USC SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDE

Last Updated March 8TH, 2013

Best practices in social media when representing the University Students' Council

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THE BASICS

Digital Media is now one of the most important POC (Points of Contact) for a company in the modern business landscape. This document aims to encapsulate a guide to interacting and engaging with alumni and current students (as well as their parents) using digital media.

Purpose:

The purpose of Social Media is to facilitate and amplify interactions between you and your desired target audience. Beyond that though, it is to ensure that you as an organization (be it the USC, or any on campus initiative) is able to better fulfill their mission statement or mandate through the use of digital platforms. In the case of the USC, our mission statement is, *"To enhance the educational experience and quality of life for all undergraduates at Western University."*

NOTE: This document is to be used as a resource for USC commissioners, coordinators and staff for how to implement a social media strategy for their operations, services, and initiatives. Anyone involved with the USC must remember that they also represent the USC in everything they do online. As such, although you may have individual mandates, it is important to recognize that you represent the USC and what it stands for through your actions.

When using digital media, you should start by asking yourself 'how can I help to achieve our mandate through social media?' Your answer will be different depending on who you are targeting, but the principles that follow are universal in the digital age.

Our Brand:

When utilizing various social media platforms, it is extremely important to first be aware of what your brand is. A brand is what your organization "feels" like to an audience. Are you perceived as witty and sarcastic, cutting-edge and informative? Before creating content, decide what your current brand is as an entity, and decide if that is how you wish to be perceived by the greater public. If it is, then begin to reflect that in your tone. If it is not, then move towards an image (through both digital content, as well as visual indicators such as photos, websites etc.) that supports what you wish to convey.

It is also important to note that a recent policy has been implemented that ensures that every USC service and operation has a *positioning statement*. This statement should reflect what you aim to accomplish as a service, while still maintaining alignment with our brand.

Basic Insights:

Tone

Tone relates to the type of content and language we use on our digital media outlets.

- Words can't be misspelled
- Slang words should be minimized
- Our language must be professional
- Posts in all capitals should be reserved for only very important info

In addition we should also consider the style of our tone. These are some good guidelines to follow.

- Be friendly, approachable and responsive.
- Use inclusive language (us, we, you)
- Talk like a person, not a machine or a press release
- Be honest; don't feign omniscience
- Be expressive, when appropriate. ("Cool!" "Great news!")
- Find opportunities to naturally build engagement hooks into your posts

Tonal Guideline:

Often, you will want your tone to come across as friendly, open, and fun.

This **DOES** mean being: conversational, inclusive, personal (Use active voice), and enthusiastic and upbeat.

This **DOES NOT** mean being: unprofessional, overusing slang, patronizing, excitable, or unrealistic.

Social Media Assets:

Social media assets are a list of all of the platforms you have created in regards to your organization. These assets may include

- Facebook Page
- Twitter Account
- YouTube Channel
- Flickr Stream
- Pinterest Account
- Instagram

There are many more social media channels one can use, but you must ask yourself what makes sense for your organization. Is your audience on Twitter? If not, then you don't need a social media asset on Twitter. Perhaps you may only need a Facebook page in order to reach your audience effectively? It is all about deciding what makes sense for your operation or service within the mandate of the USC, and your target audience.
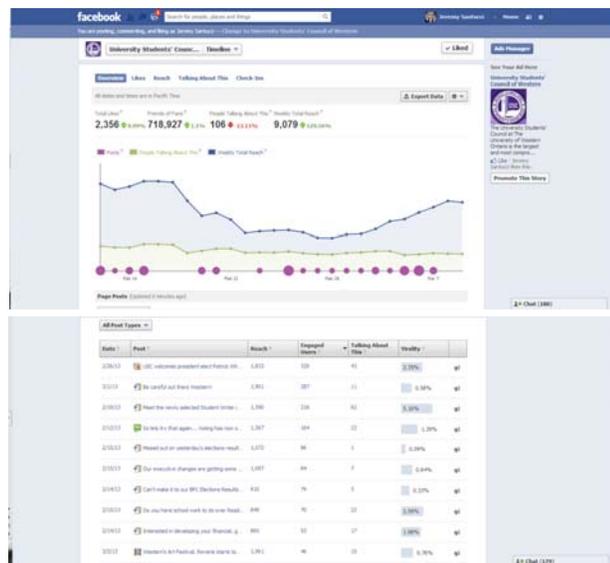
BROADCASTING YOUR MESSAGE

Getting Started/Enhancing Your Use:

Twitter
- When looking to build your audience, follow those who are actively using the medium .
- Search for key terms that pertain to your operation or service, and follow those tweeting about those issues.
- Utilize the hashtags #westernu and #ldnont in order to find Twitter users that are within the greater Western community .
- If running an event, encourage followers to use a specific hashtag (that you have created) in order to tweet about that event.
- Use Twitter to ask questions.

Facebook
- Utilize the analytics Facebook provides you with when you have created a page: the insights are extremely valuable.
  -
  -
- Production: Cover photo dimensions are 851x315 (pixels), and profile pictures are 160x160.
- Use the 'Edge Rank' algorithm to your advantage (explained further under 'content creation').
- Don't be afraid to 'highlight' posts on your page by using the 'star' icon beside the edit button: This will blow that certain image/post up so that it is the first thing users see when visiting your page.
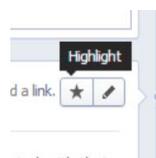
- Utilize Facebook's post scheduling feature: If you are very busy, you can time a bunch of posts at once by creating a post, and then utilizing the 'clock' button to schedule it.
- Tag people, pages or events when posting to draw traffic to them by inserting an "@" symbol

- To schedule posts on facebook, use the clock feature seen below:

NOTE: Look into registering for *Hootsuite* if you are interested in scheduling both tweets and Facebook posts from one central platform. *Hootsuite* is a free service that allows you to do both, and also centrally manage all of your social media outlets (while providing some real time analytics).

