

Teaching In A Changing Profession!

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Welcome to the world of social-networks. Technically speaking, these consist of individuals or organizations connected by one or more specific types of interdependency, such as values, visions, ideas, financial exchange, friendship, kinship, dislike, conflict or trade. The wildfire of this Internet phenom is fueled by the young, and we can learn from young, entry-level teachers who have been reared on technology. Instant text messaging, *Facebook*, *MySpace*, and *YouTube* are among the new electronic avenues on which relationships are speeding today. Sure, communication skills are essential in today's electronic world, but the real challenge is using them effectively in this networking century where changes are happening overnight.

Music educators can and ought to be ahead of this social network tsunami. *FaceBook*, *MySpace*, or other Internet-based social-networks can bring students, communities and alumni together as never before. There are real advantages inherent in these new Internet-based social-networks. Consider the following possibilities with *Facebook* and *MySpace*.

1. Interact with your students promoting upcoming concerts and review recent recordings.
2. Raise awareness by getting the word out on important issues and causes and inspire others to take action.
3. Exchanges with colleagues could include swapping stories, experiences and successful ideas.
4. Connect with students by sharing photos and videos.

5. Promote special events such as trips, music festivals with sneak peeks and announcements.
9. Create buzz for your music program with behind-the-scene excitement, answer questions and announce new items.
10. Share tricks of the trade, with successful projects and poll experts for advice.

Indiana University School of Music Program at IUPUI hosted their 18th Annual International Music Technology Conference last June. Attendee's saw the first-ever clinic presentation on social-networks covering MySpace, Facebook and YouTube. Director, Dr. Fred Rees, believes "It is essential for music educators to "catch up" with such new, emerging technologies." Let's look at how they can lighten your work load with interactive power.

MySpace.Com

MySpace was originally designed for promoting music groups. It has become a free social-networking website with an interactive, user- submitted network of friends, personal profiles, blogs, groups, photos, music and videos for teenagers and adults. And although *MySpace* is in a decline for social use, its original purpose is still effective, namely, free websites for music groups. My daughter performs in two professional bands, one with it's own independent website (www.thebordercollies.com) but they still use *MySpace* (www.myspace.com/thebordercollies) because it is so easy to update fans about upcoming events as well as blog entries about their recent work.

Music educators do not have to be web masters to create their *MySpace* pages. Changing the HTML and format to get a unique look is very easy and the web is full of sites for free templates and graphics advice. Best of all, uploads are free! MP3's of your music can give a

taste of your program along with pictures, slideshows and albums of past concerts and activities. You can even make it possible to download tracks if you want. This is a free tool that you can help promote your music program.

The Nuts and Bolts of MySpace

MySpace is a one-stop shop for posting multimedia presentations over the Internet.

Getting an account is very simple at www.myspace.com. Here are some of the tools you can use without being a web master.

1. Web Building. This lets you create your own site and customize. Rather than start from scratch with HTML or web-building software, you just fill in the blanks at *MySpace* to create your page. See <http://www.ironspider.ca/> for free *MySpace* layouts and web hosting info.
2. Online photo album. Along with your *MySpace* profile picture, you can upload other photos that are viewable by other *MySpace* members. A Google search on MySpace.com, “Sierra Vista High School” will give a good photo album example.
3. Blog: *MySpace* provides a built-in tool to start your own web journal, a blog. *MySpace* allows you to make your blog publicly viewable. You can even mark individual entries as private. Google search for an example at “Oak Grove High School Band” on MySpace Music.
4. Video hosting: *MySpace* added a tool for hosting and sharing short videos clips. Google search to see a good example at “MySpace.com - Garfield High School Band”
5. Calendar: Tired of students not keeping important dates on their schedule? *MySpace* provides a fully customizable calendar tool that allows you to enter plans and

appointments. Again, you can choose to share your calendar with students, public or private. Google search the calendar at “MySpace.com - Dawson High School Eagle Band”

