

Social Media in Higher Education

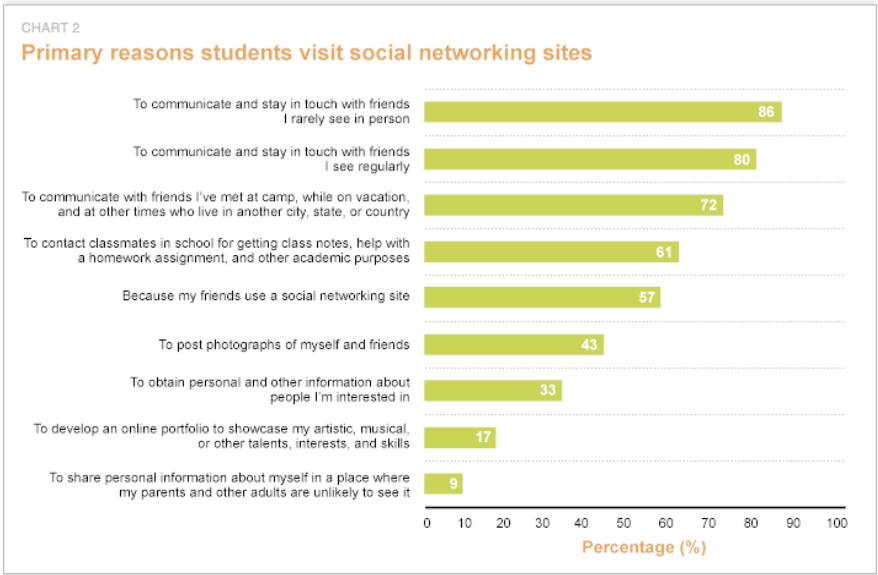
Data Analysis of Relevant Studies

In only a few short years, the popularity of social networking sites (SNS) has increased dramatically. Recently, colleges and universities have begun incorporating these tools into their marketing mix to connect with everyone, from prospective students to alumni. However, little serious or reliable research existed to indicate whether these networks were an appropriate or effective recruitment resource for colleges to use.

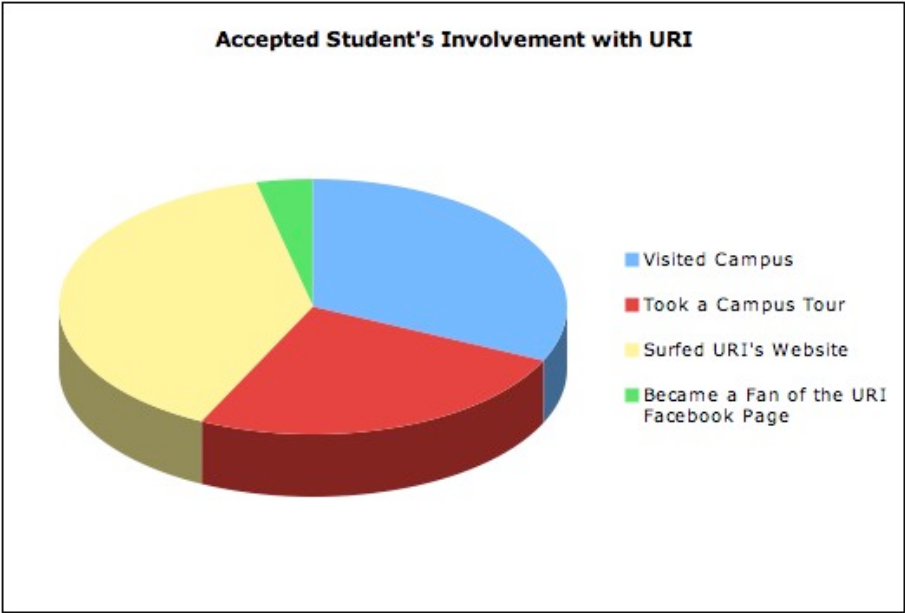
A StudentPoll report on “Social Networking Sites and College-Bound Students,” published by College Board and Art & Science Group, explores the influence, use, and importance of social networking sites among students just beginning their senior year. This report specifically explored: how and why students use social networking sites; how much time they spend visiting these sites; and what effect these sites have had on their college search.

