
Connections: Social Media in Public Relations Strategy

PBRL 4405 : A Senior Seminar



Summer Session 1
May-June, 2008
Prof. P. Parsons
Dept. of Public Relations

The Ten Keys to Social Media in Public Relations Strategy

Public relations practitioners who are successful at using social media tools and tactics for solving PR problems and capitalizing on PR opportunities understand the following ten keys to success...

- 1) What you want to accomplish (goals and objectives) needs to come before plunging into the Web 2.0 world.
- 2) Social media tools and tactics have specific characteristics that make them different (not better) than traditional communication modes.
- 3) "Social media" as a concept is a very big deal in the business and social world of today and tomorrow.
- 4) Not all social media tools and tactics work in every situation nor in every sector.
- 5) Social media tools allow for creative approaches in a wide variety of PR situations.
- 6) Every organization, whether or not they plan to use social media tools proactively, needs a policy in place.
- 7) Everything in cyberspace is forever.
- 8) Everything (or just about everything) in cyberspace is accessible to everyone (or just about everyone).
- 9) There are ethical and legal issues that should be considered prior to embarking on any social media strategy.
- 10) "Social media" as a concept is here to stay and you ignore it at your peril.

Course Syllabus

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Overview

Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, MySpace, Second Life, Digg, wikis, blogs, and the list goes on. Are these new social media tools just for teenagers, disgruntled consumers and activists? Are they a fad that will become the latest web bubble? Or are they media tools that are here to stay in ever-evolving form and that public relations managers will need to consider in strategy development and implementation? And what about the societal implications of all this user-generated content?

Although there are some perils facing any kind of organization that chooses to enter the world of social media, what is perhaps more perilous is ignoring it.

Neophyte public relations practitioners are part of the generation that was weaned on the Internet. However, using such social media tools as MySpace and Facebook for social networking and content-sharing among friends is a far cry from being able to critically examine these tools and choose those that might be important in the development of relationships between organizations and their publics.

This senior seminar focuses on answering the following broad questions:

- 1) What kind of social media tools are currently available and who is using them?
- 2) How important is this so-called "Web 2.0" for organizations in the corporate, not-for-profit and government sectors?
- 3) Can you use social media to enhance relationship building on an organizational level?
- 4) What are the legal and ethical implications of using social media in public relations and corporate communications?
- 5) How might social media tools be creatively applied to a variety of public relations challenges?

This is a true senior seminar. It requires students to synthesize their knowledge and skills drawn from the following areas:

- Community relations
- Computer literacy
- Consumer relations/marketing
- Crisis communication
- Employee communication
- Mass media theory
- Media relations
- Planning PR programs & campaigns
- Psychology of publics
- PR message development
- Public relations management process
- Sociology of publics

Although as a senior-level course it demands an ability to analyze critically aspects of social media, how it is currently being used and its

potential effects, it also allows students to apply their considerable creative processes to the application of the techniques to public relations challenges and opportunities.

Course Objectives

By the end of this senior seminar on "Social Media in Public Relations Strategy" students will be able to do the following:

- 1)** Discuss the array of social media tools currently available to organizations and individuals.
- 2)** Differentiate between those tools that are truly useful and have long-term staying power from those that are fads.
- 3)** Analyze the impact that such tools can have on the development and nurturance of long-term relationships between organizations and their important publics.
- 4)** Consider the consequences to organizations (corporate, not-for-profit, government) of not using available social media tools.
- 5)** Consider the strategic application of social media tools and techniques to a variety of public relations challenges and opportunities.
- 6)** Identify important legal and ethical considerations in the use of social media tools.
- 7)** Creatively utilize social media as part of an overall public relations strategy.

Course Philosophy

One thousand days to learn; ten thousand days to refine.

-Japanese Proverb

Pre-Requisite

Students are required to have completed PBRL 3014 or have permission of the professor.

Student Responsibilities

Each individual student is responsible for the following:

- Show up, pay attention, be honest, don't be attached to the outcomes, don't take anything at face value and do more than the minimum.
- All assignments have strict deadlines to which we will adhere unless you are in a coma. Assignments are due at the beginning of the class on the scheduled date. Late assignments will lose 20% per day starting on the day that they are late. For example, a paper passed in at 5 pm on a day when it is due at 1 pm will lose 20% that day. If it is passed in the next day, it loses another 20% and so on. If you are going to have difficulty meeting a deadline, discuss it with me in advance and it may be possible for us to make other fair arrangements if I am convinced of the validity and seriousness of your problem.

Please keep in mind that this is a summer session course and as such there is little time to spread out the assignments. Plan accordingly.

