White Paper: Extending Social Media and Personal Branding to the College Classroom

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Abstract --

Social media networks are not a new concept by any means, and if you are in the marketing/pr blogosphere you are being swarmed with new ways to interact and engage clients and customers of your business. However little is talked about personal social networking and personal branding in the undergrad college classroom. How many of you reading right now knew what a blogosphere was? Well, a blogosphere is where the new ideas are coming from. How many have, use and understand a Twitter? That's where the jobs are, and your future customers. Ideally, social media education and personal branding are the first steps of learning your place in the online marketing world. We need education on social media and personal branding in an undergraduate degree.

Introduction

The other day I was tweeting in class and the girl next to me asked, "What is that?" I replied "Twitter!" I thought to myself; please let this be a bad joke. No, she had no idea what it was or how to use it, what it did or what it could do. I explained it to her. She then replied, "Isn't that just like a Facebook status?" My head hung. This poor girl is graduating with a degree is Mass Communication in Advertising & PR this spring. In four years nobody taught her social media 101.

"At the [University of Alabama at Birmingham](#) (UAB), Allen Johnston, professor of information systems, teaches a course titled [Social Media and Virtual Communities in Business](#). The course, dubbed the ["Facebook class,"](#) debuted this past spring and will be offered again in spring 2011.
Johnston said he found only two other schools in the United States—the University of California, Berkley and Emory University—that offered a similar course this past year. Half a dozen schools have asked Johnston for a copy of his course syllabus." (Egan, 2010)

Why aren't college campuses teaching personal branding to their undergrad and graduate students? Personal online branding is so powerful in today's job market and job search. I am an undergrad at Minnesota State University Moorhead (MSUM) double majoring in Marketing and Public Relations. MSUM is home to 7,800 other undergrads, most of which have little or no personal branding out there on the web for them.

Students are graduating in to a job market in the advertising, public relations and marketing world that required them to be social media experts; most don't have twitters, LinkedIn accounts or run a functional blog. Having a Facebook is not enough, and without proper education on personal branding in social media students is being setup for failure.

"Johnston's class, which assembles students from the fields of marketing, medicine and information systems, defines four pillars of social media— communication, collaboration, entertainment and education—and delves into how they can represent a business. "Everybody has this pressure or feels like their business needs to have a Facebook site, a Twitter account and be on Foursquare," Johnston said. "They think they need to do all of these things, but the question is: Why? Why do we need it, and how do we use it to meet our goals?" (Egan, 2010)

This white paper examines the problem that is being faced by our college institutions on personally branding in a

social media world. The next step understands the needs and placement of education on personal branding online and solving the problem by determine the step necessary to educate undergrads.

The Problem --

The problem starts with how the classroom is falling behind in its teaching. In 1996 the internet starting making a name for itself by introducing two key search engines: Yahoo and Ask.com. With these two new internet tools, marketing would be forever changed, and in 1998 Google would send that change on a fast track.

The change is that consumers/buyers don't need to sit on the couch and wait for a car ad or wait by their mailbox for a magazine for the latest trend anymore. In the late 90's marketing changed from what's now referred to as traditional marketing to new marketing. New marketing is built around the proactive consumer/buyer that shop online.

Just like the new buyer/consumer evolves new management. If a company is in need of a new CFO, Designer or whatever the case, the job is not written up and sent in to the newspaper like it was done 10 years ago. Today jobs are posted instantly over twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Also, employers don't wait anymore, with websites like Monster.com and LinkedIn.com employers can seek out young employees straight from their office chair. Time is money.

The problem best stated by a beloved author of mine, David Meerman Scott, in his book *The New Rules of Marketing and PR*.

" Here's the problem, though: There are many people who still apply the old rules of advertising and media relations to the new medium of the web, and fail miserably as a result." (Scott, 2010)

Yes traditional media still packs a punch, but it's losing its edge fast. So how does this relate back to our problem with personal branding? In our institutions we are still teaching traditional media as the heart of the marketing world. We are falling behind in our educations as undergrads. We need to start having classes on social media and classes on personal branding, so that we can apply this education to our professional careers. Many professions right out of your undergraduate degree require you be a social media and personal branding stud.