YouTube
- Ensure your channel profile is updated with the correct information, and images pertaining to your brand.
- When uploading promotional videos, use eye catching and simple titles.
- Try to keep promo videos around 60 seconds in length, any longer and most viewers will loose interest.
- Utilize the ability to add tags to your video: add any that are relevant to ensure searchability online.

Content Creation:

Facebook

Facebook is a medium that prioritizes media content over type/print. "Edge Rank," the algorithm that dictates what shows up in users newsfeeds prioritizes images, videos, and links over anything else.

- All posts should be accompanied by some sort of other media content (photo or video) as to maximize the posts visibility.

- Important pictures or posts should be pinned to the top of our page.
- Most high quality images look better on the Facebook page if you enlarge them using the "highlight" button.

- Overall posts should be structured in order to foster some sort of interaction or engagement with people who have liked our page.
- Facebook and Twitter should not be linked, as when they are it makes the organization appear lazy.
- Hashtags are for Twitter not for Facebook.

Twitter

Crafting Business Minded Tweets:

Tweets should be divided into thirds covering these areas
- Important news (Info Meetings, events, services etc.)
- General organization info (What is your organization doing around campus?)
- Interest-based content (what are undergraduate students interested in? etc.)

YouTube

YouTube videos are extremely important for the sake of sharing information. Especially given how partial many are to receiving information via video content. However, you must ensure your videos that are uploaded to promote your organization relay a few things.

- It must be short: Most successful youtube videos from an advertisement standpoint are approximately 30 to 60 seconds long. Any longer then this, and you risk losing your audiences attention.
- Ensure quality of production: We live in a society where audiences associate quality with legitimacy – ensure your videos exhibit that some time was taken before uploading it. It does not need to be a masterpiece, but make sure it seems polished. If you don't know video editing, there are plenty of great tutorials on the internet.
- Music: Especially for students events on campus, great music can function as a hook to entice viewers to watch the whole video.
- Consistency: Ensure that your channel, as well as your videos, have a certain level of consistency. Your channel name should be close to your handle on Twitter, and should display the official logo of your organizations. Opening and ending credits where you flash the name of your organization is a great way to add some congruity to your videos.

Websites

If your operation or service is large enough in terms of scale to need it's own website, it is important to make sure that your website is clean and professional. Due to the nature of the medium, authenticity and legitimacy is often judged by the appearance of an organization's web presence. As such, having a cleanly designed website is very important.

If you do not have a large budget to create a website, reach out to students in the computer sciences and media production disciplines. There are many extremely talented students on campus who are looking to build their portfolio for grad school, and will often offer their services for very little or free or purchase a simple and clean template from websites such as Theme Forest and ask our USC IT department to install them.

Quick Tips:
- Everything (in terms of content) should be within 3 clicks.
- If you are a USC operation or service, you *must* include the USC logo in the footer of your home page.

REFINING YOUR ONLINE PRESENCE

Optimal Posting Times:

When creating content to be posted on social media assets, it's extremely important to note what time you are posting. Depending on your audience, your target demographic may be more active on social networks during certain times and on certain days. If your demographic is university students for instance, often they are in class during the day. However many students have the free time to be on social networks in the afternoon and evenings. Be mindful of when you think your audience is online. Posting on weekends is always a good idea, especially Sunday evenings.

Measuring Engagement:

Depending on what you're aiming for, likes and comments might not be the best metrics for measuring engagement with your audience. Instead consider the amount of 'impressions' or views your content may have received. Often the goal of social media is to share a message, and as such it is important to measure and track how many impressions your posts are receiving.

There are several ways to do this. When running a Facebook page, all administrators have access to analytics that will help them to measure engagement. Simply go to the page where you are an administrator, and click on the button labeled 'view insights.' If you are running a website, Google Analytics is a great way to gather some information about how your audience is engaging with your web page. Best of all, it's free for the standard version. Also, Hootsuite can offer some access to analytics, however for more useful metrics (many of which are covered by the standard version of Google Analytics), it does require users to get a paid 'premium account.'

Personal Use:

Social media is a great tool for sharing and disseminating important information, and it is important to utilize not only official account (for operations and services), but also your personal account to help spread media content. However, when creating content that is to be associated with an official account, please ensure it is uploaded via the right channel.

For instance:

- Ensure that Facebook events are created by an official USC operation or service page in order to draw traffic to the page as well as make it easier to invite contacts.

Conclusion: Social media can be an extremely powerful tool for connecting with your audience, and enhancing your message as an organization. Overall, the most important thing to aim for is *consistency*. Consistency in your message, consistency in your postings (both content wise, and in terms of regularity), and an overall sense of cohesion between all of your social media assets. With a consistent approach to social media, and a focus on your audience, you can effectively leverage one of the most effective tools of the digital era.

If you have any questions or concerns, please email the Social Media Commissioner at social.media@westernusc.ca or the Vice President Communications at usccomm@westernusc.ca.