

# The Intelligencer

## 'Internet is now your front door'

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Cyndi Posusney's first reaction when someone told her to join Facebook was skepticism.

"I'm not 18," she recalls thinking. "Why should I do that?"

Now she says she's found that joining the social networking Web site and using other online tools like LinkedIn and Twitter have helped her grow her year-old business, Serenity Health & Fitness Center in East Greenville, Montgomery County.

Still, Posusney said she has a lot to learn about using social networking sites to market her business, which is why she joined 100 other businesswomen (and a few men) Wednesday for a seminar on the topic.

The event, held at The Bucks Club in Warwick, was a joint presentation of Network Now, a women's networking group, and the Greater Philadelphia chapter of the National Association of Women Business Owners.

Presenters Neen James, an internationally known productivity expert and speaker, and Gina Rubel, president of Furia Rubel Communications, said business owners can't afford to avoid social marketing.

"Don't be scared of any of these tools," James said. "Go have a look and just watch. You can be sure your competitors are doing this right now."

As consumers have embraced social networking, so have businesses. Just this week, Pepsi used Twitter - a site that allows members to send out 140-word "tweets" to followers - to apologize for a controversial iPhone application. And when employees of InkStop, a retail chain that abruptly closed all its stores this month, wanted to file a lawsuit over missing wages, they found an attorney through Facebook.

"You used to have a front door where people would walk up and knock," Rubel said. "The Internet is now your front door. All of these social media tools are other doors to your business."

But social marketing isn't without its pitfalls.

Questions during Wednesday's event not only centered on how to set up profiles, but also how to keep personal and professional lives separate online.

Rubel and James said the answer is to keep your posts professional and targeted to your audience. Users also shouldn't feel they have to accept Facebook friend requests from everyone - and they shouldn't feel bad if they "unfriend" unprofessional users.

"Social media is just a tool," James said. "It's a tool just like everything else you do to grow your business, to stay connected."

Almost all of the attendees said they have a presence on Facebook and LinkedIn, a popular social networking site for professionals. But only a handful use Twitter, and even fewer said they used Google's online tools to track what people are saying about them online or to build their online presence.

Many said they find it all overwhelming and time consuming.

James and Rubel said they limit their social networking time to about 15 minutes a day. They use online aggregating tools like iGoogle and Hellotxt.com, which allow them to check posts, get the latest news and upload their own messages to any or all of the networking sites at once.

"Social media has liberated me," Rubel said. "I can have a conversation. It's in place of 'in face' for me."