

Winter Roundtable for Higher Education Results & Conclusions

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Results of Our Higher End Roundtable

On January 15th, 2010 we gathered together 15 IT Directors, Marketing Directors, and Web Managers from various colleges in a roundtable to discuss issues pertaining to Content Management and Social Media. We discussed specific strategies, as well as best practices, and overall issues of change management, organizational growth and mission, leadership, and making due with limited resources.

Thank you all for your input; it was super valuable to everyone there!

Here are some of the exciting things we learned:

- 1 **You are not alone**, and your challenges are valid!
- 2 **There's an infrastructure gap** between the haves and the have-nots
- 3 **Language is the building block**
- 4 **Social Media WILL find your institution** and can't be controlled, only directed
- 5 **The biggest social media successes happen "on the sly"**; if you do it right, you will scare people
- 6 **Branding and staffing are the two biggest web challenges** everyone faces
- 7 **Staffing needs are surprisingly similar** for all sizes of organizations, once the infrastructure is in place

Have and Have Nots

Attendees in the Roundtable room were fairly evenly split into two major categories: **fighting fires** and **future thinking**. The most fascinating thing to us as outsiders when looking at these organizations is how all organizations have about the same level of STAFFING; the big difference is that some organizations have the INFRASTRUCTURE to get more done.

Fighting Fires

These organizations tend not to have a content management system (CMS). At most, they use programs like Contribute. The institutions in this category that do have a CMS tend to need significant IT support to use it effectively.

- Challenges:**
- Maintaining current pages
 - Adding a page or a site
 - Updating navigation
 - Who "owns" the home page (or any page for that matter)
 - WAY too much stuff everywhere, but especially on the home page

Future Thinking

None of the issues above tend to be significant stumbling blocks for organizations in this category. They tend to have acceptable photo assets and a *fairly* up-to-date website. It wouldn't put an undue burden on them to roll out a new "subsite" with 10-20 pages with only a week's notice, assuming there is some copy to work from.

- Challenges:**
- Getting more people around campus involved with Social Media (see notes on Social Media below)
 - Keeping momentum on keeping things up to date
 - Improving the tone and substance of web copy
 - Improving user flow
 - Better use of Analytics
 - Appropriate use of new technologies (iPhone, text messaging, Flickr, etc.)

Language as a Building Block

“It all comes down to the English Language” – Kathy Wroblewski, Bay Path College

One common challenge everyone faces is content (text and images). When it comes to the written word there is the added complication of needing the content to be webcentric. A few people shared tips that worked well for them (see **Appendix A: Additional Content Management Notes** for more!):

- Set expectations ahead of time that web marketing will be different than print marketing
- Have a template for each department to help keep formatting consistent within
- Content management system formatting limitations can be a good thing
- Get allies (alumni, parents, students) in selling web marketing, and repeat the message until it's heard
- Instill ownership (don't get buy-in without commitment, if possible)
- Decide which one person in each department will be in charge of content
- Hire a photographer to take good shoots of smiling people to make prospective students feel they'll fit in

Content Management Notes & Tips

Content Tips

- 1 every content contributor should read at least the first two books listed below:
 - a. **Letting Go of the Words**, *writing web content that works*, by Janice Redish
 - b. **Don't Make Me Think**, *a common sense approach to web usability*, by Steve Krug
 - c. Writing Copy for the Web in a Week, by Nigel Temple
- 2 set expectations ahead of time that this will be different than print marketing
- 3 have “content parties” (with food!)
- 4 look at the average time people spend on a page on your website, then sit down with somebody who has written WAY too much text for a page, and time them reading it. When you get to the average time people spend on a page, stop them to illustrate the point.
- 5 have a template for each department to help keep formatting consistent within each
- 6 the stronger messaging your school has, the easier you can focus your content. (e.g. MCLA was having trouble defining a liberal arts education to first generation college students, so they simplified it to “It’s what employers want.”)
- 7 give resistant people one-on-one attention and support
- 8 hire a good photographer to take GOOD shoots of smiling people.

Social Media

Going rogue on the sly

The organizations in our roundtable that had the most success with Social Media and new technology had a few things in common:

- Very forceful web managers who weren't afraid to put their neck on the line
- “Just do it” mentality that wasn’t hampered by questions like “what is social media?” and “where do we start?”
- Ability to bounce back from failures (\$5K in advertising for 0 results) in order to have successes (\$500 in advertising to fill an entire summer session of empty classes)

Some realistic next steps people are taking NOW

- get control of youtube, facebook
- try to work with admissions to move things forward
- do something now
- oversee and guide (vs. control)
 - enable more people to do social media “on their own” (e.g. use Wordpress for blogs)
- educate higher ups from lots of directions at once
 - encourage alumni and students to petition for social media
- think outside of the web
 - do text messaging via radio stations (like Westwood Metro One in Boston)
- generate more multimedia content on our own by recruiting students with cameras to generate photos
- put candid messages / lectures on iTunes (e.g. have faculty record their favorite lectures, be brief and vibrant)
- use media in better ways (audio rather than video for “talking head” presentations)

