

DEBATING THE ISSUES:

The last issue featured an article by David Smith on the trends affecting the construction industry. But did he get it right? Glenn Hawkins of Clear Construction weighs in.

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UPDATE: A WINNING PROPOSITION

MBS walked away from this year's Building Awards with the title of "Supply Chain of the Year". Find out how a novel idea grew into an award-winning enterprise.

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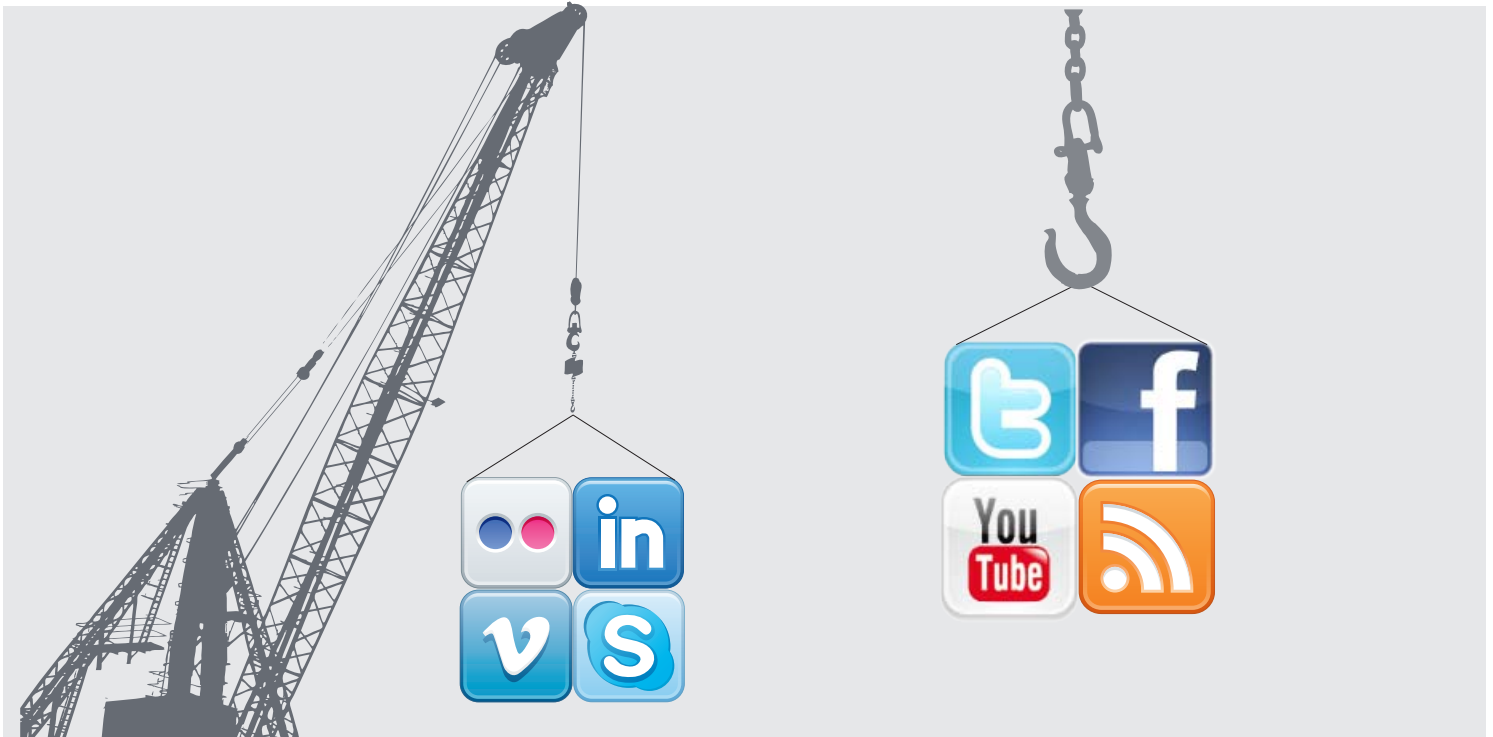
BUSINESS NEWS

From CIOB achievements to new member companies, find out all the latest news from Mace Business School.

