

Empowering Students to Take Over a Department Snapchat Account

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Introduction/Need for Innovation

Ephemeral social media, platforms that allow users to share content for a limited period of time, have become prominent features of the social network landscape (Bayer, Ellison, Sarita, & Falk, 2015). Snapchat is a social media platform that allows users to send images, videos, and text with limited viewing time for the receiver(s), before it becomes inaccessible (Vaterlaus, Barnett, Roche, & Young, 2016). Recent estimates show that there are more than 158 million Snapchat users worldwide (Carson, 2017). Snapchat was rated as the third-most popular social media platform after Facebook and Instagram, with approximately 25 percent of young adults (18–29 years old) using the app (Duggan, 2013; Utz, Muscanell, & Khalid, 2015). As agricultural communications students enter the workforce, knowing how to leverage this social media platform will be an important skill set. Therefore, it is necessary to introduce students to the technology and how it can be used strategically for an organization. The purpose of this innovative idea was to provide students with an opportunity to plan, execute, and evaluate a Snapchat “takeover.” Snapchat takeovers are a strategy that allows someone to gain control of a Snapchat account and provide content from that person’s perspective.

How It Works/Steps

This innovative idea was implemented in a senior-level agricultural communications course at [university]. Students received instruction regarding how to create effective and engaging content on Snapchat. This was a participatory exercise as many of the students noted Snapchat was one of their favorite social media platforms. The course had 22 students who each identified a day they wanted to “takeover” the department’s Snapchat account. Before receiving the login information for the account, they submitted an outline of the Snapchat story they would curate with at least 10 specific “snaps” identified. These could be photos or videos, but they had to represent the department in a positive light while sharing a story the audience would find interesting. The instructor then graded this outline and provided additional advice for the takeover. The student was then given the login information for the account.

Students were asked to promote their takeover on their personal social media accounts and provide content to share on the department’s Facebook account regarding the takeover. On the day of the takeover, the instructor attempted to follow the takeover live. All students were required to save the story and take screenshots of their snaps. These were then submitted via the learning management system, along with a reflection of the Snapchat takeover experience. The instructor graded the Snapchat takeovers on creativity, accuracy, appropriateness, completeness, and encouraging audience engagement.

Results to Date/Implications

Per student reflection papers, the majority of students found the Snapchat takeover experience to be positive. The assignment presented an opportunity for students to use a social media platform for professional use, which required them to think critically about the content they were sharing and what message it would send to their audience members. The Snapchat takeovers featured departmental and college activities, agricultural association events, and behind-the-scenes coverage of daily happenings on campus. One student said, “Overall, this assignment stretched

me to creatively use a more personal social media platform for business uses.” Students had to take into consideration who their audience was, and what content would be most well-received. “I made sure to make the content professional, but I also wanted to be entertaining because our followers are mainly college students,” a student said.

It was also indicated that this assignment simulated real-world reporting and journalism, as the students were partaking in the events they were covering. Several students noted it was a challenging task to balance participation and documentation. One student explained: “It definitely gave me a taste of what many professional reporters, photographers and videographers have to do while on a typical job. Often, their jobs entail more than standing in the corner and getting the perfect shot.”

The timeliness of Snapchat as an advantage was noted, with one student saying, “videos are posted instantly; videos are brief and hold a captive audience while they are playing, and the ability to add text to summarize a point is nice as well.” Other student feedback included comments about using Snapchat as a way to connect on a more informal level with audience members, and how the timeliness made for a less formal effect when communicating to an audience. One student described the use of the app in a professional function as being able to be “more conversational and down to earth with your audience.”

The students were optimistic that utilizing Snapchat in a professional manner would be helpful to any company to create positive rapport with consumers and clients. One student mentioned that upholding the reputation of the department was on the forefront of their mind, and that using correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation was important to maintain a good image for the university.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

This assignment will continue to be used in the course because students said it helped them practice using the platform for more than their personal use. Students were made aware of this project at the beginning of the semester, but several waited until the end of the semester to complete the assignment. This created some confusion as to who would have the account on certain days or timeframes, but only once did two students login at the same time. Students should receive instruction (and warning) regarding how to use Snapchat accordingly. Although it did not happen during the semester, it is possible that a student would forget to log out of the account and begin posting personal information on the department account. The outline students provided was an important part of the process because it helped them be more strategic about the event they presented, while also recognizing areas to be more creative.

Costs/Resources Needed

This innovative idea is free to implement. Snapchat is a free app available for both Apple and Android devices. In regard to resources, the department will need to create an account and the instructor will access to Snapchat to monitor what is being shared.

References

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