

The Changes We Face — Part 1: Getting Social

The buzz at ACTE's Global Conference in Washington DC last month was all about social networking; the business world is finally beginning to figure out how to put what at first seemed like techno-toys for teenagers into actual business tools. Their value, points out researcher and author Daniel Burrus — remember "Techno Trends"? — is that they are highly adaptable communication tools that can be used to foster teamwork, customer relationships and collaboration. Burrus has provided a checklist:

- Facebook: In the everyday world, users join networks organized by city, workplace, school and region to connect and interact with others. Friends send each other messages to stay connected via the selected online network. Businesses can use the same technology to connect all their employees — "members" in Facebook parlance — sometimes in internal, secure networks.

Best use, says Burrus: internal networking and collaboration.

- Twitter, a micro-blogging service that allows friends, family and co-workers to communicate and stay connected through the exchange of short, quick answers — no more than 140 characters (NOT words) per message. Senders can restrict delivery to those in their circle of friends or co-workers. Users can receive updates via the Twitter web site or other social networking sights such as Facebook. Young people use Twitter for answering the question "What are you doing?" but business can change that basic question.

Best business use: probably problem solving, says Burrus, but he notes that it's also being used to pitch services and deliver travel updates.

- Wikipedia: Its public / personal use is as a free online encyclopedia that anyone can use to find information on virtually any topic. Anyone can edit the content as well. Manufacturers are using the same technology to share information on parts and services, repair and maintenance instructions. Others are adapting it to training programs.

Best travel use may be as a repository on company policy and programs.