- All assignments must be laser printed and look professional. This is a senior course and nothing short of job-market-ready submissions will be considered acceptable.
- "University regulations on Plagiarism and Cheating will be strictly enforced. These regulations are posted on boards and are found in the university calendar."
- "Correct use of language is one of the criteria included in the evaluation of written assignments." MSVU Calendar
- Please! During class, no caps with peaks and no gum chewing! I will afford you the same courtesy. And please be on time. Latecomers disrupt discussion.

Department of Public Relations Writing Competence Requirement

BASIC WRITING COMPETENCE IS A NECESSARY CONDITION FOR PASSING THIS COURSE

Because writing is an important part of our field's professional practice, the Department of Public Relations cannot allow its students to graduate or intern if they do not have the ability to write correct English. Consequently, writing competence is a requirement in all department courses, and it must be demonstrated in all classes. This means that students who fail more than one assignment in this course due to a lack of writing competence will not pass, regardless the accumulation of points they achieve through team work, class participation, and the like.

The department plays a significant role in developing student writing; however, it does not offer instruction in basic writing skills because these skills are beneath the academic level at which PR courses occur. The faculty presumes that every student's general education included twelve years of writing-skills training, and therefore expects an English language competence in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and

semantics. The responsibility to achieve that minimal standard lies with the student. The professor will not suspend this requirement by virtue of a student's willingness to obtain remedial writing instruction. The public relations profession is writing intensive, and employers expect PR students to excel as writers, in comparison with the general public. Consequently the department requires the actual existence of writing skills, rather than the hope or the promise of these skills, as a condition for advancing students.

Marking Scheme

Assignment	Due Date	Worth...
In-Depth Case Analysis	June 2	35%
Presentation of Case Analysis	June 4, 11 & 16	25%
Team Project & Presentation	Projects due June 25; Presentations June 18, 23 & 25	35%

Assignment Details

In-Depth Case Analysis

Worth 35% of your grade, this is an assignment that requires you to find an organization whose Internet presence clearly indicates the application of social media tools & techniques to its public communication strategy. This is to be presented as an in-depth, written case study and is due at the beginning of class on June 2.

Select a topic from the following list:

- Social networking
- Business networking
- Podcasting

- Viral video
- Virtual community
- Wikis
- Blogs
- Content communities
- Mashup media
- Virtual product placement

Using the web as your initial source, you are required to find an organization that is using this social media tool. This case study will be the illustration of your in-depth analysis of this tool, its development, its uses, its inherent benefits and its pitfalls. You must also extrapolate from this case to discuss how you believe this tool might be used by other organizations in other venues of practice. (You will need to do background research on the organization and its industry, what its competitors are doing, what the future of the industry holds, what the business and academic literature says about this particular tool).

This will be presented as a paper/case study of between 1800 and 2000 words. It is a business case study. Paul R. Lawrence, defines the case study as follows:

*A good case is the vehicle by which a chunk of reality is brought into the classroom to be worked over by the class and the instructor. A good case keeps the class discussion grounded upon some of the stubborn facts that must be faced in real life situations. It is the anchor on academic flights of speculation. It is the record of complex situations that must be literally pulled apart and put together again before the situations can be understood. It is the target for the expression of attitudes or ways of thinking brought into the classroom.*¹

The case will consist of the following aspects:

¹ Paul R Lawrence, 'The Preparation of Case Material,' in Kenneth R Andrews, ed., *The Case Method of Teaching Human Relations and Administration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), p. 215.

- 1) Presentation of the **Situation**: A description of as much information about the organization as you can unearth including its other PR and communication approaches. Also includes a contextual discussion of the industry in which this organization operates. Consider PR issues such as the organization's publics and challenges/opportunities within its environment.
- 2) Presentation of the **problem or opportunity** that this particular technique capitalizes on.
- 3) Presentation of in-depth information about this **social media tool** itself. This is where you delve into the overall aspects of this social media tool using whatever sources you can find, both business and academic. Be very wary of using personal blogs – they rarely constitute credible sources.
- 4) **Evaluation** of the use of the tool as part of a PR strategy. Here is where you have an opportunity to synthesize what you've learned. Using the background information you have gleaned through your research, this is your chance to analyze how effective/ineffective, appropriate/inappropriate, high quality/low quality etc you believe this to be. You need to back up your conclusions.
- 5) Then, make some **recommendations** about how this tool could be used better, replaced by something else (be specifics) etc. or if it is particularly successful, how it could be adopted by other organizations.
- 6) Be sure to provide appropriate and complete documentation and write it well using a formal business style.

Presentation of Case Analysis

Worth 25% of your grade, this assignment requires you to present to your classmates the case analysis completed in the first assignment. Refer back to the definition of a good case study above and make a presentation as if you were presenting this case at the Annual Conference of the Canadian Public Relations Society.

