

The Jumpstart: Simple Social Media Beginnings

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The landscape is vast. The options are endless. How can you refine what role social media plays in your personal and professional life? How can we strike a balance of public promotion and personal privacy? How can we make social media meaningful? How do we get started? And most importantly, why should we participate as professionals in social media?

If you are looking for an excuse to begin being more intentional about social media, this is it. This is your jumpstart.

Step One: Professional/Personal – Take Stock

Take stock of what your community or membership needs. Do they need daily bursts of short content? Affirmation in the form of accolades or retweets? Do they need education? Determine what mediums will best suit your needs. Twitter is daily and needs to be monitored, but it gets major dividends in terms of engagement quickly. Facebook is a little more like a daily magazine, and other mediums have specific outcomes and opportunities. Take stock, and BE BRUTAL. Do not just leap after shiny new toys.

Step Two: Professional – Talk to your students.

You cannot engage in a dialogue online without a plan that is developed by, for, and in support of what your students need. I've seen Facebook accounts and Twitter accounts that clearly demonstrate that the "voice" of the account is administration driven. I don't think our students think the *Chronicle for Higher Education* is a priority. That said, I do not think students given free-administrative reign on any account is smart either. I suggest you do what marketing professionals do. Define four or five clear priorities, map out a monthly calendar, and develop resources that you think students/peers will benefit from.

Step Two: Personal – Set clear personal boundaries.

This should not be a list of no-no's for students. Instead lead a discussion about the boundaries of the account. Are you going to be more diligent in writing your blog? Keep from putting private inside jokes on your Twitter to be more inclusive? Give better, more thought provoking content? Make some personal commitments and give yourself over to the opportunities in social media.

Step Three: Professional – Prioritize.

Four simple steps to demonstrate a social media presence that is student success driven.

- *Educate.* Offer information/registration information/articles/video.
- *Inspire.* (Offer stories of success, TedTalks, Pinterest Pins or best practices)
- *Promote.* (Promote the organizations on your campus or the organization(s) your students have joined.)
- *Affirm.* (Affirm student leaders, peer organizations doing good, great behavior, or great ideas your students develop.)

Step Four: Professional/Personal – Execute and Evaluate

Just do it. Because this is social media 101, I am not going to suggest you look at analytics expecting to see data that blows your mind. I do think you should set simple goals and objectives related to content. Connect with people intentionally, and the quality of your social media conversations should improve. When working with students, be sure to focus on results that they have created. Affirm great strategy with more latitude and increased

sophistication. For example, develop a clear social media strategy to bring more students into the experience with posted blogs or Facebook statuses, tweets, etc. Get creative and offer resources to students to engage them.

Dynamic Best Practices

There are thousands of blogs, articles, tweets and infographics on making social media meaningful. Talking about mediums (a fancy word for social media tools like Facebook, Twitter, and Google+), to me, is not as effective as discussing the messaging. Mediums change. What you articulate on each medium and how you use messages to connect with other people is the good stuff. Here are some best practices for you to consider:

- **Your online personality should be authentic to you.**
Your political beliefs, perspectives, hopes and dreams are all an integral part of your online conversation, but keep it authentic and keep it simple. Are you an avid Pinterest fan? Love Twitter? Are you a check-in-aholic on Foursquare? Awesome. Just keep it real. Don't amplify your personal life to the point that you feel exposed. Remember, your private persona is still valuable.
- **See social media as an opportunity for you to learn.**
Do not get caught up in your follower or friend numbers; instead, focus on who you are reading and learning from. There are incredibly positive, challenging and critical content that emerges on social media. You can connect with The Chronicle (@chronicle), professional associations like AFA (@afa1976) and NASPA (@naspatweets), and umbrella organizations like the NIC (@nicfraternity) and NALFO (@officialNALFO) online. Articles, development opportunities, gatherings and jobs are all part of the dialogue and each has their own strategies.
- **Junk in, junk out.**
If you are following people who are negative, shallow, catty or difficult, you will see the social media landscape that way. Do yourself a favor. Learn how to mute, unfollow, unfriend and cut people out of the dialogue you create. Don't try to be everywhere at once, and be careful what you retweet or offer to others. The second you get online, you are curating your own life. Be true to your best self.
- **The social tool is your best friend.** Use simple systems like Hootsuite or Tweetdeck to check into your twitter feed, look at hashtags, and organize your tweets/schedule tweets. I am also a fan of Buffer. You can sign up for Buffer and "buffer" out articles that you are reading online. It's like Pinterest, but for Twitter. That way, you won't anger people who are following you for clogging up their feed. Do not, I repeat, do not think that you can tweet without downloading a system on your phone. Twitter was not designed for your desktop.
- **Do not co-post.**
If you are posting the same post from two accounts, posting on both Twitter and Facebook at the same time/with the same material, you are doing it wrong. Period.

Your voice is valuable, and the materials you promote contribute to the relationships you have on and offline. Be purposeful and intentional, and model the way for students you advise. Social media can have meaning, and must have meaning to ensure a longstanding connection to the fraternal values movement. Get intentional. Now, go forth and tweet.