Facebook* and Other Communities

In a Nutshell

Facebook is a single-login site that aggregates many forms of social media, such as messages, photos, videos, events, discussions, and links.

In a Larger Container

Facebook is a one-stop shop that allows users to interact with "friends" of their choosing and participate in groups with other users. Users can post status updates, links, photos, and multimedia such as videos; engage in online games such as word games or the property-amassing FarmVille; take online Facebook-based quizzes; join groups such as those interested in learning French or planning a high school reunion; or subscribe to information posted on fan pages of a favorite TV show, author, or business. The user can choose what content he or she posts that will be available to these friends. For instance, some friends may be allowed to see everything, while others may not have access to photos.

Upon logging in to the site, learners will see a "feed" of friends' activities. Items such as wall posts and pictures will appear on the learner's page in chronological order.

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*Facebook is a trademark of Facebook, Inc.

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How to View Facebook

As little as five years ago, a person wanting to create a web page with pictures, videos, chat features, and discussion boards had to have knowledge of html coding, knowledge of video and photo editing, ftp software to upload the material, and access to server space. Now, on Facebook, users can easily create and customize their own online materials.

"Facebook addicts prefer the social portal model versus having to log in to AIM, Yahoo Messenger, GMail, Hotmail, Flickr, You-Tube, MySpace, etc. Instead, Facebook gives them a single alternative to all these applications, with one login and interface to manage their online social interaction needs. This largely explains the explosive growth Facebook continues to experience."

Steve Thornton, www.twitip.com/twitter-versus-facebook

Facebook is an easy-to-use, intuitive tool for instructors. It's good for staying in frequent contact and helps the instructor, training department, or organization build a sense of community. You may choose Facebook for hosting an entire online course, to supplement a classroom-based or blended course, or to provide a space for course graduates or all your organization's learners to engage and share knowledge and ideas.

For instructors, Facebook can in many ways replicate the functions provided by a formal content management system. Use it for communicating assignments, offering reminders, posting notes, providing documents, videos, and slide shows, messaging individuals or groups, hosting online discussions and real-time chats, and scheduling events. As Facebook is already in use by many learners, setup, launch, and learning to use will take less ramp-up time than introducing another tool. Also, since information shows up in the learners' feed, they do not have to go to/log in to your site, page, blog, or learning management system (LMS). Facebook helps you push the information to them, rather than have to work to pull them to some other site.

Finally, Facebook is excellent for drawing people into technology and conversations from which they may have been excluded before. Its informality and user-friendliness make it very accessible to a broad audience and it—more than most other tools—is something of an equalizer/leveler. Learners with lower literacy levels or nonprofessional status, who may be less likely to add a comment to a blog, are perhaps more comfortable adding a short comment to a Facebook wall post or adding a tag to a photo.

Advantages/Disadvantages of Facebook in Training

Advantages

Facebook promotes conversation and can help to reduce the space and power issues between instructor and learners; it helps to "level" the relationships and can support inter-learner interaction rather than just back-and-forth learner-instructor discourse often seen in traditional instruction. Even new users can quickly see the fun and value in connecting with old friends and family members. Facebook is a "sticky" technology, pulling people in and back in as they check on their friends' updates, play FarmVille, continue conversations they've been engaged in, and check back to see whether anyone has made comments on things they have posted themselves. Facebook is undeniably popular, with two hundred million people checking in to their accounts at least once a day. It is therefore likely familiar to and comfortable for many of your learners.

Facebook can substitute for a formal course management system such as Blackboard or Moodle, or even for a corporate LMS. Unlike other systems, Facebook will push instructor, group, or page updates to the learner's Facebook news feed; also, instructors can subscribe to Facebook updates via an RSS feed and will therefore receive updates as they occur, without having to log in at all. This is a distinct advantage over many other content management or LMS systems, which require frequent login.

One of the reasons for Facebook's popularity is that it is so user-friendly. A click or two allows for frequent status updates, uploading photos, linking to videos, and sharing ideas. Many learners will already be using

Facebook, so the trainer incorporating it into his or her practice can put the instruction where learners already live. Learners do not need to access other sites to reach the instructor or access instructional materials; they do not need to keep up with additional passwords or URLs. Effective use of Facebook in instruction supports peer-to-peer interactions and the development of digital literacy skills.

Disadvantages

If ever technology has placed a "shiny object" in the path of an employee, it is probably Facebook. Often viewed by organizations as a timewaster, users—especially new ones—are prone to be seduced by distractors such as games. A challenge of living in the "information age" is dealing with the endless and sometimes overwhelming amount of content thrown at us every day. As with other tools, individuals using Facebook will need to learn to manage the time spent there, especially if using it on work time.

Why Facebook Instead of Something Else?

Facebook's one-stop, one-login nature gives it the advantage over many other tools, such as a blog or separate LMS. The discussion and chat features allow for more robust conversation than Twitter and less post-and-respond back-and-forth between learners and instructor than a blog. Again, many learners are already using Facebook and are very comfortable moving around within it, so it would require less introduction time than many other tools.

Why Facebook in Addition to Something Else?

For organizations using Moodle, Blackboard, or a commercial LMS, Facebook can prove complementary by offering a collaborative, social space; many Facebook applications interface well with these other products. For instance, Facebook users can link their accounts with the Skype instant-messaging and VoIP (voice over internet protocol) telephony services.

Getting Started

Set Up an Account

You will need a valid email address to begin. Then simply visit www .facebook.com to start the account setup process.

