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Online social networks are not only a fun way for citizens to communicate with one another, but are also useful tools for news media companies to utilize if they desire a universal readership. Social media can help an online publication reach its international audience, because members of social networking Web sites spread the news to their friends and family living abroad. Uploading a company’s link to its news site—whether in the form of a URL, hyperlink or clickable image—is a great method to develop an audience that spends a lot of time surfing the Internet.

For example, I used MySpace and now I use Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube. Facebook is currently the biggest social media company in the world. I use it often to communicate with friends and family living in South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. They can post news into their “status” and even upload links, pictures and videos of news-related events. Most of these would come from online publications. I connect to people around the world on LinkedIn, as well. This business component aids in furthering careers by also being on the World Wide Web. Finally, I watch many YouTube videos with a global emphasis. These clips come from several domestic and international online publications or broadcasting outlets. The average person can upload them and eventually build a huge worldwide audience. Furthermore, I have also blogged about Obama’s health care reform on BlogSpot as well as Disney-related news on Tumblr. These blogging sites are all open to the public. Anyone can click on the links I provided, which will take them to the actual media outlet that I gathered the information from.

Though I don’t use Twitter, it is another great tool for building an audience. Kevin Sablan, the Orange County Register’s online guru and social media expert mentions how easy it is. Simply uploading a cell phone photo of a U.S. Airways airplane that landed on the Hudson River less than five minutes ago can draw millions of eyes. Once people see or read something that is newsworthy, they pass it on and it becomes a sort of “chain letter” circulating through the Internet. Everyone can develop “followers,” including media outlets.

Chris Barr, editorial director of Yahoo! understands that online media properties can revolutionize the way the world consumes editorial content. One must develop an audience and use good editorial and content strategies. Yahoo! competes with MSN in this way by linking their content onto social media sites, making sure it is worth viewing by the average citizen.

Dave Piechowski, the ABC 7 web operations manager oversees the content for abc7.com and manages its delivery across social networks. He believes that for a media outlet to use social media Web sites, such as Twitter, Facebook and Google Buzz effectively, a journalist must build a brand like a curator would, instead of a writer. Topics must be covered with depth and quality and provide accurate information. Kevin Sablan compares this to a museum: different elements can be combined into something that can be presented to make sense to the viewers. Adding value to the content will pull people in, no matter where they reside on Earth.

The preceding are all excellent ways for news media to develop an intercontinental audience.