

Public Relations Research

Surveying Social Media

Interview Project

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PURPOSE

The integration of social media has been transforming the profession of public relations. Combining traditional media with social media has cultivated a concept called PR 2.0. PR 2.0 has become the new fascination of many professionals in the industry. The purpose of this study was to interview current public relations professionals and examine how social media has influenced their organization or company, if at all, as well as their job description and duties.

OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives we used were trying to:

- Discover perceptions of social media sites by PR practitioners
- Understand and explore the role of social media in public relations campaigns
- Determine how social media sites are measured in public relations
- Explore how public relations students should prepare in using social media

METHODOLOGY

To obtain the necessary information to support the purpose of this study, the interviewers used many different methods to perform their individual interviews with the participants. The interview conducted by Courtney Wilson with Boardwalk at Morris Bridge property manager, Cathy Bryan, took place on Thursday, October 22, 2009 and lasted for 4 minutes and 54 seconds. Dana Melucci's interview with Tampa General Hospital's Director of Communications, John Dunn, occurred on Friday, October 23, 2009 and had a total duration of 12 minutes and 55 seconds. Finally, Caitlin Fowler conducted an interview with USF public relations graduate, Alisha dos Santos, which lasted approximately 5 minutes and took place on Tuesday, October 20, 2009.

All of the participants are currently working as professionals in the industry. Caitlin Fowler and Dana Melucci separately captured their interviews by using the Audacity software, while conducting their interview over the phone. Courtney Wilson conducted the interview in person using her laptop computer's microphone, while recording the interview on Audacity.

*There is no particular purpose to the order in which the interviews are listed or referenced.

RESULTS

Overall, the public relations professionals all seemed to have the same perception that social media is a beneficial tactic being used, in some manner, currently throughout their career. However, each professional discussed specific limitations that social media presents. Most all agree that some social media websites are effective, but not all. The most common social media websites used by the professionals are Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. Not only do these sites help reach the specific target audiences, yet they help increase brand building.

- “The benefit of social media is to be able to get to our target audience in a very short period of time. We are able to reach thousands of our specific target market by utilizing one resource.” – Cathy Bryan
- “Well I think the benefits of social media is for a company it’s a really great way to interact with your customers and put a real face to your brand, like Twitter and Facebook.” – Alisha dos Santos
- “Hospitals have been investigated because their employees have listed and put confidential health information on those social media sites.” – John Dunn

The majority of the companies interviewed have already integrated social media into their campaigns. In general, the companies all felt they had success in engaging their publics by using social media. Some companies have more use for social media in their campaigns than others. Most companies designate a specific person or department to control the social media for the company, as well as include their staff’s contributions.

- “We also have an internal site where we can post [information]. It’s a very good means of communication for the staff, because not everyone has computers at our hospital. Not everyone is on E-mail.” – John Dunn
- “We have part-time leasing agents that are actual residents who utilize their Facebook they have with the Facebook page we have for the Boardwalk at Morris Bridge apartments. We are able to utilize and integrate their friends and networking with friends of their friends to reach a much larger audience.” – Cathy Bryan
- “In the past we have created actually some viral videos like to put on YouTube and we have helped to get the clients on Twitter and Facebook and other social media sites and for some of them we actually have managed their Twitter accounts, their Facebook accounts for them.” – Alisha dos Santos

Social media is being commonly being measured by Twitter comments and followers, YouTube views, Facebook friend totals and specific company reports. Using tracking websites to access valuable numbers to know how many hits a company websites had, as well as the tracking devices within Twitter and YouTube are all common methods. Calculating the total amount of Facebook friends, Twitter followers/comments, YouTube views/comments are useful techniques these companies use to examine the effective of social media for them.

- “Measuring them I think you just have to, for example, Twitter we can look to see how many people are responding to your comments and how many followers you’re gaining.” – Alisha dos Santos
- “By the flow of traffic and on our guest cards we are able to see where people heard about us.” – Cathy Bryan
- “We get reports of who’s [visiting], how many clicks, where they’re doing and how much time their spending on it. That’s how I know that when most people go on our web site it’s not this that or the other. It’s to find out what kind of job openings we have. That’s how I know that’s the biggest use of our web site because we get those reports.” – John Dunn

Overall, the professionals detailed the importance of not only being active in using social media techniques, but to also know how to effectively measure their uses. The professionals agreed that being able to use the wide variety of social media websites is very important in an undergraduate’s future career in public relations. In many fields in which public relations is used, social media is a vital aspect of one’s job description. Undergraduates also need to know how to use the proper tools to effectively measure social medias impact on a company.