Create a Profile

Facebook will prompt you to create a profile and then walk you through the process. This is where you decide what and how much to reveal about yourself: Your employer, marital status, education, even things like favorite books, movies, or quotes. It is important that you spend some time learning to use Facebook's privacy settings in order to control who has access to what you are posting.

Begin Inviting Learners ("Friends")

From within Facebook send your learners invitations to be your "friend." You can do this directly with learners who are already Facebook users by using the "send a friend request" feature, or via requests to their email accounts. *Important:* Instructors using Groups or Fan Pages may invite participants without having to become their "friends" or vice versa. They can then fully participate in the group or page without everyone being privy to their own (or your) personal pages.

Create Friend Lists

You can group your friends into lists. You can then interact with these lists directly, message only them, etc. As an instructor, you may choose, for example, to organize your learners into lists according to the course in which they are currently enrolled, then move them to a list for course graduates later.

Refine Your Basic Profile into a Limited Profile

Once you have established a profile, acquired friends, and organized them into lists, you would be well advised to go back and create a

limited profile. The limited profile will allow you to decide who sees what. To create a limited profile:

Click "Profile" at the top of the Facebook page, then "Settings > Privacy Settings."

Choose individual items, such as "Personal Info" or "Photos" and click "customize," as shown in Figure 3.1.

Clicking "customize" will open a new window. You can then choose who can or can't see items, as shown in Figure 3.2.

You can also set up different Facebook accounts for different purposes. I have a personal account to connect with people who really are my "friends" and a business account ("Jane Bozarth Bozarthzone," if you'd like to join me there) for business contacts. I tend to think of it as

Figure 3.1. Facebook Limited Profile Settings

Figure 3.2. Facebook Settings: Choose Who Sees What

having different personas. The "personal Jane" wears jeans and t-shirts, talks about movies and restaurants, and posts pictures of her dog and her husband's Halloween costume. The "business Jane" posts links to research, feeds new information to past class participants, and shares links to educational videos. But "she" doesn't mention her home life, dog, or husband there. You will need different email addresses to create different Facebook accounts. Hotmail, Yahoo Mail, or Gmail accounts are free and work fine for this.

Decide How You Will Use Facebook for Instructional Purposes

Do you want to host an entire class, or provide a space in which learners can communicate in between formal class meetings? Do you want to

establish a group site for all the graduates of your flagship leadership program? Do you want to create a learning space for all your organization's employees?

Apart from your personal account page, you can set yourself up as administrator of a group or a fan page. These will provide a separate space for posting information, sharing photos or videos, hosting discussions, etc. Information Groups and pages will also allow you to message all members at once. At present Facebook is still tweaking these and they are becoming more and more alike. For the sake of clarity and space, what follows is a good bit of detail about setting up a group, then a smaller bit about pages and when to choose which. The setup and function are similar and, as with initial setup, Facebook makes the process of creating a group or fan page quite easy. *Important:* People can join a group or fan page without having to set up a "friend" relationship with you or one another.

Create a Group

To create a group, just type "groups" into the Facebook search box. You'll be taken to a new page with a button, "Create a new group." From there you'll edit permissions, stating whether your group members can, for instance, upload photos. Figure 3.3 shows the template for customizing your group.

Then you can invite your learners to join your group. You can choose from among your existing Facebook friends or invite learners by email (see Figure 3.4).

Fan Pages

As this book was going to press, Facebook was still working to iron out the features of groups and fan pages; it's entirely likely that soon the differences will be minimal, or perhaps one type will simply win out over the other. At present, however, there are a few things to consider about pages (as compared to groups):

Figure 3.3. Facebook Groups Allow for Customization
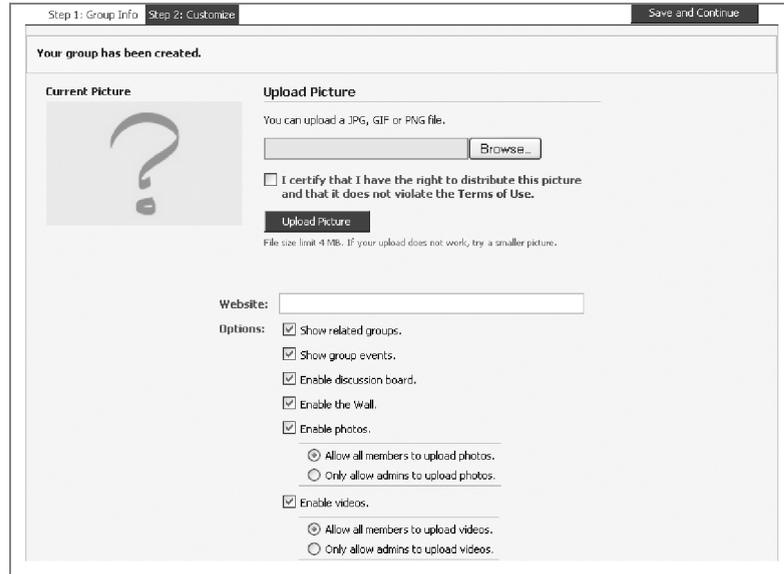
## Figure 3.4. Invite "Friends" (and Others) to Your Facebook Group
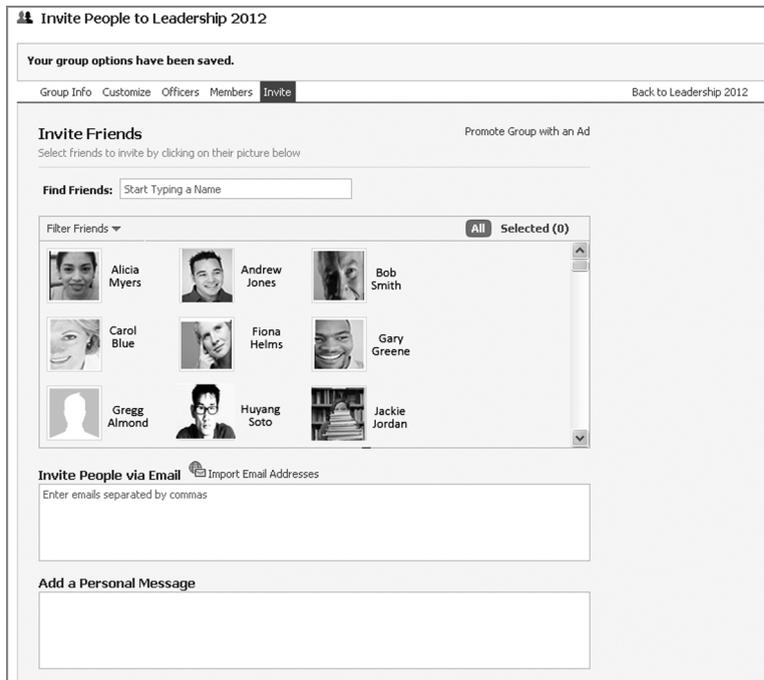
- Pages will let you add applications, such as notes or polls. At present, groups come with only "photos" "discussions," and "events."

