

## **Research on Social Media**

### **Purpose and Objectives**

Through this project we are trying to better understand the role of social media in PR and its effects on the practice. The purpose of our research is to understand the challenges social media has presented to the operation of PR and how organizations are adapting to this change. We want to learn if PR professionals believe social media is a long term or just a fad that will eventually burn out.

#### Objectives:

- To discover how social media is used in PR campaigns
- To examine how social media responsibilities are structured in a company
- To understand how social media effects are measured and its challenges
- To see the future of PR based on social media

### **Methodology**

The method we used to gather our information was interviewing. We interviewed four people that were involved in the communication and PR departments for their organizations or companies. We interviewed Brad Borghetti, Chris Freet, Elizabeth Edwards, and Davina Gold. Brad is an assistant communications director for the University of South Florida's baseball and women's soccer, Chris is the assistant director of USF athletics and communications, Elizabeth is the public relations director for a full-service marketing agency, called the Zyne agency, and Davina works with social media for Stetson law school. The interview with Brad was conducted on October 15 at 11:00am and the interview with Chris was at 12:30pm that afternoon. Elizabeth was interviewed on October 13 and Davina was interviewed on October 28. Each interview lasted approximately five to ten minutes. We used tape recorders and a recording device on the computer to support the interviews.

### **Results**

**Organizations are on multiple social media websites in attempt to connect with and provide information for fans or potential customers.**

- "We are on Facebook, Twitter, Digg, and we're on YouTube." – Chris
- "We have used Twitter, Facebook, and Myspace in campaigns to promote events and for networking and achieving e-mail lists" – Elizabeth
- "It's a way to interact directly with fans and it's another avenue to get information out to our fans" – Chris

**Social media is used not just for specific campaigns, but for the good of the organization as a whole.**

- "I wouldn't say specifically we use them in campaigns but we use them in everything" – Chris

- “We have done a certain campaign centered around social media but we have used it in most of our things” – Davina Gold

**Social media responsibilities are designated to multiple people throughout the organizations’ departments.** There are teams and groups developed to collaborate ideas and work on social media.

- “All of our communication and marketing departments have used social media and have access to it. It’s not just one person” – Brad
- “Our whole communication staff has access to all of our areas” – Chris
- “I do have access, and I also have an online communication specialist that is basically a web editor who also contributes constantly to our social media sites” – Davina

**Social media websites offer metrics that measure whether a message is successfully reaching the public, however there is still not a definite method to confirm the success.** The amount of followers and fans helps gauge success, but does not completely determine the effects of social media.

- “I’d say for Facebook, it’s with the responses you get.” – Brad
- “Well that’s the great thing about Twitter and Facebook, is that they provide metrics within them. The easiest metric is followers and friends and fans.” – Chris
- “We have not taken extensive measures to analyze the success of social media because it is basically free advertising for which there is not true accurate measurement” - Elizabeth

**Social media presents many challenges because it’s new and is still continuing to evolve.**

- “I think the challenge is to be effective, like you’re trying to stay cut, to be the first.” – Brad
- “Anytime there is something negative and you are opening up the door to fans to post, there’s the possibility that a recruit or fan is going to see a negative stance on anything” – Chris
- “I think because it’s so new and sometimes there’s not a baseline to compare it to.” – Davina

**Professionals believe that social media in general will be a long lasting tool in the future, but some websites will lose their appeal.** Social media will continue to prosper as it appeals to many different audiences and makes the delivery of messages to specific audience members easier.

- “I do think as older or different generations and just different age groups are getting into it, and the younger generations on up keep going, it will sustain and have a longer life” – Brad

- “You just have to look at Facebook which just started as college students. My grandmother’s on it now. If it can resignate with the elderly and with 18 year olds, clearly it’s apart and will become apart of everybody’s lives” – Chris
- “I believe it’s short term and long term, because there are constantly new sites being produced for the use of social media, but only two have been survived thus far” – Elizabeth
- “I think perhaps the individual tools to be a little bit of a fad, like MySpace is kind of going out in terms of being mainstream, but the ideas that are behind it are going to keep evolving” – Davina

## **Conclusion**

After conducting the necessary research, it is safe to say that each of our interviewee’s agree that social media devices, such as Facebook and Twitter, are useful in their public relations campaigns, and are here to stay in main stream media. While some of these networking sites are still relatively new, and other’s not as popular, they are a great way to keep track of how many “fans,” “friends” or “followers” a company has keeping up with them. Social media sites are not limited to specific age groups; most sites are user friendly and provide universal incentives for obtaining memberships – social networking. Social networking helps develop positive relationships between a company and its publics. Having that type of positive rapport can only be beneficial for business or organizations in the long run.

