Writing an Effective and Scalable Social Media Plan for your College or University

Kathy Dodd
Social Media Manager
George Mason University
Introductions
Hello! I’m Kathy Dodd

- 18 years of marketing experience
- 8 years in private and public higher education
- Currently, social media manager at George Mason University
- 4 years in that role
- Pursuing MA in Higher Education Administration
- Loves coffee ☕️
Ground Rules

- Be open to the process
- Participate fully
- Help each other
- Ask questions
- Take bio breaks - don’t wait!
Steps to Produce a Social Media Plan
Research

- Background
- Situation Analysis
- Social Media Audit
- Problem / Opportunity

Communication

- Build & Curate
- Engaging Social Media Content

INSIGHT

Action Planning

- Goals & Objectives
- Stakeholders / Key Publics
- Branding, Framing, and Messages
- Strategies and Tactics
- Calendar and Budget

Evaluation

- Measurement
- Evaluation
Research
By failing to **prepare**, you are **preparing to fail**.
- Benjamin Franklin, social media maven
Yes, Do Your Research

*Your research will uncover...*

- Why is no one listening?
- Why am I not receiving any retweets, shares or comments?
- What’s wrong with my content?
- Do people even care about my institution?
Don’t Worry... There’s a Research Checklist!
Checklist

- External Environment
- Industry (Higher Education)
- The Client (Your University)
- Social Media Audit
- Market Share
- Competition
- Product / Service / Issue
- Resources
- Promotions
- SWOT Analysis
- Public Profiles
Social Media Audit

What Is a Social Media Audit?

The process of reviewing what’s working, what’s failing and what needs improvement across your social media channels.

Some items to review during the audit:

- Social network
- URL to profile
- Owner of the profile
- Objective of the profile
- Branding
- Password
SWOT Analysis

- **S** (Strengths): Helpful (to achieving the objective)
- **W** (Weaknesses): Harmful (to achieving the objective)
- **O** (Opportunities): Internal Origin (attributes of the organization)
- **T** (Threats): External Origin (attributes of the environment)
Background

• Be succinct and concise
• Provide analysis of the current situation
• State the important facts
• Demonstrate relevance of your recommendation / strategy
INSIGHT
Insight

➔ Personal
➔ Unique
➔ Connective
➔ Plausible
➔ Differentiating
➔ Relevant (to the topic, timing, and stakeholders)
➔ Valuable
➔ Strategy-driving
➔ Outcome-oriented

• What does the research tell me that I would NOT know otherwise?
• How can I connect what has been done, to do it better?
• Do I have a blind spot?
Insight Generators

- What do I know now that I did NOT know before?
- How can I connect this in a new way?
- In what ways might I...?
- How / why else...?
- What am I assuming...?

Can I...?

- Substitute it?
- Combine it?
- Adapt something to it?
- Modify or magnify it?
- Put it to another use?
- Eliminate something?
- Reverse or rearrange it?
Action Planning
Create Social Media Marketing Goals That Solve Your Biggest Challenges
The first step to any strategy is to understand what you want out of your efforts. Social media marketing isn’t about flipping a switch and calling it a day.
Goals

Broad, positive restatement of the core problem / opportunity (a solution). Relevant to the overall goals of the university, but specific to the social media marketing communication.

To write them, consider:

- “In order to...”
- “To what end...”
- “Why...”
Defining a Social Media Goal

- Education
- Awareness
- Rebranding
- Positioning
- Communicate / Tell a Story
- Establish Relationships
- Change Behavior
- Change Attitude
- Ethically Persuade
- Launch

- Sell
- Advertise
- Generate Buzz / Media
- Hide / Misrepresent
- Create Propaganda
- Cure
- Maintain
- Fundraise
Keywords to Create a Goal

Reputation:

- Rebrand
- Position
- Establish Brand
- Distinguish Brand
- Awareness
- Visibility
- Strengthen Brand Recognition
- Reinforce Image
- Establish Brand Positioning
- Manage Reputation
- Manage Image
- Communicate
- Tell a Story of...
- Increase Transparent Communication...
Keywords to Create a Goal

Relationship:

- Engage
- Establish / improve relationship / regain support
- Maintain favorable relationship amid change
Keywords to Create a Goal

Task:

- Educate

- Change behavior / launch / attract interest in...

- Change attitude / ethically persuade / increase or generate support for... (could be attitude or behavior)

- Advance social change on _____ issue
Example:

To create a comprehensive university-wide social media and digital strategy that will build upon existing audiences and attract new students and other stakeholders.
What are some examples?