- Anyone can view the fan page content, although they cannot edit or contribute unless you allow that. The administrator of a group can limit what non-members may view.

- Pages will provide you with "insights" or user metrics like the ones shown in Figures 3.5 and 3.6.

To create a fan page, go to any fan page (try searching for something like CNN, *Time* magazine, learning, or a favorite TV show). Scroll down to the link "create a page for my business." You'll then be taken to a page similar to the one used for creating a group, and Facebook will walk you through the process. *Important:* Groups are linked to the person who administers them—like the president of a club. Fan pages do not list the names of the administrators. Think of this essentially as the difference between your own private group and a corporate entity.

Can't I Just Have a Course?

For several years, Facebook offered a "Courses" application but found it did not meet the needs of users. It invited developers to create their own "course" applications; as of this writing, several exist, all in various stages of maturity. Search for the word "course" to see the current applications, and read user reviews to see whether there is a single product that will meet all your needs.

Figure 3.5. Facebook Pages Provide User Metrics
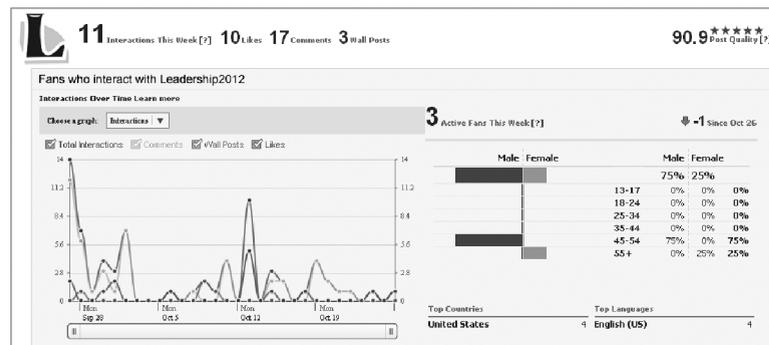
Figure 3.6. More Facebook User Metrics
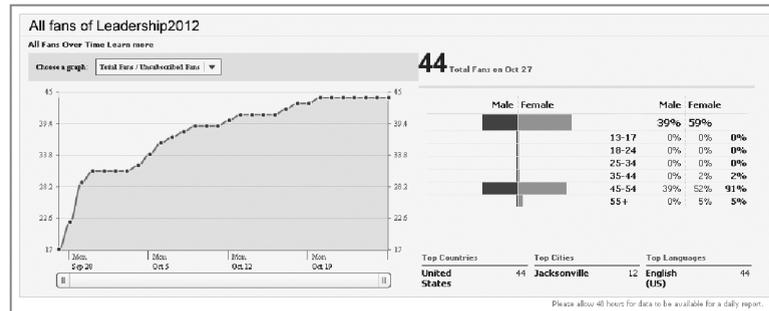
Once Your Personal Page, Group, or Fan Page Is Set Up

Post Messages via the Wall

The top of your Facebook screen will always contain an empty box into which you can enter text. You can also use a drop-down menu there to add a link, a photo, an event, or a video. For an instructor, Wall posts (as shown in Figure 3.7) might include things like daily updates, a reminder about reading assignments, a preview of the upcoming class session, a link to an article, or a YouTube video.

Post Messages Via Private Messages

Facebook allows you to send private messages to individuals, or to message an entire group or list, or all fans at once. These will be delivered to the other person's Facebook inbox.

Create an Event

Learners will receive notification of events, essentially, things with a set time and place: a formal class meeting, a live Facebook chat session, a gathering at a local coffee shop, or a reading by an author at a local library. On your own page you can simply use the drop-down menu shown in Figure 3.8. If you are using a group, you can create an event, invite particular people, ask for RSVPs, etc., as shown in Figure 3.9.

