

WILL MELTON

ON SOCIAL MEDIA



Will Melton, co-owner of Computer Concepts of Williamsburg, began working in the technology industry in 2004. With a strong background in customer service and extensive experience using software applications, Will quickly began expanding his knowledge of computers and the Internet. While his proficiency working with computers is on par with his lead technical team, his time is spent focusing on building community partnerships and reaching out to the multitude of individuals and organizations in Williamsburg.

With a great deal of time spent researching new technology, Will is familiar with the most popular social media websites on the Internet. He uses many of them to interact with his friends, family and community.

How do you define social media?

Social media is media that allows individuals and organizations to spread information to a broad audience and allows for social interaction from the audience such as comments or rebroadcasts. Some

forms of social media allow users to share ideas and digital content anonymously while others allow users to connect to a network of people who are interconnected with other networks. Often times these networks overlap allowing users to be exposed to and ultimately connect to other people or interests.

Why do you think it has become so popular today?

With constant advancements in technology, communication has transformed from party telephone lines to rotary tele-

phones and pagers to cell phones. The natural desire of humans to be able to communicate with one another has driven communication technology to make it easier and faster for people to connect with one another. Thinking about what it was like to try to get in touch with someone before cell phones were widely used, it's hard to think about how we lived without them. Since the popularity of text messaging has grown, so has social media, which gives us the ability to connect to hundreds or thousands of people, not just one person, instantly.

How does social media impact the average person living in Williamsburg?

While there is a great divide among generations – younger people taking faster to technology - older individuals have been forced to grasp it as well. I have watched many of my own customers begin using email and cell phones for convenience because that's how most people communicate. Often times the desire to connect with grandchildren or with family members who are deployed overseas is their motivation, but once they learn how to use the technology it becomes fun for

them as well. Because of this, I think that the average person in Williamsburg is very connected to social media and likely uses some form of it on a fairly regular basis.

There are many popular websites that are a part of social media – My Space, You Tube, Facebook etc. What do you think is most popular with people at home? Why?

I would say that Facebook is, by far, the most popular social website online today. While sites like MySpace and YouTube are popular, they are often more popular with the younger generations. The average person is more likely to use Facebook because of the vast number of users on the site and the ease in which one can connect to another. There are other popular forms of media such as Twitter, but in that specific case, many people still have no clue how it works; those who do, often find it difficult to find ways to utilize the technology.

Right now, Facebook seems to be a very

popular website. Why do you think this is the case? What does this website offer that is so attractive to people?

When I first had a MySpace account and Facebook was introduced, I vowed to not let Facebook become my primary social networking site. However, Facebook was originally designed for the college crowd and ultimately older people while MySpace has continued to appeal to a largely more youthful audience. As time went on I accessed MySpace less frequently and Facebook more. Since that time, Facebook has been able to stay consistent while still introducing changes that are designed by popular demand. What I find fascinating is that Facebook has allowed for the integration of many third party applications and games, while giving the user a choice as to their involvement with those apps.

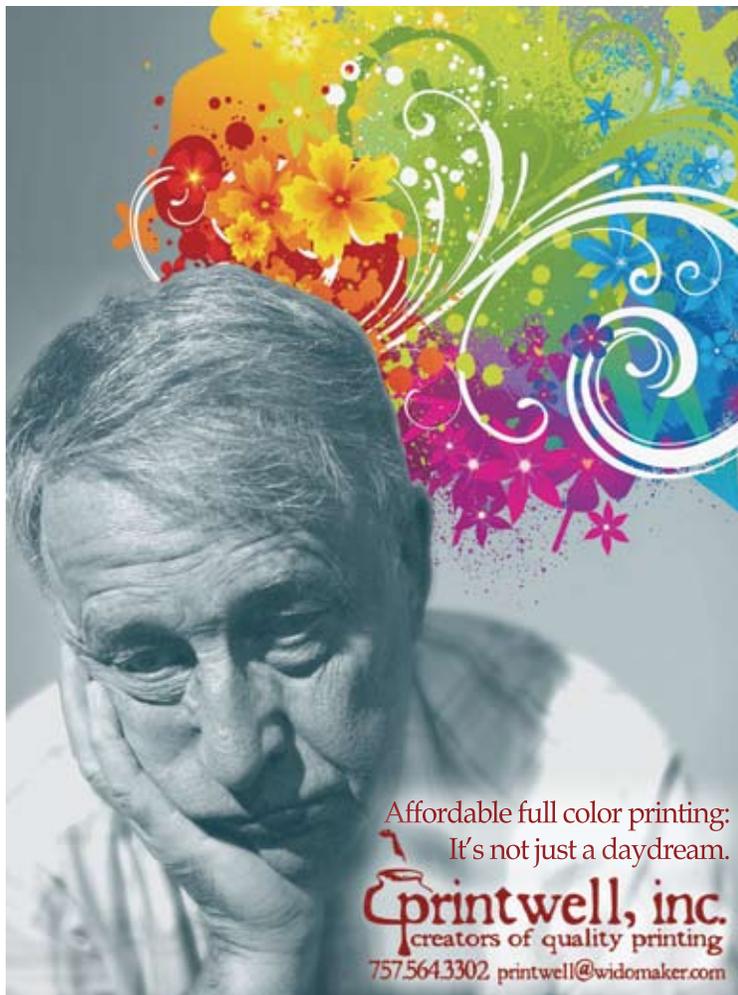
What was your first foray into social media?

