

Social Media: Multiple Channels to Capture Multiple Audiences

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I discuss several social media applications and their use to create a full media campaign to target the correct demographics. Applications such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and more offer unprecedented access to faculty, administrators, students, staff, and other members of a campus community. Social Media has broken down the silos between segments and sections of society and allows communications to occur organically and effectively. Moreover, information is consumed in real time and “just in time.” The new communications, public relations, and marketing campaigns have a new arsenal of communication channels to use. The only thing left to do is to know which to choose, how to apply them, and how to measure their effectiveness.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

K.8.1 [Application Packages]: Data communications, Freeware/Shareware

General Terms

Management, Documentation, Performance, Design, Human Factors, Theory.

Keywords

Social media, marketing, communications, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Vine, Pinterest, Return on Investment, Engagement.

1. INTRODUCTION

In an April, 2013 tweet, Enterasys CMO Vala Afshar likened the phrase, “we use Facebook, we’re a social business” to saying, “we use an oven, we’re a gourmet restaurant.” [Afshar, personal communication, April 2013] His point hits home with those working in communications, marketing, and social media who have often heard similar announcements. The truth is building and maintaining a social presence for a company or entity takes a lot of skill and talent. Creating a Facebook page for your college/university department or group doesn’t mean you’ve effectively leveraged your message across social channels nor does it mean your messages are effective or being received.

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As much as technology changes, the principles of marketing and psychology remain the same. Applying the Three-Plus Rule to social media campaigns works as well as it did decades ago in print ad campaigns. The tools we use change, but the need to be an insightful marketer doesn’t.

1.1 Background

The University of New Hampshire is a public university in the University System of New Hampshire, Founded in 1866. The main campus is located in Durham, New Hampshire, United States. Additional campuses are located in Manchester, NH and Concord, NH. The University of New Hampshire is a land-grant, sea-grant, and space-grant university offering undergraduate and graduate programs. A team of 3,000 faculty and staff support approximately 15,000 undergraduate and graduate students. With students at three separate locations, social media allows UNH the ability to communicate important messages to students, staff, and faculty and to listen to ideas, problems, and information from all in real time.

2. SOCIAL MEDIA VS PRINT ADS

Three-Plus Rule

As far back as fifty years, marketing professionals would cite the three-plus rule when placing print ads. The three-plus rule was simple. It would take the average reader seeing an ad placement three times before recognizing they’ve seen it once. When placing newspaper ads, marketing executives would make sure to run the ad at least three times that week to achieve the maximum rate of return.

Sending messages using social media is no different. Care must be taken to ensure your important message is broadcast three times in a short period of time in order to maximize the number of people who receive your message.

Let’s say you have a need to inform students of a new feature in their email. You’ve determined you are going to use Twitter to send a message. Make sure to send a minimum of three messages scattered at various times you know are effective. If you know students aren’t typically early risers, concentrate efforts during times when they are usually checking messages or on computers (lunch, early evening, late evening.) Have fun with the 140 characters; you can send the same message with slight variations and maximize the reach of your message.

The three-plus rule can also be done with different pairings of social media tools, all with the same wording and message, to span the reach beyond just those using Twitter. A combination of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram is currently a powerful trio to reach UNH students. If there is a graphic or logo accompanying

the message, the continuity will create a stronger impact, as well. Including pictures with faces, especially fellow students, will also yield higher engagement and return on investment(ROI)

2.2 Don't Rely On One Channel

Social media is much like print ads. Relying on one channel or one post a week is unproductive and should not be thought of as a comprehensive social media plan. Because messages are sent and appear in a stream among other messages, they may not be seen. More importantly, different people use different social media applications - each has it's own unique subset and understanding who is using what is crucial.

Frequent and engaging posts on several social channels/applications allow your message to be seen by people multiple times. Moreover, it allows for different market segments to be targeted. One may be an excellent application to reach parents/faculty/staff while another may have a strong female following. Matching the application to its market segment is similar to your marketing department choosing which television channel and time slot to choose. Of course, because each application is different than the other, this means the message may need to be written for each service in your social media toolbox.

Care should be taken to create a message that maximizes the strength of the application being used. Instagram is very popular with Tweens and beyond and allows for the use of hashtags and tagging pictures. Using Instagram to showcase the most beautiful places on your campus and the faces of current students allows prospective students to see the campus and the type of students they will be joining. It's much easier for someone to picture himself or herself on your campus.

