Keeping Up In A World All A Twitter

Essay presented to Columbus Kit-Kat Club

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Introduction

Mark Twain is purported to have said "The art of prophecy is very difficult, especially with respect to the future".

In 1997 I predicted that accessing the internet from our TV's would be common place by 2002. I thought the personal computer and the TV would become one and that we would be transacting much of our daily business through the interface of our televisions. In part this became a guiding justification for a major change in a customer service organization I was heading at the time. I pictured our customers sitting in their family rooms with the TV remote in hand doing all of their business with us – and never having to interact with one of our employees if they did not want to.

I think we would all agree that at a minimum I got the timing wrong. And that not foreseeing the advent of mobile computing – hand held devices like BlackBerrys and smart phones - was a bit of a miss as well. This "prediction" is now just coming true as internet ready televisions are becoming common place and affordable.

I guess I don't feel that bad. In 2001 Bill Gates erroneously predicted that tablet computers would be the most popular form of personal computer sold in America within five years. That would mean by 2006 we would all be carrying around Kindles and I pads. This has still not happened although it may become true now that Apple has now just released their I-pad. Even Bill didn't quite have the timing on his predictions right. But don't get me wrong, we (The Ohio Public Employees Retirement System) still own a lot of his companies' stock.

So I can't with a straight face put myself out there as an expert or even a good prognosticator of trends in technology. Instead, where I would like to take us tonight is less bold and risky – since we are not going to build a business around this topic and this is my first Kit Kat paper– but hopefully what I have to share will be enlightening to some and useful for others. I hope you take something away that you can at least think about and perhaps something you can use.

Before I go any further, I want to thank you all for allowing me into the Kit-Kat club. While often exhausted by the time I get here, this club has been a source of learning and most importantly friendship for a guy who moved here from Michigan three years ago. I am especially grateful to Warren Tyler who sponsored me and who has been so solicitous in introducing me to many in this community. My experience of Columbus would have been vastly different without his interest in my becoming part of the community. Thank you Warren.

In what I understand to be the Kit-Kat tradition, I thought my title was obscure. That was until I sat next to John Easton at Kit Kat last October. John was effusive about where I was headed and had several suggestions which I have tried to work in to this presentation. Anyway, so much for obfuscation.

My topic is "Keeping Up In A World All A Twitter". My sense is that the digital divide seems to be growing – between younger people and older people. Don't you wonder what our children, grand children and great grand children are doing with all of the electronic games, texting, even sexting, facebooking and tweeting? I remember when tweeting had something to do with birds. Anyway, now that I am in the second half of the first century of my life, I felt like I was missing something. This evening I want to talk a bit about this digital divide by discussing what is called social media and the advent of social networking sites. First I will attempt to describe and define these terms. Then I will offer some observations about how this way of communicating is different from what many of us are used to. Finally I will suggest some ways you may want to consider to step a bit further into this world. Of course, some in this room have already gone much farther than I have as evidenced by your responses to the on line survey. I would be curious about your observations during the question and comment period at the end.

There are a couple of ways in which this presentation is not a "normal" Kit-Kat paper. First, all the research was done on the internet. As much as I love reading, no books were read as part of my research. For that reason alone, you may wish to throw me out of the club. Secondly, this paper forced me to use a few of these new ways to communicate. Before I had selected the topic, I had not joined any social networking sites. So rather

than research, I felt like I was experimenting. I learned a lot from this and hope you find some of it valuable.

<u>What is social media and what are social networking sites?</u>

To get us on the same page, or computer screen, the types of sites I am talking about go by the names Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn.

Social media uses the internet and web-based technologies to transform monologues from one person to many --think Katie Couric doing the CBS Evening News --to dialogues – many people talking to many people --think 10 people in a room all talking at the same time, but all being understood. Imagine if you will that we were all talking as the same time, but you could understand what everyone was saying at the same time.