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SchoolReport



Does social networking have value?

Tools like Twitter and LinkedIn are everywhere, but their relevance to construction is up for debate.

Like it or not, social networking is here to stay, and companies as diverse as Monsoon and T-Mobile are reaping the benefits by using it to build communities and loyalty around their brands. Business-to-business companies, on the other hand, have reported a more hit-or-miss success rate and are continuing to question the role—if any—that social networking plays in business development.

For this issue of SchoolReport, we asked Paul Wilkinson, a marketing and PR consultant, founder of the Web 2.0 advocacy movement and advisor to The Construction Network (tCn), to tell us his views on social networking in the industry. We also asked the same question of some of our own experts.

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HELLO!



This is the second edition of **SchoolReport**. If you have a story you'd like to share with the rest of the MBS supply chain, get in touch and we'll publish it in the next issue.

Email: brian.moone@macegroup.com

Mace Business School offers management and organisation training to the Mace supply chain, helping to improve the performance and reputation of companies across the construction industry.



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by Paul Wilkinson

<http://www.pwcom.wordpress.com>

When so-called citizen journalists break news stories like the Hudson River plane crash via Twitter, when Facebook privacy settings are a lead item on the BBC news, and when established bloggers get reserved seats at political party conferences, you realise that social media is not just a passing fad.

And yet, many businesses in the architecture, engineering and construction (AEC), property and facilities management sectors still tend to treat social media or “web 2.0” with some suspicion. Perhaps the word “social” is seen as non-work? Maybe Twitter is seen as a stream of trivia or celebrity gossip? And Facebook, well, that surely just eats up time that should be spent on “real work”? Whatever the reason, many AEC firms seem reluctant to embrace the tools and techniques – and yet, in my view, they could gain so much.

Web 2.0 is, as one definition puts it, “people having conversations online”. In the construction industry, as in many other sectors, conversations are the lifeblood of business. We use conversations to ask questions, to listen to feedback, to learn about colleagues, to collaborate on projects, to share news and ideas, to pick up information, to share knowledge, to recommend (and get recommended), and to make new contacts. If people are taking these conversations online, organisations that seek to limit their employees’ use could find they miss out on the benefits of those conversations.

The Web 2.0 world

But before we delve into the risks of non-engagement, let’s try and clarify what Web 2.0 is about. Web 2.0 is changing how web users interact with the web and with each other. In the 1990s, the first corporate web sites were little more than electronic brochureware, usually intended to help deliver some company information and encourage you to pick up the telephone or send an email. Web users were passive consumers of such web sites, and companies’ PR and marketing teams prided themselves on how they integrated their communication channels and “controlled the message”.

Over time, though, web technologies have become more interactive, broadband and mobile web access has become more pervasive, and the barriers between companies and end-users have diminished. Today, user-generated content can be published to the web in seconds – by anyone, anywhere, anytime – by individuals asking a question on a discussion forum, sending a Tweet, writing a blog post, commenting on Facebook or LinkedIn, uploading a video to YouTube or a photograph to Flickr, or editing a Wikipedia page.

Any of these actions might give voice to that individual’s view of a particular company, its project or product – and, critically, are totally outside the control of that organisation. Controlling the message is now a myth. The challenge for businesses in today’s online world is to engage with people and seek to influence that online conversation.