Figure 3.7. Wall Posts Allow for Text and Other Material

Figure 3.8. Creating an Event in Facebook
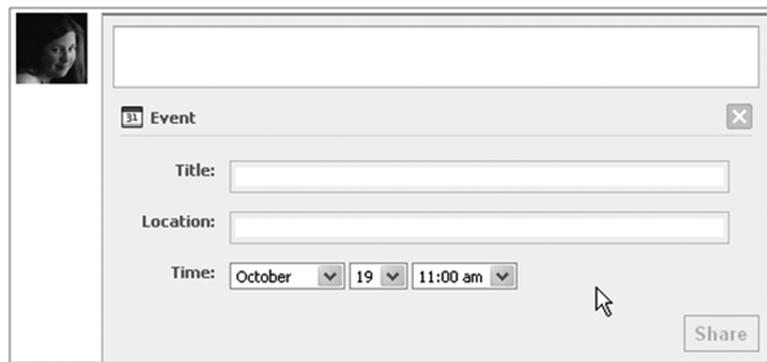
Figure 3.9. Choose Specifics About the Event
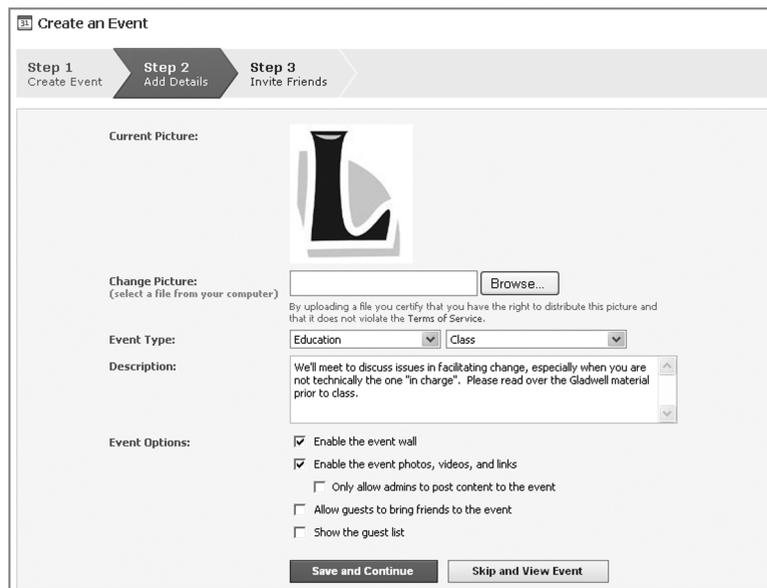
Post a Video

Facebook will let you (and your learners, if you choose) load some video formats onto your wall (or that of your group or fan page). YouTube will generate an URL for you to paste in. You can also upload video you have created on your computer or sent from your cell phone.

Post Documents and PowerPoint Shows (Using an External Application)

If it is only a page or so, and formatting isn't important, you may just choose to paste it into a message or onto the wall. If you are using a fan page, you can add it as a note, an application that can be added to the page that allows learners to open and read it.

For something longer or more formal, or for which formatting matters, you may want to use an external source for posting documents. The free Google documents feature ("Google Docs"), for instance, will allow you to upload documents, including spreadsheets and PowerPoint presentations, and set permissions for learners to view or edit them. If you just want learners to view the document, Google Docs will generate an URL so you can simply share the link in a Facebook wall post. Visit google.com for details.

Google Docs will allow you to post PowerPoint shows that your learners can view or download. SlideShare.net is another popular free site for sharing PowerPoint and will, as with Google Docs, generate a link for you.

Post Photos

The age of digital photography, and the commonality of cell phones with cameras, make taking and posting photos a fairly simple task. You (and your learners, if you choose to let them) can load photos onto your Facebook group or page. These can include photos taken during formal class meetings or photos that reveal something personal about the learner. Consider, also, how to use photos relevant to particular course content, such as pictures of pieces of equipment or demonstrations of

effective versus ineffective body language for a sales opening. Photos can be organized into albums; it is easy to add captions and to add "tags" to specify individuals' names.

Engage in Live Chat

Facebook comes with a live chat feature; at present, this allows for chatting only with one other person. As Facebook evolves, it is entirely possible that group chats will become available. As an instructor, the live chat tool could serve as a place for you to host virtual office hours during which you are available "live" to talk with learners.

Host a Discussion

Facebook groups and fan pages come with a discussion board. You or your learners can start, lead, facilitate, and engage in a text-based discussion on course material and other topics of interest. The discussion board can also be used for debates and role plays.

Hosting an Online Course

A Facebook group or fan page can serve as a site for an online course. (Facebook in its early days had a "Courses" application, but found it was not meeting user needs so handed the idea off to individual application developers. At present there is no one standard courses application, and many that exist are geared more toward college students sharing textbooks and working toward grades.) By combining use of the wall to share material such as readings, links, and videos, using available tools to create learning activities (such as the example of having learners conduct an environmental scan and post photos, as shown in figure 3.11), and providing provocative discussion topics and good facilitation of conversation, Facebook can support a robust, interesting online learning experience. Figure 3.10 shows an example of a "Leadership" course.

Wall posts offer contributions from both instructors and class members and include links to articles, book recommendations, and learner blog

Figure 3.10. Leadership Course Hosted in Facebook

posts. Discussion questions, geared toward the goals of this course, include things like:

- What makes a good leader?

- Are leaders born or made?

- Who has influenced you most as a leader? Why? What can you do to emulate that?

- What is your role in sustaining a work team?

- Discuss a change you attempted that went badly. In retrospect, what could you have done differently?

Trainers, especially those new to working in an online environment, may need to develop some skill at facilitating online discussions. A good discussion starts with a good question, one that leads to

conversation rather than just an answer (consider what you know about using open-ended and closed-ended questions). Sometimes discussions stall, requiring the trainer to make a comment to jump-start it; sometimes discussions go off-topic, requiring the trainer to rein them back in.