The results show that the use of social networking sites among college-bound high school students is nearly universal, and especially high among African Americans. Facebook is, by far, the social networking site of choice among students. Of the 960 students that were surveyed, 70 percent reported visiting one or more of these sites at least once a day and the average time spent visiting a site was 62 minutes. An interesting finding is that Hispanics and African Americans were more likely than Whites to have met friends for the very first time on social networking sites.

A relatively small segment of students are using social networking sites for their college search process. Those that are, use sites to determine their ability to fit in and feel comfortable at a particular college. However, it is important to remember that behavior regarding SNS in college choice might change dramatically when application decisions have been made, admission notices received, and final matriculation decisions made.

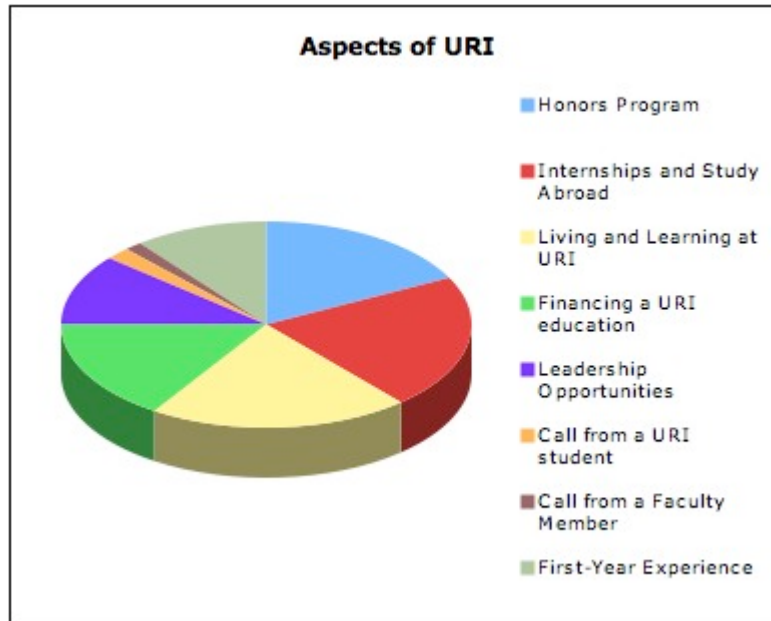


The results of this study are mirrored in the findings of a survey conducted by the Office of the Provost at the University of Rhode Island. Out of 5,716 students that applied early and were accepted to the university, 1,914 completed the email survey. The results of a student’s interaction with URI after being accepted can be seen in the pie chart below.



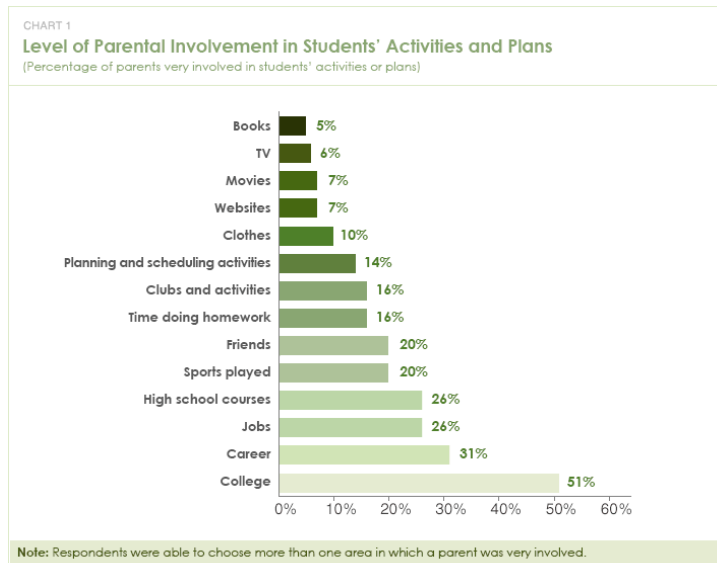
As with the StudentPoll results, we see that social media sites are not the primary tool a student uses to judge the universities they are interested in. According to accepted students, surfing URI’s website, visiting the campus, and taking a campus tour are more important in the decision making process

