

chapter 7

Social Media: Word Travels Fast



Nothing transforms a society faster than technology. Consider the following timeline of events. The wheel is vastly improved today and is obviously used in more productive ways than the invention from ancient times. Johannes Gutenberg's printing press five centuries ago produced hundreds of books in the time it took scribes to write one book. About 75 years ago, only superhero Superman was "faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, able to leap tall buildings in a single bound." In the 1930s, with automobiles filling bustling urban areas, the car radio gave motorists a medium to receive news on the move. It was a dynamic advancement over sitting huddled around a radio in the living room.

Television figuratively shrunk the world. And those were just the black-and-white images. It would become a medium for reaching masses. When television brought the first presidential debate between John Kennedy and Richard Nixon to the public, the idea of appearance and image suddenly became an important strategy for public relations and political strategists. Live television also transported the public when Dallas night club owner Jack Ruby shot and killed Lee Harvey Oswald, the man believed to have assassinated President Kennedy. Live television also transmitted grainy pictures from the moon where Neil



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Armstrong made an indelible boot print and proclaimed, “That’s one small step for man; one giant leap for mankind.” A camera attached to the lunar module caught the historic landing and moonwalk for a world audience.

EVERYONE’S A GATEKEEPER

Social media is a powerful tool that makes every user a producer of content, a marketer of ideas and, depending on the value of the content, a thought leader. The job of producing news once rested almost entirely with trained journalists. Public relations practitioners might have influenced editorial decisions by pitching story ideas and views. If judged *newsworthy*, the mass media would tell the story and the information reached a mass audience. In today’s digital world, the media relations work of PR professionals is much the same as in the past, but today PR professionals also can use digital media to reach audiences directly. Young people read fewer newspapers, if they read them at all, watch less TV news, and spend less time with other traditional mainstream media. Their eyes and ears are elsewhere, more likely glued to the screen of a smartphone or a tablet. They visually leap from platform to platform with a touch or click of a **widget** or **app**. With the right software, they may jump to a site by scanning geometric icons called **QR codes**.

One out of every seven people on Earth uses Facebook. In the United States, that number swells to seven out of 10 or 71 percent as of September 2013, according to The Pew Research Internet Project. Consumers can create their own news sites and electronic media channels. They can upload and share words, photos, video and data in a flash anywhere in the world. When public relations practitioners engage in social media, integrating strategic and tactical thinking, the results can be not only effective but transformative.

To illustrate the velocity impact of new media consider these perspectives:

- Michael Crichton, author of “Jurassic Park,” writes that adults today spend more money on food for thought than on food for the body.
- George Gilder, writer and co-founder of the Discovery Institute, said half of what high school graduates learn will be outdated, obsolete or wrong by the beginning of their third year of college.

As it pertains to technology, could anyone really doubt Gilder’s prediction? After all, the world has moved from desktop computers to handheld devices, which contain power to access information faster than ever. Wearable computing technology is available and slowly gaining acceptance. Today’s smartphones have gotten smarter, faster and more portable. They’ve also become abundant. In 2011, smartphone shipments exceeded those of PCs. International Data Corporation estimates that by 2017, smartphone shipments will reach 1.7 billion units, a figure driven by declining prices. In a world of iPads, iPods and iPhones, today’s college students are the first generation of iGrads. They are often referred to as digital natives because computing and Internet technology have always been part of their lives.

INSTANT PLAYS AND REPLAYS

Armed with everything from flip cameras to tablets and smartphones with video capability, not to mention the latest wearable technology, the world is uploading video constantly. YouTube boasts that 100 hours of videos are uploaded to YouTube every minute, and 80 percent of YouTube's traffic comes from outside the United States. Competitor Vimeo has a smaller audience and tends to be a space for more substantive videos with no commercials before the start of videos.

Beyond social media use, video is widely used in social media by marketers and retailers. The comScore Video Metrix Services reports that in March 2014, a total of 187.8 million Americans watched 46.6 billion online content videos (non-advertising). That's 17 hours a month spent watching video on computers both at work and at home. In January 2014, video advertisements reached 52.6 percent of the U.S. population, an average of 165 times during that month. Almost 27 billion ads were viewed on the Internet in January 2014. The top U.S. online video ad properties are:

- SpotXchange video ad marketplace
- AOL, Inc. (including Adap.tv)
- Google sites
- LiveRail
- BrightRoll platform
- TubeMogul video ad platform
- Specific Media
- Hulu
- Tremor Video
- Videology



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INTERNET USERS: LOST IN SPACE

Internet activity boasts equally impressive and growing numbers. A 2011 advertisement from Intel, a chipmaker that is the muscle behind much technology, reports that in any given 24-hour period, the Internet gains 144,000 new users or 100 every minute. Social media software such as Hootsuite, Buffer, SocialOomph and Tweetdeck, which allow users to schedule and otherwise manage and monitor posts and tweets, has boosted the volume of social media traffic exponentially. And the growth continues to soar:

- There are 30 billion instant messages, 35 billion emails and 40 billion SPAM messages.
- Internet World Stats reports that through June 30, 2012, there were more than 2.4 billion Internet users among the world's population of roughly 7.02 billion.
- At the end of 2000, Internet users numbered only 361 million.
- In North America alone, 78.6 percent of the continent's roughly 354 million people use the Internet.