Vine is a popular application (by Twitter) allowing for six-second looping videos to be placed on Twitter, among others. These short video clips create moving images that grab even more attention. Once placed on Twitter, use the same url and post to Facebook.

2.3 Which Channel is the Right Fit?

Each channel is an opportunity to connect with a subset of followers and hopefully they will forward the message on to their followers to extend the reach exponentially. That being said, you don't have to be on all of the channels or using all of the applications. Select several that work for you and focus on doing those well rather than maintaining ghost presences on every channel out there.

Knowing exactly which channels to use, crafting a message which is engaging or is worthy of being shared with others, and understanding how to measure the effectiveness is the art and skill of our craft.

Several resources exist to aid in choosing the right social media application for the market segment. One of the best resources for determining, which one is best, is by asking. The University of New Hampshire regularly surveys its students to determine what forms of communication are used and how to best relay and receive information. Social media is changing quickly, so it's best to survey as often as possible. Over 600 students participated in a web poll to gauge social media use. The results of UNH's survey can be found at: <http://www.slideshare.net/UofNH/2013-unh-student-social-media-survey>.

Additional information was gathered throughout the 2012-13 academic year. Students were asked to participate on a communication task force. In exchange for their participation in monthly meetings, students were given lunch and the opportunity to meet, discuss social media, and influence university communications. Each month, priceless insight into the preferences and usage was extracted from the group. After meeting with these students, UNH Information Technology had a much stronger sense of which social media channels to use, when, and how.

Students aren't always the market segment the university wants to attract. Parents, Alumni, and Donors are also important groups. Understanding each service demographics can assist in planning a successful campaign. Successfully pairing the right tool and the right message is very important if you want to leverage the full power of social media for each target market.

The University of New Hampshire is fortunate to be located a few miles from Portsmouth, NH, home of many companies on the cutting edge of technology, marketing, and social media. There are regular meetings for anyone who wants to gather to discuss emergent technologies, the latest social media applications and their effectiveness, and tips to create a successful campaign.

Check your area to see if similar meetings are held and then take the time to go! Check for local TweetUps, Meetups, and other similar events. If there are none – start one! Early morning meetings or events after typical work hours during the week have proven popular on the seacoast of New Hampshire. Just one of the regular meetings is the Portsmouth Breakfast Club.

The Portsmouth Breakfast Club (<http://portsbkfstclub.com>) meets every Wednesday morning at 6:48am in a local coffee shop in downtown Portsmouth, NH. On any given Wednesday, you'll find a dozen or so folks gathering to discuss social media and tech news or sharing tips with others. It's a casual group that allows anyone to drop in and has some of the best and brightest in the field gathered. Those unable to make it can follow the tweets or read the blog posted later in the afternoon.

3. SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS AND THEIR AUDIENCES

The following is a breakdown of several social media applications and current audiences based on the results of the UNH Social Media Survey of Students and additional information available at this time. Social media changes quickly, so it's important to note the information may have changed.

3.1 Facebook

Facebook is still the number one communication tool for engaging with students. However, our polls show students are losing favor with Facebook and instead are going to other applications to engage with other students. While students do use Facebook, they limit their interaction to special or closed groups. As one student said in an interview, "We are on Facebook – but we lurk, we don't comment or like stuff. My parents and grandparents are on Facebook. I have to be careful." Conversely, Facebook is an extremely good tool to choose to reach parents, alumni, staff, and others.

3.2 Twitter

UNH has found students prefer using Twitter to communicate after Texting and Facebook. Hashtags allow for students to create and follow conversations and topics. Direct messages function the same as SMS/text messages and allow for sending pictures, hyperlinks and conversations with multiple people, making it an attractive vehicle for students.

In order to generate a genuine and trusted atmosphere, UNH uses student interns to tweet as @UNHStudents. Students and others want to see a personality through Twitter – not just canned messages. Let your personality shine through! UNH Information Technology makes sure to cover lots of topics while showing our personality. You'll see tweets covering a variety of topics; news, available positions, tech tips, workshops, and many others including humor. We also post lots of pictures from campus that don't necessarily have anything to do with technology, but highlight the natural beauty surrounding us (flowers, horses at the Equine Center, hayfields, unique architecture, piles of snow.)