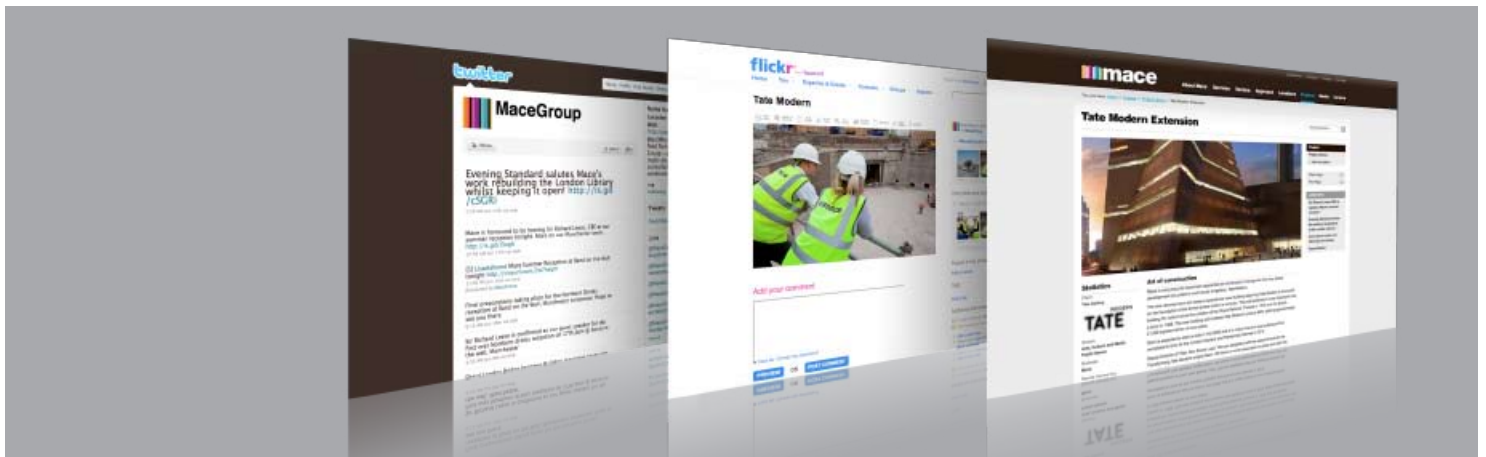
Why Web 2.0 matters for construction businesses

Working for consulting engineers, major contractors, industry organisations and specialist construction IT vendors since 1987, I started my career pre-web and embraced e-mails and web sites in the 1990s, then extended to online construction collaboration solutions in the 2000s. The most significant changes have happened during these first years of the 21st century. There are now more tools in the corporate communications tactical toolbox than ever before, and old “command and control” communication cultures and strategies need to be radically revised.

Organisations might seek to block employee access to Facebook, Twitter and other social network platforms, but trying to stop your people talking about your firm is like trying to stop them talking about you in the pub. In short, it’s useless. With a smartphone or a low-cost netbook and a 3G dongle, employees can soon bypass your corporate firewall.

Indeed, they and others may already be talking about you. It can be sobering to do an online audit of your firm’s social media footprint. In February 2009, for steel window manufacturer Crittall Windows, I identified unofficial presences on Facebook and LinkedIn, video and photos on YouTube and Flickr respectively, numerous blog posts, inaccurate citations on Wikipedia,

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Such strategies should include staff who might already be using various social networks. Rather than trying to stop them, encourage some creative and positive use of the new channels. Construction businesses should follow the examples set by enlightened organisations, including local authorities, the Civil Service, the BBC and BT, and develop policies or guidelines covering responsible use of social media.

Architect HOK, for example, brought together all the bloggers across its international offices, along with in-house users of Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Flickr, SlideShare and other Web 2.0 platforms. Colleagues developed a manifesto covering their online engagement to support the business. These platforms are now used, for instance, in recruitment; through blog posts, discipline experts and

opinion leaders subtly underline HOK's key strengths; and video, photographs and PowerPoint presentations are shared online with potential clients, and specifiers talking about the company's products on Twitter. Crittall has since broadened its communication strategy to embrace social media, and its successes include a £50,000 order from a contact first made via Twitter!

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Q&A



Catherine Button
Head of Marketing and
Communications at Mace

How relevant is online social networking to your business?