New media is growing so fast, Alan Rusbridger, editor of The Guardian in Great Britain, states that “we forget how new it all is. It's totally understandable that those of us with at least one leg in traditional media should be impatient to understand the business model that will enable us magically to transform ourselves into digital businesses and continue to earn the revenues we enjoyed before the invention of the Web, never mind the bewildering disruption of Web 2.0.”

Metropolitan newspapers are being reinvented or facing going out of business. New niche publications and community newspapers are finding new life on newsstands, online and on mobile devices. Print media and television are converging as well. Journalists are now expected to be savvy digital players and file print or TV

“The difference today is that change is happening much faster — so fast that we are, as an industry, collectively suffering from what deep-sea divers refer to as the bends. We are traveling through a period of extreme change faster than our corporate bodies can cope with. It's painful — and, if not treated quickly and correctly, can be fatal.”

stories while also submitting related tweets, blog posts and sometimes images. Similarly, public relations practitioners are modifying their practices. The story ideas they pitch with press releases are often accompanied by images and video, and simultaneously supported on social media sites such as Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and Instagram as well as the organization's own website.

Everyone in the mass communication business, from journalists to public relations practitioners, seeks the same mass audiences. They also realize that digital media have given consumers a new power as well. Consumers independently decide what and how much they want to digest about any given subject at any moment. As bloggers and tweeters and so-called citizen journalists, they can build their own reputations and their own brands by contributing

ideas that others consider valuable. Some individuals become thought leaders in one sphere or another, just as sports, music, art or politics. When individuals become really influential in social media, they may find themselves on someone's media list and receive targeted messages related to their areas of interest and expertise. Congressional leaders and presidential candidates often court younger and diverse audiences through late-night television shows and social media. Many journalists now enjoy celebrity status and are becoming hosts and guests on news programs, simply interviewing each other.

INNOVATORS IN COMMUNICATIONS

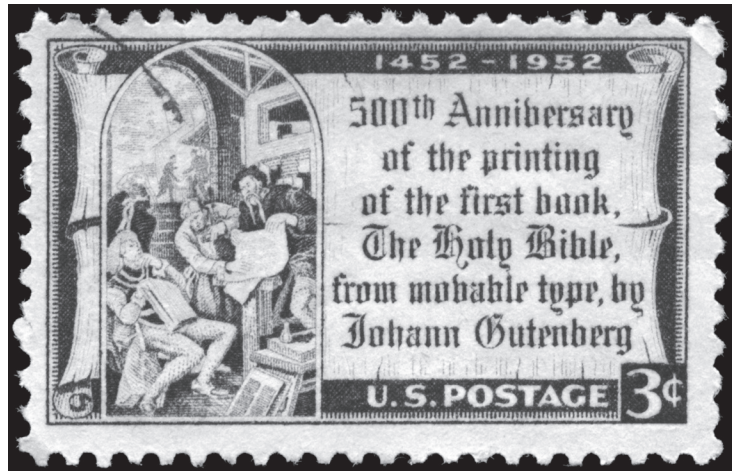
Technologies, both hardware and software, regularly advance in speed and portability, enhancing media mobility. What the late Steven Jobs of Apple, Microsoft's Bill Gates and Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg accomplished in technology, parallel the revolution triggered in the 15th century by Gutenberg, a goldsmith who introduced his printing press into German society. The printing press ignited the Renaissance, allowing the Church and academies to expand the ability to share information in a shorter time frame.

Sound familiar? Books no longer were a treasure for only the wealthy and powerful in Europe. They became accessible to a wider audience. The work of scribes and monks changed in a way that's comparable to modern-day journalists losing their traditional newspaper jobs by the thousands. Instead of books being individually and painstakingly handwritten, hundreds of books were printed in a relatively short time frame. The ramifications went well beyond merely filling up bookshelves. Literacy exploded. Education changed.

In this early era of print media, 16th century English philosopher Francis Bacon proclaimed, "Knowledge is power." And Gutenberg's printing press empowered people to stay informed and learn. The innovation earned him some fame, but not fortune. He died penniless. Gates, Jobs and Zuckerberg, by contrast, became some of the wealthiest people on Earth.

"THE WHOLE WORLD IS WATCHING . . ." WELL, MAYBE.

