I use social media to share my experiences and stay in touch with friends and family. Our goals for Kodak aren't very different from those. It's a great way to share with customers what is going on in the company and hear what they have to say."

Originally from Orrstown, Pa., Cisney this year was named by *Advertising Age* magazine one of its "Women to Watch." Blogging personally since 2000, the corporate world's first chief blogger advises, "Be transparent and open in what you do, participate frequently, listen and respond."

Grads make it easy to share and share alike

To a great extent, social media is all about sharing – sharing content, ideas, opinions and updates with friends and followers, customers and prospects. Two RIT alums have made it easier.

Created by a team led by Steve Shapiro '05

It took Facebook only nine months to reach twice as many consumers as radio reached in 38 years, says Web site Socialnomics (socialnomics.net)

New news is good news

A lot has changed since I joined RIT University News in November 1999. A decade ago, my job centered primarily around digging for news and writing news releases – printed on letterhead and "snail mailed" in envelopes (how quaint) – along with news stories for *News & Events* (our former twice-monthly, four-page printed newsletter).

Early in 2006, I became the department's first manager of new media. Today, a normal day is spent blogging, "tweeting," uploading and downloading.

In addition to posting occasional Twitter updates (twitter.com/RITNEWS), I also write regularly on the RIT News blog (www.thetigerbeat.com), record and produce podcasts (www.rit.edu/news/podcasts and Apple iTunes), update our Facebook fan page and Facebook group, and oversee our Web site (www.rit.edu/news) and *News & Events Daily*, our 1-year-old daily electronic newsletter that replaced the printed edition.

For both of the latter, I add same-day "RIT In the News" news clips. A decade ago, we waited for actual clips – cut from real newspapers – to arrive via U.S. mail a few weeks to a few months after they had appeared in print.

In fact, about the only things that have stayed the same are these: RIT still has lots of great people, plenty of good news to share, and, now, more ways to share it – immediately.

And RIT, my alma mater, is a place where I'm truly proud to work, live and breathe.

Mike Saffran '08

(information technology), digsbys.com facilitates the managing of multiple instant-message, e-mail and social-network tools via a single online interface. Part



digsby

of an entrepreneurship class project, digsbys recently surpassed 1.5 million users and has nearly 62,000 Twitter “followers” and more than 23,000 Facebook “fans.”

“The goal was to create a product that helps people save time doing the things they do most online,” says Shapiro, who grew up in Brooklyn and is president of digsbys parent company, dotSyntax LLC, based in RIT’s high-tech business incubator, Venture Creations.

Meanwhile, in McLean, Va., at a subsidiary of Clearspring Technologies, Justin Thorp ’06 (information technology) is the community manager for AddThis LLC (addthis.com), which created a Web-sharing “button” currently used on more than 400,000 sites (including www.rit.edu/news).

“It’s a little button that makes it easy for users to share content on the Web,” explains Thorp, originally from Lansing, Mich. “With just a click, they can share to Facebook, MySpace or over 150 services in 50 languages.”

Described as an upstart “giant” in online sharing, AddThis was recently featured prominently in an article in *The New York Times*.

But promoting sociability through technology is only part of his job.

“I say that I make and keep friends for a living,” says Thorp, whose responsibilities include continued on the following page



Justin Thorp '06, community manager for AddThis LLC

Tweet smarts

RIT University News (Twitter name: RITNEWS) recently conducted Twitter-style interviews with RIT social-media experts Stephen Jacobs (Twitter name: itprofjacobs), associate professor of interactive games and media, and Neil Hair (Twitter name: NeilHair), assistant professor of marketing, about the present and future of social media.

Hair recently made Systemic Marketing’s

list of “Top Marketing Professors on Twitter,” ranking number 27 with more than 600 “followers.” That leaves room for growth – topping the list is Christopher Penn (Twitter name: CSPenn), an adjunct professor at the University of San Francisco, who has more than 14,000 followers. (See the complete list at digs.by/1rs.)

In the true spirit of “tweeting,” each question and response is 140 characters or fewer.



RITNEWS Is social-media, especially Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, here for the long haul—say another 20-plus years?



itprofjacobs @RITNEWS I don’t even know if I’m here for the next 20+ years. So far, five years is an eternity in social media



NeilHair @RITNEWS If you’re not registered as an individual or a company across these channels by the end of 2009, it’s too late.



RITNEWS What’s your prediction for the “next big thing” in social media?



itprofjacobs @RITNEWS Alternate Reality Games that are played online, across media and in the real world. Check out Rochester’s ARG at picturetheimpossible.com



NeilHair @RITNEWS Managing one’s personal brand in digital channels.



