



## **Social Media: Changing Advertising Education**

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### **Abstract**

Creating an academic assignment that closely parallels an advertising agency's real world business experience is a challenge, but social media has destroyed many of the barriers that historically limited media options and completion of advertising plans. Because digital media is cost effective and easily used, commercials, videos, podcasts, and multimedia messaging can be filmed, edited, and broadcast, within the time frame of an advertising course. This article presents an applied advertising project that incorporates YouTube, Flickr, MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Ning, Tagged, Google+, and other online social networking sites as the foundation for an integrated marketing communication strategy. Infusing social media into communication preferences expands the options students have at their disposal to visually display their ingenuity. Engaging students through media they identify with and comprehend augments learning while their familiarity and expertise with social media increases the likelihood of producing a germane product. This project is an experiential learning process where the real world business client benefits from the creative deliverables produced by motivated, technology savvy undergraduates.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Education, Advertising, Learning



## **Social Media: Changing Advertising Education**

A basic college advertising course introduces students to the concepts and strategies of integrated marketing communication. Typically, students absorb the theories and regurgitate the information on standardized examinations. Understanding and applying advertising knowledge is the true test of learning and the motivation in developing this project. The primary challenge was to incorporate an assignment equivalent to an advertising agency's real world business experience. To go beyond simply creating an advertising plan and to require completion of deliverables suddenly became a viable option through social media. Social media has destroyed many of the barriers that historically limited media options and completion of advertising plans. Because digital media is cost effective and easily used, commercials, videos, podcasts, and multimedia messaging can be filmed, edited, and broadcast, within the time frame of an advertising course. The arrival of social media has not only brought exciting alternatives to traditional communication methods, YouTube, Flickr, MySpace, Face Book, Twitter, LinkedIn, Ning, Tagged, Google +, and many other online networking sites are effortlessly accessed and available for inclusion in integrated marketing communication (IMC) strategies. This article presents an advertising project that assimilates online social media into the advertising plan. Social Media is an engaging medium that permits the user to compose, amend and circulate digital information at a nominal cost. Digital native undergraduates have immersed themselves in the technology and this assignment encourages them to transform captivation into marketing potential. Class members are responsible for organizing their own advertising agencies and then competing against other class agencies for the advertising account of a legitimate business client. The essential component of the client's request is a digitally produced commercial or communication component targeted to a specific market. Once approved by the client, student agencies create, film, edit, and market their strategy. Social media venues are used for posting digitally produced items, driving traffic to the site, soliciting customer response, and generally creating a buzz thorough out the market

## **Social Media**

Social media is defined as “a communication medium that is devoted to or characterized by interaction between participants or consumers of the medium” (Kalamas, Mitchell, Lester p.3).



iCrossings's e-book, *What is Social Media*, states that social media are usually characterized by participation, openness, conversation, community, and connectedness (Mayfield, 2007, p.5). Dennis Palmieri, director of communications Independent Television Service, defines social media as “media designed to engage the public and create a social impact” (Schuler, 2008, p.2). Horton expands the idea of engagement by highlighting the main difference between traditional and social media being the former's finite ending. For social media, “every message is a work in progress that can be read or heard, updated at will, and often edited or commented upon by the recipient. And in many instances, the content may actually be created in part by the end user” (Horton, 2008, p.12).

Social media is a technologically-based form of communication that has accelerated in popularity to emerge as the preferred mechanism of younger generations for content delivery, design, and discourse. A report by *Brandweek.com* (Newman, 2007) highlights the swing away from traditional media towards Internet based digital media. This IBM study discovered that individuals now spend more personal time online than watching television. Leading the techno-savvy charge is a generation that was teathed on cell phones, interfaced with friends from all over the globe through their uniquely created profiles on Face Book and MySpace and collected their 15 megabytes of fame on YouTube, all at the same time

