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Workplace demand grows for social media training

BY DENISE DEVEAU, POSTMEDIA NEWS SEPTEMBER 21, 2013



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Linda North, marketing and community manager for Ecobee, a maker of digital thermostats, is working on getting a digital strategy and communications management certificate course from the University of Toronto School of Continuing Studies.

Photograph by: Tim Fraser, For Postmedia News , Postmedia News

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Using social media is second nature to some. But businesses are quickly learning that it's an important part of job training today for employees who are digital natives and neophytes alike.

By most measures, Linda North would be considered savvy about social media. But she believes that there's always something to be learned. So the marketing and community manager for Ecobee, a maker of digital thermostats in Toronto, is working on getting a digital strategy and communications management certificate course from the University of Toronto School of Continuing Studies.

"I used to be in PR, so I did a lot of social media projects," she says. "But you always need to keep on top of all the changes. You're continuously having to learn what's going on in that world no matter what field you're in."

Social media training is especially important since companies of all sizes are looking for expertise in the field, she adds. "Everyone is learning the best way to use different challenges and how to communicate properly. The role of a social media community manager will only grow."

It's not just about learning the mechanics of Facebook or how to post items on Twitter. Social media training also includes the thinking and behaviour that goes with it, such as communications skills, policy development, proper online etiquette, strategic planning and content development.

"If you're just focusing on the social media tool, you're missing the boat," says Cyrus Mavalwala, founding partner of Advantis Communications Inc. in Toronto, a provider of social media training. "You also have to know how to use it to deliver value."

The demand for social media training is growing, he says. "Businesses are realizing it's not a fad anymore. The fact that anyone can be a spokesperson now is changing the landscape. Social media tools are in the hands of people across the organization, from sales and customer service to HR and marketing."

The spectrum of training needs ranges from older management teams who understand strategy and business value but don't know the tools, to those who are experts at using the tools but don't know how to apply them to business, he adds.

At the City of Mississauga, Marie Fitzpatrick, manager of corporate marketing and promotions, says social media training is conducted on a regular basis. It's in the form of a social media innovators group, a team that includes more than 25 people responsible for the city's different social media channels. Members get together quarterly to discuss strategies, best practices and lessons learned.

The challenge, says Mark Collins, vice-president of marketing, Cisco Canada in Toronto notes, is that social media tends to blend personal and professional lives. "When representing a company you have to know what that means and that there could potentially be billions of listeners. It's important to learn that social media is as much about listening as it is about talking."

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