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Using Social Media to Market Online Programs

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As of January 2014, 71% of adults are using Facebook and 23% are using Twitter (Pew, 2014). Given this, social media has potential as a tool for marketing online programs. The purpose of this paper is to provide suggestions for selecting, evaluating, and maintaining social media for marketing online programs. While several social media tools can be used for marketing (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Instagram, and Twitter) Facebook and Twitter will be reviewed and discussed as possible social media marketing tools.

Social Media Selection

There are three basic steps to take when selecting a social media (CDC, 2011). First, determine your audience, for example, the social media tool is being selected to recruit students for the online program. A needs analysis conducted by the university marketing team can help determine where the potential students are located. Depending on the online program, other databases may be available that can help identify this, such as the Florida's Department of Education provides preferred destination institutions for high school seniors.

Second, determine your objectives. Using the SMART method (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-specific) based on your audience, write the objective(s). The objectives will be different to meet the needs of different audiences. For example, the online program marketing personal determines that the social media is to recruit and retain students as well as provide updates for graduates. The various audiences lends itself to different goals and objectives and depending on the social media tool selected, the university may need one or more social media tools to meet the goals and objectives written.

Third, before making the final selection of the social media, determine the cost effectiveness and resources required to maintain the social media. The Pew (2014) research results found that many are using social media. Facebook and Twitter are used,

with Facebook being the most frequently used social network. Therefore, it is recommended to use Facebook and Twitter since research suggests this is a tool used by many and the cost is low. However, the resources and time needed to maintain these social networks are considered high.

Social Media Evaluation

To measure the effectiveness of reaching the SMART goals and objectives with the social media selected, it is imperative to establish ongoing monitoring and evaluating strategies. Depending on the social media selected determines the type of evaluation. There are many free tools available to do this (see Table 1).

If Facebook is selected as a marketing tool, consideration of using Facebook Insights which allows the university administrator (manager of the page) to see the demographics and fan interactions overtime should be determine. The manager may also want to monitor the number of times the page is viewed.

In addition, evaluating posts or the types of comments made by the audience may be necessary. If the goal is to recruit and the university is determining what types of questions incoming students have, there may be specific questions about admission that is posted in a comment. If there appears to be a theme about an admissions question, than the university can use this information to update or correct the information and provide a response in a quick and timely manner.

The university may also want to determine the effectiveness of Facebook as a marketing tool and survey incoming students if they learned about the online program on Facebook or if they knew a Facebook page for the online program existed and how many times they visited.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2011), provided an evaluation recommendation for Facebook (see Figure 1) and Twitter (see Figure 2).

Table 1. Free Evaluation Tools

Tool	Location	Description
Cyfe	http://www.cyfe.com/	Monitor multiple social media sites
SumAll	http://sumall.com	Analyze data from multiple networks and select a timeframe
Google Analytics	http://www.google.com/analytics/standard/features/	Event tracking

(Table adapted from "Social Media Toolkit" by M. Dadez, 2015, Social media toolkit for marketing online programs. Handout provided at Florida Distance Learning Association, Altamonte Springs, FL).

Figure 1. Facebook Evaluation

Have an evaluation and metrics plan in place prior to launch to determine if efforts are successful. For example, it will be helpful to:

• Determine how participation will be measured. Evaluation can include simple measures of user engagement (e.g. How many followers/fans/friends does the account have? How many users commented on recent posts?)

• Take advantage of the analytic packages available on the social networking sites. These can be utilized to determine the number of people ("fans") participating in the activity and to observe how users engage with the site. For example, Facebook Insights are available to users (administrators) who maintain a page for an organization. Facebook Insights allow the administrator to see demographic information and fan interactions with the page over time.

• Consider tracking the amount of traffic being driven to a website from an organization's Facebook page. If using an analytics tool for a website (such as Google Analytics or WebTrends), that tool will show the source of traffic to a page, and the number of users who are visitors coming via a link on the Facebook page.

• Plan to evaluate with an online survey (through a tool such as SurveyMonkey) to measure user satisfaction, increases in knowledge due to the social networking page, or changes in behavior or attitudes.

(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011, p.39)

Figure 2. Twitter Evaluation

Track your efforts and regularly review the number of followers, updates, retweets and mentions in Twitter. There are also a number of ways to monitor increased traffic to your website, as well as the "mentions" outside of Twitter on blogs, websites or articles. With regular monitoring of Twitter efforts, it is easy to track increased traffic to your website generated by click-throughs of your links, changes in your followers, and the number of retweets of your messages. Many evaluation metrics for Twitter can be collected for little or no cost. When evaluating Twitter activities, consider the following:

• Track click-throughs from your links: Website analytics software (such as Omniture Site Catalyst or Google Analytics), allows you to track increases in website traffic from Twitter by measuring how many followers click through from Twitter links back to your site.

• Analyze influence on Twitter: Account users may keep track of how many other users are "following" them and how many updates they have published over time. Retweets, @replies (or "at replies"), and other mentions of his or her Twitter username are tracked on a user's profile. An RSS feed can also be set up to track these search results.

• Analyze followers: Because Twitter is web-based, it may be possible to design an online survey (through a tool such as SurveyMonkey) to measure user satisfaction, increases in knowledge due to your profile, or changes in behavior or attitudes.

(Centers for Disease Control, 2011, p.31)

Maintaining Social Media

The third step is to maintain the social media tool. Although this is labeled as the third step, this will need to be completed before the final selection of the social media tool. Facebook and Twitter, while cost effective, can be time consuming to maintain and someone will need to be the designated manager or administrator.

University of California, Los Angeles (2012) developed a "Social Media Response Guideline" (available at http://socialmedia.ucla.edu/social-media-response-guide/) that the designated manager may find useful and helpful for maintaining the social media tool. It is a tool that the manager of the social media can use to monitor the websites postings.

