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**Social Media Marketing Case Studies**

*Directions: Read the case studies and spend some time reflecting on how Stephanie Hardiman Simon and Alexander Flum use social media to market their publications*

1. As you read, annotate according to the following system:

* Underline ways that Stephanie and Alexander use social media to reach their audience.
* Highlight Stephanie and Alexander’s opinions on the benefits of social media.
* Put an exclamation point (!) next to anything that surprises you and explain WHY in the margin next to that paragraph.
* Put a question mark (?) next to anything you are unsure about or would like to discuss with others and explain WHY in the margin next to that paragraph.

***Background***

Stephanie Hardiman Simon holds a bachelor’s degree in journalism from Washington and Lee University (Va.) and a master’s degree in journalism from DePaul University (Ill.). She became interested in social media in college because of its’ value as a tool, “not just for disseminating information but also for connection with people and seeing what was going on real-time throughout the world.” She has worked as a social media marketer for the Chicago Tribune and the Better Government Association and is also involved with the News Literacy Project.

Alexander Flum is a senior at Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School in Rockville (Md.). He became interested in journalism as a 7-year old and became the sports editor of the CESJDS newspaper, The Lion’s Tale, by the end of his sophomore year. The same year, he also started a sports blog with two friends that surpassed 10,000 views within two years. Alexander was the 2014 web editor for The Lion’s Tale and headed up the publication’s live tweeting initiative for sporting events. He also ran a weekly sports webcast titled Sports Compass.

***Their Stories***

*Question: Describe the social media campaigns you’ve been a part of.*

**Stephanie**: “I've managed accounts for both TribLocal, the local reporting arm of the Chicago Tribune Media Group, and my current employer, the Better Government Association, a nonprofit watchdog news organization. Basically I've managed any and all social media interactions, including daily posting, Twitter chats, live-tweeting, etc. In my previous job, I dealt a little with reaching out to the public for tips, input, etc. via social media — they were big on creating community and conversation. We rely less on that at my current job where our organization is interested more in being a broadcaster than being a town square for conversation, but we do rely on social media from a marketing perspective, like to publicize an event we might have or solicit donations.”

**Alexander**: “As Lionstale.org editor-in-chief, I've been a part of many social media campaigns, most significantly the live broadcast we held of our school's rivalry game for basketball. I tweeted at and wrote articles about a lot of the boys varsity basketball team's game, but for the rivalry game we went above and beyond. I along with a student from the opposing school served as the live commentators while my co-editor Jeremy Kaplan and photo editor David Kulp worked behind the scenes to make sure all the technical specifics worked out. Our coverage of the game turned out to be a huge success with hundreds of people tuning in, live tweeting of the game @lionstalesports and photos being published to the website constantly.”

*Question: How does social media help you make connections with an audience?*

**Stephanie**: “I think social media can create a more casual, but possibly more important connection, with an audience. It's the casual back-and-forths that can give an organization a personality and voice much like a texting conversation can strengthen relationships with friends. We can be funny or quippy or passionate in ways that aren't appropriate in story headlines or TV promos. My favorite part is that it allows for a town hall discussion platform. I love posting stories that are going to elicit a strong response (hopefully both for and against an issue) because it promotes people to discuss an issue. And if they do it on the BGA Facebook site, there's a good chance it's going to bring more people to look at our work and our website.”

**Alexander**: “Well, first you have the obvious. You can send out a tweet and get a response from a student at school, or write a Facebook post and someone can comment on it. Additionally, social media doesn't only help spread news faster, but it can make citizens or in our case members of our school community the feeling that they are not just part of the news, but part of making the news. In this technology driven world, people and social media are a journalist's best friends. It is imperative to check and back up any lede you receive but social media can improve your publication as a whole and raise the interest in readership.”