3.3 Instagram

Tweens and Teens use Instagram heavily. Instagram also uses hashtags, allowing for conversations between users. Create a unique hashtag for followers to use when they take pictures on campus depicting a day in the life of students. UNH uses the hashtag #instaUNH and occasionally runs contests on Instagram. This is a great way to communicate to not only current students, but to bring your message to those interested in attending UNH. It's a strong recruitment tool since younger students are also on Instagram.

Instagram Video has just entered the scene. Now, users can create short videos with the same application and use the same hashtags and send

3.4 LinkedIn

LinkedIn is the professional application of choice and an excellent way to target alumni. Quick searches find professionals who identify UNH as their alma mater. Having a presence on LinkedIn allows us to communicate directly with alumni quickly.

LinkedIn has also proven a strong recruitment tool for staff and faculty. LinkedIn may not be an application students are thinking about in their first year, but becomes more popular as they approach graduation.

3.5 YouTube

Searches on YouTube are second only to Google. Having a YouTube presence is an excellent opportunity to show you campus, services, and more. Having a strong presence on YouTube also helps with your Google ranking. Beyond that, it's just a fun and creative way to send messages. 94 percent of the students questioned in the UNH Social Media Survey 2013, indicated they had a YouTube account and regularly used the application.

3.6 Pinterest

Pinterest is heavily used by women, making it an excellent choice to target this population. People are pinning more than recipes and decorating tips. It's a great place to store your InfoGraphs, cartoons and graphics, and to create "Boards" of information for all of your services, departments, and more. One Board could be a

campus tour with beautiful pictures of your campus with the script under each slide. The entire Board can be sent out by Twitter, Facebook, email, and more.

3.7 Vine

Vine is an emerging application for iOS and Android phones founded in June of 2012 and acquired by Twitter in October of 2012[2]. Vine allows the user to create short, looping, six-second videos that can be shared through Twitter or Facebook and can be embedded on websites. Vine users like the ability to create very quick videos that can be posted in seconds. Vine's potential to emerge as a major player remains to be seen but the application's acquisition by Twitter places it in the forefront.

4. DON'T JUST TALK – LISTEN!

Once target markets are identified, social media channels chosen, and messages for the campaigns crafted and sent, the hard part comes in to play. You must listen. It's not enough to talk to students. Social media is different than running a print ad, or a television commercial. It's social because they are allowed to engage in a conversation. Be prepared to receive messages and acknowledge their receipt. Engagement is key, so when it happens know how to recognize it. It may be someone sending a direct message through Facebook or twitter. It may be someone talking about your institution or service by using hashtags to start a conversation. It may be someone following your channel or liking a picture, comment, or post. When this happens, make sure to acknowledge you've heard them.

4.1 Engagement

Social Media Engagement is a term to describe when a customer/client has responded to your message. This can mean they 'liked' your Facebook page, or 'favorited' or retweeted your tweet, or liked your Pinterest, or Instagram photo. Sharing is the ultimate goal of engagement, which makes your post suddenly accessible to another group of people and is seen as an endorsement for the content. Engagement furthers your message reach and creates an opportunity to capture more followers. Engagement is viewed as an indicator of your campaign's effectiveness. Measuring engagement for each channel helps to determine which social media applications are most effective for your campus.

4.2 Analytics

Understanding analytics and reach is crucial to setting benchmarks and making decisions on future campaigns. Employing analytics is an essential step in all marketing.

Some social media tools have built in analytics. Facebook allows managers of Pages to view recent analytics. These include the number of posts/day, the reach, number of engaged users, the number talking about the post, and the virality.

The application HootSuite is useful for managing multiple social media channels. The pro version also offers analytics and reporting. UNH is currently using HootSuite University to allow the key offices/departments to send messages, assign communications, and create reports to each other.

5. CONCLUSION

Social media is changing the way we communicate whether it's our personal life or our professional life. The lines are becoming blurred and it's important for those in higher education to join in the conversations happening outside the classroom. The University of New Hampshire has embraced the social media culture, breaking down silos that previously existed, and offered unprecedented access between faculty, students, administration, support staff, alumni, and our surrounding communities. Conversations are happening in real-time and allowing information to be exchanged as never before.

Understanding the applications available, the demographics of their users, and the strengths for each contribute to a sound, effective, organic, and cost-effective communications and marketing plan. Modern communications campaigns are limited only by the creativity of the team. Departments, services, and higher ed. professionals also participate in social media and enrich the vibrancy of campus life.

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