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## BCU puts online tools in spotlight

### Group thinks businesses can benefit

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Economic developers in Battle Creek want to teach local people how to use social networking technology to market their businesses and become savvy online consumers.

Battle Creek Unlimited on Tuesday hosted the first in a free series designed to boost online communication among residents of Calhoun County. The Robert B. Miller College donated a room and supplies.

About 20 people attended the workshop led by Michael Pignataro, vice president of operations at Battle Creek's 'corePHP' Web development firm, to learn the basics of Facebook and Twitter.

"We've heard that businesses don't know how to use Facebook or Twitter, and if we can use that service to get them plugged in, obviously at no cost, then we want to do that," said Cheryl Beard, BCU technology and marketing director.

Karl Dehn, BCU president and chief executive officer, said they are tools a community needs to understand if it is planning to attract businesses and residents. The nonprofit also hopes to keep its finger on the pulse of the community by interacting with residents online.

Organizers are planning to gather input from the first group's participants before scheduling further topics and training dates, said Julie Metea, communications consultant to BCU.

Sue Anderson, chairwoman of the Climate Control Coalition, attended the event to learn if her group needed to jump on the social networking bandwagon.

"We have a Web site, but we're thinking about creating a Facebook page," she said. "This is something I'm barely acquainted with."

Pignataro explained the difference between Facebook groups and fan pages. He translated the cryptic symbols Twitter users code into their 140-character posts.

While some people found it helpful, others were disappointed in the presentation.

J.R. Reynolds, chairman of the Woman's Co-op board, said he didn't understand how Facebook and Twitter could be used in marketing.

"We are a grassroots organization and we see the potential for Facebook and Twitter for grassroots communication," he said.

Reynolds felt the seminar was not geared toward beginners, but to people who were already familiar with the tools, he said.

Most people in the audience said they had a personal Facebook page, but few administered fan pages or used Twitter.

Jonathan Shroyer, corePHP owner and senior Web designer, said he believed that while Web sites once dominated the Internet as sources of information, people are increasingly looking for it on social networking sites.

"It's a changing paradigm," he said.

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