The Next Steps in Digital Communication in Higher Education

Kevin J. Manning, Ph.D.
President, Stevenson University
If you want to understand the Internet and digital devices, talk to a true digital native.
Teenagers and college students are using digital media as never before and yet higher education is often still locked into the more traditional forms of communication.
Internal Communications are an increasing campus challenge as well... digital media can help
FastCompany February 2012 refers to this new digital era as “Lessons in Flux” in its cover story, The Secrets of Generation Flux, calling the future “pure chaos” and discussing how to thrive in it. Optimists look at it as exciting.

- Get up-to-date and stay on top of technology used by your students and their younger siblings
- There are no solid rules—be open-minded
- Corporate models are struggling too--- e.g., Netflix.
So What Should Colleges Do in this Digital Age? First—a Representational Traditional College Public Relations Model*

*Note: this model assumes the function is independent of Admissions or Development offices
With the rapid movement of students to mobile devices, especially smart phones and iPads, what should the Digital Communication Office look like today?
A New Digital Communication Structure

VP of Marketing

- Asst VP for Publications
- Asst VP for Media Relations
- Asst VP for Digital Media

- E-marketing
- Broadcast Media (TV/Radio/Video)
- Web
- Portal
- Content Providers and Technical Staff
Structural, policy and technology changes offer the opportunity to create momentum and consensus around a budget needed to fund these new essential functions.

Projected additional Annual Budget beyond the traditional model

- System Support: $50,000
- Hardware: $100,000
- Staff: $500,000
- Total: $650,000
What to Expect From an Asst VP of Digital Media

- Creativity
- Awareness of current promotional trends for teenagers and educational trends for adult students
- Excellent management and team skills
- Flexibility in work hours and in project multi-tasking
- Understanding of new and emerging technologies
What to Expect from Today’s Asst VP of Media Relations

• Integrate old media relations skills to new age of social media

• Develop external news feeds: Real Simple Syndications (RSS Feeds), build Twitter followers and follow media gurus/bloggers etc.

• Track online impressions and share results

• Share campus information internally through feeds

• Expand messages via incorporation of videos with press releases, and photos/videos to social media platforms
What to Expect of Today’s Asst VP of Publications

- Update publications with design team to be multi-purposed: web, print, Intranet/Portal etc.

- Incorporate branded messages and keep them brief and cohesive to a campus Style Guide

- Maintain brand and communicate with diverse market segments such as donors, prospective undergraduate and adult students

- Handle high volumes of quality work coordinated for internal and external uses, including digital uses
Advice on the Use of Outside Consultants for a Digital Communication Plan

- Avoid if you have in-house capabilities but if not, get references from other colleges
- Be sure the individual who will directly handle your project from the consulting firm has precise expertise
- Set a time-line from start to completion and assign an internal project leader
- Key components of the plan should be technology systems compatibility and staffing review/needs
Some Final Practical Advice

• Be sure to move carefully, hire the right people but accept the need to develop this function

• Don’t let the costs deter you—get started in stages and budget progressively

• For the website, if internal support isn’t available, use qualified consultants but avoid proprietary systems that may become outdated

• Mobile devices and other new tools offer increasingly short attention span from their users—be creative (and brief) in your messages
Successfully Manage the Chaos of New Technology