8 Social Media Goal Ideas That Align With Your Marketing Efforts

1. Increase brand awareness
2. Drive traffic to your website
3. Generate new leads
4. Grow revenue, signups or sales
5. Boost brand engagement
6. Build a community
7. Increase press mentions
8. Social listening

Photo Credit: Hootesuite
Objectives
Social Media Plan Objectives

Objectives to be accomplished to reach your goal.

➔ Inform / create awareness
➔ Motivate attitude or actions

What are these?

➔ **Specific**: State the stakeholders needed to achieve your goal
➔ **Measurable**: State the measurable outcome
➔ **Attainable**: Set a *realistic level* of attainment
➔ **Relevant**: Related to the overall goal
➔ **Time-bound**: State the time frame
Create High-Level Social Media Objectives

- Start out by writing down your top three social media objectives.
- Remember that these should support your main institutional objectives and support your unit’s objectives as well.
- They should also challenge and inspire you.
Key Results for the Objectives

Once you’ve set your objectives, it’s time to create 3 key institutional or social media results for each objective.

Objectives and Key Results

The best practice of setting and communicating company, team and employee objectives and measuring their progress based on achieved results.

Objectives:
- ambitious
- qualitative
- time bound
- actionable by the team

Key Results:
- measurable and quantifiable
- make the objective achievable
- lead to objective grading
- difficult, but not impossible
Stakeholders
Stakeholders

*Also referred to ask “Key Publics” or “Key Audiences”*

**By Definition**... Segmented groups of people whose support and cooperation are essential to the long-term survival of an organization or the short-term accomplishment of its objectives.
Stakeholders in Higher Education

- Prospective Students
- Current Students
- Alumni
- Donors
- Faculty and Staff
- Community and Government Leaders

Who else would you add to this list?
# Stakeholders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Platform(s)</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Sample Tactics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prospective Students</td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Icons" /></td>
<td>Inspire more of these prospects to make Mason their school of choice.</td>
<td>- Snapchat reminders about deadlines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Icons" /></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Instagram stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Icons" /></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Facebook groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image4" alt="Icons" /></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Podcasts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td><img src="image5" alt="Icons" /></td>
<td>Strengthen their connection to Mason, helping them see themselves as lifelong members of the Mason Nation.</td>
<td>- Contests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image6" alt="Icons" /></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Mason Nation Twitter Takeover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image7" alt="Icons" /></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Facebook events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image8" alt="Icons" /></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Snapchat stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image9" alt="Icons" /></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Video (any platform)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td><img src="image10" alt="Icons" /></td>
<td>Make all our graduates proud to tell the world where they went to school - before anyone asks.</td>
<td>- Facebook events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image11" alt="Icons" /></td>
<td></td>
<td>- LinkedIn posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image12" alt="Icons" /></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Video (any platform)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image13" alt="Icons" /></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Podcasts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donors</td>
<td><img src="image14" alt="Icons" /></td>
<td>Position Mason as a philanthropic priority and energize those who feel strongly about Mason to act on their feelings and give.</td>
<td>- ROI features (news stories, infographics, video)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image15" alt="Icons" /></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Reminders to give (Giving Tuesday, Giving Day at Mason)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image16" alt="Icons" /></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Student testimonials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty &amp; Staff</td>
<td><img src="image17" alt="Icons" /></td>
<td>Strengthen a sense of connection to the university and a shared understanding of the mission.</td>
<td>- Mason Nation Twitter Takeover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image18" alt="Icons" /></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Facebook events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image19" alt="Icons" /></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Video (any platform)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image20" alt="Icons" /></td>
<td></td>
<td>- HR related news</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community and Government Leaders</td>
<td><img src="image21" alt="Icons" /></td>
<td>Position Mason as an institution worth supporting, partnering with, and turning to for expertise.</td>
<td>- ROI features (news stories, infographics, video)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image22" alt="Icons" /></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Reminders to give (Giving Tuesday, Giving Day at Mason)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Brand Positioning, Framing, & Messaging
How do brand positioning, framing, & messaging interact?

- Brand Positioning
  - Strategic Direction
- Framing
  - Tone
- Messaging
  - Text

IMPACT

Stakeholders
Knowledge and Actions
Brand Positioning

- The space in the stakeholders mind occupied by your university
- Experiences that reinforce or detract from the positioning
- Builds reputation in terms of images, trustworthiness, credibility, consistency, and likeability - thus influencing relationships with stakeholders
Framing

- Framing is an important technique of focusing the attention of people within a broad context.

- Cues that focus your stakeholders' attention on particular attributes of a topic while excluding others.

- Shapes meaning for the message recipient.