than becoming a fan of URI's Facebook page. This survey also asked students which aspects of URI they were most interested in learning more about. The results of that question can be seen in the pie chart below.



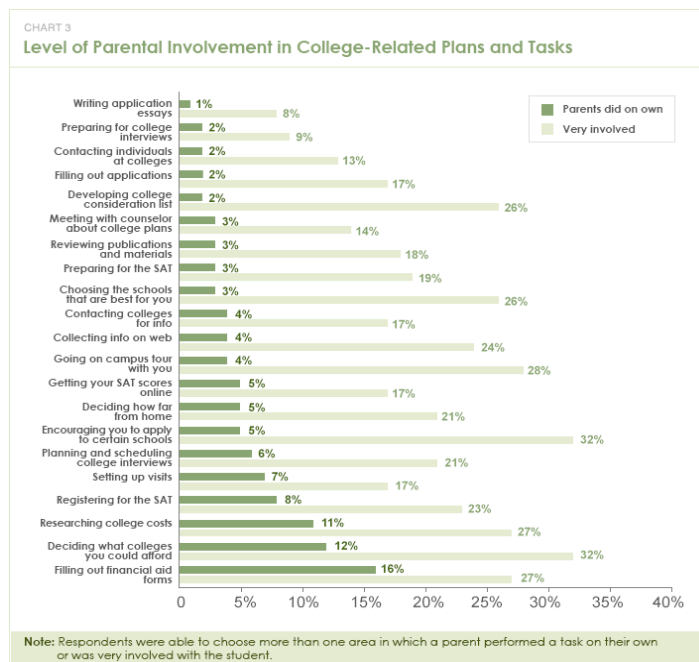
The aspects of the university that students want to learn more about, after being accepted, are internships and study abroad opportunities, living and learning at URI, the Honors Program, and how to finance their education. This survey is critically important in learning more about our accepted students, how they interact with URI, and what they are interested in learning more about.

Another StudentPoll survey focusing on parent involvement in the college planning process found that college-bound high school seniors are generally satisfied with the current level of their parents' involvement. But nearly 30 percent want more, not less, parental involvement. Colleges and universities might consider increased parental involvement as an opportunity, rather than a threat. Engaged and interested parents can be much more easily mobilized to support the academic achievement of their children, meet volunteer needs, provide philanthropic support, and become advocates for the institutions their children attend. Parents of prospective, accepted, and current students are a separate audience that need to be communicated to.



Source: studentPOLL survey.

College plans were at the top of the list for nearly all the respondent groups. More than 50 percent of the students surveyed indicated that parents were “very involved” in their college plans. Among the 95 percent of students who indicated their parents were very involved or involved to some degree in their college plans, a sizable percentage indicated that their parents were very involved with or actually took care of the following cost-related tasks: filling out financial aid forms; deciding what colleges they could afford; or researching college costs.



Source: studentPOLL survey.

More than 30 percent of students reported that their parents were very involved or by themselves planned and scheduled college interviews, accompanied the student on a campus tour, chose the schools best for the student, and developed the initial list of schools to be considered. Nearly half of the student whose parents were involved in their college plans indicated that their parents had encouraged or insisted that they apply to schools they hadn't considered. The main reason parents encouraged students to apply to these schools was word of mouth - they simply had heard good things about the college or university from a friend and/or family member.