"Social media is not a trend. It has changed the way public relations practitioners think about communicating. Many entry-level communications jobs require social media knowledge to be hired, and employers are increasingly expecting social media-savvy college graduates." (Davis, 2010)

Social media is used in the PR world more often every day. It is the responsibility of young PR professionals to learn the skills necessary to use social media effectively in the work place, but first they must be educated. Undergrads are not expected to write a thesis without the proper education required to do so. So why are undergrads expected to execute social media plans and online branding challenges without being taught?

"A recent survey conducted by a research team from the Walter E. Griscti chapter of the Public Relations Student Society of America at the University of South Florida reveals that this generation does not understand the business applications of new social media sites like Twitter."(PRSSA, 2009)

Every undergrad in Marketing, Advertising, PR, Communication and etc.

should be managing a blog on multiple blogging platforms, a Twitter account, Facebook, a Linkedin professional resume, and etc. All students should be expected to participate in personal branding, especially for students pressuring a commutations or business major as a bare minimum. It enhances the level of development that undergrads receive on these platforms before they enter an already saturated job market. Also it adds value to the degrees of students coming out of college that their institution teaches social media and personal branding in the classroom.

Understanding What an Introductory Course Would Cover --

To understand how to build a curriculum to teach personal online branding I will have to go through a short social media introduction lesson and the importance of each of the communication channels of each of them. If you are familiar with one of them feel free to glance over it, however I encourage you read them all. The following are social media and personal branding tools available, they are also the leaders of their genre of social media.

Social Media History

MySpace – Social Network

In 2003 the social network world was set ablaze with the introduction of MySpace.com. It was very popular with teenagers. With it came the surge to make your own profile online where you could add friends to your friend network, upload pictures to a public online platform, and share personal details about yourself. For the record, it was not the first of its kind, yet it became viral and very popular. The First Social Network was developed just as soon as the internet was. MySpace is not as big as it used to be because of competition in the market. Today, MySpace is still a place where Bands and clubs thrive.

LinkedIn – B2B Social Networks

Founded in 2003, LinkedIn offers a professional online resume profile design to its users and the ability to connect professionals that have worked together or would like to do business. It also offers a chance to recommend someone via your personal profile. LinkedIn also host profession tech groups such as AAF, The American Advertising Federation on which users may join and stay updated on events and trends on the industry
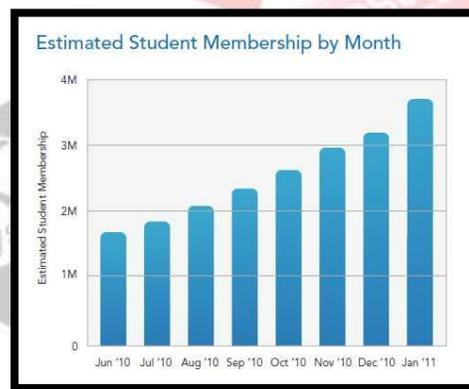

Figure 1: LinkedIn's Membership

Every undergrad should be using LinkedIn as a job searching tool and a place to build value for your professional career. If undergraduates were to be taught how to properly manage a LinkedIn account, their universities job placement percentage would see a major positive growth.

Facebook – Social Network

In 2004 Facebook is launched. It was designed at first to allow only college students with ".edu" emails to participate in its online profile sharing system. That is not the case anymore. Anyone with an email can have a Facebook. I am sure that if you are not a caveman, you are familiar with

Facebook and its growth in this country. It is home to 620 million users worldwide and continues to grow rapidly.

Undergrads most likely don't think they need help managing their Facebook accounts. Employers live on Facebook, looking to see who you really are behind your resume. Students need to be educated that they are who they are online too. Blocking or protecting your account is not enough. Also the proper use of Facebook events, SMS, chat, and Facebook direct messaging in a professional manner is a much-needed skill. If you write in AP style in your professional career, you are expected to write in it on your Facebook. If you are in college, you are not a kid, you are a young professional and you will be expected to write as one.