## **Appendices**

### **Brad Borghetti**

**Assistant Communications Director for USF baseball and women’s soccer**

*So we’re doing a project on social media. So we wanted to know what forms of social media you’ve used in campaigns and what were your results with that?*

We’ve used Fitter, I mean, we’ve used Twitter, Facebook. We’ve used Dig, which is kind of a, it’s more, like journalistic, social media, it goes more out to there. I think it’s been well received. I think it’s interesting to see how it will sustain. Like, if it’s just a fad or will it really, you know, turn into something long term. So I think uh, we really don’t know how it, but it seems to be something that’s growing. And it’s growing to a lot of age groups, different age groups.

*That was one of our questions. Do you think social media will be long term or a fad? Why would you say it’s just a fad or long term?*

As of right now, I think it will be a little more long term. Like, will it die out? Yes, but I think it will still be there. Um, I don’t think, or I do think as like older or different generations and just different age groups are getting in to it, so the more, or as long as the younger generations on up keep doing it, it will sustain and have a longer life.

*How did you decide when to use social media in a particular campaign? Or why did you chose to, or did you think it was necessary for it?*

Well I would say for Facebook, it's a great way to communicate. I would think, I don't know the exact numbers, but, I would say that USF's campus has probably close to or over 90 percent of undergraduates are there, or on it. So I think it's a great way to connect with them and bring them information.

*How did you designate social media interactions throughout your team? Are you the only one who works on the social media?*

No, basically it's the whole department. All of our say, communication and marketing department, used it and we all have access to it. So no, it's not just one person.

*How has social media changed the dynamics of your team's goals? Maybe, is it easier or has it helped you reach more people?*

Absolutely, I think, I don't know if there is a direct correlation to it, but I don't think it hurts. I think it can only help, if that's what you're asking. I think that you know, you might reach out maybe to one extra person but you still did, so obviously that's one person that you've reached out to. I think athletically, you know, coaches have embraced it. Now will it sustain with coaches? Probably not. But for us, its something vital that we can – that can help us, draw interest, create excitement. I think recently, like with this past week, you know, it's something it's just something that's there in the back of people's mind. You know, it's just a reminder that well "go green, go gold". Did you see this? Did you see what so-and-so had to say? I think it just supplements. You know, it's just another avenue.

*What forms of measurement do you use to evaluate the success of social media? Would it be how many people you reach, or how do you know that it's working for you?*

I'd say for Facebook in with just the responses you get. When you see all these people, you know, either following you or your fans and when you see there's interaction. You start to see there's a two way street. You know, when you send something out to them, and they're responding back, I think people are taking advantage of it and are enjoying it too.

*Are there any challenges of social media? How do measure if it's doing okay?*

I think the challenge is to be effective, like you're trying to stay cut, to be the first. You know, just take it that next step and find what toy or that next tool you can use. Is it, you know, getting video, what will get them excited to keep coming back? That's the challenge.

*How do you think social media has changed PR?*

That's a good question. It is – it's open it up a lot. You know, I think before there might have been strict avenues on what you can do. But now it just opens up, you know, you aren't just targeting one group. It's to everyone. It's a much, it's a simpler avenue. And you know, I just think before it might have been just a bit complex and not everyone would have taken advantage of it. But like I said, it's just a simple avenue.

**Chris Freet**  
**Assistant Director of Athletics/Communications**

*We're doing a project on social media and we wanted to know what forms of social media you've used in campaigns and what were the affects?*

I wouldn't say specifically we use them in campaigns but we use them in everything. We just use them in everything. We're on Facebook, Twitter, Dig. We are not on MySpace. We're on YouTube. I think that's it for right now.

