

Developing a Social Media Strategy

Harness the potential of social media for your institution's advantage.

BY DR. SCOTT D. MILLER AND DR. MARYLOUISE FENNELL



IF YOU COULD FIND a cost-effective way to expand your visibility to targeted audiences while promoting your institutional brand, would you take advantage of it?

Social media allow you to do this and more, yet only about 100 of some 3,500 college presidents nationwide actively use Twitter or Facebook; approximately 700 use LinkedIn, YouTube and other tools. Those who do not employ social media are missing out on opportunities to enhance their message.

Here are some proven reasons we think you will “like” social media applications for your institution.



Reinforce Your Brand

When Scott Miller was appointed president of Bethany College in 2007, we created and tested a long-term social-media strategy. The strategy focused on reinforcing the brand of a nationally ranked liberal arts college in a rural section of West Virginia, and further engaging an already loyal base of alumni and friends.

The results have been astonishing. In just six years, with minimal cost, start-up and maintenance, we now have more than 1,500 followers on Twitter, more than 3,000 LinkedIn connections and 1,750 Facebook followers. This is in addition to visibility through regular e-cards, e-blasts, blogs, opinion pieces, monthly presidential e-letters, a weekly online newsletter, and monthly online commentaries for *The Huffington Post* and a statewide business newspaper.

Bethany's audience continues to grow with interaction by those connected through social media. For example, a recent post to 1,750 people on Facebook was quickly viewed by more than 7,000 followers as a result of the “Share” function. Entire new audiences have become instant constituents.

Relatively few presidents and senior administrators have embraced social media. Notable exceptions include E. Gordon Gee, now president emeritus of The Ohio State University; Santa Ono, the University of Cincinnati; Christopher Kimball, California Lutheran University; David Rowe, Centenary College; Jeff Abernathy, Alma College; John Maeda, the Rhode Island School of Design; Angel Cabrera, George Mason University (who tweets and blogs in both English and Spanish); and Walter Kimbrough, Dillard University.

Lessons Learned


Here's what we have learned from Bethany College's social media strategy:

- **Social media quickly and effectively allow you to send disparate, relevant messages to diverse audiences.** As an active college president who is closely identified with the Bethany brand, Scott controls eight different platforms from his desktop, iPhone, iPad or Netbook. All content reinforces the branding message of Bethany. LinkedIn allows Scott to advertise position openings to colleagues and to repost college media releases while Twitter allows the president to reach alumni and students personally.
- **Social media also permit you to control the frequency and distribution of your message.** Electronic distribution services at nominal cost allow us to time-deliver messages to balance distribution. These might include campus news, reports and interesting articles from outside organizations that reinforce your institution's message and image. Messages can be scheduled at ideal times in the day, and can be as frequent as the sender would like.
- **Finally, in times of crisis, social media are essential** in distributing timely alerts, messages and updates.

Consider Your Content

While social media reinforce that the administration is focusing on communications 24/7, it's also important to keep content fresh and concise. The impact of this strategy has far outweighed the time needed to create and implement it. The social media initiative for Bethany College has been an unqualified success, exceeding expectations and widening the reach of Bethany's marketing strategy.

In the late 19th century, when electricity was in its infancy, President and Mrs. Rutherford B. Hayes, among others, are said to have so feared this new technology that they preferred not to touch the light switches.

Like electricity, social media are here to stay. We urge you and your colleagues to harness this vast potential. 

Dr. Scott D. Miller is president and M.M. Cochran Professor of Leadership Studies at Bethany College. He was previously president of Wesley College and Lincoln Memorial University. He is chair of the Board of Directors of Academic Search, Inc. Dr. Marylouise Fennell, RSM, a former president of Carlow University, is senior counsel for the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) and principal of Hyatt Fennell, a higher education search firm. They have collaborated on 11 books.