Blogging

Blogging is the oldest of the all of these personal online branding tools. In 1997 the term weblog was born. Blogs are a great way for people to openly express ideas that they are passionate about. It is also a great way for companies to answer questions and solve the problems of their consumers/buyers. It is great way to engage with buyers or potential ones. Some blogs are used to strengthen companies SEO. I will talk about SEO later in this paper. To be honest, there are more details on what blogs can do than can be expressed in this paper and still keep us focused on our goal.

Blogging is another way to reach customers who don't think the website is personal enough. For example, Sharpie, the marker company, has a website that is informative but not very customer friendly or entertaining. So they introduced the Sharpie Blog, which is a blog of funny and creative things people are doing with sharpies all over the world. I am doing the same thing with my college sports department, Dragon Athletics. Everyday, the

Media Director and Assistants upload content and press releases to the school's athletics page; however it misses a sizable audience. The website is great for sports writers, alumni, and parents, but what about the student and the athletes? The purpose of my blog is to offer another channel to Dragon Athletics that entertains a student and athlete audience. It is also a great way to show appreciation to student athletes by writing posts about their accomplishments. Another purpose of the blog is to highlight alumni that are doing great things for Dragon Athletics. Many of my blogs are funny, which keeps readers coming back. Why is this important? Today's students and athletes are tomorrow's alumni. So keep them involved in Dragon Athletics because they will have a better chance at staying involved and up-to-date later.
http://blog.msumdragons.com/

Twitter – Micro-Blogging

In 2006 Twitter was born, its serves such an undervalued purpose to many, but its power has stilled not been fully recognized and utilized in the online media world. Twitter is similar to the concept of blogging, but you are expressing a singular thought instead of many. So instead of 1000 words, twitter offers micro-blogging a way to express your thought, feelings, a joke or breaking news in 140 characters. Tweeters, as they are called, can follow other tweeters and receive updates from their published micro-blogs.

Tweets can be sent directly to your phone for instant updates through SMS.

Figure 2: How Twitter uses SMS

Many confuse this practice as a Facebook status update. However, there is much more to it. It allows for instant live blogging and personal expression. It's an instant movie review, a cry for help for DIYers or just about anything. It is also a great place where companies can engage in an active conversation with consumers when they an upset with a product or service and can diminish the damage of bad PR produced by an unhappy customer. It also serves wonders for breaking news updates. Do you remember the uprising of Egypt earlier this year? That instant relaying of new coverage was made possible by tweeters in Egypt tweeting that they were being shot at with live ammunition after their government had turned off the internet because of the Egyptian protest. I know I was re-tweeting tweets from Egypt that whole first week.

The same goes for both tweeting and blogging. You are writing for an audience, so talk to them. Talk with them. Learn to engage, not ramble. Most teachers want to apply the rules of journalism to a blogger or tweeter. No! blogging and tweeting live by their own rules. Buy again, like Facebook, you are what you write, so some professionalism is expected.

YouTube – Video Sites

YouTube is viral marketing's Barbie dream house. Everyday, thousands and thousands of videos are uploaded. Whether it's a funny clip of a friend falling down the stairs or a promotion video for college D2 basketball team, it all has the potential of going viral. Some videos have Millions of views. YouTubers can form accounts and comment on videos. Also, YouTubers can upload videos and produce their own YouTube Channel. YouTube Channels allow the owner to make their own url to which viewers can watch videos exclusive to them. The owner of a channel may also design a Channel background to suit their needs. Channels also have the ability for users to subscribe.

YouTube videos are getting more and more creative. For instance, interactive YouTube videos are a relatively new marketing tool. Interactive videos are where the viewer is engaged and sometimes asked to answer a question that will lead the video in another direction. One of my favorites is "NSFW. A Hunter Shoots A Bear", which is an ad campaign for Tipp-Ex white-out tape.

