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Social media is the communications technology on the Internet through which users can share information or content, which can take the form of text posts, photos, videos etc. Social networking consists of online communities where users interact and share information. The distinction between the two is that social networks are more community focused; the main use is for people to connect and interact with each other, or network. Social media, on the other hand, uses social networking sites as a platform, but is more of a way to publish information to an audience. The two are similar in that they involve users online sharing information with each other, and the websites used often overlap. For example, on Twitter, users can connect with each other and discuss ideas amongst themselves, interacting in a community. This would fall under social networking. Additionally, brands and influencers can make Twitter profiles to post content to their audience; they aim to gain a following to whom they can spread their message. This is the social media aspect of Twitter. Overall, the two have some similarities where it might be hard to distinguish, but they are distinct concepts in that one is for human interaction and the other is for broadcasting to a larger audience.

The company I will be discussing is VEX Robotics. VEX offers five different product lines for teaching different ages of children about robotics from kindergarten through high school. One social networking feature I found on the website is a forum where users discuss upcoming competitions, ask questions, and share ideas. The forum is quite active with many new posts every day. My observation is that the community loves to learn and is very passionate about the company and the opportunities it provides them. Another social networking feature I found was the Coach PD+ program which allows VEX coaches to connect with each other and have the support of other professionals. From what I've gathered, it seems that VEX is doing great with the social aspect of their brand. By holding competitions and allowing people to connect in real life and online over their experiences, VEX is more than just a product; it's a real part of their users' lives. Kids make friends building robots together and may decide to pursue robotics as a career, and coaches get to educate their team in a fulfilling way with their own support system of other coaches. Memories are made by this company, and that wouldn't be possible without the community aspect. I would continue to push this concept as is or even add more social networking features, as it's what made them successful.

VEX is chiefly an educational company, focused on teaching all ages of children that robotics can be fun. The website offers lots of resources on learning how to build their robots, mainly for educators using VEX in the classroom. For them, there is an online community of other educators who can support them with any questions or concerns they may have. By providing them with so many resources, they make it easy for teachers to understand the robots and thus educate their students in a coherent and engaging way. The students then receive a good understanding of engineering and coding because it came from a robust and passionate community. But what if someone wants to learn to build VEX robots on their own? This is where the forum is a great resource. Browsing through the forum, I can see that a lot of questions are asked. The community seems very welcoming to beginners and most of the questions get at least one answer, if not more. Someone new to VEX could gain a lot of knowledge by heading to the forums when they need some guidance and support. They will assist users on things from programming to engineering to even opinions on their builds.

The VEX community is the heart of the company. It's what brings life to what could have just been another assignment at school. They bring immense value to the company in many ways. One of these ways is by making VEX look fun and inviting. When someone from the outside looks at the company, they see a whole group of people who have fun at competitions, talk passionately online, and are eager to include anyone who wants to join. Another way the community brings value is by providing free support. By letting the users themselves help their peers with their questions, VEX saves lots of money not having to write tons of help articles or provide as much customer support. Additionally, the community creates value by ensuring new users will have a voice and be heard. Customers like to know that they aren't alone, and knowing that they won't be ignored if they have some input on something is a big draw. One other way the community creates value is by providing free advertising and brand awareness. Because community members are so involved, they are sure to talk to their friends and family about VEX in a positive light. That means VEX is marketed to lots of people without having to spend any money. One final way that the community brings value to the company is by providing tons of feedback on products. With such an active group, VEX gets to know what people think and make the most profitable changes without having to do the work to ask for feedback themselves. In all, the VEX community is truly what makes the difference between a forgettable company and a vibrant one.

VEX Robotics: https://www.vexrobotics.com/

Sources: https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-media

https://www.britannica.com/technology/social-network

https://www.techtarget.com/searchunifiedcommunications/answer/Whats-the-difference-between-social-media-and-social-networking