

Chapter 5

Building and Maintaining Relationships through Social Media

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blogs have rocked the higher education world. No longer is just being present on these mediums enough. Integration of social media tools into daily practices through monitoring, teaching, and collaboration allows those in higher education to build and maintain relationships with key publics. From devising social media goals and objectives to monitoring channels and evaluating efforts, social media can be integrated into the higher education arena. In this chapter, multiple dimensions of social media tools and the various ways those in higher education can integrate those tools into operation are exposed and elaborated upon. In an effort to provide readers with best practices, ideas are shared to present those in higher education with optimal ways to connect, build, and maintain relationships with others both internally and externally.

FOUNDATIONAL BUILDING BLOCKS

Social media is evolving every day. The quest for the next big social media platform seems to be the dangling carrot for many looking for a better way to connect, engage, and collaborate with others. This chapter delves into the multiple dimensions of the social media tools and the various ways higher education institutions, particularly faculty members and administration, can integrate these tools into daily practices through monitoring, teaching, and collaboration.

Academics can leverage these tools to enhance classroom education and interaction, as well as educate students about the strategic and tactical value of these communication tools. The new technologies available today make it easier than ever to meet students where they are. Yet current students are only one key audience to which higher education institutions should focus their efforts building meaningful relationships through the use of social media tools. Prospective students and families, alumni, and peers are just a few other key publics who are primary relationships that can be built and sustained using social media tools.

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This chapter draws attention to using available tools and platforms to connect with key publics and network both face-to-face and virtually. Many times in higher education faculty members long for more hours in the day to connect with others in order to share and collaborate in an effort to advance their teaching and knowledge within their particular discipline. Social media allows educators and administrators alike to connect virtually with hopes of eventually collaborating face-to-face in a sense building new communities. It boils down to this: Many have heard of social media tools, some may even be utilizing them... but are those in higher education optimizing their use social media tools to connect, build, and maintain relationships with others both internally and externally?

DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

As defined by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), “Social media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content” (p. 61). Davis, Deil-Amen, Rios-Aguilar, and González Canché (2013) defined social media as the “Web-based and mobile applications that allow individuals and organizations to create, engage, and share new user-generated or existing content, in digital environments through multi-way communication” (p. 1). Both definitions share common core elements. In combining and simplifying the two aforementioned definitions, I forward one of my own, defining social media as applications that allow the user to create and share user-generated content.

The first recognizable social media site that came into play was SixDegrees.com in 1997 (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Yet, after a three year run, the site was shut down. “SixDegrees.com allowed users to create profiles, list their Friends and, beginning in 1998, surf the Friends list” (Boyd &

Ellison, 2007, p. 214). Thereafter, several social media sites developed, some still in place today, while others fell by the wayside. Ryze, Tribe.net, LinkedIn, and Friendster all came to the surface around 2001 and shortly thereafter (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

The social media frenzy began to spread and early adopters were quickly buying into the next new network. In 2003, Myspace was founded by Tom Anderson and Chris Dewolfe and quickly became a teen favorite (About Myspace, 2013). Boyd and Ellison (2007) stated, “As the social media and user-generated content phenomena grew, websites focused on media sharing began implementing SNS features and becoming SNSs themselves. Examples include Flickr (photo sharing), Last.FM (music listening habits), and YouTube (video sharing)” (p. 216).

Zuckerberg built the social networking site Facebook in February 2004. Initially started as a website dedicated strictly to users at Harvard where Zuckerberg attended college, he slowly allowed it to grow to include users at other colleges and universities. In September 2006, Facebook opened their social networking website to the general public, including anyone age 13 and over with a valid email address. The social media tool now boasts it has over a billion users and is still going strong.

Blogs also have taken hold and boomed in the social media landscape. The first well-documented pioneer blogger was Justin Hall who began posting online in 1994 (Harmanci, 2005). According to Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestr (2011), “Today, the resulting ‘blogosphere’ of more than 100 million blogs and their interconnections has become an important source of public opinion. There are search engines, like Technorati, that are dedicated to searching blogs” (p. 242).

Social media has come over the higher education industry like a tsunami. In the first year of *The Internet and Higher Education* academic journal, Michael Harris made this statement. “For, by all the evidence available to us, it seems clear

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