FourSquare - Location-Based Social Network

In 2009, FourSquare mobile positioned itself into the picture. Foursquare is a location-based social networking website based on software for mobile devices. This service is available to users with GPS-enabled mobile devices, such as smartphones. Users "check-in" at venues using a mobile website, text messaging or a device-specific application by running the application and selecting from a list of venues that the application locates nearby. Each check-in awards the user points and,

sometimes, "badges". Many businesses are beginning to use FourSquare to drive customers to their locations by offering a "special" check-in where FourSquares users can receive a deal or gift by simply checking-in. If you have more check-ins in a single place than anyone else you can qualify as the "Mayor" of that location. So business give incentives to the mayor.
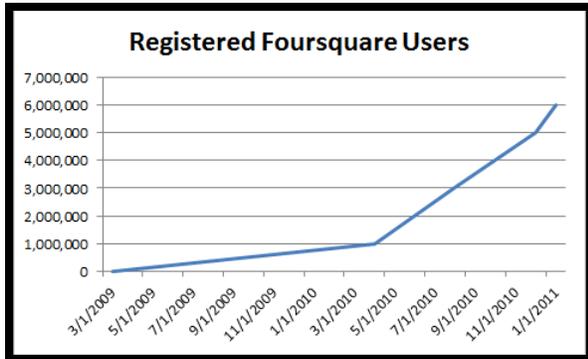
Flickr – Photo Networking

Flickr is an image hosting and video hosting social network. Many Flickr account holders use it to share and embed personal photographs. Flickr is a user-friendly way to post images that bloggers embed into their blogs and social networks. There are almost 6 Million uploaded photos according to Flickr. Flickr is becoming increasingly popular with mobile users on smartphones.

Wiki

A Wiki, ironically enough, is best described by Wikipedia

*"A **wiki** (🔊 /ˈwɪki/ WIK-ee) is a website that allows the creation and editing of any number of interlinked web pages via a web browser using a simplified markup language or a WYSIWYG text editor.[1][2][3] Wikis are typically powered by wiki software and are often used to create collaborative*

works. Examples include community websites, corporate intranets, knowledge management systems, and note services. The software can also be used for personal notetaking.

Wikis serve different purposes. Some permit control over different functions (levels of access). For example editing rights may permit changing, adding or removing material. Others may permit access without enforcing access control. Other rules can be imposed for organizing content"

Social Bookmarking

Social Bookmarking Sites are also known as aggregators. Aggregators are programs that collect certain information from the web and align it into a Really Simple Syndication (RSS) information feed. One example is the news aggregator Digg.com.
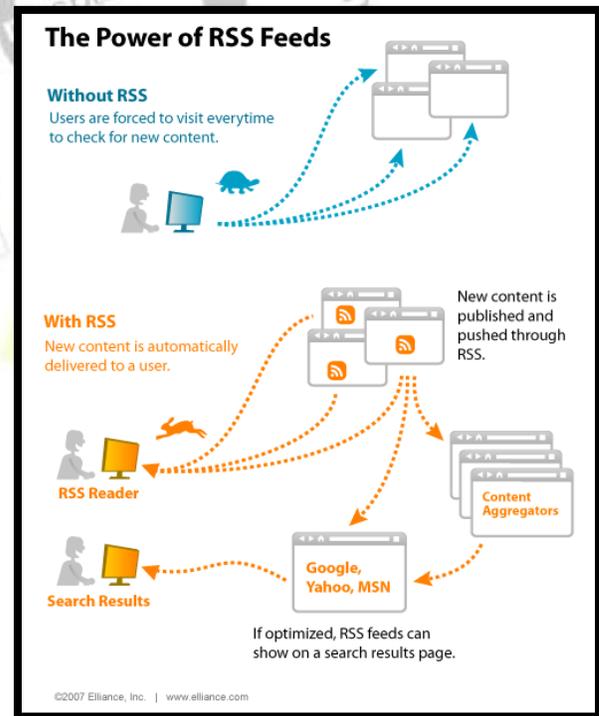
Search Engines – Search Engine Optimization

Now we all should be aware of search engines thanks to years of Google and Yahoo, but are you aware of how search engines could be working for you? I am currently the 10th page on a Google search for Billy McDonald. It's my LinkedIn profile, the first LinkedIn Profile to be listed on a Google search of my name. Now this may come to a surprise to you but there are more than 10 Billy McDonald's out there on the web. So how did I get myself to the first page of a search of my name? The answer is search engine optimization.