Many years ago I installed a toolbar on my web browser called StumbleUpon. It

allows users to discover websites that fit a predefined criteria of interests. As users click the Stumble! button they are taken to random websites that are recommended by other users on the network. You can then choose to give the site a thumbs up or thumbs down, ultimately affecting the site's popularity and the frequency with which it is shown to other users. While I did not use the tool for very long, when I did use it I would get lost for hours looking at fun and interesting websites that I never knew existed. Some of the websites were interactive, some were informative and others we just plain hilarious. In 2004, I began using MySpace, but I rarely log onto that website anymore, either.

Which social media networks are you most active in now?

I am definitely most active with Facebook, but I am finding more ways to utilize Twitter as I try to promote my business and my personal blog. Speaking of blogs, a blog is another form of social media that allows users to effectively share a journal



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with the world. I enjoy writing in my blog, but Facebook has captured my attention because I am able to find and connect with just about everyone I know or meet and Twitter tends to be more work than fun.

Is social media just for young people?

Social media is absolutely for everyone. While popularity among young people is usually the force behind wide-spread popularity, eventually older people end up using the technology to connect to their family and friends and share with others who have similar interests.

You are a member of Facebook. How do you use it in your everyday life?

I use Facebook primarily to find out what is going on in my friends' lives and to connect to distant loved ones. In these busy times I meet many people, but don't always have a chance to get to know them better. Facebook allows for an immediate connection and it has become a more convenient way to get in touch. In addition to my personal interaction, I have used Facebook to connect to a number of professionals in the community who also have Facebook accounts. I also use Facebook to promote my blog, and my company website through sharing information and purchasing ad space on the website.

Is it simply a way to stay in touch with people or do you also use it as a part of your business strategy?

As Facebook has become more popular, I have integrated it more and more into my business. Facebook is a way to keep myself and my company in the forefront of others' minds. The more you post on the site, the more people will see you and ultimately the more they will remember you. When it comes to marketing, they say it takes seven impressions before a consumer utilizes the services of an advertiser. I remember seeing one of my company's Google ads on Facebook; I thought it was so cool that I decided to start an ad campaign through Facebook itself.

Do you ever feel uncomfortable sharing personal information about yourself?

I am a pretty open person and am typically willing to share with everyone who I am, what I am like and what is going on in my life. The only thing that I have worried about is clients or potential clients not doing business with me because they know more about my personal views and lifestyle.

What controls does Facebook offer for you to limit accessibility to some of the information you have on your Facebook pages?

Facebook, like MySpace, has always had privacy controls to limit access to personal information. Recently Facebook released an update that gave users much more control over their privacy. For instance I can give one group of my personal contacts access to a specific photo album while excluding access to an-

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other. I can also limit access to various bits of personal information to a group that I define to be more of a business group while leaving that same information open to everyone else.

For you, has it proven to be a way to reconnect with friends from the past or is it more of a way to keep in touch with your present friends?

Initially, I used Facebook as more of a way to keep in touch with my present social network, but as more people use the site and as I connect with more of those people, I am constantly reunited with people who I haven't thought about in over a decade. I have extended family members that I don't even remember seeing as a kid that I have been able to catch up with on the site. Even my grandmother has a Facebook page!

You also produce a blog called "The Sanguine Reality". Why did you decide to create a blog?

I realized that I wanted to share ideas of hope and inspiration with the world because in my own life I have experienced depression and a lack of motivation. I felt like a blog was a permanent way that I could share my ideas and grow an audience to share those ideas with.

What kinds of things do you write about in your blog?