*Why did you decide to use it or why did you think it was necessary?*

When I came in here two years ago, my thought process was we needed to take control of our news and take control of how that information was presented to our fans. You're never going to have complete control of it, but with the struggling state of newspaper business and media business in general there, is less and less avenues to get your message out. Before it used to be, you send out a press release and you let the media take care of it and it got to everybody. That's not the case anymore. People get their information off of Facebook, and never look at the Tampa Tribune website or a Tampa Tribune paper for example. So, it's a way to interact directly with fans and it's another avenue to get information out to our fans. Whether it be entertain purposes or what we think is vital news information, ticket sales, traffic alerts for football games for game day, that kind of stuff.

*How do you designate social media within the department? Is it one person?*

No, our whole communication staff has access to all of our areas. And then our marketing staff has access to it as well. I think that group will expand. Every thing kind of runs through me. We don't have written ground rules, but our guys know my general thinking on it. And I kind of lead the charge as to what gets pushed out but everyone has access to it.

*How do you measure or evaluate the success of using social media?*

Well that's the great thing about Twitter and Facebook is that they provide metrics within them. The easiest metric is followers and friends and fans. But, Facebook has a great insight area that has you know, tells you how many new fans have been added and how many fans have dropped you. It gives you trends automatically. There's resources like that for twitter, but you can just follow twitter through any of their aps and you can see see how often USF is being used, see how often Grothe is being used. And you can track

all that and you can track links as they go out, and see how many times people click on links, people look at pictures, twit pics, and all that kind of stuff.

*What are some of the challenges of using social media?*

Well the challenge for us as we are a PR wing of this university and we are the main PR wing of athletics and our coaches are recruiting 365 days a year. So anytime there is something negative and you are opening up the door to fans to post, there's the possibility that a recruit or fan is going to see a negative stance on anything. Whether it be a football game or a change in policy by the athletic department. You are always concerned that that's going to affect their view point on the university and is going to affect their decisions on coming and being a student athlete here.

*How has social media changed PR?*

It goes back to probably what I said in the beginning, that now we are trying to connect directly to fans. Before we wrote a press release, it was very dry and information heavy. And now we try and write news articles. Fans won't read a press release. There's plenty of research that shows attention span on the internet is short. They want to read something that's going to draw them in. So if we are just going to put press releases on our website, they aren't going to stay on our site. So we try to write differently, we try to interact directly with them and that's where it's really changed the most. We can get our message directly to the fans without any filter, without any opinion from a secondary source.

*Do you think social media is long term or just a fad?*

No, it's long term. I'm convinced of it. I mean, you just have to look at Facebook which just started as college students. My grandmother's on it now. My grandmother's addicted to it. If it can resonate with the elderly and with 18 year olds, clearly it's apart and will become apart of everybody's lives. It's just another form of communication that's become very useful, addictive, handy, all those adjectives.

**Elizabeth Edwards**  
**Communications for Dallas Bull**

*How have you used social media in PR Campaigns and what were your results?*

Have used social media (Twitter, Facebook, MySpace) in campaigns to promote events and for networking and achieving e-mail lists. Was successful in both aspects. Also currently using to implement new campaign at Dallas Bull, will keep you posted on results.

*Why did you decide social media was necessary in that particular campaign?*

Decided it was necessary because main demo of that venue is males and females ages 18 to 39, also many college students. Thought social media was the most up-to-date way to go.

*Who handles the social media part of campaigns? Is this expertise many people in your organization have or are there designated experts?*

Myself and the principle at my agency handle all social media aspects, unless it is necessary to include client's input.

*How has social media changed the dynamics of your team's goals?*

It has raised expectations of attendance at events. However, it has also made our clients feel that it is not necessary to advertise anywhere else (paid), which is not a good thing.

*How have you measure the success of social media in your campaigns?*

We have not taken extensive measures to analyze the success of social media because it is basically free advertising for which there is no truly accurate measurement.

*What are the challenges of measuring social media?*

Getting a truthful number. Example, 500 people say they are coming to event, how do you know who of those people actually showed up.

*How has social media changed PR?*

I personally don't like using social media, but I think it has changed PR for the better because it is a convenient way to reach targeted audiences.

*Is social media long term, or is it a fad? Why do you say that?*

I believe it is long-term and short-term, because there are constantly new sites being produced for the use of social media, but only two have survived thus far. Also, many people do not know how to use Twitter to their advantage, and make it a waste of time.

**Davina Gold**  
**Stetson Law School**

*Have you ever used social media in a campaign and if you did what were your results?*

Well we do have Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Flickr sites and we've integrated into a lot, pretty much anything that's public, we have just used it as another channel, just another media, the same way that we have media relations with newspaper, or any of the other places, this is more of our channel so we use it quite a bit. We have done a certain campaign centered around it but we have used it in most of our things.