Learners who are new to this may need some help. Patti Shank's *The Online Learning Idea Book* (2007) offers a list of ideas for helping learners understand what constitutes a good discussion post: Show that you are reading others' comments by referring to them in your own posts; construct an argument, offering evidence and supporting resources; remember that a good post is one that gets people thinking and makes them want to reply.

Leverage Facebook's tools to enhance the learning experience. Learners could, for instance, be asked to post photos or video to the group or page as part of the training experience. As an example, one of my frustrations as a trainer is dealing with the reality of a work culture that does not match the behavior management it is asking learners to develop. A favorite activity, outlined in Kouzes, Posner, and Bozarth's *The Challenge Continues* (2010) invites learners to conduct an environmental scan. Ask them to consider: What does your physical environment say about your organization's culture? Does it support or conflict with stated goals? For instance, if your mission statement says, "All employees are equal partners," then why are there executive parking spaces? Direct learners to take photos of furniture, office space, waiting areas, and signage—whatever is in the work environment—and create a photo album representing their environmental scan. The results can sometimes be surprising. Figure 3.11 shows examples of real cell-phone-camera photos taken by learners during a customer service training course. The organization, purveyor of a large chain of motels and fuel stations, held "respect for customers" as a core value. Do the examples of signage shown support that value? What is the message being sent to customers? What tone has the organization (perhaps inadvertently) set before the customer even sees an employee?

Figure 3.11. Learner-Provided Photos Reveal a Good Deal About Company Culture
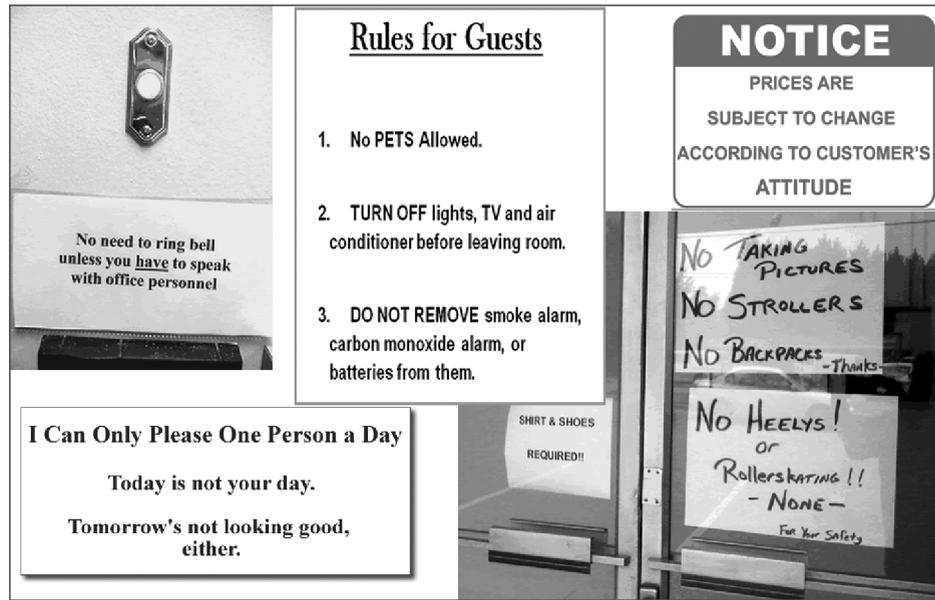
Supplementing a Traditional Class

Facebook provides opportunities and space for more robust discussion than Twitter. Chapter 2 on Twitter outlined small, specific suggestions for questions or topics that would be manageable within Twitter's 140-character limit and rapid-fire, nonlinear style. Many of the ideas would work equally well as Facebook wall posts or discussion questions, while allowing for more conversational depth and organization.

Prior to Course Start

Here are some ideas for using Facebook prior to a course:

• Use Facebook as an advance planner for learners: Post agendas, objectives, links to source texts, etc. This will set the stage for learning and clarify course content for learners.

- Ask learners to read and comment on an article dealing with course content.

- Invite learners to introduce themselves, including an interesting tidbit or two, a photo of their cubicles, or links to a favorite book for sale on Amazon. Remember the old icebreaker-type introductions that included finding "something in your wallet that represents you or your style as a leader or your attitude toward change"? That could easily be replicated by taking photos of items and posting them on Facebook with a sentence or two about why the item was chosen. Figure 3.12 shows an example.

- Offer comments on the upcoming program: Their experience in the topic, their interest in enrolling in the course, a question they'd like to have answered in class, or something they hope others can help with.

Instructor Cristine Clark uses Facebook quizzes, such as the Facebook version of the "Myers-Briggs Type Instrument" or an "Emotional Intelligence" quiz to generate discussion. While the Facebook versions are usually abbreviated versions of full instruments, they are enough to formulate discussion around key ideas. For instance, learners can explore awareness that we all have different experiences, preferences, and ways of responding to situations, and that, essentially, we all have different way of understanding the world.

Figure 3.12. Facebook Can Support Learner "Icebreaker" Activities

Caption: I chose this badge as it is a continual reminder of my commitment to my community and my responsibility to ensuring public safety.

