

Blogging & Social Networking

© 2009 by Nick B. Nicolaou, all rights reserved

President, Ministry Business Services, Inc.

Reprinted from *Christian Computing Magazine*

Today I'm feeling a little like Andy Rooney on CBS' 60 Minutes. While I'm not anywhere near 90 years old (he turned 90 on January 14th this year), I sometimes share his skepticism of some current trends. Today I'm thinking about the incredible amount of communication we do with technology, and am feeling a bit overwhelmed.

Blogging

Blogs are journals, or "web logs", that folks use to share thoughts, concerns, wit, and wisdom. I keep a blog (see <http://ministry-it.blogspot.com>) and have some fun with it! There are noteworthy blogs, and there are some that just make me scratch my head— or, if I was Andy Rooney, rub my eyebrows. But blogging is a great way to share your thoughts with others and have some fun!

There's an aspect of blogging that makes it a convenient medium: RSS. RSS (Real Simple Syndication) is a tool most blogs have that allow you to subscribe to their updates. Like getting the morning paper delivered to your door, these blog updates come to you! I prefer to receive my RSS feeds in Outlook 2007, which is very convenient since I check my email often and am in it a bunch. When working on my Mac, I receive RSS feeds in a free tool from NewsGator (www.newsgator.com) called NetNewsWire. If you'd like to know more about RSS, I wrote an article on it in 2006 you can download for free from my firm's website (www.mbsinc.com).

You can blog for free through many services, but my favorite is Google's BlogSpot (www.blogspot.com). Give it a try! It's fun!

Social Networking

Social networking websites like FaceBook, MySpace, and LinkedIn drive me nuts! There are so many of them! I think there must be at least one new social networking website created every week! What I don't like about them is that I have to log into their site to use them, and then they only allow me to network with others who are members of *their* service.

Enough already! Someone needs to create a solution that can aggregate and publish to every social networking service at once so we only need to go to one place to "meet" with our family, friends, and colleagues. Those of us who work, have a family, and are involved in a community (like church) just don't have time to do social networking in dozens of systems.

Twitter

Twitter (www.twitter.com) is the one social networking service I like. Similar to sending text messages from your phone, these are limited-length (only 140 characters) messages sent to everyone, to groups, or to an individual. Tweets can be sent to/from cell phones or computers, and can be subscribed to sort of like subscribing to an RSS feed, but in the twitterverse it's simply called following someone.

Must Unplug

The greatest challenge for many of us who work with technology is unplugging. My family recently told me— again— that I need to do a better job of unplugging when I'm off work. They want me to spend time with them that is undistracted; where they're my central focus. I agreed with them and reduced my tech-time— again— so I can be more available to them.

It's tempting to get defensive, or to respond negatively. But the health of our family relationships is very important, and each family member needs to feel like they are a priority in our lives. For those of us in ministry, this is especially important because we set the pace for those whom we have the privilege of serving and leading.

Bushy Eyebrow Perspective

Mr. Rooney once said, "Computers make it easier to do a lot of things, but most of the things they make it easier to do don't need to be done." And, "Computers may save a lot of time but they sure waste a lot of paper. About 98% of everything printed out by a computer is garbage no one ever reads." And, finally, "Making duplicate copies and computer printouts of things no one wanted even one of in the first place is giving America a new sense of purpose."

Mr. Rooney accurately observes that much of what we do on computers is not necessary, and doesn't help us accomplish what we hope to in life. Perhaps we can purpose together to be more discerning and intentional in our use of the technology at our fingertips.

Nick Nicolaou is president of MBS, a consulting firm specializing in church and ministry computer networks, operational policies, and CPA services. You can reach Nick via email (nick@mbsinc.com) and may want to check out his firm's website (www.mbsinc.com) and his blog at <http://ministry-it.blogspot.com>.