*Why did you decide social media was necessary for that particular goal?*

Well because we are recruiting mostly undergrad student who are all on Facebook or on the other things and also a lot of our alumni, particularly young alumni, but we are getting, it is getting to be where older individuals are using it too, but it's just another way for us to reach our audiences where they are at, so it's just a natural fit, and it wasn't that time consuming to add to what we were already doing, so there weren't many downsides to doing it.

*Who handles the social media part of that?*

I do, and I also have an online communication specialist, basically a web editor who also contributes constant to all of our social media sites.

*Ok so it a team of people?*

Mostly the two of us, the other people in our office, our media relations person has the access and the passwords to it, but it's pretty much just the two of us that add the content to that as the opportunity arises.

*Has social media changed the dynamics of how you reach people or your goals?*

I think it's just supplemented to what we are already doing. It has changed it a little bit in that we can get more feedback from people. We can hear back from people so it is nice to be able to do that. We haven't done a lot of interactive stuff where it's been intentional. Like "tell us this or what do you think about this so far" through social media. We have had some surveys that we've used, that have been done that in a more formal way. But we do get interactions and people like what we post or they have comments and they tend to not be or they haven't yet been directed towards what we as an institution have been doing but more subject orientated. We have posted that we had new welcomes on our Facebook page. "Welcome to the 12 new students who just started their orientation today, and some of the alumni students

*How do you measure the success of social media campaigns or how it benefits your company?*

That's actually the part that I'm looking forward to with the FPRA. We've been able informally measure how many followers or fans we have but in terms measuring that with tangible revenue benefits, we haven't done that yet. We are looking into this next year for our law students to formalize that a bit more and really try and use the social networking and maybe creating our own network to allow us to answer questions and stuff like that online. So that when they come in they know who their classmates are and they already have answers to some of their questions. And maybe measure that in terms of how many people in the community, how many of them actually enrolled and became

students and did we get fewer calls to our office about orientation. This is how we can translate the intangible PR benefits.

*What do you think the challenges of finding that measurement are?*

I think because it's so new and sometimes there's not a baseline to compare it to, I'm actually fairly new in the management in the website and social media efforts, we didn't really measure before on our website. A lot of those measurement differences are outside of my office. Like how many people signed up and did they get a high percentage of people accepted and then enrolled. Trying to backtrack and trying to find out what things were like before social media. It's just trying to make things tangible will be the biggest challenge.

*How do you think social media has changed public relations?*

I'm sure in all of your books there's different models and the symmetric model of 2 way communication, but I think before you had to do surveys and more extensive things in order to get two-way to get what people wanted, instead of just sending out your message. I think social media makes that a lot easier and makes it practical and get more of an immediate interaction with the people you are trying to contact. I think it's a big fundamental change and an exciting one.

*Do you think this is long term, the effects of social media?*

I think perhaps the individual tools be a little bit of a fad, like MySpace is kind of going out in terms of being main stream but the ideas that are being it are going to keep evolving. I don't think its going to disappear in terms of the people like being able to communicate with their companies, but I think some of the stuff that companies are creating and people using thousands of dollars trying to build relationship. They are building a lot of friends and keeping on contact. I think when you have Starbucks or a TV show, there is only so much people want to engage with those fans. But I think some of that might be a fad. There's only so much people want to hear about it. I think that kind of thing will change. Overall, I think it will still be out there.

## **Interview Guide**

The purpose of our study is to better understand the role of social media in PR and its effects on the practice.

Objectives:

- To discover how social media is used in PR campaigns
- To examine how social media responsibilities are structured in a company
- To understand how social media effects are measured and its challenges
- To see the future of PR based on social media

Interview Questions:

1. How have you used social media in PR Campaigns and what were your results?
2. Why did you decide social media was necessary in that particular campaign?
3. How did you designate social media interactions throughout your team? Is this an expertise that many people in your organization have or are there designated experts?
4. How has social media changed the dynamics of your team's goals?
5. What form of measurement do you use to evaluate the success of social media?
6. What are the challenges of measuring social media?
7. How has social media changed PR?
8. Is social media long term, or is it a fad? Why do you say that?

Interview Project  
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