6. Address book. Need a place to store the e-mail addresses and *MySpace* usernames of your students and friends? *MySpace*'s address book tool keeps track of that important information. Google search “Fellguard Best High School Band” on *MySpace*.
7. Send and receive messages: *MySpace* accounts come with a mailbox similar to e-mail where other *MySpace* users can send you messages or get replies from you.
8. Post a bulletin: The bulletin option is a good way to get a message to all your students and parents. Google search “MySpace.com - John Overton High School Band”
9. Post an event and invitation. You can also share information about a concert with the entire *MySpace* population by entering it as an event. You can filter the events pages by location or time frame to focus on events going on in a given locale and time-frame. After you post an event, you can follow up by inviting your *MySpace* subscribers or other contacts that don't use *MySpace* to the event.
10. Chat with other users. *MySpace* provides a forum for posting comments on specific topics to a bulletin board or taking part in live chat in an on-line chat room.
11. Leave comments. *MySpace* offers the chance for your students to comment on your ensemble profile, blog entries, or photos.
12. Update your mood and status. You want instant gratification, you got it.
13. Post a classified ad. *MySpace* offers classified ads should you have a special need for a job, a service, or an item. There are plenty of high school music programs with *MySpace*

pages to advertise themselves. Google search on “Promote Your Band With Myspace Music” for ideas on how to do it.

Customizing MySpace for Music Educators

The trick is to maximize a *MySpace* account when you first go to sign up for a new account. On the right side of the page is an icon to sign up as a "Musician." That will give you the easy calendar and .MP3 player for your site. Click *that* icon first and then sign up so you can have these features built into your account.

To customize the look of your ensemble profile, there are 18 different themes available from *MySpace*. There are also lots of websites out there advertising "free myspace layouts!" to help customize the look, but most of these are filled with spam and pop-ups. The *MySpace* platform has plenty of great applications without using outside sources. You can load the gig calendar, the music player, the photo albums and load videos. Load them directly to *MySpace* and they will appear in the "channel" you can find on your profile. If you have videos uploaded to *YouTube*, these have "embed" qualities, so all you need to do is copy and paste the URL found on the specific video page from *YouTube*; then pasted it into your profile and it will appear.

Musicians sell music tracks from the .MP3 player on their site through <http://www.snocap.com/>. I know most band music is probably covered by copyrights, but there are other interesting applications to consider. How about a composition competition for students with the chance to sell the recording to their family and friends. SNOCAP is MySpace affiliated.

Facebook

Facebook is another popular, free-access social-networking website that offers unique opportunities for music educators. Users can join networks organized by city, workplace, school

and/or region to connect and interact with other people. The media often compares *Facebook* to *MySpace*, but the most significant difference between the two websites is the level of customization. *MySpace* allows users to decorate their profiles using HTML and Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), while *Facebook* only allows plain text. *Facebook* does have a number of features with which users can interact. The *Wall* is a space on every user's profile page that allows friends to post messages for the user to see. *Pokes* allows users to send a virtual "poke" to each other. With *Photos* users can upload albums and photos,. And *Status* lets users inform friends of their whereabouts and actions. A user's *Wall* is visible to anyone who is able to see that user's profile depending on their privacy settings.

Facebook has also added several new features to its website. A *News Feed* now appears on every user's homepage and highlights information including profile changes, upcoming events and birthdays related to the user's friends. You can automatically control information shared with students. Users are now able to prevent students from seeing updates about different types of activities, including profile changes.

One of the most popular applications on *Facebook* is *Photos* where users can upload albums and photos. *Facebook* allows users to upload an unlimited number of photos, compared with other image hosting services such *Photobucket* and *Flickr*, which apply limits to the number of photos that a user is allowed to upload. Privacy settings can be set for individual albums, restricting particular users.

Facebook has a blogging feature that allows tags and embeddable images. *Facebook* has instant messaging called "Chat" that allows users to communicate with friends and is similar to desktop-based instant messengers.

Facebook is *not* an open website. It is a password protected networking site. Many parents prefer this because it allows only people who have been "added as friends." If you look at the data, it is among the most visited websites for teens and young adults. People visit it several times a day. The advantage of this is that you can get information to your students and know they'll get it, because they *will* be on *Facebook* sometime that day. A teacher can do is create a profile and ask their students to add them. Then, you can easy e-mail them all. Also, a "status" is something that all your students can view and you can change it as often as needed. For example, "John Kuzmich, Jr. says projects are due today!" and they'll all see it and be reminded, or "John Kuzmich, Jr. is really proud of his band today - great concert!!" Students will flock to comment on the status.