Social networking is the future. These are tools that simply allow us to share knowledge, communicate and collaborate in more efficient ways. Tools like LinkedIn help you to find like-minded people to have conversations with that you may not meet otherwise, and cloud environments [which provide virtual access to shared resources] reduce the need for email and multi-version documents flying around. It can make businesses better.

On the other hand, at Mace we don't see it as sales tool; it's a communications toolkit. As a business-to-business company operating in the construction and property industry, we have a long buyer's journey that doesn't lend itself easily to the consumer-focused social networking environment. Social networking environments enable communications teams to listen to the conversations taking place, take part and hopefully influence in an open and honest way. Social networking is almost anti-marketing.

In terms of engaging your employees, how do you ensure that they aren't saying things that you don't want them to say?

The fear that businesses have over social networking tools is fascinating. There appears to be a push to create more and more regulation for what employees can and cannot access during work time, and many businesses seem to wish to "gag" their staff through increased policy and guidelines. People talk, and will always talk, the rise of social media just means it is more visible. They were always saying what they are saying; it's just now you can see it, which for brand and communications specialists is a gift not something to be frightened of. It is now much easier to understand, monitor and manage your brand's reputation.

My advice would be to be clear as to the purpose of social media in your organisation, and ask your employees to be responsible for what they write. Give advice on how to protect their personal online profile, and if they blog or use open communications channels such as Twitter, request that they post a disclaimer such as: "The postings on this site are my own and do not necessarily represent my company's position or opinions." Ultimately, it's about honesty, from the employee and the employer. We believe that we have some of the best and most engaging people at Mace. The fact that they are using social networking is something we should encourage, not be afraid of.

How do you use social networking channels to manage your reputation?

The old adage of "Today's news, tomorrow's chip paper" is long gone. What goes online, stays online, and it's my job to know what is being said. We monitor and measure all commentary on Mace—through customer satisfaction surveys, employee surveys, in the media, and less formally on site, in the office,

at the coffee point—this is just another channel. Companies monitor their media reputation avidly so it makes total sense to treat online channels in the same way. The difference is that social media allows us to engage in conversations. For example, we often thank photographers who post images of our construction projects on Twitter and Flickr; we've re-connected with ex-employees on LinkedIn; we've built reputations with thinktanks through all of our social networking channels; and we always try to answer technical questions about our building programmes directly. It is about engaging with a completely new group of stakeholders that we wouldn't necessarily have reached before. It's great for increasing awareness and improving the perception of our company, and it's a lot of fun.

How does social networking fit in with your other marketing tools?

I've always seen it as a communications tool (a way to get information out there) versus a marketing tool (a way to sell) but it does support marketing campaigns. Successful marketing campaigns engage with multiple routes to market and social media is one of those potential routes to improving the position of your organisation. It's not my go-to marketing channel, but we do use it to spread the word about our organisation and encourage traffic onto our website. We want to be creating fresh content that interests people, and we want people to read it. Pushing our content out through our social media channels increases the likelihood of people finding it.



Danny Lucas
S. Lucas spray and painting contractor



“ If we don’t communicate effectively, we’re dead commercially. ‘Did we do a good job?’ ‘What’s the problem and is it sorted?’ ‘Do you think they’d consider us for the job?’ We have to know what’s going on in the market, we have to know what’s being said about us, and we have to be sure our service is completely satisfactory – today, now. We are beginning to build an online following and we’re up for letting them and all our other contacts know about our capabilities and achievements as quickly and effectively as technology allows – and that’s just about instant these days. ”

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AEC 2.0

Web 2.0 for the construction industry is not just about mainstream platforms. Some sector-specific communities and applications are also being developed.

In 2008, I co-founded the Be2camp social media advocacy movement. Be2camp—a conflation of Built Environment (BE), Web 2.0, and “barcamp” (an informal, participative conference) —organised the world’s first construction “unconference” in London in October 2008. It brought together a community interested in applying Web 2.0 to help plan, design, build, manage and operate a better, more sustainable built environment, and has since organised events in Liverpool, Birmingham, London and Chelmsford (with at least four more events planned in the second half of 2010).

