

Chapter 12

Developing a Social Media Communication Plan

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ABSTRACT

Social media is accepted as an effective communications and promotion tool. Social media tools such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, blogging and podcasting are leveraged by different organizations for creating profiles, establishing communication, interaction and launching promotional activities. However, promoters might encounter certain challenges in targeting potential audiences and maintaining interest and the interaction of the audience in their social media profiles. The purpose of this chapter is to identify effective communication and content approaches, with a Finnish perspective, and to develop a social media communication plan.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of social media websites facilitates communication and interaction with large numbers of people. The unique communication and promotional possibilities of social media are being leveraged by different organizations which enable conducting of direct conversations with the potential audience which is in contrast to the traditional communications of high degree presence of organization's direct control. The services of social media are democratizing communications and interaction, thus generating more interest and popularity in the use of social media websites for communication, dissemination of information and promotional purposes (Scott, 2010).

However, social media is a large media consisting of different promotional profiles in which unplanned targeting of the audience and non-strategic communication with them might be both time-consuming and distractive. Identifying and perceiving the sources of motivation and interest of the target audience are essential in developing connections with the audience and becoming interactive with them. Therefore, organizations need to focus more on developing attractive pages as well as interesting and valuable contents to gain and maintain interest and interaction of their audience on their profiles. The primary question of our study is to investigate effective social media communication, content and promotional

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approaches under a social media communication plan for the Quicker Steps project to manage more efficient leverage of social media profiles and obtain differentiated social media profiles (Evans 2010, 16).

The Quicker Steps project is a project with the purpose of disseminating knowledge and best practices of the diverse cooperation and partnership solutions between higher education institutions and working life in Finland, Luxembourg, Austria and the United Kingdom in order to develop students' possibilities to quicker become employed from higher education, nevertheless the focus of the study is limited to the Quicker Steps project in Finland. Considering the substantial popularity of social media websites for communication and promotional purposes in Finland, the promoting team of the Quicker Steps project is also using the social media websites of Facebook and LinkedIn for communicating and promoting the purpose and current issues of the Quicker Steps project. The promoting team of the Quicker Steps project has managed to increase audience awareness of the project via Facebook and LinkedIn (The Quicker Steps project website). However, certain challenges in acquiring more audience awareness of the Quicker Steps project, increasing interest and conversation of the audience in Facebook and LinkedIn regarding the purpose of the Quicker Steps project are coped with. In order for the Quicker Steps project to become differentiated and interesting for the audience on social media, there is a need for developing more attractive, interactive and valuable communication and content approaches.

The objective of the study reported in this chapter is to investigate possible social media communication and content approaches to develop a social media communication plan for achieving audience awareness and promoting audience engagement in conversations regarding the purpose of the Quicker Steps project. However, the theoretical section of the chapter includes propositions regarding communication theory, social media websites and elements of a social media communication plan, that apply more generically. The empirical part of this chapter studies the methods and approaches of promoting audience awareness and interest of the Quicker Steps project on Facebook and LinkedIn and increasing their engagement in conversations.

The primary question of the study is formulated as *What types of communication and content approaches are efficient in attracting the potential audience and motivating them towards participation in conversations on the Facebook and LinkedIn profiles of the Quicker Steps project.* The author attempts to evaluate communication and content approaches under a social media communication plan for the Quicker Steps project to manage more interactive and interesting profiles in Facebook and LinkedIn.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Communications Theory

According to Smith & Zook (2011, 120), communication is defined as the process of transmitting and exchanging of information through verbal, nonverbal and visual messages. Communication is not a unidirectional flow of information, meaning that communication is based on a reciproactive interaction between individuals in which information and intelligence are transmitted and shared. The process of delivering verbal, nonverbal and visual messages does not guarantee successful communication; the prerequisite for a functional and successful communication is receiving the message intended by the sender to be received. Messages that are rejected misinterpreted and misunderstood result in ineffective communication (Smith & Zook 2011, 120).

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