

Advertisement



Save your money®

Member FDIC

**High Interest.  
No Fees. No Minimums.**



The Orange Savings Account<sup>SM</sup>

Open Now

**SunSentinel.com** | ARTICLE COLLECTIONS

You are here: SunSentinel.com > Collections > **Social Media**

Ads by Google

**Master's in Social Work**  
Earn an MSW Degree Online. Submit Contact Info & Learn More Today!  
[msw.USC.edu/Virtual-Academic-Center](http://msw.USC.edu/Virtual-Academic-Center)

**Social Media Top 10**  
Organic Food Producers From Haberman, Modern Storytellers  
[www.modernstorytellers.com](http://www.modernstorytellers.com)

**Digital Content**  
Increase SEO and engage customers with branded content  
[www.totembrandstories.com](http://www.totembrandstories.com)

**Connect with Other Models**  
Create a modeling profile and network with models worldwide.  
[www.modelmanagement.com](http://www.modelmanagement.com)

**Free Marketing eBook**  
Use Social Media, SEO, Blogs to Get More Leads for Your Business.  
[www.HubSpot.com/Social-Media](http://www.HubSpot.com/Social-Media)

Find more stories about

- Social Media

**FEATURED ARTICLES**

- Ann Brown: Agency's Redeemer  
November 28, 1999
- Bell To Refund \$100 Million State Ruling Will Mean An...  
October 16, 1991
- Schools Ok Gay Tolerance Training  
April 24, 2002

**RELATED LINKS**

- Facebook:** Become a friend of the Sun Sentinel on Facebook!
- South Florida's Twitter community
- Friend our Marlins page on Facebook
- Facebook:** Become our friend on Facebook for the latest entertainment news.

## Government watchdog and advocacy groups need to be more social

October 10, 2010 | By Seth Liss, Sun Sentinel Columnist

We hear from our readers almost every day about issues affecting their lives. They ask why their hard-earned tax dollars are paying for elaborate construction projects or why utility bills must pay for new power projects. They criticize the cost of property taxes and home insurance despite four years without a direct hit from a hurricane.

We hear them, but I sometimes wonder if our elected officials and state leaders do.

They probably get an earful from lobbyists and special interests that can afford frequent trips to Tallahassee. But many South Floridians can't make it to the state's capital for public hearings.

Social media can help balance the playing field for consumers and their advocates.

There's a plethora of non-profit groups, such as the Consumer Federation of the Southeast and Florida TaxWatch, that could use social networking to build grass-roots support for their cause and interact with the people they represent. There are even state-funded agencies such as the Office of Public Counsel, which represents utility customers, and the Insurance Consumer Advocate — neither of which have a presence on social media yet.

Ads by Google

**Just Energy®**  
Tired of Volatile Electric Bills? Free \$75 Gift Card with Enrollment.  
[www.JustEnergy.com](http://www.JustEnergy.com)

**Social Media Whitepaper**  
How to Centralize Your Social Media Programs for Success. Read More!  
[Lithium.com/Social\\_Media\\_Community](http://Lithium.com/Social_Media_Community)

I understand that consumer advocacy groups have small budgets and staff, but most social media tools are free and open to the public. It's time to start meeting people where they're increasingly at: online.

Take the Citizens Utility Board, the state of Illinois' utility customer advocate. The office uses its Facebook and Twitter pages to share links on the latest issues affecting customers and to respond to consumers' complaints. In this way, they probably avoid having to answer dozens of call about the same complaint.

In recent posts, customers swapped information about energy-efficient appliances and the electric utility's new pricing program. Responding to a customer who asked if he should enroll in the program, another customer shared what happened to her electricity bill when she joined the program.

Similarly, the Michigan Automobile and Home Insurance Consumer Advocate uses Facebook to build support for his fight against insurance companies using credit scores to set prices. And Texas Watch, a consumer advocacy organization, posted this discussion topic to its Facebook page: "Should legislators be able to access complaint records with private patient information from the Texas Medical Board?" They got 15 responses that helped the group gauge public opinion.

At the very least, social media can increase transparency and dialogue between government and its people. And that is at the very heart of a healthy democracy.

*Seth Liss is online content editor for SunSentinel.com. You may reach him at [sliss@sun-sentinel.com](mailto:sliss@sun-sentinel.com) or follow him on Twitter at [twitter.com/sliss33](http://twitter.com/sliss33).*

Ads by Google

**Social Media Whitepaper**  
How to Centralize Your Social Media Programs for Success. Read More!  
[Lithium.com/Social\\_Media\\_Strategies](http://Lithium.com/Social_Media_Strategies)

0 tweet

1 retweet

Like One person likes this.

Advertisement



Start a new holiday tradition with family and friends.

**Celebrity X Cruises®**  
Designed for you™



| [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#)

| [Index by Date](#)

[Index by Keyword](#)