- “It is just really important that you have a good handle on social media because when you’re looking for jobs and you go in for your interview they’re going to want to know how much you know about social media.” – Alisha dos Santos
- “The biggest thing they need to learn is how to evaluate its effectiveness because right now my sense is that social media is kind of in the fad stage.” – John Dunn
- “Facebook has been very successful for us, and by having the part-time and full-time leasing agents we have been able to save the company a lot of money without having to hire a media resource for that.” – Cathy Bryan
- “You need to be able to convince the CEO that this is a cost effective thing to do and that these are the positive things coming out of it. If you can’t do that you will probably find that the CEOs going to say well you know we tried the social media but no one could justify our continuing to do it. Therefore, we’re not going to do it anymore, best of luck in your next job.” – John Dunn

CONCLUSION

After conducting these interviews with professionals who are currently practicing public relations, many similarities arose as well as many differences. Results concluded that social media is an important tool, no matter how much is it used, in communicating with your publics and engaging them in your brand. It adds a more personal aspect to a company, because social media allows the publics to make it what they want it to be. It allows them to have a voice by contributing with personal feedback or their opinion.

It also concluded that social media is still on the up rise. The effectiveness that social media has on a company has become a fundamental aspect in which every company is interested in. Learning the techniques on how to properly monitor and measure social media's effectiveness is a necessary tool that comes with using it. Results also concluded that there are still many flaws in social media. Many professionals have not been able to make the transition to PR 2.0 and have struggled with integrating it into their company.

Overall, the results proved that social media has been a positive source of communication for many of the companies actively using it; regardless of how much it is being used. We found that being able to communicate more effectively with one's target audience has increased customer support, as well as further develop a company in brand building.

APPENDIX

Interview Transcript: Cathy Bryan
Conducted By: Courtney Wilson

Courtney Wilson: Ok, this interview is for the social media project for my public relations class and I am interviewing Cathy Bryan and her position is....

Cathy Bryan: My name is Cathy Bryan and my position is the Property Manager for Boardwalk at Morris Bridge Apartments.

Courtney Wilson: Ok first question is...what do you see as the benefits or limitations of social media?

Cathy Bryan: The benefit of social media is to be able to get to our target audience in a very short period of time. We are able to reach thousands of our specific target market by utilizing one resource.

Courtney Wilson: Do you see any limitation of using social media?

Cathy Bryan: Not as of yet. We have been able to do many different types of marketing which have proven to be very successful in reaching our target market.

Courtney Wilson: Ok question number 2...Which social media sites do you think have the most potential and why?

Cathy Bryan: Currently we use Facebook and we have tremendous results. We also use Twitter.

Courtney Wilson: Question number 3...How does your firm or company incorporate social media into their campaigns?

Cathy Bryan: We have part-time leasing agents that are actual residents who utilize their Facebook they have with the Facebook page we have for the Boardwalk at Morris Bridge apartments. We are able to utilize and integrate their friends and networking with friends of their friends to reach a much larger audience.

Courtney Wilson: Question number 4...Who handles the social media in your company other than your leasing agents. Is it yourself or do you have a specific employee or an expert?

Cathy Bryan: We all do. I have a Facebook. My Facebook integrates with the Boardwalk Facebook and everyone on the staff participates.

Courtney Wilson: Question number 5...Have you had success in engaging your publics through social media? Can you give me an example?

Cathy Bryan: Actually we have several events that we do year round. Many monthly activities: pool parties, Halloween costume party. These are all events that we use to bring people into the community to further our marketing efforts for them to lease apartments later in the future. We post the activities on Facebook and then once the event is over we have photographs; pictures that we take, that allows everybody to tag themselves in pictures, further giving our word of mouth and reputation out there to increase our marketing efforts in the future.

Courtney Wilson: How do you measure your social media initiatives? Can you give me an example?

Cathy Bryan: Well actually by the flow of traffic of our guest cards we are able to see where people heard about us. We have a large base of people we communication with on daily, weekly and monthly basis through these efforts.

Courtney Wilson: What specifically would you like or recommend PR undergraduates, like myself, to learn about social media?

Cathy Bryan: I feel this is the type of thing undergraduates should do, working with an organization to be able to test market the efforts to see what kind of response people are getting by interacting from that specific company with reference to what their specific needs are. Facebook has been very successful for us, and by having the part-time and full-time leasing agents we have been able to save the company a lot of money without having to hire a media resource for that.

Courtney Wilson: This concludes our interview.

Interview Transcript: John Dunn

Conducted By: Dana Melucci

Dana Melucci: The first one is who handles social media in your company?

John Dunn: Well we have a person in the foundation, or hospital foundation, who handles all of that for the foundation, even though they're separate entities they still are housed inside the hospital. She manages the Facebook page for them and the YouTube. The main hospital has a person in marketing who is pretty much dedicated to social media. That's not the only thing she does, but that's her other duty that is assigned.