- Framing is a form of agenda-setting – the process by which a communication source defines and constructs a public issue.
Framing Examples

Common Frames

- **Situations** (e.g. Priceless Campaign)
- **Attributes** (e.g. Sprint vs. Verizon advertisements)
- **Choices** (e.g. Truth campaign)
- **Actions** (e.g. VERB campaign)
- **Issues** (e.g. War on Terror)
- **Responsibility** (e.g. BP vs. Federal Government)
- **News** (e.g. BP as villain)

Common Cues

- **Symbols**
- **Uniqueness**
- **Generic nature**
- **Pre-empting competitors**
- **Informing**
- **Credibility**
- **Emotion**
- **Association**
- **Lifestyle**
- **Incentive**
- **Reminder**
- **Interaction**
Messaging

- Research, research, research
- Tie to communication goals and objectives
- Know your audiences
- What action do you want the audience to take?
The 6 C’s for Messaging

1. Clear
2. Concise
3. Compelling
4. Credible
5. Customer-focused
6. Consistent
Messages

- Start at the end - what action do you want to occur as a result of the message being received?
- Use clear language that resonates with the audience
- Primary message supported by facts or supporting statements in the secondary messages
Creating messages is like packing for a road trip
Pick your Route

- Decide what you want your stakeholders to know, do, or believe after hearing your message
- Understand the current brand positioning (and the desired brand positioning, if applicable)
- Identify how you want to frame the issue to tap into the stakeholders’ self-interest
Ready your Ride

- What are the topics you would best want to understand from your stakeholders?
- What are the competing messages they have already received?
Pack the Car

Message Categories

1. Main take-away or core message
2. Quality or value of product, service, or issue
3. Central passion inspiring the university, faculty, staff, program, or the initiative
4. Unique characteristic about stakeholders, collaborators, or programs
5. Counter to common misconception or concern (if applicable)
Before you turn that key...

The purpose of this message is to convince __________ [stakeholder] that __________ [brand] will __________ [benefit] because __________ [proof].

The tone of the message should be __________________________ [description of messages personality].
Strategies & Tactics
Strategies & Tactics

Once you’ve translated your university’s goals into social media goals, the next step is to map out the specific actions you need to take to accomplish the goals you’ve set.

Or Simply...

- How to send the Message
- to a Stakeholder
- through a Social Media Channel
- to motivate an Action
Tactics

**Tools** and **tasks** that allow you to accomplish your social media strategies.

~ or ~

Detailed description of how you **convey messages** to a **specific stakeholder group** through the **channel** identified in the strategy.
For Example...

If our goal at the University of Awesome is to expand into a new market segment, and we’ve set a social media goal to discover and build relationships with influencers and brands in that market – how can we break that down into specific tactics we can take action on?

Some ideas...

- Create a list of 100 influencers in the target niche who might be open to sponsored posts
- Direct message each of them to see if they’d be interested in partnering with us
- Set up a sponsored post with 1 brand or influencer every month
### What’s the difference?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Strategy</strong></th>
<th><strong>Tactics</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● The plan</td>
<td>● The tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Game plan</td>
<td>● Execution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Audience-specific</td>
<td>● Action-specific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● An approach for each audience</td>
<td>● Task to carry-out the approach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Our Toolbox

One last item you will uncover during research is what social channels your university will be best suited for.
Calendar & Budget
Never forget that a calendar is strategic! When you calendar a plan, you are not just picking dates; you are finding the optimal dates to:

- Post a video on Facebook
- Launch an advertising campaign on YouTube
- Do an admissions blitz on all your social networks
- (you get the idea)

Timing is critical! To ensure effective calendaring, keep in mind interactivity, conflicts, tradition (holidays), lead time, and planning.

Use a tool that works for you and your team. Whether it’s a traditional calendar or a Gantt chart, it should be easily read and understood by all users to be effective.
Calendar Software
Budget

The budget should also be considered strategically. The issue should not only be total cost, but also who should pay and how. You can include other campus partners to offset costs in your social media planning if they will receive a positive outcome to your strategies.
Every marketing team, no matter its size, has finite resources. So it’s essential to prioritize your tactics and create a social media marketing plan from them.

1. Evaluate how much value I expect each tactic will bring to the university
2. Compare that to how much effort each tactic will likely require and how complex it will be to implement
3. Prioritize the highest value tactics that require the least effort/complexity
Communication
Content is
How do you find content for your social media?
You are already surrounded by great content!

- News stories produced by your University Relations office
- Updates from your Intercollegiate Athletics department
- Alumni Affairs events
- Rankings updates
- Photos of your campus
- User-generated content (students, faculty, staff)
- Stories produced by your schools/colleges
- Research from your faculty
- *And so on...*
But, every Monday morning...