Parents are a key factor in the decision making process of a college-bound high school student. This audience can be communicated with using social media tools. Keep in mind, that what is most important to a student, is not always important to a parent, and vice versa. The messages that you communicate to these different audiences must be tailored to meet their individual needs. Social media is not a one-size-fits-all approach.

Now that we have identified our specific audiences and analyzed their priorities, we can discuss what experts in the field are saying about the use of social media in higher education for marketing and communication. A guide compiled by Rachel Reuben, the Director of Web Communication & Strategic Projects in the Office of Public Affairs at SUNY New Paltz, introduces the more popular forms of social media and recommendations for using these tools in higher education marketing.

The recommendations are based on the results of a survey administered to 148 colleges and universities asking what social media they are using most, how they are using it to reach their target audiences, and which department(s) are responsible for maintaining it.

Facebook, the most popular social networking site, allows universities to create an official fan page for their university. People who view the page can choose to become "fans" of your organization, and this shows on their personal profile page, for their friends to see. This creates a viral marketing effort. Facebook pages also offer organizations the ability to communicate with fans through direct and targeted messages, such as fans in a specific network or age group, and view "insights," which includes detailed

statistics on the usage of the organization's page.

Universities have been using photos and videos for over 20 years to aid in recruitment efforts. YouTube now provides a platform to easily distribute these videos to a much wider audience. Universities have found Flickr, an online photo site, to be a great tool to easily share photos with students, alumni, faculty and staff. The automation of uploading photos and turning them into organized collections with slideshows is a great timesaver for time-strapped web development staff.

The most popular use of blogs for marketing in higher education is having currently enrolled students blog about their lives on campus, as a recruiting initiative in conjunction with admissions. Karen Sines Rudolph wrote a thesis on the topic of using official admission blogs to recruit millennials, from a public relations perspective. In this research, she found it was key that the bloggers selected best represented a full spectrum of interests and status, and that they have a clear understanding of the purpose of recruitment through their blog posts. She also found it important that the institution's brand practitioners stay involved with the project, actively guiding bloggers so their posts can meet established goals, namely to provide prospective students with the clearest picture of life at the institution (Rudolph 2007).

For every form of social media questioned in the survey, respondents reported that an overwhelming majority of these tools are maintained by one or more individuals in their marketing/communications/public relations office. Adding social media into the mix can become time intensive. There needs to be a strategic reason and plan in place to use social media. The Ohio State University (OSU) coined the term "Social Media Butterfly."

One of their designers took the logos of the social media sites they use and shaped them into a butterfly. All of these sites are a part of their social media strategy and help them develop interaction with their target audiences. Social media gives us the opportunity to humanize stories of students and alumni of our universities, which can create loyalty and attract future students.

A more extensive study conducted by the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth Center for Marketing Research compares adoption of social media between 2007, 2008, and 2009 by the admissions

offices of all the four-year accredited institutions in the United States. This is one of the first statistically significant, longitudinal studies on the usage of social media by college admissions offices. All three studies examined the familiarity with, usage of, and attitude towards social media by the admissions offices. To date, this is the most comprehensive study done of American institutions of higher education and their use of social media in their admissions activities.

Sixty-one percent of the respondents in 2007 reported they use at least one form of social media. In 2008, 85% of college admissions offices are using at least one form of social media. In 2009, a record breaking 95% of college admissions offices use at least one form of social media. Usage is up for every tool studied. At most schools, the IT department sets up the blog and the admissions office manages it. When asked who manages their blog, the most popular answers were the admissions office, marketing and public relations.

There has been significant improvement as we look at the implementation of the most popular tools, blogging. The latest research shows 51% of colleges and universities have an admissions blog for their school. Interestingly, fifty-five percent of admissions departments feel that social media is “very important” to their future strategy. The mantra of the blogosphere is “conversation.” For students and their parents looking to have an online conversation about particular aspects of university life, this increased interaction through blog comments can be significant.

When asked what the future plans for the school’s blog in 2007, the most popular answer was that there are no future plans for the blog. In the 2008 study the most popular response was to expand the blog.