Success Stories

"We were lucky, a student made a site for orientation last year, and they let us post on it. Admissions saw it and loved it and now they're asking for us to do it for them." - Deirdre Chonail, Clark University

Admissions and the Administration weren't ready for social media, and the Clark web team was overloaded, so some prospective students took their online space and ran with it completely unmoderated. **An administrator's nightmare, but a web manager's dream.**

Here are some of the other success stories people shared:

- getting 4 times as much interest through social media than through our website
- highlighting low-enrollment summer classes and filling them up via targeted Facebook ads
- establishing community early on (retention)
 - starting summer reading conversations early, online
 - using student photos with our branding on Facebook—students tag themselves and share them
- using texting to reach prospective parents (20% text open rate vs. 6% email open rate)
- students blogging about their REALLY cool internship experiences.
- using podcast of songs from regional bands to listen to on the drive to open houses (cross-promotion)
- iphone friendly site: good for internal use (check laundry, gym availability, cafeteria lines, etc.)
- iphone receipt page: good for external use (sending to parents, includes directions, etc.)

Appendix A: Additional Content Management Notes

Getting it done

How do you get buy-in?

- compare “our site” to a “good site”
- tie into development, show value of website “giving back”
- do a page audit
- use MCLA case study:
 - applications up 65% since their new website
 - traffic went from <1,000 per day to 7,000 per day
 - repeat visitor rate is way up
- keep telling people over and over
 - get allies in selling the web. If Alumni, parents, and prospective students all tell your president something, she'll listen more than if it's just you.

How do you work with not enough staff, not enough interest, or not enough training?

- Instill ownership (don't get buy-in without commitment, if possible)
- Decide which one person in each department will be in charge of content
- have them report to main web content manager

Other observations:

- message gets diluted the farther out you go from original trainers
- good web copy makes editors who are familiar only with print uncomfortable, emotional
- simpler to approve all sites before they go live, harder to monitor maintenance & updates.
 - Technology doesn't solve this problem, as the "reminders" get overwhelming.
- some departments will want to “do their own thing” (library and athletics)
 - don't waste your time fighting them.
- content management system formatting limitations (like in gsCMS) can be a good thing
- well done pages bring more traffic to their department
- it's really hard to detach people from a print mentality
- it's hard to keep print and web content parallel and up to date with each other
- google analytics as a tool, plus marketing and goal oriented people, equals a good combination for distilling data into good recommendations
- almost everyone in attendance agreed that their approval process for the web is not strict enough, but they also struggle with wanting more people to contribute more often (which requires less bottlenecks) and social media (forget approval on that one).
- website content and maintenance are pretty much all under the domain of marketing now (finally)
- all photo editors should be vetted for sales pieces, but anything can go up for internal audiences.
- In testing when presented with 10 printouts of websites, prospective students can easily pick the 3 that they think they'll fit in the best at just based on the photo choices. Have you made sure that yours is one of them?

What content management systems do we currently use?

gsCMS	Umass, MCLA, SCSU	iModules	Elms
Joomla	Umass	Dreamweaver	Umass
Ingeniux	Elms	Frontpage	Clark
Wordpress	Clark	Contribute	Landmark, Umass
Presto	Elms, MCLA		
Sitecore	Elms		

Appendix B: Social Media Notes & Tips

Getting it done

How do you get around getting buy-in?

- do social media “on the sly,” get creative
- present results rather than projections (increase in enrollment, event attendance, etc.)

how do you know where to start...and when to stop?

- technology is moving faster and faster – you don’t know what will stick around and what will change
- successes work best from the bottom up
- different social media is not necessarily interchangeable—set different goals for each type
- prioritize in terms of goals, and decide what the right staff team for each is
- start with one thing (e.g. myspace), move on (e.g. to facebook) when it doesn’t get results
- just do it, keep trying things out, have to embrace it

how do you stay in control of social media?

- negative stuff is ALREADY out there (externally); give people a place to also post positive things
- give your institution a way to RESPOND to negative things
- put up your own presence before somebody else does
- let go a little

Audience & Branding

- your audience isn't always up to date on technology
- text messages are good for audience who has cell phone but no computer
 - targeting parents with deadlines, open houses, etc.
 - targeting prospective students via text is NOT as successful as targeting their parents!
 - A lot of parents do NOT have computers/internet
- linkedin is good for alumni
- “go where they are”
- message has to be bold, unedited, unhindered, not “marketing speak”

other observations:

- social media cannibalizes your website, but this can be ok
- social media does mean duplication of effort
- social media lets you see what people are saying real-time
- personal connection is important
 - open houses
 - social media groups
- social media is technology cheap, time expensive