Social media, then, give a voice to the masses. In countries where personal and media freedoms are enjoyed, a common concern today is privacy. In less democratic countries that crush the exercise of many freedoms we take for granted, social media are giving voice to the traditionally voiceless. Smartphones and other handheld devices transmit images and



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"Suddenly, in a historical eye-blink, scribes were redundant. One year, it took a month or two to produce a single copy of a book; the next, you could have 500 copies in a week. Hardly an aspect of life remained untouched — Gutenberg's invention made the soil from which sprang modern history, science, popular literature, the emergence of the nation-state, so much of everything by which we define modernity."

—John Anthony Garnet Man, author of
"The Gutenberg Revolution"

descriptions of uprisings and other aspects of life in such places as Egypt, Libya, Iran, Iraq, Syria and other hotspots. Grassroots sources take risks to report on events or express opinions as eyewitnesses to major world events. Suddenly, individuals almost everywhere have a voice and perhaps a global audience.

Technologies are tools. What ignites them are the strategies that dictate their uses. Twitter, Facebook and other social media can be used solely for trivial communication that strips away one's privacy. A lot of it is one-way communication that produces little content of value. Spike Jones, author of "Brains on Fire," described the chatter this way: "There are waaaaaay too many people on Twitter and Facebook (talking to themselves) who think it's the be-all, end-all. It's a great tool. But it's just a tool. It's not the answer. And it can easily become part of the problem. It's not going to go away, but the smart companies are the ones that say yes, it's a tool to connect, but see beyond the connection. They are thinking about how now they have a conversation going, but what's next?"

Plugged into the public relations process discussed in Chapter 3, the real power of new media tools is fully unleashed. Using research to develop objectives, strategies and tactics yields an integrated plan that expands the ability to reach larger audiences with content that can influence opinion and change behavior. The use of digital media is relatively new for public relations, and ideas, philosophies and strategies are evolving constantly. Some things work. A lot of things do not. In developing a social media strategy for a public relations campaign, the central focus should be finding and joining relevant audiences instead of waiting for them to randomly find your message. Seek out audiences who are interested in a topic, and deliver content to them that is useful and engaging.

MANY VOICES ON STAGE

When Shakespeare wrote, "All the world's a stage," the theater was a place for storytelling and drama. In the world of digital media, everyone shares the stage. Ordinary players can become experts. Experts can become ordinary players. Everyone can be part of the conversation. Here is a sampling of perspectives from professionals regarding new media and public relations:

Maddie Grant and Lindy Dreyer, speaking to thousands of association executives about the challenges of social media, discussed how people are "bonded by what your organization represents and care enough to talk to each other online." They comprise an "open community." Dreyer learned at a Blogworld conference that social media used for public relations was about building engagement year-round with people around your brand or organization. "The concept of Open Community challenges PR pros to work more collaboratively across the organization and empower more people to share more valuable information more often," she said, adding that public

relations firms are used to controlling the message and the (traditional) distribution channels. “That’s just not realistic anymore. Nor is it scalable to Open Community.”

Stefanie Guzikowski, chief passion officer for Portsmouth-based E&G Public Relations, LLC (www.egpublicrelations.com): There is more news bandwidth that has created more competition to gain media attention. “This increased ‘noise’ in the marketplace means companies must cut through the clutter and attract attention by being far more creative, thoughtful and relevant,” she said. “It’s never been faster or easier to share information with a huge network of contacts, who can expand your reach by sharing the same information with their networks.”

Jamie Carracher, mynewsdesk.com, “The PR Pro’s Guide to YouTube,” April 21, 2011: “Video sharing sites like YouTube are an excellent way to break the ice because nothing online is as personal and human as video.”

Jason Baer, in his article, “Who wins the Struggle for Social Media Control?” writes: “When new tactics emerge, the purveyors of the historic methods circle, dodge and proclaim that their experience best positions them to manufacture this new elixir. It happened with radio. It happened with websites. . . . (It) is still happening with SEO and email. Social media is the new battleground.” (www.mpdailyfix.com)

CASE STUDY: Man Lives in IKEA

The YouTube world was comedian Mark Malkoff’s stage when he wanted to create a comedy bit from an IKEA store in Paramus, N.J. His request to live for a week in the recognizable big blue box store with the gigantic, yellow IKEA letters, was referred to the retailer’s public relations firm, Ketchum. Ketchum thought Malkoff’s week-long stay would support IKEA’s theme, “Home is the most important place in the world,” with a dose of humor.

Malkoff moved into an in-store “apartment” where he was allowed 24-hour access to film anything and everything, including interactions with customers and IKEA coworkers. Behind the scenes, Ketchum worked closely with IKEA to coordinate interviews, ensure clear messaging and anticipate possible issues. Over the course of the week, Malkoff’s team edited and posted 25 short videos of his adventures on MarkLivesinIKEA.com and YouTube — showcasing everything from IKEA’s furniture to its on-site restaurant in an entertaining, fun, positive light.