I get it, we are surrounded by great content, but how stop ending up looking like this while we plan our week?
Commit to Quality over Quantity

While it should go without saying, it’s always worth repeating. Great content is the core of your social media and content marketing strategy.

To ensure the quality of your content, determine your process for producing, polishing and publishing it. How frequently will you post and how much time can you commit to marketing that content?

Keep in mind that the quality of your content is a direct reflection on your business. This isn’t an area where you want to over commit and under deliver.

Create a content calendar to keep you focused and on track. There’s nothing worse than putting a content marketing strategy in place only to get derailed by a lack of planning.
Editorial Calendar

- A coherent content calendar is crucial because it will help you map out and outline your projects, and maintain consistency.

- Look at *all of your available campus calendars* to have a better understanding of what events and major milestones are occurring during the academic year.

- Use a tool that you are comfortable with (Excel, Google Docs, Hootsuite, Falcon.io, HubSpot, Airtable) and build the editorial calendar.
Take it one step at a time.

- Yearly
- Quarterly
- Monthly
- Weekly
- Daily
Tie your content back to your goals

Review your social media goals and objectives regularly to ensure that your content calendar is consistently in sync.
HOW OFTEN YOU SHOULD POST ON SOCIAL MEDIA?

- Facebook: 1 time per day
- Twitter: 6 times per day
- LinkedIn: 1 time per day
- Instagram: 1-2 times per day
- YouTube: 1 time per week
- Google+: 1 time per day
- Pinterest: 3 times per day
- Snapchat: 1 story per day
Evaluation
Establish Your Most Important Metrics

Don’t get wrapped up in vanity metrics (follower count) - it does not tell the whole story of your brand.

We often get wrapped up in viewing followers and likes as the truth to a campaign, but it’s smart to take a step back and evaluate the social metrics associated with your overall goals.

Engagement metrics sometimes paint a more complete picture, because they show us building lasting relationships works on social media.
Pay Attention to What’s Working (and what’s not)

Ever wish you could see directly into the thoughts of your potential buyer? Wouldn’t it be great if you knew exactly what they wanted and then could provide it every time?

You can, or at least you can come close by paying attention to your analytics, metrics and goals.

Numbers don’t lie and will always give you the guidance and direction you need. Measure your conversations, interaction, engagement, and shares. You’ll also want to test your messages and frequency to establish the point of diminishing return.

Know what content is hitting the mark and what’s a miss. The bottom line is that no matter what tool you use to measure your content marketing efforts, you must commit to a review process.
Engagement Metrics

- **Reach:** Post reach is the number of unique users who saw your post. How far is your content spreading across social? Is it actually reaching user’s feeds?

- **Clicks:** This is the amount of clicks on your content, university name or logo. Link clicks are critical toward understanding how users move through your marketing funnel. Tracking clicks per campaign is essential to understand what drives curiosity or encourages people to take an action.
Engagement Metrics

- **Engagement**: The total number of social interactions divided by number of impressions. For engagement, it’s about seeing who interacted and if it was a good ratio out of your total reach. This sheds light on how well your audience perceives you and their willingness to interact.

- **Hashtag performance**: What were your most used hashtags on your own side? Which hashtags were most associated with your brand? Or what hashtags created the most engagement?
Engagement Metrics

- **Sentiment**: This is the measurement of how users reacted to your content, brand or hashtag. Did customers find your recent campaign offensive? What type of sentiment are people associating with your campaign hashtag? It’s always better to dig deeper and find what people are saying.

- **Organic and paid likes**: More than just standard Likes, these likes are defined from paid or organic content. For channels like Facebook, organic engagement is much harder to gain traction, which is why many brands turn to Facebook Ads. However, earning organic likes on Instagram isn’t quite as difficult.
Analyze & Adapt

Last but not least, after you’ve set your plan it’s important that you remember that this is a live document and you make adjustments and adapt your goals and tactics as you go throughout the year!

You look at the tactics you’ve produced, what worked, what did not work and you make changes.
Guy Kawasaki and Peg Fitzpatrick
The Art of Social Media
Power Tips for Power Users

Jonah Berger
Contagious
Why Things Catch On

Rick Levine, Christopher Locke, Doc Searls, and David Weinberger
The Cluetrain Manifesto
The End of Business as Usual
The Zen of Social Media Marketing
An Easier Way to Build Credibility, Generate Buzz, and Increase Revenue
Shama Hyder
Founder and CEO of The Marketing Zen Group

Enchantment
The Art of Changing Hearts, Minds, and Actions
Guy Kawasaki

Socialnomics
How Social Media Transforms the Way We Live and Do Business
Erik Qualman
Second Edition
Thank you for your time!

Kathy Dodd
Social Media Manager
George Mason University

kdodd5@gmu.edu

@kathydodd