Dana Melucci: Well this question says how does your firm incorporate social media into their campaigns, but I guess how does the hospital incorporate social media?

John Dunn: We don't do it a whole lot, we have some YouTube and we are going to set up a YouTube channel just to try to control some of that. We have looked at Facebook and Twitter and we just have not seen any type of application for the hospital that makes any sense to us. I've looked at it in terms of communicating quickly with hospital staff in the event of an emergency or something like that. Quite honestly when I set up my Twitter account, what I got was bombarded with people trying to follow me and I had no idea who they were. We have about 300 and some Blackberry's that are out there. And if they all too had to get twitter accounts they too would be bombarded with all of that. Our IS department is working on some other application so we don't have to deal with all the stuff that goes along with having a Twitter account. And the problem we have with blogging, honestly, is that it takes up too much time if you're going to do it the right way you have to be active on it and nobody has been in big enough trouble to be assigned to handle the blog

Dana Melucci: And have you had success in engaging your publics in social media and if so can u give me an example?

John Dunn: We have used/ Doctors have used social media for getting out information on....For example, infectious diseases. We have a Web site/ Tampa General has a Web site, but what we found on that was it's mainly used by job hunters. If their looking for a job, they go to our Web site. That is probably the overwhelming amount traffic we get. However, we also have an internal site that we call for a lack of better words the employee portal, which is basically an internal web site where we can post [information]. It's a very good means of communication for the staff because not everyone has computers at our hospital. Not everyone is on E-mail; probably a third of our workforce does not have E-mail. We needed a way to be able to communicate to the entire house. Plus, we operate 247. Reaching of the overnight people and reaching the weekend people tends to be an issue. We have this internal Web site where we can post all our rules and policies. Probably the biggest success thing we have had is getting updates for swine flu. Because the CDC in Atlanta, sends out these directives and updates that change almost hourly. So one day you had to wear a certain kind of mask, the next day they decided you really don't need the mask. It just got to be a whole mess as to who was the latest and greatest. What we do is we post all that information on our internal site, with links to other sites if they want to find out more. For example, a nurse wants to know what they do if they have a patient with swine flu. They can go on to this thing and find out the latest and information on how to

deal with it. If they decide they want to find out more, we will link them to the CDC and they can just get more information. Probably our internal web site has been the most effective thing and it allows us to give everybody updates on some of the breaking health issues that we all are dealing with.

Dana Melucci: The next question is what do you see as the benefits or limitations of social media?

John Dunn: The biggest limitation is time. You know from a PR stand point, I would like to be able to monitor what is being tweeted about us. But nobody wants to take responsibility for providing Twitter updates. The biggest handicap we have is that nobody has the time to invest in maintaining a blog or a Twitter account or Facebook stuff. However, we know it's out there. We know that there are websites going up about us. There's Facebook pages that various employees and departments have created. We have had to actually develop policies for governing how employees use social media.

Dana Melucci: Do you give them limitations on what they can say and what they can't say?

John Dunn: First of all, we have to remind our employees that social media is not private media. It's called social media because anyone has access to it. If you put yourself out there and you put yourself out there as an employee of the hospital you take on a certain responsibility for your conduct. If they choose that they need to conduct themselves in a way that's not detrimental to the hospital. That's a choice. I mean I have a Facebook page, but I don't list on there that I work at Tampa General. Technically I have a little more latitude than someone who has a Facebook page that says I work at Tampa General. Then they decide to write my boss is a jerk, he really pissed me off. I came in and I didn't do anything today just because I'm so mad. When you identify with the hospital, and you start to carry on like that it will cause you problems. We just need to remind employees that this stuff is out there for anybody to see it. You need to be careful with how you conduct yourself. Plus, people can't talk about patients in social media. You know they think somehow that it's private and it's not. We have to remind them not to put photos out there because hospitals have been investigated because their employees have listed and put confidential health information on those social media sites. Fortunately, we have not had that problem. We had to put policies in place so we could get out in front of it.

Dana Melucci: What would you say would be the major benefit of social media?

John Dunn: Right now from our stand point the major benefit has been with the foundation because you can sign up as a friend of the foundation. They provide updates on what's going on. We have a program called the White Coat Program that people in the community basically shadow a doctor and then we sit down with them after they shadow and they can talk about their experience and what they've seen and then we post it on YouTube with a link to the foundation's Facebook page. The foundation has really found a

good use for social media because they been able to utilize the YouTube, so people could share their experiences of what it's like to be in an operating room with a doctor doing brain surgery. Then more people that are Facebook friends can link to those things and...

Dana Melucci: Share it

John Dunn: Yea and it also helps them with their fundraising and that kind of stuff. They've found it to be very effective way to keep in touch with people who want to know what's going on with the foundation.