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—Jason Baer

As a result, the videos had nearly 1.5 million views, 15 million hits to MarkLivesinIKEA.com, and more than 382 million positive media impressions. Additionally, the N.J. store saw sales rise 5.5 percent and traffic to the IKEA website increased by 6.8 percent over the previous January. The campaign generated a return on investment of 3.5 cents per 1,000 impressions (CPM = 0.035), causing the client to herald the program as “the most successful PR/marketing campaign in IKEA U.S. history to date.” In 2009, PRWeek honored “Man Lives in IKEA” with the coveted Campaign of the Year Award as well as awards for Best Use of Online Media and Corporate Branding Campaign of the Year.

Source: http://www.ketchum.com/Man_Lives_in_IKEA

STRATEGIES FOR FACEBOOK

The staggering statistics for participation on Facebook would suggest the world’s largest social media site is a must tactic in one’s media strategy. What is often lost in the numbers, though, is that Facebook is a very personal space. Just because users “like” something doesn’t mean they like the information enough to share it. People still have to be motivated to share it. How do you do that? What incentives would encourage that kind of response? Users also can block information, block messages from “friends”; “unlike” something; and otherwise manage the flow of information. Of course, requests can be ignored or rejected.

The Facebook community is inundated with sites. Despite well-publicized instant successes, Facebook may not work for every idea, product or event. Jason Winocour, social and digital media practice leader at Hunter Public Relations in New York, said Facebook excels in building awareness and “stoking engagement,” but its power as a tool to drive sales is less than certain. “Too often, a Facebook strategy is built on the never-ending quest to acquire . . . likes, or likers,” not retention, he said. “For many companies and organizations, coupons and giveaways prime the pump for new liker acquisitions. But useful and entertaining content coupled with an open dialogue is what keeps likers engaged for the long haul.” The effectiveness of Facebook, Twitter and other social media sites, thus, must be researched and evaluated. In many cases, the success of social media as public relations strategies will depend on various aspects:

- Content
- Target audiences
- Search engine optimization (SEO)
- Integration with other social media and digital platforms

The decision on whether to use social media or how to use them in public relations begins with research. Will social media help reach a target audience? Are social media users predisposed to an idea or product? A common media strategy for social media is to target audiences that have something in common with the

client. If there is something in common between an audience and the client, there is a basis for a conversation using social media. Specific social media tools serve as tactics for engaging and interacting with an audience. Social media are built on **social networking**. Facebook and Twitter users join, friend, like and follow. Reciprocating is part of the nature of social media.

PLUG INTO THE PROCESS

Apply the PR Process (Chapter 3) when planning social media tactics. Measure results through impressions and outcomes. With social media, as with conventional media, it's possible to create great awareness about something. Yet, it's quite another thing to convert awareness into outcomes such as ticket sales, donations or changed behavior. Ultimately, people have to be motivated by the quality of the idea, a product or a cause or enticed by incentives to get them to act. Natural disasters are an example of when the speed of social media matches the urgency of need. Social media in such circumstances provide real-time information to inform emergency responders.

Retailers are also interested in getting consumers to act. They can use social media to distribute downloadable coupons to drive traffic to their “bricks-and-mortar” shops. They offer price incentives, either discounts or free shipping, for shoppers to buy online. This approach also works with websites and linked Web advertising, but commonly accelerates through social media. Quantifiable outcomes like sales can be tracked to judge the success of social media strategies. Companies used to be satisfied with measures such as “likes,” website click-throughs or number of YouTube video views. Increasingly, however, they want evidence that tactics generate behavioral outcomes such as sales, votes, donations, attendance at events or store traffic. Advertising and public relations can cost a lot of money and clients want proof they are getting results.

CASE STUDY: “Go Bananas After Dark”

Dole Fresh Fruit Co. of Westlake Village, Calif., a producer and marketer of fresh fruit and vegetables, spent the summer of 2010 promoting its “Buy a Bunch Lose a Bunch” campaign, encouraging banana lovers to eat more bananas to lose weight. Facebook friends could enter to win trips to Banana Beach in Belize. In mid-summer, Dole wanted to promote uses of bananas beyond their usual place with breakfast and expand uses to outdoor and evening dining. Its “Go Bananas After Dark” campaign, with the efforts of DGWB Advertising & Communications of Santa Ana, Calif., was expanded through cross-promotions with Char-Broil grills and Six Flags Entertainment Corp. Dole’s invitation for people to profess their love for bananas “after dark” was enhanced with recipes and grilling ideas. Radio spots and a Chiquita Brands International sticker design contest, subsequently noted in The New York Times Magazine, helped generate 195,000 fans on its Facebook page — they voted on the entries — to give them more than a half million. Food bloggers found their

own enthusiasm for the idea as well. As a result of all the attention, grilled bananas became a part of backyard grilling that summer, tailgating in the fall and baking during the holiday season. From the sticker design contest, 18 stickers were placed on bunches nationally and displayed on signage at Six Flags and elsewhere.

