

## Don't Just Make Dialogue. Make It Work.

*Allan Schoenberg, director of corporate communications at CME Group, and Alex Kepnes, Fleishman-Hillard's business-to-business digital practice group leader, kicked off BMA Chicago's first Breakfast Roundtable of the 2009-2010 program year with the first in a series dedicated to exploring best practices in social media. The event took place on Sept. 16 at IIT's [Stuart School of Business](#).*



By [Whitney Baker](#)

Social media continues to revolutionize how businesses engage with everyone from future employees to complaining customers. But many companies have yet to move beyond the buzz, or create real strategies to support new marketing tools such as [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

At BMA's September Breakfast Roundtable, Allan Schoenberg and Alex Kepnes shared expert insight and practical tips for getting started with social media, including the following key takeaways:

**Make sure dialogue goes both ways.** It's not enough for organizations to simply create social media accounts. They must actively engage in online conversations. Smart companies use social media to listen and respond to what customers are saying, and lean on tools such as Twitter to help boost customer service. "Constant communication is key," Kepnes said. "In this day and age, you ignore an incoming tweet, you ignore a posting about how I have a service problem, next thing you know you're in crisis mode."

**Go beyond promoting your own business.** Instead of using social media channels to blast news releases, which can easily turn people off, Schoenberg said he builds credibility with followers by posting information that affects his company indirectly, such as relevant new research. "We are out there talking about things that matter to us," Schoenberg said.

**Aim for adaptability.** Kepnes compared the current phase of social media to the first inning of an extra-inning baseball game. Few people used Twitter two years ago, and new tools continue to surface. It's important to have the right program structures in place to enable your company to respond to upcoming social media channels, Kepnes said.

**Establish clear social media management guidelines.** Employee training is a key component of social media success, Kepnes said, since items requiring action might bubble up through social media channels at any time, day or night. All staff members involved must know when and how they are expected to monitor and contribute to social media conversations.

CME Group addressed this challenge by identifying various social media spokespeople, according to Schoenberg, who said he encourages these employees to use the “CEO” test when posting information online. “If my CEO is not going to approve of what I say, I’m not going to post it,” he said. “You have to have fun sometimes, but only to a certain degree.”

**Explore options for reaching various audiences.** “It’s not about being on Facebook,” Kepnes said, “it’s about what’s best for you.” There’s no one tool that’s going to reach everyone from financial analysts to potential and existing employees. Companies need to use a combination of new marketing vehicles to communicate with different groups. Kepnes said the process involves evaluating what tools will work best to achieve the business objective.

Schoenberg encouraged marketers to consider technologies such as [CoTweet](#), a tool that, among many functions, helps a person manage multiple Twitter accounts or prepare tweets to be automatically delivered at a scheduled time and date. “All of this stuff is brand new,” Schoenberg said. “Don’t be afraid to experiment a little ... you’ve really got to go out and kick the tires.”

For more information, or to download a podcast of the full presentation, visit <http://events.fleishmanhillard.com/bmaroundtable>.

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