In this photo: No one.
Click on people in the photo to add them.
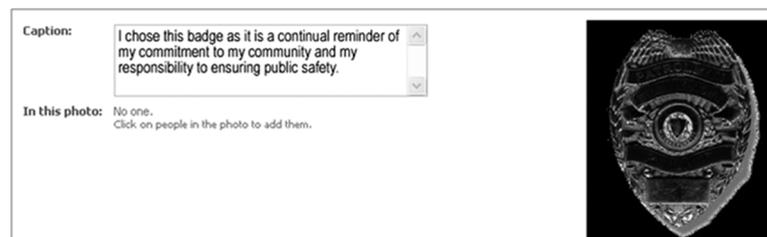
Intersession Work

A Facebook group or page can serve as a spot to continue conversation cut short by class time. If the course is structured around set meeting times, use Facebook to keep learners engaged—and keep the learning going—between gatherings. Utilize approaches that will help learners become more mindful of their own learning, stay on track and in touch with one another, and help to reinforce new learning when the learner is back at the worksite.

- Post links to readings, videos, and slideshows. These can include videos of yourself and other instructors, PowerPoint shows, standalone tutorials, or YouTube videos.

- Post an outline of upcoming topics to think about. Ask learners for reactions, reflections, and ideas for applying information.

- Create events to remind learners of project or reading due dates.

- Continually ask, via a wall post or discussion question, "How have you been applying the information from last week's class session?"

- Follow up training sessions with specific questions about applying learning: "Last week we talked about the Pareto Principle. What examples of that have you seen since then?"

- Start separate discussion topics on different pieces of the content. For instance, in a business insurance course, use four different questions to ask learners to provide examples of the four different types of loss exposure: external, internal, governmental, and legal.

- Continue conversations cut short by the end of class time: "Jan was asking for suggestions on establishing herself as credible when she is so much younger than all her employees. What ideas do you have for her?" "Just as we were wrapping up, Nigel asked about the negative aspects of change. How can we address this honestly in selling change to leadership, without undermining our chances at a successful pitch?"

- Use the discussion feature to create a debate ("Jim, Your position is that learners are born, not made. Shana, you believe that everyone

has innate leadership talent that must be nurtured and developed.") or role play: "Pedro, you are the district sales manager. Alima, you're the regional sales rep. Sahana, you supervise the customer service center, which works mostly from an online chat tool. And Xuan, you are the customer. Xuan has been promised delivery of a product that's now been delayed for a third time. He's already spoken with customer care twice. He is angry and his message has been kicked up to Sahana."

- Use the discussion feature to host a "meet the expert" conversation. This could be someone from within the company, an author, or other expert in the field.

- Use the discussion feature to invite assigned "varied reactions." Ask learners to respond to video clips, articles, or news stories from various perspectives. Assign learners (or groups of learners) roles such as the naysayer, the one who believes anything, the devil's advocate, the detective (lots of questions), the disagreer, the person who can't take a stand, and the one who takes everything at face value—seeing no context beyond the immediate issue.

- "Hot Seat": Assign learners to groups and a date (a specific day, or week, when it will be their turn to be in the "hot seat"). Provide each group with a piece of content, theme, or issue from the course content for which they will be responsible. They need to research and read material (either that you provide or instruct them to access via web or other searches), collect links or other resources, and essentially educate themselves. They will then be in the 'hot seat' to answer questions, facilitate conversations, and so forth during their time slots.

- Create "critical incident" discussions: "Describe a time you were able to apply consensus-building techniques when leading a work team." "Describe a time when you were able to put your knowledge of the NC-8732D training to work in resolving a manufacturing delay."

- Use a photo as a touch point to spark discussion. During a course on preparing social workers for home visits, for instance, offer a

photo like the one in Figure 3.13 and ask: "What are some safety concerns here?" (Some possible answers: high heels, large bag, talking on phone.) Further facilitate the discussion by asking learners to generate their own tips for safe practices during home visits.

Facebook can also provide the instructor with evaluation data. Discussion comments can reveal whether, and how much, of the training seems to be "sticking," whether there appear to be learning gaps, and the extent to which learners are working to apply new learning to the work setting. This can serve both to further support individuals enrolled in the particular course sessions and to refine future offerings.

Figure 3.13. Visual Prompt for Learner Activity

Building a Learning Community with Facebook

As many learners already use Facebook and check in frequently, and as items posted on a group or page wall will appear in the learner's feed, Facebook offers an excellent vehicle for "getting into the spaces" between formal learning events. Consider creating group or fan pages for graduates of particular courses or topics of interest to a broad span of your learners. For instance, "building and sustaining change," "preparing for management," or "strategies for continual improvement."

Invite employees (not only your "trainees") to participate in Facebook groups focused on a topic of special interest in your organization. Including all staff helps to build stronger ties to the training department. Post articles, videos, and other references. Encourage conversation about the topic. Use Facebook to foster

Figure 3.14. Ethics Discussion Hosted on Facebook

informal one-time mentoring by a staff member to an employee via a comment or suggestion. Figure 3.14 shows an example of a discussion held by employees participating in an "ethics" Facebook group hosted by the training shop, which also offers ethics workshops several times a year.

Case: Facebook as a Community for InSync Training, LLC, Course Graduates

Jennifer Hofmann's InSync Training, LLC (www.insynctraining.com and www.insynctraining-eu.com) specializes in training facilitators and designers who will be working in synchronous, virtual classroom environments, such as Elluminate, WebEx, Adobe Connect, and iLinc. She offers several multi-session certificate programs in synchronous facilitation and design, typically with some twelve to eighteen learners in each. On course evaluations, graduates reported time and time again that they wanted a space in which they could talk about their new practice, discuss their growth, share tips, and work through one another's challenges. InSync set up a Facebook group as a space for the graduates. The community manager created an initial plan:

- Membership would be open to anyone who wished to join, but members would be actively recruited only from the pool of practitioners who had completed InSync courses. The group was not meant to serve everyone who had ever attended a webinar.

