

IMTS 2010: IN 140 CHARACTERS OR LESS



Those skeptical that social media can't serve as a valuable networking tool in the manufacturing community take note—Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Flickr and YouTube were just as busy as the exhibition halls during IMTS 2010 in Chicago. Whether it was Bosch Rexroth discussing its energy-efficient machines or Makino pitching a lunch-and-learn series on micromachining, information via tweets, videos and news feeds rolled in all week long.

Even the men and women behind the scenes at IMTS made a strong push to increase the role of social media in 2010.

"We introduced social media at IMTS 2008, but it was very small-scale," says Monica Haley, marketing communications manager at the Association for Manufacturing Technology (AMT). "In the two years since, it has grown and developed with the online preferences of the users."

Haley says exhibitors and attendees used the IMTS blog, Facebook, LinkedIn, Flickr and Twitter to varying degrees to push education about the show and the city. "We used to just post information about the show, the manufacturing and technology and general interest items, but this time we solicited entries from conference speakers and frequent industry tweeters. We posted images from the show floor to the blog and embedded videos which were cross-posted on YouTube."

Many exhibitors took it upon themselves to frequently update Twitter pages with information regarding their booths. This way, attendees knew when to stop by for a product demonstration or when a speaker was scheduled to discuss new technology. With a trade show of this size, the ability to update and share information beyond the official IMTS directory of exhibits proved a valuable commodity.

"Twitter was the most used medium at the show, but it was also the most promoted," Haley adds. "Facebook and YouTube were also popular sites utilized throughout the show. We posted many videos of YouTube, as did several exhibitors. I expect to see at least a handful of visitor 'experience' videos posted in the coming weeks."

IMTS tweeters were encouraged to add the hashtag #IMTS to their tweets during the show so that aggregate sites could draw like entries together to provide a single feed of content. "Televisions throughout IMTS displayed this aggregate, which encouraged others to contribute, and we used *tweetchat.com* to draw the

#IMTS feed," Haley says.

The social media push for the 2010 show began long before the doors opened. "We proliferated prior to the show with more blog entries, chatter on LinkedIn and posting videos to YouTube," Haley says.

Those that couldn't physically attend IMTS 2010 also found advantages to the various social media networks by participating in Twitter discussions, blog posts and YouTube videos online. "It was a useful tool for those who couldn't attend but wanted to experience the show remotely," Haley says.

The trick for keeping social media relevant in the future is to stay current on the various trends. MySpace, for example, played a large role at IMTS 2008 but has faded away as Twitter and Facebook have gained more prominence.

"Social media in general will be a growing part of the show, as well as the months between the shows," Haley says. "The challenge for us is to maintain and up the ante in the conversation. If any of the sites become overshadowed by another medium, we will focus on what's new."

While there aren't final totals for the number of tweets made on the exhibition floors, it appears social media will remain a relevant form of communication for IMTS in the future.

IMTS 2012 will be held September 10–15, 2012 in Chicago. Exhibitors can register now to be part of the initial 2012 assignment. For more information, visit www.imts.com.