*Question: In your opinion, how is social media marketing a powerful tool for journalism?*

**Stephanie**: “Social media is powerful because it offers another platform and arguably an influential one. Social media beyond all else is social. People are more likely to look at and read information that is recommended by friends. We value their opinions more. ... The social factor is incredibly powerful because it allows for customized agenda-setting. Before social media, outside forces told us what was supposed to be important to us — what was on the major network news, what was on the front page of the magazine, what billboard went up in our neighborhood. Now we set our own agenda, in part fueled by the interests and recommendations of our friends. To get on this "insider list" that someone is curating makes a brand more powerful. And the ability to create this power is also important for the audience.”

*Question: How has using social media and the web changed the experience of journalism at your school?*

**Alexander**: “It has 100 percent advanced the publication as a whole. For years — and long before my time — our publication has been a newspaper, containing features and news stories alike. With the introduction of the website, the paper has been enabled to become more of a hybrid newspaper/news magazine (closer to a news magazine). The paper now is mostly comprised of comprehensive feature stories; while the website serves as an outlet for breaking news and updates. To simply put it, the integration of the web and social media into our publication has allowed us to give our school a wide variety of coverage and up to the minute news.”

*Question: What are the most effective social media platforms, especially for branding?*

**Stephanie**: “Facebook is our primary social driver, followed by Twitter, LinkedIn and Google+. Google+ is really more to help us in the Google algorithm than to bring people to our page there ... The Facebook cover photo is a great branding and marketing tool. It's easy to change (more so than a web layout) and can be funny or creative or give a call to action. Your staff can be a huge tool to increase your social media presence. Much to my chagrin, many in our organization refuse to be on social media. And that hurts us. If we had more people who, maybe only part of the time, linked to our work and talked about what we do, that would amplify our voice.”

**Alexander**: “Twitter. Everyone and their brother is on Twitter nowadays. Many people use it as their main source of news. There are a lot of unreliable sources on Twitter, but Twitter has become a staple in the world of media despite this. … Twitter is also an excellent way to gain readers and hear readers insight. Twitter is the best way to go, but don't leave out Facebook, Instagram, Vine, etc.”

*Question: What advice would you give to high school journalists wanting to start or improve social media accounts for their publications?*

**Stephanie**: “Decide what kind of voice you want your organization to have, which is probably in part decided by who your audience is. This can affect the types of stories you choose to promote, how you go about promoting them and what words you use to do so. If your audience is students, don't try to give yourself the voice of an adult. Don't use words students wouldn't use. Find ways to be social — don't just be a broadcaster. Find ways you can highlight conversation with your readers, by responding to them, thanking them for their comment. FInd ways your reporters can talk about their stories and take questions from readers. Show readers "how the sausage is made" (what goes into reporting stories, getting story ideas, etc.) and when possible and appropriate, ask them to take part. I try to operate by the rule of thirds. Spend a third of the time talking about you, your stories, your organization. Spend a third of the time highlighting people similar to you — maybe this is the local newspaper, the school, etc. Retweet news they put out, alerts they have, etc. Spend the last third of the time being creative, being social and being a personality. Maybe it's tweeting a picture of a staff party. Or tweeting something your readers might find funny but isn't newsy. That's what will distinguish you as different from others.

Have someone else take a look at things you send out/post. It's a pain, but develop an efficient system for it. Someone needs to be there to catch typos, improve on language and catch possible ethical issues. I try to do this in my job when it's appropriate. … Develop guidelines and stick to them. Don't edit comments. Try not to delete them unless it's totally necessary. Decide if you want reporters to weigh in to answer questions about reporting (media organizations are kinda split on this, but I'm a fan). Decide which tool you want to go with (Buffer, HootSuite, Tweetdeck, etc.)”

**Alexander**: “Just go ahead and start it now. It's not hard, set up an account, spread the word about it throughout your school and go. Start posting, use it to publicize stories and your publication. If you want take it to the next level, start making news videos to go along with stories. Aside from following the basic code of ethics, I always say that a publication needs to have super communication amongst the adviser, the executive editors, the section, editors, the reporters and also the rest of the school community. Journalism is communication, we as journalists need to be able to communicate with our sources and communicate news back to everyone whether it be through writing, broadcasting or social media. If a publication can maintain an excellent sense of communication throughout their whole staff and with the rest of their community, they are well on their way.”