You will have twenty (20) minutes to make this presentation dynamic, informative, entertaining and professional. It should have objectives

and conclusions. It should be supported by well-designed visuals. Presentation dates are as scheduled in the tentative course timetable.

Since you will be graded on the actual case in the submission that you will have made, the grade for this assignment will be based on how well you are able to capture the important aspects of your case submission in this short presentation. You will also be graded on your ability to make a professional presentation, including the preparation and use of visuals, hand-outs and any other presentation devices you might choose. Your level of professionalism will also be taken into consideration.

Team Project

Working in teams of three, you will prepare a plan for the creative use of a social media strategy for a client. The client is Mount Saint Vincent University and the final presentation will be in the form of a creative pitch. Each team will have 40 minutes to present this pitch. Interested outside parties will be invited to attend these presentations.

Details attached. This capstone assignment is worth 30% of the final grade.

Tentative Schedule

Date	Topic
May 12	Course Intro & pre-assessment
May 14	Why do social media matter? Social media & society: A critical view
May 19	Victoria Day – No Class
May 21	Social Media Tools & Tactics (The “Big Seven”)
May 26	Tools & tactics (cont’d)
May 28	Application of social media tools in a variety of venues (employee relations, media relations, consumer/client relations & IMC applications, community relations, public information campaigns, social marketing)
June 2	Managerial Aspects of Social Media Involvement: Ethics, the Law and Organizational Policy (and how to “pitch”)
June 4	Case presentations
June 9	CPRS Annual Meeting / Group work
June 11, 16	Case presentations
June 18	Group project presentations # 1 and 2
June 23	Group project presentations # 3 and 4
June 25	Group project presentation #5 Discussion about the course

Resources

The following list of resources is provided to facilitate your research and the completion of your assignments. There is no textbook for this course (none exists).

Periodicals & Conference Proceedings

Ashling, J. (2007, July). Blogs & social media forum 2: What's on the corporate horizon?. *Information Today*, 24(7), 29-29.

Dearstyne, B. (2007, July). Blogs, mashups, & wikis, oh, my!. *Information Management Journal*, 41(4), 24-33.

Fernando, A. (2007, February). Social media change the rules. *Communication World* 24(1), 9-10.

Fine, A. (2006, November 9). Social change and the connected age. *Chronicle of Philanthropy* 19(3), 32.

Frydman, G. (2007, September 8). Health 2.0. *The Economist* 384(8545), 16.

Guiniven, J. (2006, November). Getting social with press releases. *Public Relations Tactics* 13(11), 6.

Hamm, S. (2007, July 2). Children of the web. *Business Week*, Issue 4041, 50-58.

Havenstein, H. (2007, February 19). Companies may Face lawsuits if employees abuse web 2.0 tools. *Computerworld*, 41(8), 36-36.

Hildreth, S. (2007, June 4). Web 2.0 goes corporate. *Computerworld*, 41(23), 26-30.

- Hirschorn, M. (2007, April). The web 2.0 bubble. *The Atlantic* 229(3), 134-138.
- Illia, L. (2003, November). Passage to cyberactivism: How dynamics of activism change. *Journal of Public Affairs (14723891)*, 3(4), 326-337.
- Ingram, M. (2007, March 29). Social media: Slowly scaling the walls of corporate halls. *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto), B 9.
- Johnson, S. (2006, December 26). It's all about us. *Time* 168(26), 1.
- Keen, A. & Laskoff, M. (2007, July 23). What to do about web 2.0. *Brandweek* 48(28), 24.
- Lim, J. (2006). Resistance to ethically suspicious video spoof on YouTube: A test of inoculation theory. *Proceedings of the 10th International Public Relations Conference*, DiStaso, M. (ed), S. Miami, FLA., March 8-11.
- Michael Gorman vs. Web 2.0. (2007, July 6). *Chronicle of Higher Education*.
- Morrissey, B. (2007, January 29). Inside the promise and peril of YouTube. *AdWeek* 48(5), 10.
- Paine, K. (2006). New rulers redux: Now that we've been measuring blogs, wikis and other computer-generated media for three years, what have we learned? *Proceedings of the 10th International Public Relations Conference*, DiStaso, M. (ed), S. Miami, FLA., March 8-11.
- Paine, K. (2007). How to measure social media relations: The more things change, the more they stay the same. Institute for Public Relations.
http://www.instituteforpr.org/files/uploads/How_to_Measure_Blogs.pdf
- Schatsky, D. (2007, January). The web's new frontier. *Mediaweek* 17(2), 11.
- Shields, M. (2007, September 24). Digital Destiny. *Brandweek*, 48(34), SR13-SR13.
- Smith, S. (2007, April). Why employees are more trusted than the CEO. *Strategic Communication Management*, 7.

