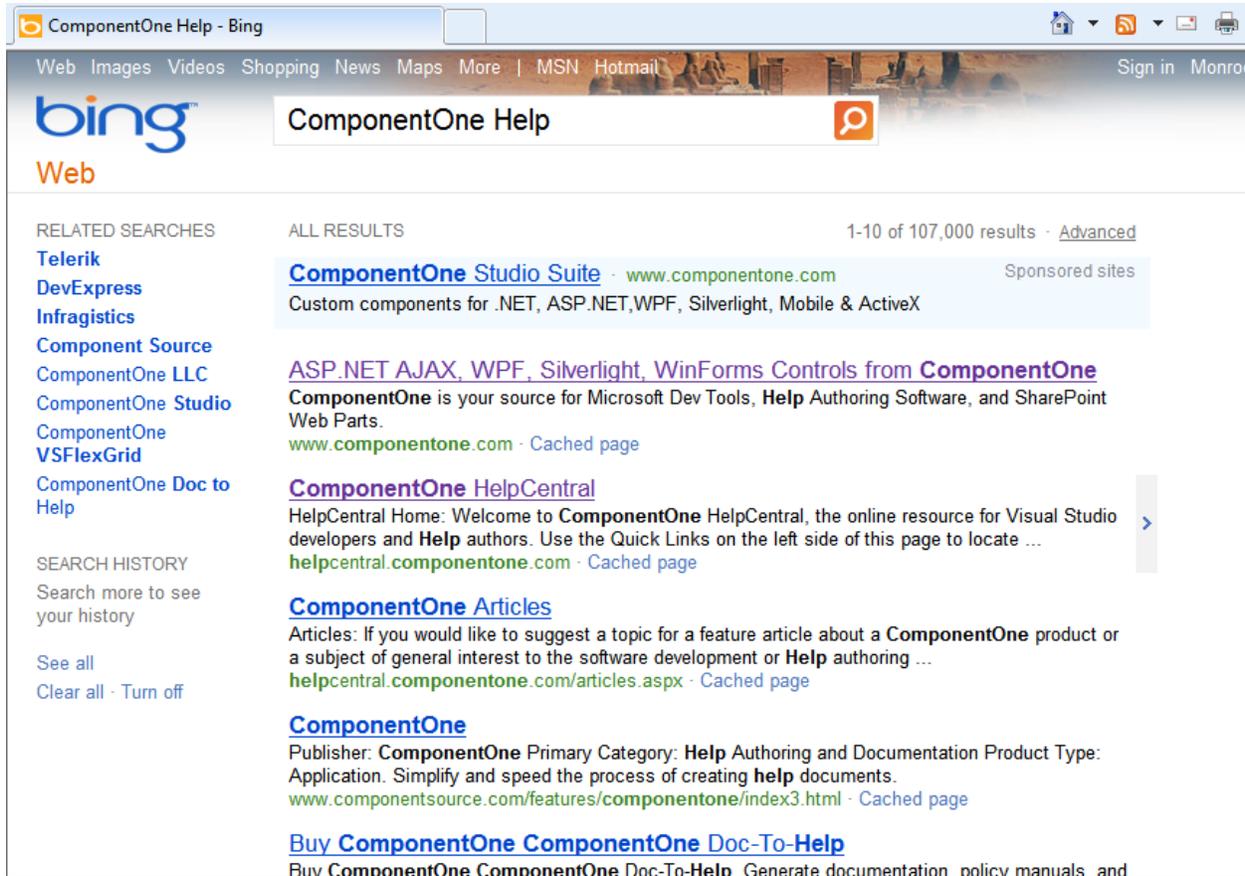


Enhancing the User Experience with Social Media

Software companies have been interacting with their users online for many years. It's common to find forums where users can interact with one another AND the company, as well as with web sites that provide multiple forms of assistance. Since 2004, ComponentOne has maintained HelpCentral, a web site that includes forums, knowledgebase articles, FAQs, videos, documentation, access to tech support, and code samples. Search engines can easily locate the site and its content.



The screenshot shows a Bing search results page for the query "ComponentOne Help". The browser's address bar shows "ComponentOne Help - Bing". The search results are displayed under the "Web" category. On the left side, there are sections for "RELATED SEARCHES" (listing Telerik, DevExpress, Infragistics, Component Source, ComponentOne LLC, ComponentOne Studio, ComponentOne VSFlexGrid, and ComponentOne Doc to Help) and "SEARCH HISTORY" (with options to "See all" and "Clear all - Turn off"). The main results area shows "ALL RESULTS" for "1-10 of 107,000 results". The top result is a sponsored link for "ComponentOne Studio Suite" from www.componentone.com, described as "Custom components for .NET, ASP.NET, WPF, Silverlight, Mobile & ActiveX". Below it is a result for "ASP.NET AJAX, WPF, Silverlight, WinForms Controls from ComponentOne", stating that ComponentOne is a source for Microsoft Dev Tools, Help Authoring Software, and SharePoint Web Parts, with a link to www.componentone.com. The next result is "ComponentOne HelpCentral", described as the online resource for Visual Studio developers and Help authors, with a link to helpcentral.componentone.com. Below that is "ComponentOne Articles", described as a place to suggest topics for feature articles, with a link to helpcentral.componentone.com/articles.aspx. The final result is "ComponentOne", described as a publisher of Help Authoring and Documentation Product Type, with a link to www.componentsource.com/features/componentone/index3.html. At the bottom, there is a link for "Buy ComponentOne ComponentOne Doc-To-Help" with a sub-link "Buy ComponentOne ComponentOne Doc-To-Help Generate documentation policy manuals and".