Social media changes people from content consumers to content producers. All parties are creating content and exchanging it – or at least making it available to be read. The content or information is exchanged virtually instantly and it is free.

Social media are different from traditional, broadcast or mass media like newspapers and television. Where traditional media require significant resources to publish or access information, social media are inexpensive and the tools to publish or access information are accessible to virtually everyone.

Social media depend on interactions between people to build shared meaning. It is not passive or one way. One example is trying to find someone you went to college with but have not seen in 30 years. Facebook or classmates.com are designed to make this easy. But more than that, once you have participated you are building shared meaning – an easy way to find others from your class or for them to find you. I must say it was a strange feeling to have Facebook suggest that I might want to be "friends" with a person from grade school who I had not even thought of in years. But if I decided to connect with him, it would have created shared meaning for both of us – a connection and a shared meaning that would have otherwise been unlikely.

Social media take many forms. You have probably heard of or experienced blogs, podcasts and internet forums. To narrow the scope of this paper I will focus only on social networking.[1]

Social networking services (SNS) or sites focus on building social networks and social relationships among people who share interests or activities.

They are defined by academics as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system." [2]

The most widely used SNS's worldwide are Facebook, Bebo and Twitter. MySpace and LinkedIn are most widely used in North America. These sites have attracted millions of users many of whom have made interacting this way a part of their daily routine.

Social network sites can be broken into two broad categories: internal social networking (ISN) and external social networking (ESN). An internal social network is a closed/private community composed of people within an organization. An example would be a project team in a work setting. An external social network is available to all web users and is designed to attract advertisers. This is where I have focused my attention. An internal social network can be an invitation only group created by a user of an external social network. External social networks can also be smaller communities linked by a common interest like golf. While most sites support pre-existing social networks, others help strangers connect based on shared interests, political views or other activities. Some sites attract diverse audiences, while others attract people based on shared language or racial, sexual, religious or nationality-based identities.

Whether internal or external, specialized or generic social networking sites share a common approach. Users create a profile of themselves and can supply a picture. One researcher called this "typing oneself into being".

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[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_media

[2] --http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol13/issue1/boyd.ellison.html

The profile is created by answering questions which typically include age, location, interests and an "about me" section. Users are able to be "friends" with other users, but both users must agree.

There are also privacy settings that control who can see the information they have posted. For instance Friendster and Tribe.net are, by design, visible to everyone. LinkedIn on the other hand controls what a user sees based on whether they have a paid account. MySpace users choose whether there profile is public or "friends only". Facebook is designed so that users who are part of the same "network" can see each other's profile unless the user decides to deny access to those in their network. An example of this was when my youngest son learned I was on Facebook. He first had to decide if he wanted me as a "friend" – here the answer was yes. He then decided to limit my ability to see some of his pictures. I think that is just as well.

The public display of connections is a distinguishing aspect of social networking sites. The friends list contains links to each friend's profile. On most sites, the list of friends is visible to anyone who is permitted to view the profile. Most social networking sites also provide a way for users to leave messages on their friends' profiles. This feature typically involves leaving "comments," although sites employ various labels for this feature. On Facebook, this is called "the wall". In addition, SNSs often have a private messaging feature similar to email. When I first started getting "friends" on Facebook I got several messages on my wall. I am still more comfortable using the private messaging feature – much like email- for person to person communication.

Interestingly, what makes social network sites unique is not that they facilitate users meeting strangers, but rather that they enable users to spell out and make visible their social networks. Prior to the advent of these technologies, I think it would be pretty uncommon for any of us to map out all of our friends and family almost like a very busy family tree. But that is what this technology does by making this network explicit. This can result in connections between individuals that would not otherwise be made, but that is often not the goal, and these meetings are frequently between "latent ties" who share some offline connection. Again my friend from grade school was suggested by Facebook to be part of my network because he is a friend of another one of my friends and we went to the same school – at least I think that is why. Given that some of my friends

are from high school or college these connections seem obvious now, but they were never spelled out before. So, on many of the large SNSs, users are not looking to meet new people, but primarily are communicating with people who are already a part of their extended social network.[3]

Who is using social media and social networking?