RITNEWS Can you give any social-media “best practices” advice for individuals or organizations?



itprofjacobs @RITNEWS Don’t put anything online that you’d be uncomfortable with your mother or boss seeing now or your grandchildren seeing later.



NeilHair @RITNEWS Listen first, then engage. Finally, think about branding and your image – in that order.



RITNEWS In your opinion, what is the most effective social-media tool for reaching an audience?



NeilHair @RITNEWS My money is on Twitter, but it depends on your objectives, entirely. Horses for courses!



RITNEWS Do you have a favorite social-media tool?



NeilHair @RITNEWS Yes, talking face-to-face – which will, after a time, follow online encounters with interesting people (“Tweetups,” as an example).



RIT NEWS

Name RIT NEWS
Location Henrietta, NY
Web <http://www.rit.edu>
Bio RIT University News is the news and public relations division of Rochester Institute of Technology.

100 following **1,008** followers

continued from the previous page

marketing, customer outreach and support, and business development. "I'm one of the warm smiling public faces of the company."

Keep on truckin' (and tweeting)

As part of his job as communications manager for the American Trucking Associations (an advocacy group, based in Arlington, Va., that represents more than 37,000 trucking companies), Brandon Borgna '06 (professional and technical communication) writes for three separate blogs, including BizCentral.org, and he "tweets" on Twitter.

While an RIT student, Borgna, on a co-op with RIT University News, blogged on The Tiger Beat Blog (thetigerbeat.com) – one of the first and only higher-education news blogs focused on giving the "inside scoop," rather than a more traditional, straightforward news presentation.

"There's a huge shift towards all things digital and I can't begin to express how thankful

I am to have an education from a tech-centric school like RIT and wonderful exposure to new and social media while working at University News," Borgna says. "I've gone to a few social-media training luncheons at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which made me realize that I'm so far ahead of most PR folk around here, and having that background is probably my biggest competitive advantage."

Jumping in. Figuring it out. Earning a living and having fun. It's what RIT grads are bred for. (And you can "tweet" us on that.)

Mike Saffran '08

According to the Web site Socialnomics (socialnomics.net), if Facebook were a country, it would be the world's fourth largest

WEB EXTRAS:

Hear an RIT News podcast interview with Ashley Hennigan and Rachel Pikus, "Studio 86: Getting Social," at www.rit.edu/news/podcasts

Read an *Inside Higher Ed* Q&A with Mike Saffran, associate director for new media, RIT University News, on how RIT University News uses new media at www.rit.edu/news/utilities/pdf/2009/2009_06_19_HigherEdNews_Saffran.pdf

Read *The New York Times* article, "Share the Moment and Spread the Wealth," mentioning AddThis, at www.nytimes.com/2009/09/27/business/27ping.html

Follow RIT and some of the people featured in this article:

RIT

Facebook Fan Page: www.facebook.com/pages/Rochester-NY/Rochester-Institute-of-Technology/12355161929

Social Media at RIT directory: www.rit.edu/social_media.php

RIT News

Twitter: twitter.com/RITNEWS

Facebook Fan Page: www.facebook.com/RITNews

YouTube: www.youtube.com/user/RITUniversityNews

Blog: www.thetigerbeat.com/blog

Brandon Borgna

Twitter: twitter.com/TruckingMatters

Blog: www.truckline.com/truckingmatters and www.bizcentral.org

Jenny Cisney

Twitter: twitter.com/kodakCB

Blog: jennycisney.1000words.kodak.com

Kodak social-media directory:

<http://www.kodak.com/US/en/corp/ourCompany/index.jhtml>

Neil Hair

Twitter: twitter.com/NeilHair

Personal Web page: www.neilhair.com

Ashley Hennigan

Twitter (RIT Undergraduate Admissions): twitter.com/RITAdmissions

Twitter (Ashley Hennigan): twitter.com/ROctoNYC

Blog: ashleyshannon.wordpress.com

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/ahennigan

Stephen Jacobs

Twitter: itprofjacobs

Rachel Pikus

Facebook Fan Page (RIT Alumni Relations): www.facebook.com/RIT.Alumni

Twitter (RIT Alumni Relations): twitter.com/RIT_Alumni

Mike Saffran

Twitter (RIT News): twitter.com/RITNEWS

Twitter (Mike Saffran): twitter.com/MikeSaffran

Steve Shapiro

Facebook Fan Page (digsby): www.facebook.com/digsby

Twitter (digsby): twitter.com/digsby

YouTube (digsby): www.youtube.com/godigsby

Justin Thorp

Twitter: twitter.com/thorpus

Blog: drinkingoatmealstout.com

Get connected

RIT has created a social media directory that lists of more than 50 on-campus organizations using social media, plus quick links to the groups' Facebook, Twitter and YouTube pages. To connect to the directory, visit www.rit.edu and click on "follow us!"