Search engine optimization (SEO) is the process of improving the visibility of a website or a web page in search engines. Since I did this myself, it is considered the natural un-paid way. However, if I had outsourced this task, it would have been considered search engine marketing (SEM), which is target paid listings. I actually did SEM at my first internship. I wrote twenty 100-word blogs and snuck in the client's brand and products within them, all the while pretending to be unbiased. The higher on the page and the more often a site appears in the search results list, the more visitors it will receive from the search engine's users.

Listservs – Email Marketing

A listserv is an electronic mailing list software application that consist of a list of email addresses for a group or organization. The sender can send one email and it will reach a variety of people on the list.

Email marketing is using a listserv to send Marketing tools like e-newsletters and ad to a group to sell an idea or product. I am a member of multiple email marketing listservs. I receive e-newsletters and updates from GNC, Apple and Best Buy. I mostly ignore them; however, one catches my attention occasionally.

How to Solve the Problem of the Gap between Social Media and Personal Branding Education—

A social media introductory class should be offered to every freshman undergrad in the United States along side first year experience courses. There are many skeptics that argue against doing this because social media is a rapidly changing course. However it should be the job of the professor to stay on top of the changes and growth. I do not believe that because something is innovative and comes with a high turnover we should stay away from it.

The classroom should be half teaching and half open forum discussion. Student and professors alike can gain much from an open discussion of what's new, what works and what they are doing on the web. It is the task of the professor to point them in a direction and teach the basics of social media and its dangers.

Many could argue that this would be a violation of a student's privacy, but students would not be asked to share their profile and accounts, instead they would be asked to learn and to discuss. If they have online profiles, they are not private. Students need to be taught they are what they tweet, blog, post and update.

Teaching undergrads how to properly use social media tools for themselves will teach them how to use it for companies in the future. Personal branding is a tool that every undergrad can go to for their career of choice.
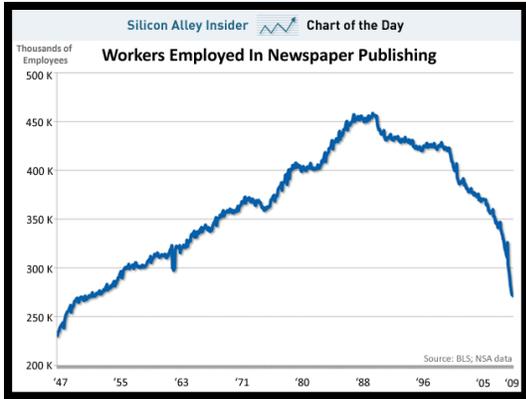
Figure 5: Jobs found in Job listing in the Newspaper

Just look at the graph in Figure 1. If people aren't finding jobs in the paper, where are they finding them? The answer is online.

No matter what you do or who you are, social media will be part of your everyday life. We live in a world where the morning paper is printed with news that is 6-12 hours old. The internet is a revolving door of information; constantly bring news with an almost instant turnover.

Conclusion –
The introduction of a first year experience course on social media and personal branding for undergrads is the ultimate way to give students a head start to the job market and eliminate poor online activity that could tarnish a good academic record. In the introductory course, students would be trained on the existing ideas and the possibilities of social media. Student will be taught how to market themselves as young people in their field of study. I believe this will happen; preferably sooner than later.

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Figure 1: http://studentdev.jour.unr.edu/journovation/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/f.gif

Figure 2: http://static.howstuffworks.com/gif/sms-message-path.jpg

Figure 3: http://placepunch.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Foursquare-Registered-Users.png

Figure 4: http://www.socializeyourcause.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/How-rss-works.gif

Figure 5: http://studentdev.jour.unr.edu/journovation/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/f.gif