



**Lower
Manhattan
Cultural
Council**

EMPOWERING ARTISTS,
INVESTED IN COMMUNITY

MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS FOR ARTISTS

BOOST YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

QUESTIONS FOR SYDNEY SKYBETTER: INTERNET & SOCIAL MEDIA

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 invited six artists and arts professionals effectively using social media to share their approaches, successes, and lessons learned.



LOWER MANHATTAN CULTURAL COUNCIL (LMCC): Briefly describe your work as an artist and any other roles or affiliations you have as an arts professional.

SYDNEY SKYBETTER (SS): I have a pretty stereotypical gen x/y workload. I'm an independent choreographer with a company in Brooklyn now setting a new work at the Kennedy Center, I'm a curator with the DanceNOW[NYC] Festival that produces dance shows at venues ranging from The Public Theater to DTW, I'm a lecturer and speaker on subjects ranging from technology to dance history, and a clipboard-toting change management and technology consultant at a consultancy I co-founded. I'm a trustee of Dance/USA and Zia Artists, teach at a number of universities, and volunteer for several not for profits.

(LMCC): When and how did you start using social media professionally? How and why do you use it now?

(SS): I was dragged on to Facebook late —about 2007 or so. Enough people bullied me into it that, despite my fear of being targeted by ex-girlfriends, I was convinced it was a good career move. The 'how' of Facebook, et al. was still being developed —it wasn't immediately clear to me what the point was, but of course, now I'm a zealot for social platforms and social tech.

Content updated 2012

I divide my time between Facebook (which is more about personal marketing for me, along with occasional crowd-sourcing when I'm researching something or collecting opinions) and Twitter (which is ALL about signal collection). Twitter, by and large, is more useful to me. I only follow people / brands that I need to do research on or that function as content curators, and have found it to be a great way to stay ahead on all sorts of curves. I could live without Facebook. I'd die without Twitter.

(LMCC): 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?

(SS): I have a pretty rudimentary goulash of Bit.ly analytics (to share, track and analyze links), Google analytics (to track website traffic and online marketing), Hootsuite analytics (aggregator to measure performance across various social platforms) and Facebook analytics (tracking metrics for Facebook applications, websites, pages).

I tend to use these platforms for utilitarian ends, so people either answer a question I pose on these networks, or they don't. 99% of the time I don't need to track who is clicking through what because my only prerogative is to gather intel that folks volunteer when they tweet back at me or comment on a post. I'm pretty lucky, all told. In a moment of light snark, I asked the Internets if I should buzz my hair or not. Nearly 70 people commented. It's insane.

(LMCC): If you have one great success story about using social media, please share it.

(SS): In 2009, we used Facebook and Twitter exclusively to market that my dance company was live streaming its rehearsals and performances. (This was before everyone was doing it, mind you.) By the end of the campaign —and exclusively thanks to traffic garnered through online social platforms— more people viewed our 2009 season online than could make it to the sold-out run, and folks made donations without solicitation. It was a different time, but it indicated to me that if you're doing something novel and interesting, there just is no better way to get news out there than through online / social means.

(LMCC): Please share the most important lesson you've learned using social media —or a "mistake" you think that others could learn from.

(SS): Expectation management is crucial. I was convinced to start a company fan page on Facebook that I knew I didn't / don't have time to administer. It has a few hundred fans, but doesn't generate meaningful traffic or conversation. I really should just shut the thing down, but funny enough, I can't get around to that either. I think the thing to learn here is to be honest with yourself about how much time you can commit to this junk, and to acknowledge / learn from "failure" as quickly as you can.

(LMCC): How do you manage and prioritize your time and effort on social media?

Content updated 2012

(SS): It's such a part of my workflow now it's hard to differentiate social media from my work overall. It's a vital tool for my day-to-day, so it's not like I'm using it to post skateboarding dog videos. I mean, g-d, I wish I had time to waste on social media. It'd be a hell of a lot of fun I'm sure. I do occasionally post a picture of my kid. But he's exceptionally and empirically cute, and frankly, generates more traffic than almost everything else I do.

I post on Facebook an average of twice a week, but check it maybe four or five times a day. (Total daily investment: maybe 15 minutes, more if I've posted something that brings about some sort of conversation.) I tweet / retweet an average of 10 times a day, very roughly. I check Twitter whenever I have a free moment. (Total daily investment: maybe an hour, more if I'm tracking a news event, conference, or particular conversation.)

I try really, really hard to make this all worth my time. It's a constant struggle, because there is an incredible temptation to make these platforms, well, personal—to make it about friends and "socializing." It's not. It's about the appearance of those things. It's a simulacrum of the personal, and the time investment (at least for me, a stupidly busy father and owner of my own businesses) *has* to pay off professionally. It's a little mercenary. My wife accuses me of killing Facebook for everyone else. We can both be right.

(LMCC): What do you consider to be important “dos and don'ts” for using social media?

(SS): *Do:* get to know your metrics. If you can't measure success somehow, don't waste your time online. *Don't:* be uninteresting. This is harder than it sounds. *Do:* try things. Pinterest. Google+. They're all good at different things and you'll never know if another platform isn't better for your purposes if you don't give it a shot. *Don't:* be a broadcaster. These are listening mediums. Don't be that guy who whines about their boss and then begs for attention. That's what shrinks are for.

Sydney Skybetter is a choreographer, curator, and consultant at Edwards & Skybetter LLC | Change Agency
www.skybetter.org
www.edwardsandskybetter.com