Except for the forums, none of this falls into the social-media category. However, HelpCentral is an example of a one-stop, user-assistance shop that includes user peer-to-peer conversations, with a large helping of self-help information. But, as described by supply-chain folks, HelpCentral is a "pull" system. You have to open the site and to see what it offers, or use a search engine and find it.

"Pushing" user assistance out to customers has always been preferable but difficult. Email blasts are time-consuming to create and easily ignored. But the "push" is where social media shines by providing a variety of ways to interact with customers and potential customers, and also gives your company a bit more personality.

Traditional user assistance and social media dovetail nicely. They can work together to make information and resources you already offer more findable and more engaging. social

media also brings technical communication and marketing together. Informed customers make for more satisfied customers. And each piece of information posted to social media – a tip, a blog post, an answer to a question on Facebook – has the company’s name on it.

Following are a few examples of what we are doing at ComponentOne. You might want to try these activities within your company.

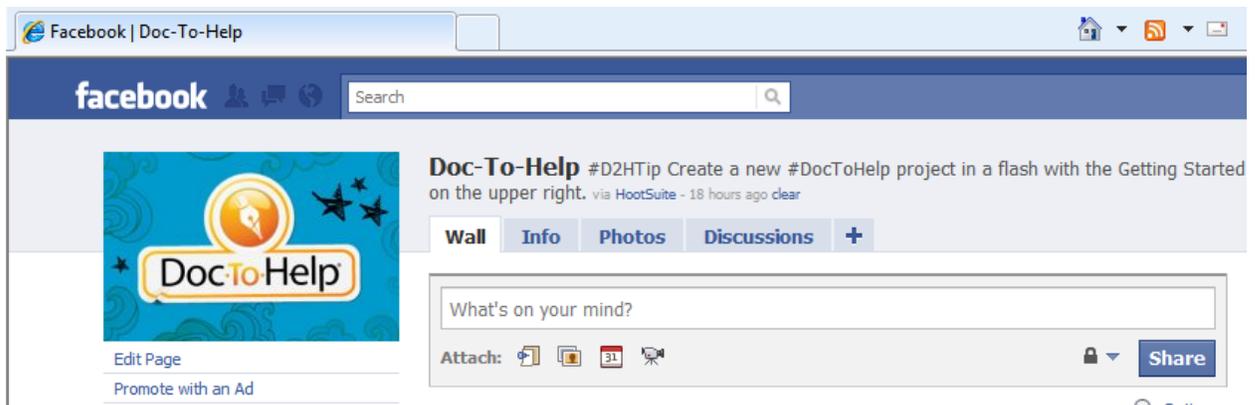
- Use Twitter to tweet product tips and tricks and answer product-related questions that users have posted. Tweet product news, links to company blog posts, free webinars, contests, upcoming trade shows, special offers, and links to useful industry information – as these are other forms of assistance and engagement.

On Twitter, tweets display in real time, so timing is important. This also means that answers won’t be displayed with questions, so create and use a product [hashtag](#) in each tweet so users can find the information later via search.

#D2HTip Create a new #DocToHelp project in a flash with the Getting Started Wizard. Just click the button on the upper right.

about 21 hours ago via HootSuite

- Cross-post the tweets to Facebook (we have a product page). The advantage with Facebook is that it keeps postings and comments together, making the information easier to follow. There’s also no 140-character restriction like there is with Twitter. Plus, Facebook lets you gather “fans,” interact with them, and include photos and a company overview.



- On LinkedIn, we follow technical communication groups and answer as-needed questions about our products and the field. There are over 20 groups out there related to technical communication, so the conversation can’t be limited to one group. Starting a group for a single product is easy, but the questions will not be limited to that venue. (Much like email lists like HATT and Techwr-l.) In fact, users often post the same questions to

several groups, meaning you need to answer the same question on several lists to reach everyone (of course, if you only answer once, you will reach the original questioner).

- Company blogs are not new, but they can now reach further because of social media. We apply links to new posts on Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. The posts are a mix of information – how to use our product with Agile, SharePoint mythbusting, licensing, help resources – as well as industry information, and thoughts on trends in technical communication.
- We create podcast interviews with our customers to show how they are using our products to solve their problems. We post the podcasts to our company web site then announce them on Twitter, Facebook, and in our email newsletters.
- We post selected product videos on YouTube and post selected presentations on SlideShare. This information may also be posted to the HelpCentral, but posting them to these sites makes them available when existing and potential customers search on these sites.

Of course, this all takes time, but the effort enhances the user experience. And there are drawbacks to social media – such as potential negative comments, videos, etc. But ignoring social media it isn't going to make those issues go away. So you might as well dive in!

Related Links:

helpcentral.componentone.com

www.twitter.com/doctohelp

www.facebook.com/doctohelp

[D2H Team blog](#)

[Technical Communication Camp blog](#)

[LinkedIn](#)

[SlideShare](#)

About the Author

Nicky Bleiel is the Lead Information Developer for [Doc-To-Help](#). She has 16 years of experience in technical communication; writing and designing information for software products in the documentation, media, industrial automation, simulation, and pharmaceutical industries. She is a Director-At-Large of the Society for Technical Communication and has presented talks at the STC Summit, WritersUA, tcworld, LavaCon, and DocTrain on many topics, including embedded help, tools and technologies, user assistance design, single sourcing, wikis, Web 2.0, and convergence technical

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