In 2009, the most popular plan is to incorporate social media sites into blogs. Many schools now include audio podcasts, video and live chats as part of their blog and others are sure to follow.

One cautionary note has to do with having a blogging or social media policy that defines what is acceptable via the institutions’ online communications. Thirty-two percent of schools have such a policy in place for their employees or students who engage in online conversations as it relates to the school. Less than 25% of the Fortune 500 companies currently have social media policies in place even though

many companies have hundreds of employees that utilize blogging, Twitter or Facebook on a regular basis. Social media policies are now seen as important elements as an institution develops their social media strategy.

Perceived importance of social media to the school does translate into monitoring behavior. Those schools with a culture where online communications are respected as having value are more likely to fully embrace that activity. They are gathering critical strategic information by listening to what is being said about their institutions and their competitors in the social media world.

Because there is such a wide array of electronic methods for communicating with students, it's more important than ever for colleges and universities to understand what prospective students expect, so that campuses can focus on areas that will produce the greatest enrollment results. In early 2010, the Expectations research group, sponsored by Noel-Levitz and NRCUA, surveyed more than 1,000 collegebound high school students, polling them on their online behaviors and expectations.

Despite the multitude of communication options on the Internet, the college Web site is still the main destination and portal to a campus. One hundred percent of respondents said they had viewed at least one college Web site. In terms of searching for campus Web sites, students relied mostly on Google or other search engines, but nearly one-third used college-matching services.

How students search for college Web sites	
Use Google or other search engines to find school names they've heard of from parents or friends	44%
Use a site that matches them with schools that fit their profiles	30%
Enter words or phrases in Google/search engine that describes the programs they're interested in	20%
Guess at the URL until they get it	3%
Use NCAA or other similar sites	3%
Research on social media sites	1%

Regardless of the search method used, 65 percent of students said that their searches landed them on a college's home page.⁶ It makes the first impression and connects students with the resources they need to inquire, apply, and enroll.

However, many institutions struggle to identify a primary user for their external Web resources, resulting in home pages that attempt to serve every constituent but end up disappointing the users who rely on the site the most - prospective students. Design your Web site through the lens of the prospective student so you can meet their needs and expectations.

How do students learn about schools?

Information received in the mail	89%
Parents, family, friends	80%
E-mail messages	79%
High school teachers or counselors	77%
Finding the school's Web site	75%
Online search (Google, Yahoo, etc.)	65%
Offline resource from library or counselor's office	62%
College fair	61%
Online college planning site	45%
Web site advertisements for schools	41%
School-specific radio or TV advertisements	35%
Sporting events/athletic programs	34%
Planning site sponsored by student's high school	32%
Camp, program, or competition at a school	31%
Billboards	21%

E-mailing prospective students isn't a new strategy, but clearly one that can pay off—especially when targeting the right students with the right message. Similarly, Web site advertisements (or pay-per-click) are another valuable method for building volume at the top of the enrollment funnel.

Imagine if one out of every four prospective students considering your campus dropped your school from consideration due to a bad experience on your Web site. That's what 24 percent of respondents said they had done. Of those, 51 percent said it was because they couldn't find what they wanted. On the positive side, 65 percent said they had become more interested in a campus because of a positive Web site experience. Thirty-one percent said it was because they found what they wanted, 21 percent responded that the site worked well, and 14 percent said it was because the content was helpful. Failing to provide key content - or making it difficult to find - will disappoint a majority of students, and you risk losing a key opportunity to grab their attention.

What content do they find most valuable? Fifty-four percent identified academic-related content as most valuable and thirty percent ranked cost-related content as most valuable. Ten percent of students ranked admissions information and 3.8 percent said student life. Not that admissions and student life content is not important, but academic and cost content is more important to your target audience. Social media tools should be used to communicate admissions and student life information in an informal manner.