LinkedIn has numerous industry-specific groups (a recent search identified 2,000 architecture groups and 3,500 construction-oriented ones), but which suit you or your

business and which avoid the inevitable recruiter spam? Alternatives include construction-specific communities such as tCn – the Construction Network. tCn founder Ryan Briggs is keen to help employers sidestep “non-work” networks. He says: “We have set out to get corporate “buy-in” to tCn. We want organisations to make tCn an officially sanctioned business networking site for their employees or members, a safe and exclusive business networking space that remains industry-specific, and promotes interaction with the people you want to network with.”

There are also some industry-specific applications employing Web 2.0 techniques. For example, Be2camp events have showcased “democratic design” principles in Slider Studio’s YouCanPlan and StickyNote applications; EarthExchange.com deploys Google Maps to help re-use site materials; and Pachube uses web protocols to share real-time environmental data from buildings.

ROI - Return on Ignorance

Companies need to be listening to what their customers are saying about them (on Twitter, Facebook, etc). If they aren’t, their competitors are almost guaranteed to be listening in and looking to gain a competitive advantage. Last year Kodak’s chief marketing officer Jeffrey Hayzlett posed another ROI: “What’s the return on ignoring?”

Construction organisations which still think of their communications as mainly one-way broadcasts will be less likely to participate in real-time conversations with their customers, and less likely to hear what’s being said about them, their products and services – at least, not until it’s probably too late. ❌



Debating the Issues



In the last SchoolReport, David A. Smith wrote an article on the eight biggest issues facing the construction industry, which included changes in demographics, shifts in how people work and shop, and emerging industries and energies.

The article elicited responses from across Mace, the supply chain and the industry. Glenn Hawkins, founder of  Clear Construction, comments below:

"I do not think that David Smith has correctly identified the major challenges facing the UK construction industry.

I think that the real challenges can be split into two categories:

1. The first is the need to improve the performance of the traditional construction, refurbishment and repair activities that are associated with the industry. This includes improvement in areas such as time, cost, quality and health and safety.

2. The second, and more important challenge, is to evolve beyond the narrow concept of construction as an industry that builds, refurbishes and repairs to a much broader vision that focuses on performance outcomes of the built environment.

In order to meet these two challenges, the construction industry needs to develop a clearer sense of purpose. This purpose should be based on a vision of an industry that is driving the transformation of the UK into a sustainable and low carbon economy that promotes a high quality of life for its inhabitants; an industry that produces better performance outcomes for the clients that it serves, and an industry that is a first-choice career destination for current and future generations of young people.

This will help strengthen relationships with clients, and increase and stabilise workloads. This will facilitate investment in people development, modern methods of construction and in the scientific and technical knowledge on which innovation is built."

Brian Moone responds:

"While I do not disagree with Glenn's comments, David Smith's article addresses the broader external economic and social issues that will influence the industry and define the markets and demographics that will affect our capability to deliver. Glenn's comments address two ways the industry can respond to these issues and ensure it is positioned and has the capacity and capability to deliver against the identified challenges. The industry needs leaders who understand the external influences and can respond in the way Glenn describes."

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Update: Building Awards

Mace Business School
**Building awards
winner 2010**
Integrated Supply
Chain of the Year

A winning proposition

MACE BUSINESS SCHOOL WALKED AWAY FROM THIS YEAR'S BUILDING AWARDS WITH THE TITLE OF "SUPPLY CHAIN OF THE YEAR". HERE'S HOW A NOVEL IDEA GREW INTO AN AWARD-WINNING ENTERPRISE

In the last issue of SchoolReport, we announced that the Mace Business School had been shortlisted in the Integrated Supply Chain of the Year category at the 2010 Building Awards. We're delighted give you the update that Mace Business School was selected as the winner at a lavish awards ceremony on the 23rd of April at The Grosvenor House Hotel in London.

