

Book Review

Neal, D. R. (Ed). (2012). *Social Media for Academics: A Practical Guide*. Oxford: Chandos Publishing Ltd

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Much has been said about the value of using social media to teach our students. After all, are they not digital natives, technologically savvy, multitasking their way through lectures, texting and tweeting, liking and laughing at lolcats? Although this book includes advice on ways to use social media to engage students in learning, the main aim of this book is to illustrate how academic staff, teachers and librarians can use social media to enhance their own working practices, share their research more effectively and develop their professional networks and careers. As such, it is a refreshing take on using social media in education. If we really think students should be using it for learning, shouldn't we be using it for our own professional practice too?

In fact, it is possible that most academics will not be able to avoid it in the near future. The UK government has stated that by 2014 all research will be open access and this means that managing sharing and networks will become ever more relevant. Who knows, perhaps Google analytics will one day be used to produce the RAE? This book contains two sections, the early chapters cover the 'nuts and bolts' of social media and the second section includes chapters on putting social media into practice. There is a clear practical focus throughout, with a number of detailed guides and explanations about how to use social media tools. Whilst this is helpful for the relative newcomer, it is also the book's main drawback. Social media is a dynamic set of tools and applications, and they are all constantly changing. No book can stay up to date for long, and this reviewer found some tips for updating Facebook settings already outdated.

In one of her chapters, Neal herself argues that social media is best taught by using social media and I agree. Logically, this makes the use of a 'practical' hard-print book somewhat anachronistic. The chapters that include reflections on and evaluations of using social media for academics are less likely to suffer from rapid obsolescence. The practical tips and guides are best suited to social media formats, for example, a blog post or wiki page that can be easily updated.

The first chapter states that a large number of academics now blog because they are motivated by a desire to share their professional ideas and to develop a network of

peers and colleagues for mutual support. This theme of sharing is a thread that runs throughout the book, and underpins the variety of uses social media tools are put to by academics.

Other early chapters include how to make educational use of social networking sites such as Facebook, as well as some more professionally-orientated sites. Other topics include how to use Skype, Dropbox and Googledocs for immediate sharing of voice and document; using specialist academic search engines for locating research material; using reference databases and automatic bibliography tools; using Twitter and finally a chapter on using a variety of tools on mobile devices. Each chapter is aimed at the new user and includes guidance on getting started as well as, for most chapters, discussion of some of the issues and problems that may arise with the tool. The second section includes chapters on putting social media into practice, which helpfully broadens the scope of the book. These chapters are more reflective and include a range of personal case studies from the differing perspectives of teachers, librarians and students.

These later chapters include examples of how to use social media in teaching by integrating them with more traditional virtual learning systems; using social media to promote and share academic research; developing a sense of digital identity and privacy online; using social media specifically to promote library use, and finally a chapter reflecting on the delivery of the particular online social media course that Neal herself has taught for a number of years.

Neal's own enthusiasm for, and wide engagement with social media is apparent throughout the book. This enthusiasm and the varied discussion of ways that social media can be used to share and build a valuable professional network are sure to interest and engage those relatively new to social media.