

Chapter 8

Are Universities Unsocial with Social Media?

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the necessity of teaching social media in university courses. Many of today's business organizations have replaced or augmented traditional marketing with social media in order to promote their products or services and take advantage of blogs, social networks, audio, video, email marketing, and collaborative environments to reach their customer base. The benefits include cost savings, stronger customer loyalty, increased sales, heightened product/service awareness, the ability to mine data, and reaching customers quickly. Universities, while focusing on the primary responsibility of teaching, are also employing social media to promote their business to their customers, the students. While university programs are sometimes criticized for focusing on theory instead of specific skills and relevance to the workplace, could this same criticism also be applicable to how universities use social media and how this burgeoning business tool is perhaps not being taught? In this chapter, various uses of social media in the university setting are uncovered and recommendations are made for improvement of social media initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

Universities have derived value from the use of social media. Examples include cost savings, stronger loyalty, heightened brand awareness, data mining, and competitive intelligence. Specific uses of social media by universities will be shared.

Some visionary professors and universities have also included social media within the curriculum. Some specific initiatives will be shared. Despite these spot initiatives as well as the high demand of social media skills in job applicants, insufficient social media knowledge for students is being shared. Instead, social media spot initiatives

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are seen as “An afterthought, like a few patches protecting an old suit; but carefully stitched in to the fabric as if to say, ‘see, I can still be worn” (Fidelman, 2012, para 3). Challenges will be summarized; recommendations will be included and opportunities for future research will be proposed.

BACKGROUND

Types of Social Media

“Social media” is a large umbrella under which several kinds of content and intent reside. Consultant and author Tim Grahl identified six main types of social media: social networks, microblogging, blog feeds and forums, social news, bookmarking sites, and media sharing (Grahl, 2013). An additional area is identified by Shannon Vallor of Stanford University are location-based sites (Vallor, 2012).

- Social networks were initially intended to offer online communication between friends but have grown extensively to now also serve as a venue for marketing and professional networking (Sherchan, Nepal, & Paris, 2013). Examples of social networks include MySpace, Facebook, and LinkedIn.
- Microblogging allows for the sharing of tidbits of information that can be read instantly or at a later time (Gao, Luo, & Zhang, 2012). Twitter enables account holders to share political beliefs, short personal anecdotes, news, and any other kind of information that can be presented in 140 characters or less; it is especially noted to have changed the face of political commentary since its inception in 2006 (Johnson, 2013).
- Blogs and forums provide asynchronous online commenting; while blogs center

visitor comments around the blog author’s posts, forums tend to be discussions between equal conversants (Grahl, 2013).

- Social news is essentially a “giant bulletin board” of news generated by users (Anders, 2012). This kind of system has both positive and negative implications; Reddit, for example, has billions of online views each month - an enormous audience - but has been criticized for offensive content uploaded by contributors (Anders, 2012).
- Bookmarking sites such as StumbleUpon and Delicious are “recommender systems” which allow for saving favorite websites as well as locating sites within the user’s interest; by using a web interface, the user is no longer device-dependent (Bogers & van den Bosch, 2011). Interest-sharing sites such as Pinterest fit into this category as well (Vallor, 2012).
- Media sharing sites such as YouTube and Flickr allow for the sharing of multimedia with the public (Grahl, 2013).
- Location-based sites are map-based geographic locators; while enjoyed by travelers, issues have arisen from “stalking or other illicit monitoring of users’ physical movements” (Vallor, 2012, para. 17). Examples of location-based sites include Google Maps and FourSquare.

Universities’ Benefitting from Social Media

Universities have recognized the benefit of social media and use this tool to assist with recruiting, outreach, connecting, career planning, stickiness, and marketing analytics. With a minimal expense of social media, universities can achieve both breadth and depth linking inside and outside stakeholders to a common goal. Some examples of universities’ uses will be shared.

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