Dana Melucci: Ok, awesome I just have two more questions.

John Dunn: Sure

Dana Melucci: How do you measure your social media initiatives? Can you give me an example?

John Dunn: What we are measuring right now is our web site cause that's all that concerns the main hospital. We get reports of who's [visiting], how many clicks, where they're doing and how much time their spending on it. That's how I know that when most people go on our web site it's not this that or the other. It's to find out what kind of job openings we have. That's how I know that's the biggest use of our web site because we get those reports.

Dana Melucci: And then lastly, what specifically would you recommend PR undergraduates to learn about social media?

John Dunn: I think the biggest thing they need to learn is how to evaluate its effectiveness because right now my sense is that social media is kind of in the fad stage. Businesses are all aware of social media. They don't know what it does. They don't know how it does it. They just know that there's this buzz going on about social media. At some point they are going to want to know what's their return on investments. If you're a PR person and you're hired to handle the social media. You need to be able to convince the CEO that this is a cost effective thing to do and that these are the positive things coming out of it. If you can't do that you will probably find that the CEOs going to say well you know we tried the social media but no one could justify our continuing to do it. Therefore, we're not going to do it anymore, best of luck in your next job. I think you obviously need to know how to use, but even more importantly need to know how to measure it. Measure it in a way that the CEO is going to understand it.

Interview Transcript: Alisha dos Santos

Conducted By: Caitlin Fowler

Caitlin Fowler: What do you see as the benefits and limitations of social media?

Alisha dos Santos: Well I think the benefits of social media is for a company it's a really great way to interact with your customers and put a real face to your brand, like Twitter and Facebook, I think that's one of the major benefits in relation to public relations.

Caitlin Fowler: And do you know of any limitations?

Alisha dos Santos: I guess it can be a little bit impersonal because, you know, I guess because it's online, not in person and sometimes things that you might say on Twitter or Facebook can be taken in the wrong way, sometimes you could say something to a potential customer that they take the wrong way and it actually turns them off to your brand.

Caitlin Fowler: The second question is which social media sites do you think have the most potential and why, which social media sites do you think have the most potential?

Alisha dos Santos: I would say Twitter has really taken off in popularity in the past few years and it's becoming a good way for a lot of people to, for companies to interact with their customers, and Facebook as always to view the fan pages, so I guess Twitter and Facebook.

Caitlin Fowler: How does your firm incorporate social media into their campaigns?

Alisha dos Santos: In the past we have created actually some viral videos like to put on YouTube and we have helped to get the clients on Twitter and Facebook and other social media sites and for some of them we actually have managed their Twitter accounts, their Facebook accounts for them.

Caitlin Fowler: And then who handles the social media in your company, an expert, an employee, a certain firm or section?

Alisha dos Santos: Our Vice President is our social media director and also everyone is pretty much involved in social media, everyone in our company in some way, we have one social media director.

Caitlin Fowler: Question 5 is have you had success in engaging your publics through the use of social media and can you give one example?

Alisha dos Santos: I think we definitely have, we used to work with the Melting Pot restaurants and we created some cool viral videos for them which we didn't get to execute completely in putting them online but when they came out for the company it was a good way to catch the attention of the publics.

Caitlin Fowler: And then how do you measure your social media initiatives and can you give one example?

Alisha dos Santos: Measuring them I think you just have to, for example Twitter we can look to see how many people are responding to your comments, how many followers you're gaining, I guess that's really the only way to measure it.

Caitlin Fowler: And then the last question is what specifically would you recommend PR undergraduates do to learn about social media?

Alisha dos Santos: I would say get your own personal accounts on Twitter and Facebook and different sites, just try to learn as much as you can on social media, because really social media is taking off in popularity and is becoming so important to Public Relations it is just really important that you have a good handle on social media because when you're looking for jobs and you go in for your interview they're going to want to know how much you know about social media and that's something you can really bring to the table.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Purpose:

Social Media in Public Relations

Objectives:

- To discover perceptions of social media sites by PR practitioners
 - **Question 1** – What do you see as the benefits/limitations of social media?
 - **Question 2** – Which social media sites do you think have the most potential and why?
- To understand and explore the role of social media in public relations campaigns
 - **Question 3** - How does your firm incorporate social media into their campaigns?
 - **Question 4** – Who handles social media in your company (expert, employees, PR firm)?
 - **Question 5**- Have you had success in engaging your publics through social media? Can you give me an example?
- To determine how social media sites are measured in public relations
 - **Question 6** – How do you measure your social media initiatives? Can you give me an example?
- To explore how public relations students should prepare in using social media
 - **Question 7** –What specifically would you recommend PR undergraduates do to learn about social media?