Craig Stephen, Chiquita's vice president for North America, said, "In the past, we didn't just choose to put an ad in Sports Illustrated and think we were going to cover everybody. Social media goes to a demographic that may under-consume our product, probably (ages) 18 to 35. We want to reach out and let them know what we can offer." Dole also took advantage of mobile media to promote events at 10 Six Flags parks throughout North America, from St. Louis to Montreal.

Dole and Six Flags used the banana stickers to promote in-park after-hours events. Patrons could download a special voucher on event dates and receive a wristband for an extra hour in the park on a designated night. They were treated to grilled bananas topped with whipped cream at Six Flags food locations. Bill Goldfield, communications manager for Dole, said the use of mobile media "allowed us the opportunity to offer meaningful content in real time in a manner consumers were able to digest while in the park that traditional print or Web content would not."

Sources:

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CONTENT

In conceiving a website, Bill Gates' comment "content is king," clearly applies. (Others are quick to chime in with "interface is queen.") With social media, the same adage applies. To have impact, content must be relevant. Personal content has its place on Facebook and Twitter, but professional communication on behalf of a client or with media must be relevant to a wider audience than casual friends and acquaintances. It should still, however, be something that one would be willing to say in person.

Toby Brown, Man Bites Dog

"This is a huge opportunity for PR to fill the void with rich content in the form of videos, images, info-graphics and audio that help to tell client stories in more ways, increasing the opportunities to get in front of, and engage audiences."

Graham Goodkind, founder of Frank PR:

"The dynamics of the industry are changing quickly. Great thinking will win out. . . . It is not so much about which type of media channel is the most important, it is about content and which idea is best."

Susan Cato

**senior director of Web and New Media
Strategies of CompTIA**

"You can't have a social media strategy without a content strategy."

The Chrysler Group invested tens of millions of dollars in 2011 Super Bowl commercials, expanding on its “Imported from Detroit” public relations campaign. Chrysler had momentum. However, an employee with New Media Strategies (NMS), a digital public relations and social media agency based in Arlington, Va., had access to Chrysler’s Twitter account and tapped a carefree tweet on March 9, 2011, announcing, “I find it ironic that Detroit is known as the #motorcity and yet no one here knows how to f***** drive.” The creator of the message was fired and, ultimately, the Chrysler Group ended its relationship with NMS.

Chrysler didn’t dodge the public relations nightmare from that tweet. They admitted the mistake using the hashtag (#motorcity), which allowed more people to see the actual tweet. In the “Twitterverse,” discussions can take sharp turns, and in this matter, followers wondered whether the firing of the perpetrator was justified. Chrysler joined the exchange, explaining why NMS (not Chrysler) fired the person.

CLEAR, FACTUAL, USEFUL, RELEVANT

All public relations messages should be clear, factual, useful and relevant. This is especially true for social media. They are instant media that have given birth to many inexcusable and unforgiving moments. When it comes to representing clients, practitioners must not be careless, convey trivial information or share opinions that will create embarrassment and have to be retracted.

Social media, however, does need to interest and engage. Sarah Skeriki, blogging about “Integrating Social Media into Public Relations” (Aug. 9, 2011) wrote: “Building interactions with your content – getting people to like, share and comment on the things your organization posts – is where the Facebook magic happens. Those liking and sharing interactions can trigger viral distribution of your message. People won’t like or share boring things, however, so sharing good stuff is an imperative.”

Some ways to engage publics on various platforms include posting questions, polls, artwork and relevant links to other sources. How often one should post is more art than science. The conventional wisdom may be to post three to four times per week to keep followers interested. Social media, however, are instantaneous and require practitioners to continuously evaluate the expectations of the community. Some researchers believe that posts outside business hours have high engagement rates. Since digital media are global, audiences in different parts of the world are using social media at different times. Many companies try to monitor and engage with audiences around the clock using personnel in different countries.

Rich Brooks, president of Flyte New Media, encourages practitioners to know “what your customers, audience or community want to talk about” and “be willing to engage in those conversations.” He takes into consideration the various platforms for conducting those conversations. A Twitter widget on a site or a blog is a useful and easy way to get new content posted to various platforms. Though platforms can be linked, people do have preferences, if not favorites, for where they “hang out” online. “Know where your audience wants to have these conversations,” Brooks says.

As with all public relations campaigns, success must be measurable. Some topics will resonate more greatly than others. By mining Twitter for followers in real time via its search function, PR practitioners can find out what people are saying about someone, a company, its products or services. For campaigns geared toward driving traffic to or creating awareness for eateries, stores or events, the world of apps and such social media sites as foursquare and Yelp! that benefit from Global Positioning Systems (GPS) technology, are growing in popularity.

Websites such as eBay, Amazon and Craigslist are well-branded in the consciousness of shoppers. New social media and online sites arise continuously. Two examples that take advantage of mobile devices are SocialTwist (www.socialtwist.com) and Convio (www.convio.com). SocialTwist creates a referral network referred to as “customer advocates” to help relay product deals and other marketing messages to on-the-go customers. By August 2011, SocialTwist boasted partnering with 100,000 brands and 4.8 million users involved in offers and content sharing.