Mace Business School was up against worthy contenders including Turner and Townsend, the Olympic Delivery Authority, Skanska, Bovis Lend Lease and Heathrow T4 extension, which included 3DR Reid, Buro Happold and Taylor Woodrow.

"It was a great honour to win the award against such excellent competition," said Brian Moone, director of the Mace Business School, who attended the ceremony. "Training is traditionally seen as something you stop doing early in life, but we have demonstrated that there is a business benefit to the entire supply chain continuing to learn."

Building magazine commented on the judges' decision: "The contractor that set up its own university of construction, then used it to develop the skills and knowledge of the supply chain, took the award this year."

"The contractor that set up its own university of construction, then used it to develop the skills and knowledge of the supply chain, took the award this year."

BUILDING MAGAZINE

How did we get here?

Controlling the quality of a supply chain has traditionally relied on a stringent selection procedure and careful on-site management. But according to ConstructionSkills, fewer than 38% of managers in the construction industry have received any kind of management training.

Dissatisfied with the variability of this approach, Mace developed a unique solution: it founded the Mace Business School in 2006. This was intended to promote the formation of long-term partnerships with a select number of supply chain companies, to research risk and then to implement training to mitigate it.

The courses are designed to ensure that managers fully understand industry best practice. They are attended by a mix of trades, and every person is encouraged to draw on his or her individual experience.

The partnerships formed and the knowledge gained through this system have had a positive impact on a number of Mace projects – in particular, the £155m Ropemaker office for British Land. The key suppliers on this project participated in Mace Business School's workshops, and lessons learned were fed back into the process. The result was the cohesive delivery of a project that has broken ground for innovative procurement. Undoubtedly, Mace will reap the benefits of this institution for many projects to come.



BUSINESSNEWS

A ROUNDUP OF THE LATEST NEWS FROM MACE BUSINESS SCHOOL



Mace Business School welcomes three new members

Mace Business School is pleased to welcome two world leaders in the lift and escalator market, Otis and Kone. Kone has been working with Mace on the prestigious 72-storey Shard project. Otis has worked extensively with Mace on small and large projects, including the 30-floor Willis Tower on Lime Street.

MBS is also pleased to welcome M&E business DG Robson Services Ltd. into membership.

“We value the opportunities that the Mace Business School program presents; to improve our project team skills to better match the needs and future demands of Mace, while improving project execution and efficiency for all. We are excited to be part of the Mace Business School.”

A REPRESENTATIVE AT OTIS

Six MBS delegates get closer to CIOB



The following five Business School delegates have moved closer to achieving CIOB chartered status thanks to Mace Business School's continuing support: Neil Coleman, Ian Findlay, Neal Bailey, Colin Heal, Adrian O'Grady, and Sean O'Grady. Of the six delegates, five achieved highly prized distinctions. The results were particularly rewarding as for most of the students, this was the first time returning to a learning environment, and many were under great pressure with work constraints.

The Mace Business School, which is a CIOB training partner and a Chartered Building Consultancy, delivers training courses to staff at supply chain companies.



Mace Business School celebrates its 50th member

May marked the fourth year of training for Mace Business School, which celebrated by signing up its 50th member. Starting with just nine courses and 20 clients, the school has grown to include 14 courses and an impressive trainer network of 22 experts from across Mace.



In the press: Building and Construction Manager

Spotlight: After a year of declining lead times, MBS questions whether economic recovery is on its way and how calling it right can give you the competitive edge. (Building - 19/04/10)

Lead Times: MBS reports on the first increase in enquiries as the industry looks to be turning the corner. (Building - 19/04/10)

Construction Manager: MBS discusses the need for manager training—and the risks of untrained managers. (May 2010)

The next Spotlight and Lead Times will be in Building on 09/07/10.

GOT A STORY YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE?

An idea you think other supply chain members might benefit from?

Get in touch and we'll publish it in the next issue of SchoolReport

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