

GROWERTALKS

Acres & Acres

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Social Studies

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I'm feeling guilty. I mean, here I am, doing something so totally last week like writing a magazine column, when I should be updating my Facebook status to let you know that I'm sitting on my sofa in front of my laptop with a coke, a bag of pretzels, Andy Griffith on the TV and Mulligan the cat in the window. I should also Tweet something, such as "Trying 2 come up w idea for Oct GT column. Got any brainstrms?"

As you can guess, this month's column is about social media. It's one of those topics that divide folks into three distinct camps: those who embrace it right away, those who aren't too sure but are keeping an open mind, and those who thumb their nose at the whole stupid idea.

As a friend of mine says about his anti-social media stance, "I don't care what you're doing, and I don't want you to know what I'm doing."

As a 50-something, I could, I suppose, exempt myself from the whole trend. Like I did with video games, for instance. PlayStations and their ilk didn't make it big until I was in my 30s, so I've never owned one (although I've dropped lots of quarters into Pac Man and Burger Time in my day).

However, I'm savvy enough to recognize that Facebook, Twitter and the rest are tools—communication tools—and my job as an editor is to communicate with you using all the various tools that you are using ... and "you" are a pretty broad audience, ranging in age from probably 15 to 95 and tapping into every technology on the planet.

That's why I've been spending even more time on Facebook and Twitter lately.

In reality, *GrowerTalks* was the floriculture industry's first social media. I mean, George Ball and his sons made it possible for growers all around the world to know what others in the business were up to. They traveled, they shared stories from folks they visited, they ran letters from customers and readers ... other than having the speed of a really, really slow dial-up, *GrowerTalks* was the Facebook of its day.

A few things I've learned about social media. First, "friends" and "followers": I have my fair share of them. But I

don't know all of them. Does one go for quality or quantity? I aim for the former. I friend someone or accept a follower if they appear to be in the industry, but ignore them otherwise. Sorry Glacier Digital, I just blocked you.

However, having lots of Facebook friends proved to be a problem when I recently tried accessing my account from an unknown location. That triggered an alarm at Facebook, and now they want me to verify my account by identifying pictures from my "friends" albums. Yikes! So far I've tried three times, and I've failed every time. I may be permanently locked out of my account if I can't identify the stout gentleman with the cigar or the woman with the hat.

Second, what should you write or tweet? You can send out generic announcements about your company, but I think it's more interesting when you work in something personal, such as "I'm walking the greenhouse this morning, and our cyclamen look killer! Get yours today. Special case pricing, too!" (That's just 98 of 140 characters allowed on Twitter.)

When I write something on Facebook or Twitter, it's generally a combination of personal and work. Like, suppose I'm at Lowe's and I see something interesting in the garden center. I may mention that I'm buying a flapper for my toilet, but I'll also tell you something worthwhile about garden mum pricing and quality.

Admittedly, this social media thing takes practice. And if writing doesn't come easy to you, you'll struggle. My main challenge? I'm usually too busy doing something to stop and write about what I'm doing.

I suggest you get used to the idea that social media is here to stay. After all, think about faxes and cell phones. Once novelties, now we can't live without them.

Friend me on Facebook (Chris Beytes) or follow me on Twitter (Beytes) for an easy excuse to get started. I'll keep the toilet tweets to a minimum.