Convio works with nonprofit organizations to help cultivate relationships with such constituents as donors, activists, volunteers and alumni. Its blog, Connection Café (www.connectioncafe.com), shares insights from Convio employees on how it helps constituents address issues concerning fundraising, outreach and advocacy. Donors, for example, can react immediately to a disaster by donating through their smartphones.

TARGET AUDIENCES

Social media unites and reunites people. It permits groups to build communities. They can be open-ended or organized as a close-ended group, in which one must be accepted. They unite people who share an idea or have something in common — family members throughout the world or long-lost high school friends. One of the authors of this textbook routinely communicates on social media with friends and relatives from Alaska to Norway to Saudi Arabia. Google+ allows users to place individuals in circles for targeted communication.

For public relations planners, it is important to determine whether targeted audiences use social media, why and how. Are these platforms used to share information and ideas or to network? Which audiences use which social media? Some people want entertainment, news, updates from friends or sports.

In a survey conducted for The Sports Business Journal, Catalyst Public Relations found that “three-quarters of fans want athletes to engage with them directly through social media.” Kevin Sullivan Communications of Washington, D.C., said social media, primarily Twitter, provides a “productive connection” with fans, sponsors and potential fans and sponsors. The following strategic ideas are useful with any use of social media for public relations campaigns. Sullivan provides several examples of how social media can be applied to public relations. He advises:

- Engage with your followers
- Be insightful and entertaining
- Put a spotlight on community service

Fans of celebrities in the sports and entertainment world will find insights in the lives of these people. Particularly appealing to reporters and bloggers are expressions of frustrations, delight or general announcements. Sullivan points out that Twitter gives celebrities a method to engage in a dialogue with their fans. Amar'e Stoudamire (@Amareisreal) polled his followers on which model of Nike shoes he should wear. Linebacker Kirk Morrison (@kirmorrison55) asked his followers to vote on which T-shirt he wore every day during training camp. Yankees favorite Nick Swisher (@nickswisher), a major leaguer with more than a million followers and Matt Duchene (@Matt9Duchene) retweet messages from their followers on request. One-time New York Jets quarterback Mark Sanchez (@Mark_Sanchez) used videos and images from "Jets West" workouts in California to keep 400,000 Twitter followers engaged to his Facebook page in the face of a possible NFL lockout. Oakland Raiders tight end Kevin Boss (@KevinBossman) shared behind-the-scenes information about his workout routine, tweeting: "Getting mentally prepared for my Saturday sled workout . . . pulling a 60lb sled for 30yds and 50x's." The shorthand works within Twitter's 140-character limit.

Such messages, and there are countless others by thousands of athletes and entertainers, are fertile for retweeting and prompt abundant replies and comments. So prominent and prevalent is this activity that Sean Payton, head coach of the New Orleans Saints, said every tweet "is a one-minute press conference."

"TWEET WITH A PURPOSE"

Most professional athletes — many college athletes, too — and other celebrities understand the value of financially supporting community activities or lending their names to causes. They often communicate these interests through social media. While fans generally love their teams and have their favorite players, they also tend to look toward them with disdain in the face of contract disputes, work stoppages, and increased prices for tickets, souvenirs and concessions. Owners and players can soften ill feelings through community engagement.

Social media give the public a chance to share thoughts and connect directly with their heroes. For players and teams, social media provide ways for them to express gratitude and humility and for fans to answer back. Of course, they can also share their displeasure when matters turn negative. In that case, they can vent frustration and match wits with other cynics. Sullivan says, "Thanking the fans for their support never gets old." He writes that Drew Brees (@drewbrees), the Super Bowl champion quarterback with the New Orleans Saints, never fails to thank his 500,000-

plus followers for their support. He also emphasizes his dedication to improve his performance, and shares credit for his success with his teammates and his coaches. He uses various social media platforms to promote the good works of the Brees Dream Foundation and the President's Council on Physical Fitness.

Reggie Bush (@reggie_bush), the Heisman Trophy winner from the University of Southern California, tweeted about returning his Heisman Trophy after revelations concerning recruiting violations with him at the University of Southern California. Despite the general public's desire to tweet trivial, 140-character messages, Brees, Bush and other sports figures and celebrities exemplify what Rich Gotham, president of the Boston Celtics, means when he says, "If you're going to tweet, tweet with a purpose."

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION



Digital media, like earlier forms of media, face competition. A strategy used to drive traffic to websites and add followers on social media is called **Search Engine Optimization**, often shortened to "**optimization**" or SEO. Optimization builds on the power of search engines. The more a site appears as a search result, the more attractive it will become to visitors. Cody Moya, a blogger with www.freeinternetmarketingcourses.com, writes that when customers can't find a company online, the business goes bankrupt. "You need to get ahead of your competition and stay ahead.

Now is the time to prepare for the future before it's too late," Moya writes.