I post to my blog each week and each week I choose a different theme. I typically write about an experience that has given me insight into my own life and I try to present that experience into an idea that everyone can relate to. I try to find quotes that fit well with what I am trying to express and I encourage my audience to go out and take on the world, enjoying life one day at a time. In the past, I have let little things get to me and often times those little things would ruin my day. Now I realize how precious each moment is, so I try to remember that each time something frustrates me I can make a positive change in my attitude. Since I have practiced this I have been a much happier person and I want to share with everyone else how easy that really is.

What kind of feedback do you get from readers of your blog?

Because I chose only to express positive views on my blog from the beginning, almost all of the feedback I get is positive. However, a personal goal that I am documenting in the blog makes it appear as if I am aligned with a particular political party, and while I remain very independent, some people have commented on that with a little less enthusiasm.

You are also a member of LinkedIn. Tell us more about this website and why you are a member.

A local graphic designer initially introduced me to LinkedIn as a way to promote myself and my professional endeavors. I created a profile and connected to many other professionals, but I have to admit, LinkedIn says my profile is only 55% complete. With so much to do and so many social media sites to tend to, it is difficult to keep up with them all!

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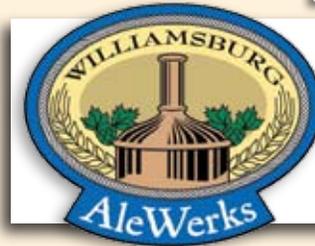


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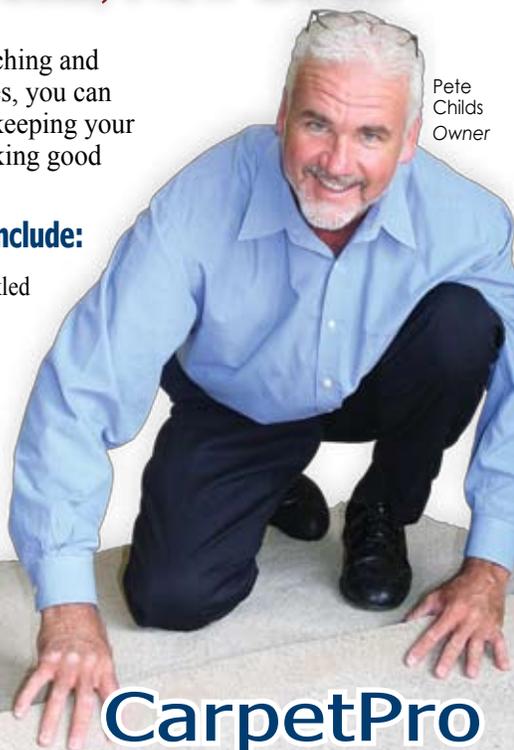
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How do you find the time to keep up with all of your social networking connections?

It is odd how social media has transformed the way we communicate with one another. It seems that the more people I connect with, the less I am able to connect with each of them. However, the great thing about these sites is that I can post something that is new in my life and people have an opportunity to comment on my post. While it may seem less personal, often times I have an exchange with someone I might not have talked to in a while and it always brings a smile to my face. At the end of the day, I don't have enough time to keep up with them all, but that's okay. Having a profile on a social networking site does not obligate you to interact with it every day.

Have you come to prefer social networking over actual human interface?

I am a very social person and social networking has allowed me to connect with more people, but I will always prefer the real thing. There is nothing more real than being able to hear someone's voice, observe their body language and enjoy an interaction that cannot be replicated online. I think computers are a long way from allowing people to share a real hug or kiss.

What do you think the next big thing in social media will be?

While the currently popular social media sites allow you to send a blast to hundreds or thousands of people, the way people view that content is still on an impersonal, but one-on-one basis. People access and comment to that content at their leisure and while some communication is very real-time like what chat services provide, much of it still has a delay like email does. My belief is that the next big thing will be multi-user video conference calling. A site called ooVoo.com has a free version of their product that allows for two-way conferencing and a paid for version that allows for up to six people to connect, see each other live, and have a conversation all over the Internet. But because most social networking sites offer tools that are completely free, ooVoo will have to become completely free or another site will have to introduce the technology before that type of media really takes off.

A lot of people are really anxious or uninformed when it comes to social networking but they are still interested in trying it out. What is a good way for an inexperienced user to get started?

Most people are interested in social media because someone they know uses it. I encourage those who feel anxious to get started by asking their friend or family member what site they use. If it happens to be Facebook, just go to facebook.com and start a new account. You will be surprised how much information social networking sites give you to get started. It's like having a personal coach. The best advice I can give anyone: when you start read everything on every page and I promise it will make sense. NDN