Facebook

According to Dadez (2015), there are three ways to increase social media outreach for Facebook. First, optimize social pages. This requires having the profiles setup with your institution's information, logo, website, and cover image. Second, promote the Facebook page. This can be accomplished by having Facebook connected to other university social networks.

For example, if faculty have an email signature, include the link to Facebook. In addition, have faculty include the Facebook page url on business cards. If faculty already have business cards before the Facebook page is created, then create a QR code printed on a label and then placed on back of business cards. Third, share useful, valuable content. This suggests that once you promote the Facebook page and have the audience returning, the manager needs to ensure that a consistent stream of valuable, useful, and engaging content is posted.

For example, if the audience includes potential students, current faculty may provide a "mini" lesson that can be posted to Facebook. Depending on the audience and goal, the university may want students enrolled in the online program to provide testimonials about the program.

When developing a page, remember that pdfs, word documents, or excel spreadsheets cannot be used. Instead use photos. There are free tools that can be used to enhance the Facebook page (see Table 2) (Dadez, 2015).

Table 2. Free Photo Enhancing Tools

Tools	Location	Description
Canva	www.canva.com/	Templates for many social media images
PicMonkey	http://www.picmonkey.com/	Add filters, frames, textures and more
Pixlr	https://pixlr,com	Have full control of images, including layers and effects

(Table adapted from "Social Media Toolkit" by M. Dadez, 2015, Social media toolkit for marketing online programs. Handout provided at Florida Distance Learning Association, Altamonte Springs, FL).

Lessons Learned

Perhaps, the most important lesson this author learned while developing a Facebook page for her program was also seen and emphasized by the Center for Disease Control (CDC, 2011) which is

> it is important to note the difference between a Facebook page and an individual Facebook profile. Facebook pages are utilized by organizations and businesses while Facebook profiles are for individuals. Unlike profiles, pages are moderated by page administrators who logon to post content or monitor comments and they do not receive notifications when users take action. (p. 37)

The error of creating a "professional" email (using Gmail) to sign into the account and then post information created "chaos" between profile and pages. As this author reflects on this error it is proposed that it would be better to have the manager (the university administrator) create the pages and the respective faculty or other individuals provide the content via photos or video.

Second, be sure that someone is designated to be the administrator of the Facebook page before launching. This author recommends careful consideration is given to the time management and resources. For example, if the university decides to have a student become the manager when the student graduates the online program another student will need to be selected. This may disrupt the flow of postings or amount of postings. Or, if a faculty member volunteers to create and maintain the Facebook page if the faculty is

assigned to a different position the program will need to decide who will take the role and responsibility.

Twitter

The CDC provides a very useful list of ways that Twitter is used (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Ways to Use Twitter

Twitter events:

• Twitter Chat: Scheduled events allowing organizations or programs to communicate with their followers. Chats include free flowing discussions, question and answer sessions and the dissemination of information to a large audience through sharing or retweeting of content.

• Twitterview: This scheduled event is a type of interview in which the interviewer and the interviewee are limited to short-from responses of 140 characters per message.

• Twitter Town Hall: A scheduled forum that allows followers to submit questions on a specific topic. Responses can be delivered through live tweets, video or live stream.

• Live Tweeting: Tweeting live from an event to highlight key points of a presentation, audience engagement and comments, and play by play moments. Live tweeting is often utilized for conferences to allow followers not attending to follow the events.

(Centers for Disease Control, 2011, p. 29)

For marketing purposes, the Twitter events can be linked to the Facebook page and allow a different social media to meet different SMART goals and objectives established. For example, if the university's audience are current students and the objective is to get online students involved in university events and if an event is being streamed a live tweeting could be taking place between faculty and students.

On the other hand, if the university's audience is potential students, the admissions office could have a twitter chat to answer any questions a potential student may have. Again, the type of Twitter event selected depends on the university's audience and SMART goals and objectives.

Figure 4. Twitter Best Practices

Twitter Best Practices
1. Account set-up recommendations - Profile Name, Image and Biography

a. Profile name - Each Twitter account has a unique profile name that describes the subject matter of the account, name of the organization or contains a keyword describing

the nature of the organization. (e.g. CDC_eHealth, FluGov). The profile name should be short and concise (maximum 15 characters).

b. Biography - The biography is a 160-character description of the profile. This biographical statement should be the first post from a new profile.

c. Image – A logo or graphic that represents your organization or agency.

2. Keep content short and simple. CDC recommends writing tweets of 120 characters so that messages can easily be retweeted, (the practice of posting another user's tweet), without editing. If a tweet contains the maximum 140 characters, users who want to share your message by retweeting will need to edit the message to reduce the character count.

3. Provide more information with a shortened URL. If possible, provide a link back to your main website for more information. You can save space by using URLs that are shortened. Several websites are available that can help you: http://tinyurl.com or http://is.gd.

4. Promote your Twitter profile. Provide links to your Twitter profile on other communications materials that you have prepared, including both traditional and social media, and work with other Twitter profiles to build your audience base strategically.

5. Keep followers engaged. Setting a regular posting schedule will help engage followers.

6. Post other relevant content. Develop a strategy for retweeting posts from partners and followers.

7. Search Twitter for comments about your organization or health topic: You can use search.twitter.com to monitor Twitter. You can then "listen" to conversations about important health concerns, find messages about your organization and monitor how audiences are responding to messages.

(Centers for Disease Control, 2011, p. 30).

Summary

In summary, social media is being used frequently and can serve as a marketing tool for online programs. The steps for using social media are (1) determine the audience; (2) evaluate and monitor the social media tool; and (3) maintain the social media tool.

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