Among the popular ways to optimize a website are to edit content to use specific, relevant **keywords** and to share links with other relevant sites. Websites are enhanced with icons called **widgets** that connect users to a myriad of social media platforms. Using the algorithmic language of the Internet, the digital world uses **spiders** and **web crawlers** to find **tags** and keywords that will boost visibility. Search engines use "spidering" as a means of finding data. Web crawlers create a copy of all visited pages for processing through search engines. The information is indexed to facilitate searches. Crawlers also check links and validate codes. Searches that yield the message, "Page Not Found" show the work of crawlers.

STAYING ALERT

Organizations want to know what is being said about them. There are numerous alert systems, many of them free, that help monitor topics, sources and influencers.

They scour news and blogs and deliver them regularly to an email address. This strategy can continually build on a community. Public relations practitioners and client organizations need to study, evaluate and understand these results. The results can build both the community and the conversation. Actions strategically taken to boomerang visibility from one platform to another are part of the SEO process. In other words, conversations can be expanded by helping to move them from one social media platform to others. People interested in a particular topic probably use a variety of social media platforms, so it is wise not to rely on only one if the audience is gathering in several places.

Facebook, which logs tens of billions of pieces of content every year — links, notes, photos and video — is gaining in popularity as a medium for *sharing* content over producing new content, excluding status updates. The Global Web Index indicates that Facebook membership in the United States may be reaching a saturation point with behavior “shifting into a more passive usage.” Visitation remains high, GWI indicates, but users are doing less in terms of creating content versus sharing existing content. The exceptions seem to be an increase in posting images and video to profiles. John Bell, writing about “The Digital Influence Mapping Project,” said people are looking for “great stuff” to pass along. “We call this the rise of the ‘transmitter ecosystem.’”

Some people believe social media is racing past the world of SEO. As long as there are search engines and websites, though, SEO is an important booster for driving Web traffic. Various SEO experts have made a concise list of Do’s and Don’ts in this area, among them:

- Strive for great content, headlines and html tags. Caveat: Do not misrepresent your site.
- Create keywords that people commonly use in their searches. Don’t use too many keywords. This practice, known as “stuffing,” may get a site identified as a spam site.
- Use keywords on each page of your website. Use four to six keyword references in the text.
- Use URL architecture that a search engine will read more easily than one that is filled with all sorts of punctuation and other code. For example, Google prefers hyphens (-) over underscores (_).
- Keywords should be used for images and image filenames.
- Add the company address and phone number on every page to enhance opportunities to gain Google map attention.
- The overall website should be easy to navigate.
- Boost the number of links to your website. Google considers such links as endorsements of your site. They add to your site’s reputation. Conversely, links to notorious spam sites have the opposite effect.
- Do not duplicate website pages.
- Don’t have pages that redirect visitors to another page. If a webmaster is trying to trick a search and get visitors redirected, a website might find itself banned.
- Be careful not to submit your URL to search engines multiple times during a day. You may get bumped for over-submitting your URL.

CASE STUDY: American Airlines 30th Anniversary of AAdvantage loyalty program “Tweet to Win 30K Miles”

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American Airlines created a Twitter contest to salute three decades of its AAdvantage awards program. Its “Deal 30” campaign involved 30 partner deals and promotions during 30 weekdays. The AAdvantage team created a microsite that promoted a new daily partner deal or promotion — the Twitter contest occurred on the fourth day of the promotion. Participants had to register their AAdvantage number on a microsite, tweet the #Deal30 hashtag and follow the @AAdvantage account to enter for a chance to win 30,000 AAdvantage miles. The

campaign was promoted primarily through AAdvantage and American Airlines social media channels. The goal was to drive traffic to the Deal 30 microsite to increase buzz for the remaining deals and to attract new Twitter followers for the @AAdvantage Twitter account.

Within one week, the microsite’s link gained nearly 18,000 clicks via Twitter, and the @AAdvantage Twitter account experienced a 70 percent increase in followers. Overall, retweets on Twitter increased 43 percent and the Deal 30 microsite received more than 27,000 entries.

Source: Swallow, E., 7 Twitter Marketing Campaigns to Learn From, posted July 6, 2011, <http://mashable.com/2011/07/06/twitter-campaigns/>

CASE STUDY: Network Solutions: “GoDaddy Parody Super Bowl Media Blitz”

Commercials have long been a focal point of the Super Bowl. So anticipated are the often wild and wacky commercials that the commercials have gained a media life of their own. In recent years, companies who’ve paid millions of dollars for spots have gained a massive bounce in advance of the NFL championship game by previewing commercials on YouTube and other social sites. In 2011, Network Solutions, the registry for domain names, used the Super Bowl to promote its .CO product offerings and detract attention from competitor GoDaddy’s Super Bowl media blitz (<http://networksolutions.com/video>). Network Solutions used a \$200,000 budget to spoof GoDaddy’s infamous Super Bowl commercials with the hope of winning attention on Twitter among social media influencers. GoGranny’s “the original domain girl” was countered with a series of “mockumentary vignettes,” featuring Academy Award-winner Cloris Leachman.