- Terilli, S. Driscoll, P. & Stacks, D. (2006). Corporate bloggers and the commercial speech legal bog. *Proceedings of the 10th International Public Relations Conference*, DiStaso, M. (ed), S. Miami, FLA., March 8-11.
- The Ongoing Web Revolution. (2007, September). *Library Technology Reports*
- Trammell, K. & Keshelashivilli, A. (2005). Examining the new influencers: A self-presentation of the A-List blogs. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 82, 968-982.
- Van Schouwen, M. (2007, October 15). Web 2.0: What Do You Want to know?. *Business West*, 24(12), 24-24.
- Web 2.0 at Work. (2007, July/August). *Information Management Journal*, 26-27.
- Wright, D. (2006). Technology's impact on communication theory: Rethinking traditional communication methods. *Proceedings of the 10th International Public Relations Conference*, DiStaso, M. (ed), S. Miami, FLA., March 8-11.

Books

- Gillin, Paul. (2007). *The new influencers: A marketer's guide to the new social media*. Sanger, CA: Quill Driver Books.
- Holz, S. & Demopoulos, T. (2006). *Bloggging for business: Everything you need to know and why you should care*. Kaplan Business.
- McConnell & Huba, Jackie. (2006). *Citizen marketers: When people are the message*. Kaplan Business.
- Scoble, Robert & Israel, Shel. (2006). *Naked conversations: How blogs are changing the way businesses talk with customers*. New York: Wiley.
- Scott, David. (2007). *The new rules of marketing and PR: How to use news releases, blogs, podcasting, viral marketing and online media to reach buyers directly*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Tapscott, Don & Williams, Anthony. (2006). *Wikinomics: How mass collaboration changes everything*. Portfolio Hardcover.

vanDijk, Jan. (2005). *The network society: Social aspects of new media*. 2nd ed. Sage Publications Ltd.

Web Resources

The Proceedings of the 10th International Public Relations Research Conference (as cited on several occasions above) can be accessed at:
http://www.instituteforpr.org/files/uploads/IPRRC10_Proceedings.pdf#page=283

The Institute for Public Relations Research's web page on the research they have carried out on the new media
<http://www.instituteforpr.org/research/internet/>

The Pew Internet and American Life Project,
<http://www.pewinternet.org/>

Wikipedia's list of social software,
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_social_software#Social_bookmarking

PBRL 4405
Social Media in Public Relations
Management



Excellence • Innovation • Discovery

Team Assignment Description

The Client

Mount Saint Vincent University

The Challenge

To utilize a social media tool as part of a strategic approach to capitalizing on a public relations opportunity in one of the following areas of the team's choice:

- ▶ Community relations
- ▶ Internal relations
- ▶ Media relations
- ▶ Government relations

The Team Submission

Each team will submit a complete written pitch consisting of the following elements:

- ▶ **Background** including a summary of the client and the quality of its relevant relationships
- ▶ A description of the **strategy** including one overall strategic goal
- ▶ A detailed **rationale** for the selection of a tool to operationalize the strategy
- ▶ Specific, measurable **objectives** for what the tool(s) selected will accomplish
- ▶ A description of the **tool** and a presentation of the actual tool as developed by the team,
- ▶ The actual tool as developed by the team
- ▶ A plan for **evaluation** of the success of the strategy
- ▶ A **discussion** of the future applications or extensions of the tool.

The actual written submission itself must be client-ready. It must be presented in exactly the professional way that you would if you were trying to

win the contract to complete the project.

The Individual Submission

Each individual student must submit a written evaluation of the contribution of each of his or her team mates' contribution to the overall success (or not) of the project.

The Presentation

Each team will make a 40-minute pitch presentation during class on the day assigned. It is expected that each of the team-mates will have a role to play here. Be very careful how you handle the changes of speakers. This should not in any way hinder the flow of the presentation and should capitalize on the strengths of each team member.

The Assessment

The presentation will be graded on the following:

- ▶ Evidence of research on the client, the public involved and the social media approach chosen.
- ▶ Appropriateness of the strategic approach
- ▶ Appropriateness of the social media tools chosen for the specific strategy and public and rationale provided.
- ▶ Clarity of description of the tool.
- ▶ Execution of the tool.
- ▶ Appropriateness, feasibility and usefulness of the evaluation strategy.
- ▶ Presentation and use of visuals.
- ▶ Ability to engage the listeners.
- ▶ Professionalism.

This assignment is worth 30% of your final grade. All students on the team may not necessarily receive the same grade. I will take into consideration the confidential assessments of your classmates as well as my own observations of individual performances during the presentation.

Please note that outside observers may attend the final presentations.