Now, you can create groups on *Facebook*. Both of my daughters band's have groups that fans can join. You can build a fan base with "groups" for each of your ensembles. Add pictures, video, "Notes", and "create an event." Fill out a page with information for a concert, and easily invite all the members of the group. They can leave messages on the page and ask questions, leave comments, add pictures or video, and RSVP. I envision this as a fabulous new way to network with students because it's a site they go to *everyday*, and it sends reminders right to their e-mail.

Facebook has safe and easy networking and notification. *MySpace* is a great, easy way to advertise and tell the world about your ensemble. It's just simple to see these are the most effective way to network today - and are perfect for classroom ensembles.

YouTube

YouTube is useful for a large music program or private studio. When students need

performance help, you can frequently find a video recording of it on *YouTube* and share the URL with your students. One of your advanced students could record their performance on a webcam right there in the lesson and upload it to *YouTube*. Then, students can practice with it. You probably don't want to make it public, so just make your videos private and only invite people with their e-mail addresses to access and view it. Create an account with an easy password that students know so they just log in and practice with the videos. When my clarinet student was learning the Stamitz Clarinet Concerto, I quickly found a *YouTube* recording and had her listen to it. It motivated her to practice and she played it in a public concert three months later!

YouTube allows you to post high-definition videos. So, post a high quality performance of your ensemble on *YouTube* then embed it on your Myspace profile for a free, one-stop site for students, family and supporters. *YouTube* lets the viewers rate videos and share comments about them. Here are several high school recordings at YouTube at:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cIK-XaL_mso

A word of caution: Don't assign a *YouTube* video for student viewing unless and until you first view it. You never know when something inappropriate might unexpectedly be there. Here are several high school recordings at YouTube at:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cIK-XaL_mso

More Options?

If *MySpace* and *Facebook* seem a little too big for your needs, you might want to consider *Ning.com*. *Ning* is built for small-niche online communities while *MySpace* and *Facebook* are built for broad networking. *Ning* is like a *Facebook* group in that you can customize a *Ning* site with your own URL or CSS style sheet. The *Ning* interface is totally drag and drop with different

themes. *Ning* creates a private or public online music and video storage space. Music files can be set to stream vs. download, and integrates Creative Commons licensing. Videos posted to *Ning* can be embedded in other sites. *Ning* has lots of administrator controls and custom options. *Ning* for K-12 is completely ad-free. If you want your music or class materials to be seen by lots and lots of people, use *Facebook* or *MySpace*. If you want a site that focuses on collaborative learning through integrated blogs, wikis, media-players, RSS feeds, chat and forums... use *Ning*. *Ning* has a pre-existing community of educators connecting with children, students and teachers from around the world. *Ning* can be used as an easy tool to build a social website around your school, class or program. Google search for *Ning* examples at “The Pell City High School Band of Gold” and “Hueytown High School Band.” One of the leading promoters of *Ning* for the music education field is Dr. Alex Ruthmann at the University of Massachusetts at Lowell. See his *Ning* Young Professionals Focus Group for the International Society for Music Educators at <http://ismeypfg.ning.com/>. For more info about *Ning*'s educational uses, go to <http://education.ning.com/>.

Possible Firewall Restrictions At School

Be aware that inside most schools, the Internet security system will probably filter out all social-networks. One way around it when you want to demonstrate specific videos on *YouTube* for instance, search for the videos in *Google* and chances are you will be able to play it for your students despite an Internet filtering system.

Closing Comments: Think Outside the Box!

We are living in a fast-paced, ever changing world, there is much to be gained when educators explore new ways to connect and communicate with parents and students. Indeed, we

can learn from each other! Traditional methods are not necessarily outdated but why *not* let the advantages of social-networking work for your program? Interactive communication is definitely part of today's society. Imagine using a social-network to stay in touch with your alumni over the years, and even organize a special concert honoring your alumni or a retiring faculty member. Google "University of Liverpool Alumni, Ning" for an example of *Ning* alumni networking capabilities. After you've Googled a few of the examples cited here, you'll see there's a party going on. You're invited!