The answer is lots of people. 43% of US internet users visit social networking sites. This is up from 27% in 2008 – a 60% increase in one year.

The amount of usage is interesting too. More than half of social networkers log on at least once a day. The majority log on several times a day. Interacting with family, friends and celebrities are among the main reasons people access these sites. The majority of users log on at home, although a quarter of social networkers log on at work which raises challenging questions about managing its usage in the work place. Ten percent connect through their phone. Certainly this will increase rapidly with the advent of smart phones.

Social networking spans all generations. As you might expect, over 70 percent of those under 35 do it. But, apropos of the people in this room just less than 19 percent of those age 55 and over visit these sites, up from just 6 percent a year ago. Women are ahead of us on this technology. They are more likely than men to use social networking sites (48 percent versus 38 percent), but usage has increased dramatically among both groups in just a year.

Based on my survey of this club, the use of social networking is significantly higher than the 19% reported nationally. For instance over 50% are members of Facebook, over 40% are on LinkedIn and over 15% are on Twitter.

"Social media is here to stay," says Lynn Franco, Director of The Conference Board Consumer Research Center. "Online social networks are more than just a fad among the younger generation. They've become an

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[3] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_network_service

integral part of our personal and professional lives. They're an effective way to keep in touch with people, connect with friends and family, and network with colleagues. Social media will also transform marketing as we know it. They're powerful communication tools, and are becoming an essential part of successful marketing strategies."[4]

What does this mean for us?

It looks like this technology is here to stay. I am reminded of the movie "The Fly" from 1986 where Jeff Goldblum's character says, "Be afraid, be very afraid." Or to put it a bit less dramatically, this change seems to me to be enlarging the digital divide and is frankly a bit intimidating.

A Nielsenwire report from last November reports that web users averaged 66 hours of internet use during that month. Are any of us using the internet 66 hours in a month? My guess is that this number is driven by those much younger than us.[5]

In addition, when you think of how we like to communicate, the baby boomer generation and older prefer to communicate with emails, letters and face to face. One member of our group reports writing 600 letters in the last 6 months. While there is an email component to social media, you won't be looking for any letters in your mail box with this form of communication. Most of us are regular users of email though- with 96% of us checking it daily. So we should be okay. But maybe not. As these social media become the more preferred way the younger generations communicate, we are at risk of being left out or left behind.

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[4] http://www.conference-board.org/utilities/pressDetail.cfm?press_ID=3669

[5] http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/online_mobile/u-s-web-users-spent-just-over-66-hours-on-the-computer-in-november/

I took a look at the changes going on with email communications. As one of the technology writers for the Wall Street Journal recently wrote, "Email has had a good run as king of communications. But its reign is over".[6]

The Nielson Company reports that in August 2009, over 275 million people used email across the U.S., several European countries, Australia and Brazil, -up 21% from August 2008. But the number of users on social-networking and other community sites jumped 31% to 301.5 million people. So more people are using social networking than email.

Just like letters I suppose, we will still have email. But email is better suited to the way we used the internet at first—logging off and on, checking our messages from time to time. Now most internet users are always connected --whether we are sitting at a desk or on a mobile phone. Always being connected has created a host of new ways to communicate that are much faster than email, social networking among them.

Take Facebook for instance. You don't need to wait for an answer to an email for some questions because some questions can be answered without asking them. You don't need to ask a friend whether he has left work, if he has updated his public "status". Anyone with access can know the answer.

How will these new tools change the way we communicate?

The most obvious way perhaps is they make our interactions much faster.

Years ago, we were frustrated if it took longer than a few days for a letter to arrive. A couple of years ago, we might complain about a half-hour delay in getting an email. Today, those younger than us complain if it takes an extra few seconds for a text message to go through. Some writers speculate it will not be long before we may be complaining that our cell phones aren't automatically able to send messages to friends within a certain distance, letting them know we're nearby. Apparently this technology already exists.

