

Sound Bites: What to Say Online
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Over the past decade, we have seen the internet just explode with content and data. The way we receive information has changed. Within the square dance activity, we have been behind the times for using these new features to our advantage. Many people in the activity have blamed technology as a reason for the decline in square dancing. I don't know if that statement is true, but what I do know is that social media can help us to promote, advertise, and engage both dancers and non-dancers.

Ways to communicate your message

1. E-mail & Email Newsletters
2. Forums
3. Blog
4. Website
5. Social Media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram,)
6. Youtube
7. Newspapers

Emails: (Electronic Mail) is the oldest way to communicate online & works much like traditional mail that it is sent from one person to one or more people. While it does deliver a message, it does not allow people to communicate easily between one another like social sites like Facebook. Currently some callers have **newsletters** that dancers can subscribe to.

Forums: Either through an e-mail list or part of a website that allows for group discussion. Members, not just one leader, can start a discussion that others can read and reply to.

Blog: an online journal usually written by one person. This can be used for many different reasons depending on the writer → a personal diary, provide information, or tutorial.

Website: a semi-permanent home on the internet and a great way for people to find you or your group. Websites can be as basic or complex as you wish. Some great information to include would be: biography, schedule, promo picture, home program information, and links.

Social Media: A user creates a profile and is granted access to the site where they can view other user profiles and connect with them. On Facebook, users can create a personal page, a group page, and even a fan page.

Youtube: allows you to upload a video for others to discover and watch.

Newspapers: Many newspapers have gone from paper print to digital/online editions. Articles are a great way to promote the activity in your area and most newspapers are begging for good content and color photos.

Start with Facebook

I think everyone should have a Facebook page. It is free and can serve multiple functions. First, it is a great way to connect to friends & family. It has the most daily traffic and it is easy to create a group page. (Example: Top Spinners Memphis) Below are a few other things you can do.

1. Remember important dates: Wish couples a Happy Anniversary or say Happy Birthday to an old friend.
2. Upload photos from a current dance or flyers for a future event.
3. Promote upcoming Beginner Dances and have your club members share, post, tweet & like.
4. Share – did you find an article or video relevant? Share with others that might find it entertaining.

“The currency of social media is relationships. Therefore, your focus should be to create as many relevant relationships as you can.”

Ten Important Things to Remember

1. Have a Plan

Before you start, have a clear idea of your purpose. Are you informing current dancers? Are you trying to recruit non-dancers? The type of information you include will vary as well as the language you use. *My first goal was building awareness in my community. Now, I'm focused more on building customer engagement.*

2. Stay Focused & Be Consistent

There are a lot of websites that litter the World Wide Web. Have you searched for your favorite caller only to find out what their calling schedule was for 2009? Be sure to keep it updated with relevant information. Some helpful hints are to *post the schedule for the entire year or use language like: recently, last month, or soon*”. Make sure phone numbers are up to date and watch for spelling & grammar.

3. Create/Know your personal brand

A brand is anything that separates you from someone else. This can be a symbol, design, name, reputation, tone, etc. Be positive and upbeat. This can get you recognition in your field and better contacts. Maybe it's a tag line *“Thanks for coming & thanks for staying!”* or maybe you always tell a story about your adventures. Be unique.

4. Pictures REALLY are better than 1,000 words

Research shows that 87% of all interactions of a Facebook page happen on photo posts. To compare, posts with links receive 4% of all interactions. Choose a photo that is appealing. Crop & edit photos and remember who your audience will be. *Tag people in photos as a way to share.*

5. Call to Action

Leave your readers with a clear call to action. Try to only promote one objective at a time. You can talk about multiple things but have a clear conclusion.

6. Mix it Up

Try some different things to keep an audience engaged. Have a contest and offer a prize. Ask for people to submit photos or answer a question. Poll the audience for feedback.

7. Know & Use your Symbols

- a. **Hastags:** The pound sign (#) turns any words or group of words into a searchable link. #squaredancing #CALLERLAB #TeachingOldDogsNewTricks
 - i. Don't use spaces. Everything is one word
 - ii. Numbers are okay
- b. **The @ sign:** The @ sign is used to call out usernames in Tweets: "Hello @twitter!" People will use your @username to mention you in Tweets, send you a message or link to your profile.

8. **Start Slow & Run a Marathon:** It will take a while to build followers. This is usually a good thing because it will give you time to figure out your message. You don't have to create every account today. Start with one and watch it develop over time.
9. **Don't try to hard sell** – If you have been on social media awhile, you all know that one person you try to avoid because they will twist your arm to try “the latest thing that will change your life.” Don't be that type of person. Create awareness or start a conversation that can possibly translate into them becoming a dancer.
10. **Articles online** – a free way to gain exposure. Have one person in charge of writing the articles & one for taking pictures. 3-4 paragraphs are all that's needed. Give the basic description of the group and event. Pictures are a huge plus. List the dancers' names and where they are from. E-mail the same article to various newspapers and just change the names of the dancers listed.

Examples:

ReasonToDance #9 It's scary! Just kidding! to step outside of your normal routine can be uncomfortable. Embrace it.

ReasonToDance #5 Research found that a weekly dance program could improve physical performance & increase energy.

ReasonToDance #2 – Improve posture. Dance requires balance & coordination & helps to strengthen your core.

List Reasons to Dance:

Entertainment – Socialize – Get Out of the House – Exercise – Learn Something – Family Time

What if you could find one super-activity which accomplishes everything on your to-do list, all at the same time? It would be awesome! Can you imagine how free and simple your calendar would be, if you could check everything off your weekly to-do list with just one activity?

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