The use of social media to facilitate and extend classroom discussions and learning can have the added benefit of giving voice to students who normally would not participate. “Technology can afford voice to individuals who may not feel comfortable talking in a traditional classroom discussion” (Wassell and Crouch, 2008, p. 213). Kelly, Keaten, and Finch (2004) also agree that students may be more at ease presenting their ideas online. Also, the Internet is an unparalleled content-delivery platform. It greatly increases the dissemination of information with greater accessibility and flexibility than other mediums. Communications in bulletin boards (on social networking sites such as Face Book and MySpace) can improve student-to-student and student-to-faculty interactions (Weisskirch and Milburn, 2003). Evidence has also been found that social networks can provide support among students in a class (Baker-Eveleth, Eveleth, and Saraker, 2005). Hsu also believes that “these technologies and tools are best suited to course structures



where class collaboration and communication are encouraged, rather than those with emphasis on lectures and a presentation of factual information” (2007, p. 71).

### **Digital Generation**

Modern college students can be referred to as digital natives. This terminology implies an indigenous ability to operate within the social media community. Today’s college age student has experienced digital based media in both their public and private lives. Throughout their entire existence these young people have enjoyed the opportunities created by the continually advancing and developing technological environment. Digital immigrants are those individuals who have not always had technology so readily available. In fact, they view media-based technology as a yet to be mastered second language. The digital natives are confident using social media as a forum for self-expression where they can “communicate, collaborate, and connect with one another” (Dye, 2007, p.38). The use of social media as a mechanism of disseminating user created, modified, and or transformed communication is dominated by digital natives. As cohorts in this generation, college students network or interface online with friends from around the globe 24/7, while watching television, texting Mom, and studying for an exam. A generation more comfortable with digital media than their Mothers were in shopping malls, they lead the charge down the superhighway of technology in embracing social media. Having never existed in a world void of computers these natives grasp innovative technology with a fervor not usually expressed on inanimate objects.

### **Applied Learning**

The success applied learning has enjoyed probably received its most notable endorsement from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). The recognition by AACSB of significant student learning taking place through personal involvement was a tribute to the educational archetype. Multiple researchers have drawn similar inferences regarding more effective and enhanced learning (Bobbitt, Inks, Kemp and Mayo 2000, Lopez and Lee 2005). Karns also advocates for real world learning that students find challenging and enjoyable (2005). Theory and application come together in this applied social media project to yield an opulent



learning environment where concepts and philosophies presented in the classroom are incorporated into strategies that culminate in unique creative productions.

### **Initial Social Media Project**

Creating an academic assignment that closely parallels an advertising agency's real world business experience is a challenge, but social media has destroyed many of the barriers that historically limited media options and completion of advertising plans. Connecting with the "real" world was accomplished by assimilating business clients into the academic process through this applied project. Clients who participate in the project are selected based on criteria identified in Figure 1. The selected business provides the product or service, sets measurable objectives, interacts with students, and provides feedback throughout the semester. As part of the assignment, students in the class form advertising agencies of four to five students. Each agency develops an integrated communication strategy that meets the stated client objectives. The student ad agency creates mock-ups and storyboards of the deliverables and pitches the completed plan to the business client. At the prerogative of the client, agencies can be requested to make adjustments, modify, or begin all over.

Eight to ten different advertising concepts are typically evaluated and approved by the business client. Once approved each undergraduate agency films, edits and posts their digital product to a designated social media location. Agencies promote their commercial thorough Face Book, MySpace, Twitter, email, or other social media sites with the goal of driving traffic to their online presentation during a pre-established time period. Grades for the project were based on three variables: 1) meeting the objectives of the client, 2) determining the target market and producing an advertising strategy (IMC plan) that best met the target market's profile and needs, and 3) number of views and market response to the applied plan. This project proved to be a very engaging, fun, and successful experiential learning process.