These tools also make communicating more frequent and informal—more like a passing comment in a conversation, rather than a thoughtful email or letter sent to one person. There is not the need to spend time writing a

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[6] http://online.wsj.com/article/
SB10001424052970203803904574431151489408372.html

long email to a half-dozen close friends about how your vacation went. Now those friends, if they're interested, can watch it unfold in real time online. Instead of sending a few emails a week to a handful of friends, you can send dozens of messages a day to hundreds of people who know you, or just barely know. This is not a subtle difference.

Case in point? Twitter allows users to send 140-character messages to people who have subscribed to see them, called followers. So instead of sending an email to friends announcing that you just got a new job, you can "tweet" it for all the people who have chosen to "follow" you to see. The same idea applies with Facebook. Users post status updates that show up in their friend's "streams." They can also post links to content and comment on it. No in-box required.

David Liu, an executive at AOL, calls it replacing the in-box with "a river that continues to flow as you dip into it." I am still getting my head around this concept.

But faster and more frequent is also less personal and intimate. Communicating is becoming so easy that the recipient knows how little time and thought was required of the sender. While ones half-dozen closest friends can read your vacation updates, so can 500 other "friends." You are also likely to say a lot less than you would otherwise with so many people reading your updates. We have come a long way from the thoughtful and carefully written letter to the tweet. I am conflicted as I grapple with these new forms of communication. I feel both a sense of loss of intimacy and the advantages of greater connectedness.

The less personal and intimate nature of this communication worried some of you. In the brief on line survey, some commented on the eroding depth and quality of communication. Several others were concerned about the erosion of civility due to quick and harsh messages that tend to hurt feelings.

As something of an aside, it is interesting to me that my kids consider communicating with each other in this way as "talking". When they mention that one has talked to the other, and we ask when they saw or called each other, they say they "talked" on Facebook or by text. So the definition of "talking" seems to be changing.

Another difficulty is the amount of communication there is to manage. It is a constant stream. Information overload is one problem. When people

can more easily fire off all sorts of messages—from updates about their golf game to questions about the evening's plans—being able to figure out which messages are truly important, or even which warrant a response, can be difficult.

Enter filtering. With email, we can get by with a few folders, if that. But in the land of the stream, some sort of filter is a must.

On Facebook, you can choose to see updates only from certain people you add to certain lists. Twitter users have adopted the trend of "tagging" their tweets by topic. So people tweeting about a company may follow their tweet with the # symbol and the company name. A number of software programs filter tweets by these tags, making it easier to follow a topic.

The combination of more public messages and tagging has search and discovery implications. In the old days, people shared photos over email. Now, they post them to Flickr and tag them with their location. That means users can, with little effort, search for an area, down to a street corner, and see photos of the place. Here again you can almost feel the hair on the back of your neck stand up as big brother taps you on the shoulder and yet there is the enhanced utility of finding a picture of a place in seconds. You could not have done that even a couple of years ago.

Perhaps the most significant change that these email successors bring is more of a public profile for the user. In the email world, you are your name followed by a "dot-com." In the new messaging world, you are making easily available a "higher" profile, packed with data you want to share and possibly some you don't. Recent changes in Facebook security settings overriding what users had decided to share and not share has required even greater vigilance to limit what is shared. In my view Facebook was not transparent about this change which has not been discovered by many users- resulting in the sharing of information without them being aware of it.

Such a public profile has its pluses and minuses. It can draw the people communicating closer, faster -- allowing them to exchange not only text but also all sorts of personal information. You know a lot about the person you are talking to, even before you've ever exchanged a single word.