- Several discussion topics were set up around course content. These would serve as conversation starters, but members would be encouraged to start their own new topics.

- A library of relevant articles and links was developed for distribution to the group across a span of time (in order to have fresh content at the ready).

- The community manager would do a quick recap of group activities and send a message to all members once a week to pull members back to the group. This message is not sent according to a set schedule, making it routine, but comes out at a different day and time each week. Messages to members are kept to a minimum to avoid engendering a feeling that messages are spam.

Over the span of several months, the group grew to 350 members from all over the world, mostly from the pool of InSync Training's course graduates. The five initial discussion topics quickly tripled as participants started their own, on subjects ranging from opinions about software to strategies for dealing with multicultural audiences in the live-online setting. Past participants were able to reconnect with friends from courses they'd taken; synchronous trainers and designers feeling isolated in their roles found many others who shared their interests. Perhaps best of all, graduates—most of whom were new practitioners—were able to continue the discussions from their own training as they worked to transfer their new learning to the workplace. Member Greg Sweet says: "It is the community I was looking for."

Readers are invited to visit the group: Go to Facebook and search for "InSync Training."

Going Mobile

Facebook offers a free mobile application for smartphones that offer functionality similar to that offered on the full site. Users can update status, comment on another's status, and post photos and videos. At the present time Facebook mobile allows for interacting with fan pages, but not groups. Figure 3.15 shows an example of a Facebook class page displayed on an iPhone.

Figure 3.15. Facebook Class Page Accessed via Mobile Application
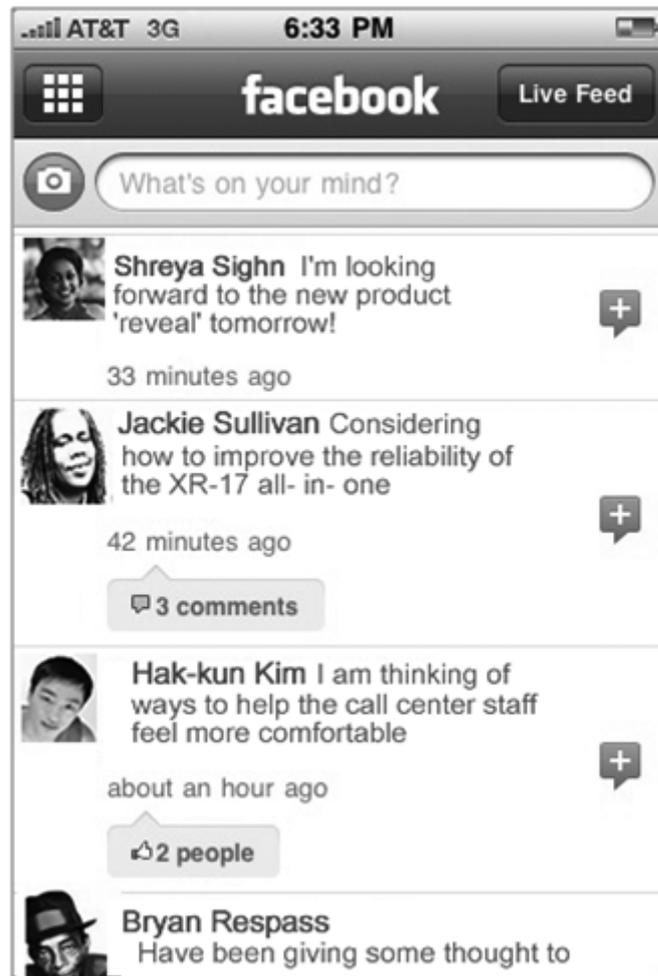
And Now, a Few Words about LinkedIn

Whenever I speak on using Facebook in training, someone invariably asks about LinkedIn, alleging that it is the "professional" version of Facebook. It is a place for people to connect, often on a purely professional level, without photos of kids or distracting games. But

overall, similarities between Facebook and LinkedIn are few. You can set up groups, invite members and manage memberships, and host private discussions. Discussions allow for text and pasted-in links. As some LinkedIn members choose to have hundreds or even thousands of contacts, you can (much like Twitter) choose from among them a smaller list of contacts to "follow."

Figures 3.16 through 3.20 illustrate some of the basics of LinkedIn.

For training purposes, any activities in this book involving basic text discussions can be adapted for use in a LinkedIn group. Links to external sites, documents, videos, and other materials can be pasted into the discussion messages. As I mentioned in the Introduction, it's important to choose the tools your learners will use. A 2009 Deloitte report stated that 47 percent of Baby Boomers maintain a profile on a social site. Of those, 73 percent are Facebook users, while 13 percent use LinkedIn (Deloitte, 2009). Individuals in certain professions may be more likely to be on LinkedIn, particularly jobseekers, those in need of making sales or developing vendor-client relationships, and those in professions for whom a broad contact base can be important.