The first time this project was assigned, the business client was an entrepreneurial engineer who had invented a protective covering for iPod products, digital cameras, cell phones, and similar electronics. The product was described by the designer as a "slim, semi-rigid cover" that does



not impede operation of the electronic device. The product does not use adhesive and can be easily removed and reapplied. For the class project, students were asked to develop, design, film, and edit a commercial for the product targeting the Millennial Generation. The university technology department offered instruction on filming, downloading, editing, and uploading videos. Surprisingly, the ten competing student advertising agencies each targeted a different niche within Generation Y. All of the agencies opted to use an emotional appeal with a large proportion (i.e., approximately 80%) using humor as their primary approach. Some commercials required reediting after the client viewed the first drafts.

Each agency was responsible for creating a social media strategy promoting their videos with the goal to drive hits on YouTube. This, in effect, taught them about the power of viral marketing and how to promote on shoe string budgets. At the conclusion of the two week posting of agency commercials the most popular video received over 18,000 hits on YouTube, with the next closest at almost 6,000. The majority of videos had less than a 1,000 hits.

### **Project Variations**

Subsequent classes have necessitated variations on the initial assignment. Social media campaigns are usually the most requested promotion scheme of business clients as they struggle to adapt to rampaging technology and its corresponding impact on consumers. Even when a more traditional media approach is sought, social media can be used as a quick medium to research the market and gauge acuties. The immense popularity of Face Book has obliged the business community to tap into its potential and student ad agencies are eager to comply. Rather than placing client commercials on YouTube and simply calculating views, advertisements can be positioned on a class Face Book page and “friends” recruited to offer germane feedback or assess competing concepts. Client websites have been used to station videos, podcasts, and interactive PDF’s and patrons were requested to articulate suggestions, comments, and evaluations. Blogging, Tweeting, LinkedIn, and wiki are social media options that student advertising agencies have recently added to their arsenal of communication instruments for building relationships with the target market. Finally, changes in media consumption have increased the likelihood of social media holding a principal position in advertising plans, and it is



the obligation of the academic community to enlist these new interactive media options in an engaging way.

The success of this project is evidenced by the number of businesses' requesting to be clients and students trying to enroll in the classes that incorporate this project. Every semester the class closes out enrollment within the first couple of registration days. Our marketing department currently maintains a waiting list of companies who are anxious for the service, and willing to provide financial compensation to the department for participation. Business organizations acknowledge the unique creative perspective of undergraduates and are aware of their own deficiencies with the cutting edge communication technology social media.

### **Conclusion**

Marketing Educators utilization of social media as a new advertising channel of delivery thrusts them into a frame of reference their audience may be more comfortable and adept at than they are. But, the inclusion of social media as a communication media is essential to an advertising curriculum for integrated marketing communication to be complete. Social media is a diverse, engaging medium that allows undergraduates the opportunity for creative expression. Everyone on the planet seems to be obsessed with the medium's capacity to connect at any time and in any location, so the challenge and/or scramble to incorporate elements into an advertising plan is understandable. All professors can confirm their student's preoccupation with social media as they text, tweet, and blog, nonstop, through class. Captivation with the technology has enhanced student fascination with this project to yield dedicated, enlivened young people proud of their output, and clients enamored with their accomplishments.

Incorporating this type of applied learning assignment into the course requires only minor adjustments by the instructor. The most significant activity involves screening potential business clients, coaching those selected on expectations and level of interaction, and scheduling class visits. The technology is easily acquired and actual commercial production methods can be downloaded for free at online sites such as Windows Live Movie Maker and digital films.com (2011). A class Face Book page or LinkedIn and Twitter accounts can be comfortably managed



by the professor to facilitate this project. This project is an example of a simple, low cost, successful incorporation of social media into academia, while servicing a befuddled business community.





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### Screening Criteria for Business Client

1. Client is accessible and willing to meet with students and class.
2. Client request is manageable and encompasses course content
3. Client provides Specific Measurable Objectives
4. Client is Realistic and has a sensible understanding of student involvement
5. Client provides a realistic Budget
6. Client has a specific product or service definition
7. Client is willing to provide access to personnel, facilities, customers
8. Client has Identified expected deliverables
9. Is the company open and responsive
10. Will the student generated product(s) be used