In just five days, the campaign attracted more than 3,500 tweets and received nearly 20 million impressions across Twitter, reports its agency, CRT/tanaka. Sanjay Gupta, head of marketing for Network Solutions, said the company's 500 percent increase in .CO domain sales was attributed to the GoGranny splash from social media channels and promotional pricing. On top of that, #GoGranny became a trending topic in Washington, D.C., and top influencers who tweeted about GoGranny. Shashi Bellamkonda, director of social media and PR at Network Solutions, said, "Twitter is extremely helpful for generating buzz around an online social media campaign, but it needs support from other social outlets as well." Network Solutions actually launched its video on the Friday of Super Bowl Weekend on its website, Facebook page, YouTube channel, blog properties and Twitter streams, along with its online banner ads. Following a three-day social media blitz GoGranny Cloris Leachman was crowned a social media "sweetheart."

Sources:

<http://about.networksolutions.com/site/network-solutions'-go-granny-campaign-wins-big-with-social-media-by-increasing-sales-500-percent/>

Swallow, E., 7 Twitter Marketing Campaigns to Learn From, posted July 6, 2011, <http://mashable.com/2011/07/06/twitter-campaigns/>

"Twitter is extremely helpful for generating buzz around an online social media campaign, but it needs support from other social outlets as well."

—Shashi Bellamkonda

CASE STUDY: H1N1 "Swine Flu"

In 2009, fears about H1N1 "swine" flu necessitated the release of information from the government, including details about risks and ways to protect individuals and families. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention tapped experts in its Influenza Division for information. Among the informational products from the CDCP was "Symptoms of H1N1 (Swine Flu)," which attracted more than 2.1 million views. It ranked in the top two videos across YouTube in the news and science category. Eventually, 32 videos covering H1N1 topics would be produced, attracting 3.13 million viewers. H1N1-related podcasts were viewed 2.67 million times. The CDC used Twitter to deliver real-time updates during the 2009 outbreak. The CDCFlu and CDCemergency and CDCeHealth Twitter accounts attracted a following of 1.28 million users.



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CASE STUDY: Rev up the Accordion

McDonald's sought the creative counsel of MWW Group to launch its Spicy Chicken Sandwich in New York. In addition to inviting media to taste the product, MWW created the world's largest Chicken Dance contest. The result was more than 18 million hits in less than a week on YouTube. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OFayPSM3I-A>

Source: http://www.mww.com/case_studies.php?id=8

CONCLUSION

Most public relations clients today recognize the need for a digital media strategy. Digital provides tools and platforms that practitioners can control. Traditional media, such as television and print media, involve gatekeepers (journalists) who control access to audiences. Social media, alternatively, give public relations practitioners and clients direct access to audiences. To optimize the marketing of messages, practitioners must identify multiple and specific target audiences and create content that is interesting, valuable, even newsworthy. Ideally, content must attract the masses much the way P.T. Barnum (of circus fame) pitched stunts that were never before seen. For example, hilarious or adorable YouTube clips often go viral or the narratives around Super Bowl commercials become a major focus of the football game promotion. A good idea or piece of content then gains leverage as it appears on various platforms — from Facebook, Twitter, podcasts, video, other news and social media channels — through links and apps. The goal is to grow a community of people who want and use and share the content.

The power of new media is its interactivity, the world's ability to share with a click or touch on a screen. Good content encourages people to join a conversation. On Twitter, for example, a good strategy is to follow others who share mutual interests. Blogs expand the reach of content through keywords, words that characterize the content's subject matter.

The digital platform is evolving. The next iteration may be tomorrow or next month. Public relations practitioners are valuable for their knowledge and experience with media — all media. They must understand traditional media like newspapers, magazines or television, as well as newer media such as the Web or social media. Public relations practitioners must apply public relations thinking — creative, strategic thinking — to the currents of media, and like a top-caliber surfer, be ready to catch the next technological wave.

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CHAPTER EXERCISES

1. Choose any subject or issue and create a blog. Develop content for it and a strategy to build an audience for it.
2. Take the same subject or issue and create content and promote it using two social media platforms.
3. Write an evaluation of your blog and other platforms, assessing successes and shortcomings in using new media for your subject.
4. Participate in five different online chats and discuss the benefits or detriments of this experience.
5. Name five news events from the past six months in which Twitter has played a major role in supplying news and other information.

Name _____ Date _____

QUESTIONS

1. What should be done to create or maintain a following on either Twitter or Facebook?
2. Why is it important to incorporate new media in an overall media strategy?
3. What role do journalists working for conventional media play in the world of digital media?
4. Discuss three reasons why a social media strategy is crucial in formulating a crisis communications plan.
5. Give three examples of how organizations celebrating anniversaries use social media to create awareness for their milestone.