

The Social Media Communications Matrix:

Bridging the Gap Between Traditional Strategic Communications and Digital Media

Beki Winchel, bekiweki@gmail.com, 13-384-5805

Dr. Kenneth Plowman, Communications

Purpose of the Project

As digital media grows more prevalent in our society, many communication and business professionals are struggling with the necessary information, examples and strategies to be successful in the new digital frontier. The public relations program at BYU is recognized as one of the top five programs in the nation, in large part due to the creation and use of the Matrix System for strategic communications. However, there is a growing gap between strategic communicators who are well-versed with public relations and/or the Matrix System and those who are excelling with cutting-edge social media marketing and communications. I seek to bridge the gap between these groups of professionals, allowing everyone in the business, communications and marketing fields to learn from one another for increased success.

Importance of the Project

The social media revolution has changed the way brands and consumers communicate--forever--and it's not going away anytime soon. However, although 64 percent of advertisers expect an increase to their social media budget in 2013 and many are embracing social media communication, many others are hesitant to jump on the social media bandwagon. Time constraints, ROI benefits and security concerns are common questions when businesses want to start using social media, and answers are sometimes not easily understood.

Both business professionals in a variety of fields (communication, marketing, entrepreneurship, advertising, journalism and social media) are constantly seeking information to establish their companies and brands on social media as well as grow their presences. Communication and business students both here at BYU and throughout the nation are increasingly seeking for guidance on digital media communications as well, and there is a definite lack of cutting-edge information with a solid foundation of communication strategy.

Project Proposal Body

The SMC (Social Media Communications) Matrix is based on the Matrix System for Strategic Communications by Laurie Wilson and Joseph Ogden. It references the framework, using it to underline the importance of a solid communication strategy for success in all sectors, and then applies it to current digital media trends. This publication will research case studies and strategies in branding, pop culture, crisis communications and international sections, drawing lessons professionals and students can use to understand the changing communications landscape. Our first book, to be published on Business Experts Press January 2014, will be a primer for our larger book, which we will have completed by April 2014.

Along with the publication of The SMC Matrix, we have created a site (www.smcmatrix.com) containing various blog posts as our research progresses as well as a survey for all strategic communicators and social media professionals, which we will be using, along with various case studies, for our second book. This site facilitates a collaborative environment for our research through the survey and post comments, further strengthening the community as well as keeping us on top of fast-moving trends and events.

In a culmination of both the books and our online community, we will be traveling to various public relations and social media conferences to engage and network with the various professionals at each event. We are also submitting speaker proposals for our books and research and plan to share these presentations with both professionals and the student body in the communications department at BYU.

Anticipated Academic Outcome

Both undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in the public relations emphasis have been given opportunities to work on various projects through the SMC Matrix, including research and blog posts to the SMC Matrix website. These projects have been during Winter and Fall 2013 and have proven to be helpful to students' understanding and application of communications to the cutting edge developments of digital media. We will continue these projects with the students through Winter 2014.

I have also been involved in explaining our research project and answering social media questions during these semesters with the involved classes, and as our first book is published, we will be sharing both the publication and the lessons involved with several undergraduate and graduate communications classes. We will be attending classes to offer suggestions and professors may also order the book for use as a text in their various classes.

Qualifications

My mentor, Dr. Kenneth Plowman, specializes in strategic communication and conflict resolution in public relations and has a doctorate in journalism from the University of Maryland along with a MPA from George Washington University. He spent fifteen years in the public relations field, the majority of that on Capitol Hill. He has also authored more than forty publications and is a retired public affairs officer from the US Army Reserve. He is an associate professor of communications and the faculty advisor within the public relations emphasis.

I have worked with companies of all sizes—from Fortune 500 to startups—in the tech, academic, food, sports, realty, nonprofit and social entrepreneurship industries. I am a senior in the communications program with an emphasis in public relations and have been researching trends, business objectives and other communication implications in the digital media landscape for the past two years. I'm also a regular participant in social media groups, Twitter chats and other networking communities and have gained many industry contacts and opportunities to interview communications professionals at various companies and firms. I've written social media and technology pieces for The Daily Universe and The Deseret News along with blogs for Objectiveli, ViralHeat and Bad Rhino. Lastly, I co-moderate #NostalgiaChat, a weekly Twitter chat, and manage various Facebook groups and Google+ communities.

Project Timetable

We are completing our first book and will be submitting it to Business Experts Press by the end of November. We plan to have it published January 2014, and shall start writing the second book in January. We will finish the manuscript by April 2014 and will be securing a publisher prior to its completion.

We have build the website and are using it Fall 2013 for undergraduate student projects as well as our own insights as we complete the first book, and shall continue to use it into 2014 (and beyond) as we write the second. We plan to attend several public relations and social media conferences to present our research and network in Spring 2014.

Fit With BYU's Mission

This project is intellectually enlarging both to me and my fellow students. I have the opportunity to research cutting-edge case studies and draw correlations between the fast-paced world of social media and a traditional strategic communications model that has been successful for many years.

This project also is character building, allowing me to step outside of my comfort zone as a student and new public relations professional to share new knowledge and ideas which will benefit my seasoned networks.

Lastly, this project is spiritually strengthening not only as I apply ethics to the case studies we are researching but as a collection of case studies, I will also be looking at various religious organizations and how they apply both strategic communications and social media to fulfill their aims.