



### QUESTIONS FOR SARAH A.O. ROSNER: INTERNET & SOCIAL MEDIA

Sarah A.O. Rosner is a choreographer and arts entrepreneur dedicated to using radical questioning and innovative business approaches to move the dance world towards sustainability, and she loves to yell about art.

[www.theAOMC.org](http://www.theAOMC.org)  
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*In 2012, social media remains an evolving terrain in which artists and organizations must determine which platforms, levels of participation, and tracking methods are most effective and sustainable for their own needs. To inform this process, LMCC has invited six artists and arts professionals effectively using social media to share their approaches, successes, and lessons learned.*

**1. Briefly describe your work as an artist and any other roles or affiliations you have as an arts professional.**

I run a company called [the A.O. Movement Collective](http://www.theAOMC.org). We make performance work, but are also interested in engineering sustainability and new arts-business structures within dancemaking. To do this, I've founded two other companies: [Urgent Artist](http://www.urgentartist.com), an arts blog (and means for resource sharing), and [A.O. PRO\(+ductions\)](http://www.aopro.info/), a freelancer collective that offers affordable management, consulting, media, and design to working artists. All three companies are young (the AOMC was founded in 2006, UA in 2008 and PRO in 2009), so for all of them I fulfill multiple roles: director, fundraiser, content provider, marketer, choreographer, HR, etc. For the past four years I've also been working full time as the Manager of Engagement at New York Live Arts (formerly Dance Theater Workshop)—I'll be leaving at the end of May 2012 to evolve my three companies above into a more full-time capacity.

**2. When and how did you start using social media professionally? How and why do you use it now?**

I'm fascinated by my generation because we're on the cusp between digital immigrants (people who have come to technology later in life) and digital natives (people who have lived with technology since birth). I find myself more on the digital native side —each of my companies' founding *included* social media creation— the fact that they had a Gmail account or a Facebook page (or at that time, a group) was as much of a sign of their existence as the beginning of our work in the studio or signing of a contract with a client.

**(cont'd)**

I mainly use social media for presence, interaction, and information sharing rather than say, for sales or word of mouth. That dictates the tools I use: Facebook (social networking), Vimeo (video sharing), Constant Contact (email marketing), Wordpress (websites, blogs), Tumblr (websites, blogs), Pinterest (image, video sharing), and newly: Kickstarter (online fundraising/crowdfunding).

The only ones I flatly don't use are Twitter (I'm a maximalist) and Foursquare (although I should probably give it a try). I also create websites and projects that are mini-social networks in themselves, or that rely on a digital native or social networking mindset to function (for example, [the MENU project](http://theaomc.org/menu): <http://theaomc.org/menu>)

For all of the platforms, I try to offer a mix of news, insider information, and calls to (inter)action.

**3. Do you use any tools or methods to track readership, website traffic, click-throughs, shares or other evidence that you are reaching and engaging people? If so, which tools and why?**

I generate basic Google analytics reports for all of my sites, and follow the user tracking on Facebook pages and Vimeo, more for my own interest and geekery than as a strategic tool, although that may change in the near future.

The things I pay most attention to are the structure and timing of click-throughs and likes (for example, looking at how the *time* of the email or post affected the open rate, rather than the content, or how the visual structure of a page is highlighting certain click-through paths rather than the logical flow of information.) There's no such thing as too much information in my book, and I enjoy being aware of trends even if I'm not using them as hard data to boost sales or attract new business.

I find myself using tracking info most often to be used in human context—noting that a friend of the company liked a certain post and remembering to bring up related information the next time I see them, or seeing that a prospective donor clicked a donate link but didn't follow through, so following up in a different context.

**4. If you have one great success story about using social media, please share it.**

[The MENU project](#) (while a created, rather than traditional, social media platform) has been a real victory for us in making progress toward sustainability. We created the MENU project in hopes of creating a [transmutable](#) piece (<http://vimeo.com/42058956>) that would offer a more sustainable way of dancemaking —the main user function was that people could see video of each section of a piece in process, and then book their own selections. We would collaborate with them to make a version of the piece in their traditional or non-traditional space. Think Kickstarter meets Vimeo meets Tumblr.

The project piqued the interest of someone we had never met in person, who happened to be on our email list. The level of interactivity and transparency of the creative process motivated her to curate [our first performance](#) (<http://vimeo.com/29568178>) with the help of a friend, and proved to be a fantastic experience for everyone involved. She is now a member of our advisory council, and one of our biggest supporters!

All this cultivation/evolution has happened in less than a year — by traditional models of donor cultivation and audience engagement, we would still be trying to get her to come to her first show. By creating our own new media, we were able to take what was already present in our work and make it accessible to new audiences, develop the work, generate earned income, and make an invaluable connection with a new supporter!

**5. Please share the most important lesson you've learned using social media —or a “mistake” you think that others could learn from.**

Something that I've learned (that I fiercely resisted when I was younger, perhaps because it felt like a resignation that I was no longer truly young and knew it automatically) is how helpful it can be to research best uses and creative ideas for platforms before jumping in. While I'm still a huge advocate of learning by doing, I'm also starting to see the value in not reinventing the wheel every time you join a new type of media. Why not learn from what the best in the field are doing, assess their victories and mistakes, and start out on the right path?

A good example of this is my use of Twitter vs. Kickstarter. I didn't really understand Twitter when I made the AOMC's account, and just followed a ton of random people in the hope that they'd follow me — big mistake, as now my feed is too full of spam and random to be of much use. For Kickstarter, I spent a lot of time researching best practices so I had all the strategy knowledge in mind when we launched our first campaign. You always learn as you go, but starting out with clarity and knowledge can make a big difference.

**6. How do you manage and prioritize your time and effort on social media?**

I don't. The only things I schedule are monthly e-blasts (Constant Contact) and an annual or semi-annual fundraising campaign (Kickstarter or e-blasts combined with a few blog and Facebook posts). The rest really feels like a holistic part of my life as a digital native. I think that a growing lack of boundaries between our social/personal and our artistic/startup-founding selves is something that's increasingly common with my generation and those younger. In much the same way, I don't segregate use of social media as my personal self, my artistic self, and my business self. I'll post something for myself, then update the AOMC's Facebook, and then work on a post for UA about a project I've just finished for a PRO client — it's holistic, ongoing, and (for the most part) second nature as opposed to a technique or item on my to-do list. The use of social media feeds the creative/business work as well, leading to realizations and innovations that are then shared, so it becomes very cyclical. For some platforms (Pinterest is a great example) there's even less of a separation between selves — some of the most important and exciting parts of my personal self *are* my companies — why would it be any different online?

**7. What do you consider to be important “dos or don'ts” for using social media?**

DON'Ts:

- Don't make it about *you you you* all the time — it's endlessly boring and it doesn't work. Instead, use social media to interact just like you would human to human – ask questions, network, share, and be generous!
- Don't use a platform just because everyone else is on it — assess if it's right for you, check to see if you seem to be getting a return for your effort, and ask yourself if you enjoy using it.
- Don't be afraid to outsource work or ask for help — if you're a digital immigrant and feel endlessly lost with social media, it might not be worth your time or energy to do it yourself. That's okay! There are lots of people out there who can help.

DOs:

- Update *often* and update *interesting*.
- Shoot for “lean forward” engagement/interactivity rather than “lean back” entertainment.
- Create your own platforms and media! Our brains are becoming more and more hardwired to actually think in terms of programs and media — might as well use it to be creative and productive!