Take, for example, Facebook. Send a message to someone and, depending on your privacy settings, she may be a click away from your photos and your entire profile, including news articles you have shared and pictures of

that party you were at last night. The extra details can help you speed and deepen communication. If you see that I am in New York, you don't need to ask me where I am. This can also make communication feel more personal, restoring some of the intimacy that email does not contain when compared with say, letters. If I have posted to the world that I am in a bad mood, you might try to cheer me up, or at least think twice about bothering me. Perhaps more relevant to this group, if I had posted the title of this month's paper title for all my "friends" to see, I might expect to get questions or suggestions on the topic.

All of this additional personal data may also turn off the people you are trying to communicate with. If I really just want to know what time the meeting is, I may not care that you have updated your status message to point people to photos of your recent visit attendance at a White House State dinner – whether you breached security or not.

Having your identity pegged to communication also creates more data to manage and some challenges. For instance, what's fine for one sort of recipient to know about you may not be acceptable for another. While our growing digital footprints have made it easier for anyone to find personal information online if they go search for it, new communications tools are marrying that trail of information with the message, making it easier than ever for the recipient to uncover more details. For someone like me who tends to guard my privacy and a few respondents to the survey, this is a concern. For others, especially younger people, this seems to be less of a concern.

One other big question is whether the new services save time, or eat up even more of it?

Many of the companies pitching the services insist they will free up people.

With more information available and easily accessible – at the click of a mouse – we could at least theorize that time will be saved, freeing people up to do other things.

But you can also argue that because we have more ways to send more messages, we spend more time doing it. Not only do you need to get the snail mail and check your email each evening, but you also need to check your Twitter and Facebook accounts. That may make us more productive, but it may not. We get lured into wasting time. And we will no doubt waste time communicating stuff that isn't meaningful– in part because it is

so easy and requires little thought. This time wasting may be at the expense of more meaningful communication. Such as, say, talking to somebody in person.

<u>How might we respond to this change in the way we communicate?</u>

There are those who have and will continue to ignore these new ways to interact. Clearly, one can live a full life without ever friending someone on Facebook or tweeting. My topic for this evening is "Keeping Up In A World All A Twitter". So let me articulate some reasons why you might want to engage in helping bridge the widening digital divide.

First, if you are still working it has become or will soon become essential to success in business. Just as we all needed to learn about word processors and what a web page on the internet was, links to Twitter and Facebook are now common place in the business world. So, many of us will be required to learn to use social media to remain relevant in the business world.

I would argue, however, that there are other reasons. Curiosity is one. This group strikes me as a group of curious adventurers. As I have come to know some of you I am impressed by where you have traveled, the books you have read, the hobbies you pursue. One of the reasons for this club according to the "Plan of Organization and Traditions" is "the promotion of social intercourse among congenial men who are interested in literature, art, education and other matters of broad human concern". I think exploration of social media falls into one of those categories.

A second reason is the challenge of it. For me, use of social media has pushed me way out of my comfort zone. I feel ignorant on the one hand and have had to ask several people to help me. My kids have gotten quite a kick out of this. I also have a pretty strong predisposition toward privacy that I have had to modify to some degree to participate in social media and write this paper. In the end it has forced me to grow a bit and that is always good.

A third reason to engage social media is the desire that many of us have to keep up – especially with those younger than us. I would guess than many in this room were the youngest or the first to do many things in your careers or lives. This was true for me. But as I got older, I moved from being the young guy in the room to being one of the older ones. While not thrilled with this reality, trying to remain connected to the younger

generations through the use of social media seems a useful way to stay connected in an ever changing world.

The fourth reason is to stay current in a world that is changing very fast. Just as email was the major means of transitioning from letters and social media. Social media will transition us to something else. It seems that having missed a step in the transition will make engagement in what is next all the more difficult.

On the more personal front I offer a couple of reasons for jumping in and trying social media. The barriers to our ability to connect in as deep a way as you want with old friends and acquaintances are now gone. Social media finds and suggests people we might know. These are connections we likely never would have pursued. My experience during my experiment was a profound sense of gain in knowing friends from years ago are out there and having some sense of what they are up too. It is like that feeling you get when you are at a class reunion and everyone fills you in on what they have been up to for the last 30 years. You can take this as far as you want from doing nothing -- to reestablishing the relationship. This just would not have happened in my view without these tools.

