



Computer Business

Faux Pas at the Social Networking Party

By Angela Render

Social networking. Agents and editors say you have to do it. I've given you how-to tips. You may have even tried it. Here are some common faux pas people make on social media. Could this be you?

Imagine social networking as a huge cocktail party at an extravagant, modern Malibu home overlooking a Pacific sunset. Everyone who is anyone has been invited, and a lot of people have shown up—from big names to everyday people. They drink exotic drinks, chat, laugh, nibble. Some dance or sing or show off their art. Both men and women exhibit the following:

The Gatecrasher

In walks a guest dressed in ill-fitting, high-fashion knockoffs—mismatched styles and gaudy jewelry. Grease dribbles from his slicked-back hair. He bellows greetings, slapping people on the shoulder as he strides to the center of the room. He gets up on a table, splattering the dip on his neighbors. He shouts in a stentorian bellow, "Get to the top of Google for just \$100 a month! I'm an expert! I'm an expert!" The partygoers quiet. They watch him a moment, and then resume their interrupted conversations, eventually drowning out the shouting.

First off, don't let this be you. Social networking is about chit-chat and making personal connections, albeit virtually. Screeching your marketing message at the top of your lungs won't get you anywhere on this medium. Second, don't let this guy scare you off. Ignore the spam and the general personal horn-tooting that is common on the media. Unfriend people, report them, hide their comments. Every social medium out there has a way for you to filter the information you receive. Don't worry about hurting feelings. The Gatecrasher's too busy shouting to notice.

The Wallflower

This lady has spent months preparing for the party. She's practiced her pitches, planned what she's going to say and how to deliver it, learned where the people she wants to meet cluster and what they prefer to chat about.

She's spent \$5,000 on the perfect designer gown, \$10,000 on her matching diamond jewelry, \$2,000 on heels just the right height and color, and \$1,000 on her handbag. She's spent the entire day at the salon. Manicured nails, professional hair and makeup: perfection. She arrives at the party in style, sweeps through the room, turning heads as she passes. She heads directly for the nearest potted ficus and stands behind it with her nose in the corner.

Sigh. For as many gatecrashers attending the party, there are even more ficus-dwelling wallflowers. Not all of them spent as much time or money on their looks, but many people who get this far never take the last step. If this is you, come out from behind the plant and socialize!

The Burnout

Jogging shorts, running shoes, and ponytail, she runs through the party bobbing and weaving, engaging everyone she can in quipped one-liner conversations, trips over a wallflower and is facebusted in the shag carpet, there to remain for the rest of the party.

Pace yourself. Many people embark on social networking with so much enthusiasm that they run out of energy or things to say. Socializing requires listening as well as talking. Slow down and enjoy the party. You have plenty of time.

The Disenchanted

This fellow came to the party dressed for action. He engages a few people in conversation. When he doesn't immediately draw a crowd, he throws his hands up in disgust and leaves, muttering that it was a waste of time.

This isn't the 1990s when putting up a Web site brought instant notice. It isn't the early 2000s when a little blogging drew an instant following. It's not even 2005 when social networking could get you friended by thousands of people in a few weeks. In 2010 you have to work for your following just like the rest of us. Log in. Be witty, charming, intelligent, helpful, or some combination thereof. Make sure you take the time to set up your software to best advantage, but participation over time is the key.

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Props—Just like backgrounds, props are important. Plan what prepared foods you intend to shoot and then gather the props accordingly. Look for props that both complement and contrast with the food dishes. As far as plates, generally stick with plain white or black. The plate is merely something for the food to be set on. With either a plain white or black, the plate won't draw attention from the food. Think about silverware, napkins, tablecloths, and even garnishes. When searching for nonfood props, watch for sales at stores such as Target, IKEA, Pier 1, etc.

You can stock up on great props and spend very little money. With garnishes, think color, such as fresh green herbs, red radishes, yellow curry, and orange paprika.

Techniques—When photographing prepared food, you have very little working time before the food starts becoming visually unappealing, so everything must be planned and staged ahead of the actual shoot. You have to work fast and get close. I like to visualize the setting and draw it out beforehand on a piece of paper. That way I can have the background and props already in place when the plate of food arrives, so I can squeeze out more working time.

Now comes the easiest part—shooting the food. Everything should already be in place before the plate of food arrives—tablecloth, props, tripod-mounted camera, lighting, and even an empty plate as a fill-in until the *real* one with the food arrives.

You'll want to zoom in to fill the frame, so set the lens aperture at f4 or f5.6 for a shallow depth of field. This will throw everything but the food slightly out of focus. The human eye focuses on the part of the image in focus—namely, the food. Set the tripod height so you are shooting at an angle slightly down toward the food, but not straight down, although there are times when shooting straight down may work, depending on the food subject. Use an ISO of 200.

Work fast. Even in a best-case scenario, you will have only about fifteen minutes to shoot that dish; most often you'll have much less. During that time, try different angles and slightly different camera heights, and use different garnishes. Employing the help of a trained chef to cook the food and prepare the presentation is invaluable. Work out a deal beforehand that is beneficial for both of you.

Once you have mastered the art of food photography, you will be in a small niche of a highly specialized type of photography and in high demand for your talent. Happy shooting!

Ron Kness is a travel writer and photographer with articles and photos published in various house publications, in-flight magazines, and other media sources. You can view a sampling of his photography work at www.mygalleryplace.com/ronaldkness. View his travel writings at www.sunlightmedia.net.

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The Corporate

He wears a tuxedo with the tie too tight. He stands quietly by the buffet, nibbling miniquiches. Occasionally, he speaks, but the words are scripted—lawyeresque. Once in a while someone will speak with him, but soon wanders off, leaving him alone.

It's a *party!* Loosen your tie and engage people as persons not as a corporation. There's such a thing as too professional. I'm not saying you should throw professionalism over a cliff. I am extremely careful about what I say and how I say it in all correspondences. But that doesn't mean I can't be entertaining or speak my mind. My mind and personality are what attracted my friends in the first place. This will be true for you as well. An unpleasant side effect of the corporate is that he or she often turns into the disenchanted or the wallflower. Social networking by committee won't progress.

This is a perfect opportunity to invite your participation. I would love to hear your social networking archetypes. Please write *WRITERS' Journal* and tell us about your experiences on social media.

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