

Following the leaders

Local CEOs wielding power with their posts

BY TOM DEMEROPOLIS

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Even for the busiest of executives, it's getting harder and harder to ignore the power of social media.

Just ask George Vincent, managing partner and chairman of downtown law firm Dinsmore & Shohl.

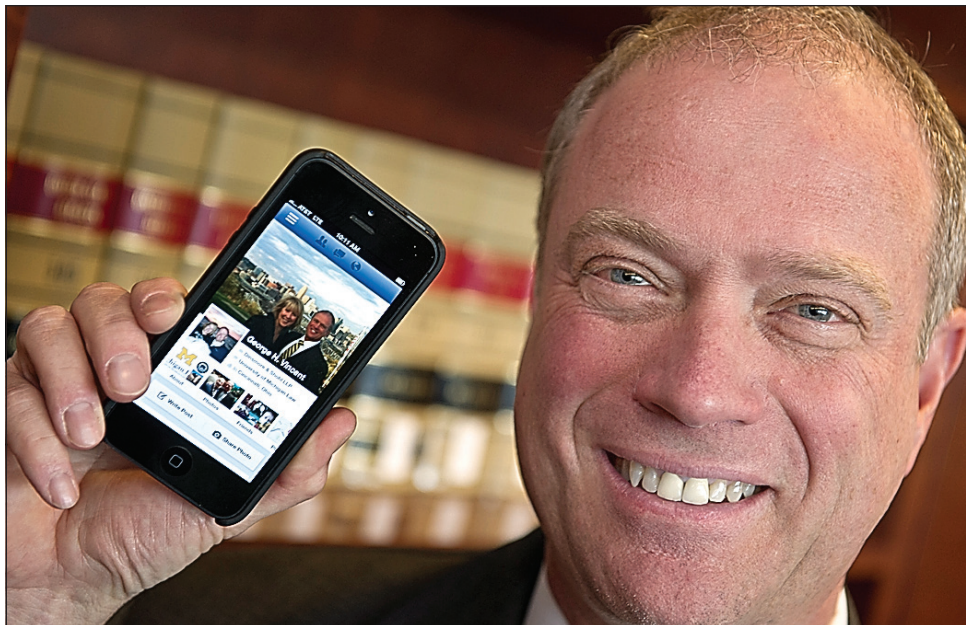
"I understand what's going on with the world," he said. "It's a great way to converse with people in an easy, timely way."

Vincent already has plenty to keep him occupied. Dinsmore is, after all, Cincinnati largest law firm, with more than 475 lawyers in 13 cities. But he also updates his Facebook page, letting his nearly 700 "friends" know what's on his mind. He mostly writes personal posts — pictures of family, congratulating sports teams and the occasional political opinion.

And Vincent is far from the only high-level Cincinnati business leader with a strong social media presence.

Of 221 Cincinnati-area chief executives, 140 are engaged on one or more social media platforms — Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Google+, according to a new study of CEOs and social media by Vehr Communications.

Vehr, the downtown-based corporate communications firm, studied the involvement of Cincinnati CEOs in social media, comparing them with chief executives of some of the world's largest and fastest-growing companies.



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George Vincent, managing partner and chairman of law firm Dinsmore & Shohl, keeps his nearly 700 Facebook "friends" updated with personal posts, photos and opinions.

This first-ever study compared local CEOs' social media engagement with the chief executives of the Fortune 500 and the fastest-growing companies in 2012, the *Inc.* 500.

Vehr found that local executives are more engaged in social media than leaders of the world's largest public companies, but less engaged than those running the fastest-growing companies.

"Social media is fast becoming the most important tool for managing key relationships beyond face-to-face interaction," said President Nick Vehr.

Social media needs to be a part of companies' strategy going forward and it needs to start at the top, Vehr said.

Even Warren Buffett, CEO of Berkshire Hathaway, joined the social media sphere. You can follow him on Twitter, @WarrenBuffett.

The Cincinnati CEO with the biggest social media presence is University of Cincinnati President Santa Ono. On Twitter, the microblogging site where he writes under the name @PrezOno, Ono writes 15 to 17 "tweets" per day. Of the more than 16,750 tweets Ono has posted, he wrote about 97 percent. Ono said he has someone on his staff who will tweet for him when he doesn't have time.

The university is a business, with nearly 10,000 employees and a \$1.1 billion annual budget, but Ono notes that his audience is different than that of many other Cincinnati companies. In his position, Ono is working to connect with 270,000 alumni, 43,000 students and another 20,000 to 25,000 prospective students.

"Young people are connecting through mobile or social media more than telephones or email," Ono said. "It's really about who your audience is."

His tweets range from informational messages to shout-outs to students or faculty. Others are just to show a bit of Ono's personality.

"Every now and then I have to admit — I miss Pokemon," Ono tweeted last month.

Social media doesn't take a lot of Ono's time, but since he's using his most precious commodity on it, the university tracks the results. UC has seen an uptick in applications and commitments from high school students because they feel they really know the university and Ono through Twitter. A spike in the number of donors to UC also coincided with an increase in Ono's follower count.

In terms of volume of posts, Ono is pretty busy. But he can't hold a candle to the tweets fired off by Jeff Ruby. Since joining Twitter a year ago, the owner of Jeff Ruby Culinary Entertainment averaged 46 tweets per day.

'IT'S PART OF AMERICA THESE DAYS'

More than anything, Ruby said using Twitter lets him connect with his guests. Feedback from Twitter was instrumental in his decision to reopen the Waterfront because his followers told him how much the restaurant meant to them.

"My Twitter followers like the fact that I talk to them," Ruby said.

And he does, all the time. It's obvious by looking at his feed, @TheRealJeffRuby, the messages coming out are straight from the region's top restaurateur.

For Jeff Wyler, CEO of Jeff Wyler Automotive Family Inc., social media is something he knows makes sense to do.

"If there wasn't a benefit, I wouldn't do it," Wyler said. "It's part of America these days."

For the most part, Wyler's personal Facebook account is managed by his daughter, Jessica Wyler. On occasion, he'll post inspirational quotes and an action item for the day.

But Wyler knows being on social media matters. It's a place to see good and not so good comments about his business, and then react accordingly.

Ono offers this advice for CEOs who may be thinking about picking up social media: Think before you tweet.

"Before I send a tweet, I pause, save it, and come back to it and look at it again," he said. "Twenty-seven thousand people will see what I do."

SOCIAL CEOs

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Cincinnati CEOs with the most Facebook "friends"

1. Santa Ono , president, University of Cincinnati	4,998
2. Jeff Wyler , CEO, Jeff Wyler Automotive	3,345
3. Chris Cicchinelli , CEO, Pure Romance	2,758
4. Jim Price , CEO, Empower MediaMarketing	770
5. George Vincent , managing partner, Dinsmore	677

Cincinnati CEOs with the most Twitter "followers"

1. Santa Ono , president, University of Cincinnati	14,929
2. David Hodge , president, Miami University	4,292
3. David Nussbaum , CEO, F+W Media	1,566
4. Jim Price , CEO, Empower MediaMarketing	976
5. Geoffrey Mearns , president, Northern Ky. University	914

Source: Vehr Communications' 2013 Cincinnati "Social CEO" Study



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