Perhaps the most important reason I would suggest is that you can connect more efficiently with close friends and family. Now some will argue with me that this efficiency is at the expense of intimacy. I am not so sure. For those that I am already close too – like a son who is off at college who otherwise may only call once in a while- I am more able to keep up with him and him with me.

How to get started

Let me finish up with some thoughts on how to get started.

First and easiest is find a young person to help you. A child or grandchild is best, but most anyone in their teens, twenties or thirties will do.

Another way is to utilize a recent article in AARP called "Social Networking Primer"[7]. I left copies of the article in the back. This provides a step by step guide.

Finally if you are still working or like to network within your field start with Linkdin. More men use this service and it is transactional in the sense that you can find ways to apply it directly to your business.

Conclusion

To conclude then, social media are here to stay and I believe there are good reasons for us to engage. While I have suggested concerns about this new means of communications, these concerns do not for me outweigh the benefits for engaging. So make some time, grab someone to help and have an adventure.

Survey observations

52 were sent the survey

31 responses for a response rate of 60%

- 5 Kit Katters do not use email and were not sent the survey

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[7] http://www.aarp.org/leisure/activities/articles/ social_networking_primer.html?

- 4 have previously opted out of the survey instrument and were not included

How many letters?

Frequency	Number	Percent
0	3	10
1–10	11	35
11–50	12	39
51–100	4	13
101 and over	1	3
	31	100%

- One person writes 600 letters every six months

1. How often do you respond to email?

- 96.7% every day
- 3.3% a couple times a week

2. Have you ever sent a text message?

- 74.2% yes
- 25.8% no

3. Have you joined:

- Facebook – 89.5%
- LinkedIn – 73.7%
- Twitter – 31.6%

- 12 of 31 skipped this question

4. What worries or intrigues you about the growing use of electronic or digital communication?

- Worries
    - Promotes the fragmentation of society
    - More and more people get there information primarily from highly focused sources that do not offer balanced points of view

- Attention to grammar and style in correspondence is eroding (4)
- Depth and quality of communication is eroding (2)
- Erosion of civility (5). Quick, harsh and abrupt communication that hurts feelings compared with phone
- Work assignments "dumped" on people without effort to explain projects, or encourage collegiality
- Lack of privacy (2). Anything can be forward and this discourages honest and frank dialogue
- No reliable historic document for future use/research
- Security and longevity of electronic documents
- Being forced to electronic, and then unable to correct errors that get embedded in records
- Irresponsible dissemination of erroneous, false or libelous information (2)
- Identity theft (2) via unauthorized views of Facebook info
- Requests for networking (groups and individuals) I just as soon ignore. When I do, they persist.
- Inundated with too much email and too much information (2)
- Eats into time to think, daydream and plan
- Expectation for quick response takes grace and thoughtfulness away.
- Less warm and personal compared to face to face communication (2)
- Intrigues
  - Ability to build connections with like communities
  - Develop relationships that may or may not culminate in face to face ones, that are still real and important
  - Ability to connect with high school buddies from 30 years ago

- Intrigued by instant networking which occurs when first sign up on Facebook. I've discovered long-lost friends.
- Communication via texting, Twitter etc., vastly increases human contact.
- Hugely positive development. My access to and quality analysis of work affairs has increased exponentionaly.
- Ability to collaborate in real time across the globe with others has changed who I can work with on regular basis
- Email and text messaging has saved enormous amounts of time, mine and frustration (2)
- It is powerful...I think the internet is the "single greatest" invention of our time. It is a low cost delivery system for all kinds of business (healthcare, education and social interaction).
- "It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the most responsive to change." Charles Darwin
- Social networking has strengthened collaboration, and charitable initiatives with zero out of pocket expense
- Good outweighs the bad many times over