Other Communities

Some learning or content management systems (LMSs, LCMSs) are now working to include community spaces, so check to see whether a product your organization uses—such as Moodle—includes something

Figure 3.16. You Can Choose People and Discussions to Follow
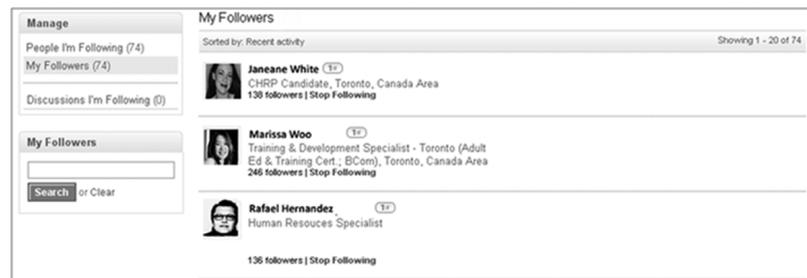
Figure 3.17. One-Page Setup for Creating a LinkedIn Group

Figure 3.18. Invite People to Your Group by Choosing Among Your Connections or Sending to an Email List

you might consider using. There are also a number of free online communities that provide for functionality similar to that offered by Facebook. They can provide a separate, private space for learners to engage. In choosing to use one of these, remember that they require from your learners setting up another account, keeping up with another

Figure 3.19. LinkedIn Groups and Subgroups Are Places to Host Discussions
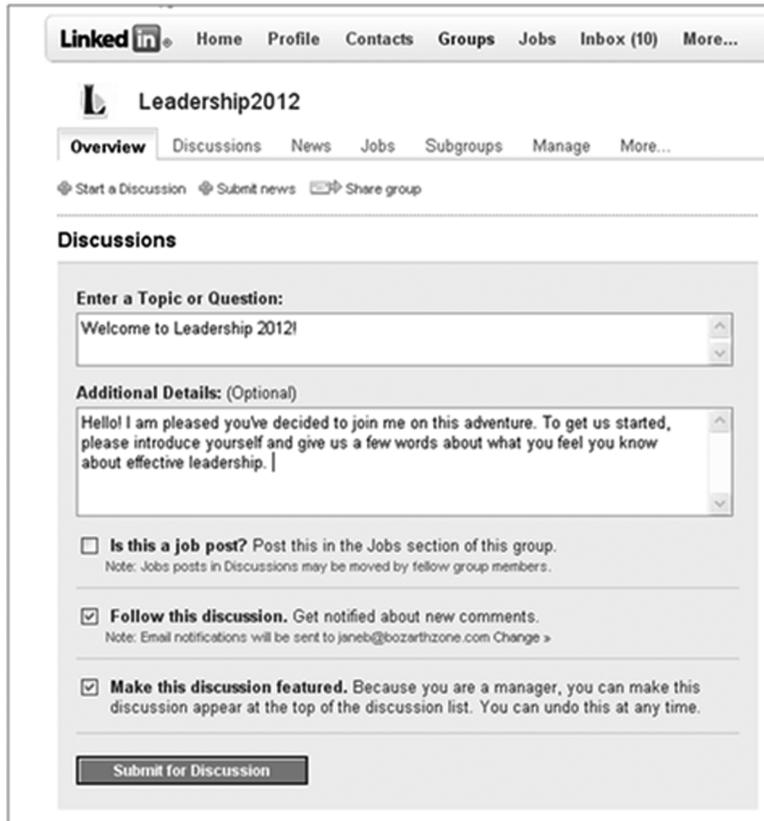
Figure 3.20. Discussion Topics Appear on the LinkedIn Group Site
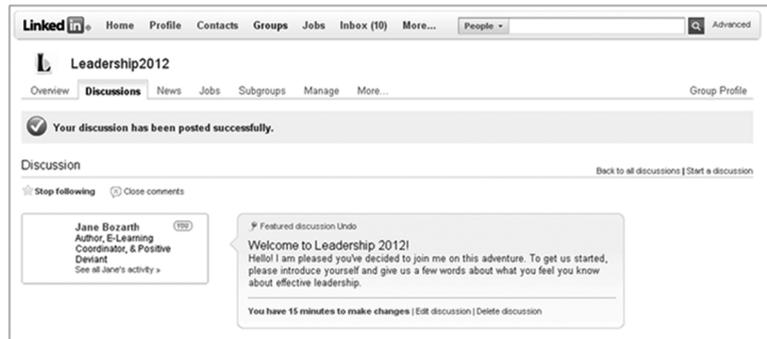
login, and remembering to check in. If learners are already checking in to Facebook, LinkedIn, or your organization's LMS, you might want to look for ways of utilizing that product rather than ask learners to keep up with yet one more site.

One such online community provider is Ning (www.ning.com), a site that allows individuals, schools, or businesses to create their own social networks. Members can join communities and participate in discussions, contribute to blogs, share photos and videos, and so forth. Pages and community sites are highly customizable, with easy-change templates and widgets. Members of communities create their own home pages and share their own ideas and materials. Figure 3.21 shows the Ning home

Figure 3.21. Ning Community Member Home Page

The image is used courtesy of Patty Ball and Ning.

page for Patti Ball, a member of the Northeast (USA) SABES Tech trainings community. She has chosen widgets for sharing her documents, video tutorials, and bookmarks with other members of the NESABES Ning community.

As this book went into print production, Ning announced it would discontinue its free group/network hosting service. Users wishing to stay with Ning will need to upgrade to premium accounts, starting at US $10 per month. As noted elsewhere, technologies and products are ever-evolving, but as of this writing some free alternatives to Ning include Cubetree, Jabbster, Shout'em, and EdModo. Wordpress bloggers have access to BuddyPress, which requires a bit more technical skill than the others products. Depending on the functionality desired by users, old message-board-based standbys like Yahoo Groups and Google groups are still available as well.

Summary

Allowing for more length than Twitter, without the formality of a blog or the required-contribution feel of a wiki, Facebook or other communities can prove an effective tool for supporting instructional goals. Learners are given one-login access to a wealth of collaborative, engaging materials and activities; instructors, a one-stop space for hosting web materials from links and photos to videos and discussions.