When these 1,000 students were asked which social media resources they use, Facebook was the clear front runner. Respondents also affirmed that social media have become important parts of recruitment campaigns. Thirty-three percent said that they had searched for schools on social networking sites. Seventy-four percent thought schools should have a presence on social media sites, with 80 percent of those students saying they wanted both official and unofficial content through social media.⁶

Are students watching campus videos on the YouTube, the world’s most popular video site? Or watching college videos at all? Unfortunately, only 10 percent responded yes to watching college videos on YouTube and 47 percent said they don’t watch videos at all. However, subjects that are most interesting to students are student life and academics, and student-made videos are more appealing than university-made videos.

Have they viewed any videos about a college or university?	
Yes, on the school’s site	42%
Yes, on a site like YouTube	10%
No	47%

What video subjects are most interesting to them?	
Student life	46%
Academics/classes	30%
Location/areas around campus	11%
Athletic events	6%
Faculty/program details	5%

Students see social media as a way of supplementing official information about a college with unofficial perspectives that round out their impressions of a campus. Remember though that an external Web site is the number one recruitment marketing tool, it is a student’s first impression of an institution.

Supplement official content with unofficial social media content. Students want to hear a genuine point-of-view from current students and alumni about what an educational experience at a college or university is like. However, social media efforts should focus on the channels that will have the greatest enrollment impact.

Advice from experts

Based on our research and life experiences, it is clear that social media has pervaded nearly all aspects of our society. Consumers participating in social media have the luxury of experiencing a ubiquitous, vibrant marketplace. Likewise, the marketing and advertising of products to consumers has been revolutionized given the seamless buying experience often promised by the manufacturer. At the same time, organizations recognize the competitive landscape has forever changed given the spontaneity and instantaneousness of the social media world.

Like many organizations, the University of Rhode Island recognizes it must confront the social media revolution in order to remain a competitive player in the world of academia. Given that need, the University asks the question: are we effectively and appropriately using social media to attract and retain students to the University? In answering that question, the students utilized the advice of several experts to gain a better understanding of the implications of social media tactics in marketing and strategic media communication.

The primary blueprint for this project was the innovative advice of the internationally-recognized social media leader, David Meerman Scott. Author of “New Ways of Marketing & Public Relations”, Scott is considered a maverick in the public relations and marketing industry. In addition, we sought the advice of two local experts (Christopher Medici, Executive Vice President, Director of Strategic Marketing & Communication at the United Way; Kim Reis, Digital Marketing & Media Manager, WJAR-Channel10).

The following synopsis conveys significant points for URI to consider as we enhance our current social media platform. Based on input from the three experts, the synopsis is organized in three sections. Social Media Look reflects the personality we, as a university, should consider developing. Secondly, the Social Media Menu illuminates specific tactics to be considered as we move forward with our social media plan. Lastly, Specific Next Steps addresses such items as the big picture, our website, blogging and our Facebook presence.

1. The Social Media Look

- Be Fearless and be real. Use your “real” voice rather than a “Public Relations” voice. .
- Respond! Social media is a two-way dialogue. Aim to have a conversation.
- Take risks – The goal of social media is to be social.

2. Social Media Menu:

- Be consistent, succinct, accurate, frequent
- Always be ready to change
- Identify key stakeholders and “speak” to them
- Use an integrated approach (traditional marketing efforts coupled with social media tactics)\

3. Specific Next Steps

Big Picture – need a unified, branded look infused in all social media tactics (and all publications/messages)

- Create one cohesive, branded message integrated in all of the social media efforts. Integrate the same tone and message in all efforts. Use the same color scheme/theme for Twitter and YouTube pages.
- Your best consumers participate in online forums – so should we. Invest the resources in personnel who can engage in consistent, interesting on-line discussions.
- Focus resources on a few social networking sites – start small.
- Know your buyers
- Create in-depth buyer persona profiles and focus on specific advertising techniques tailored to these individual audiences. Resist the temptation to throw information out there hoping to reach many different audiences at the same time.
- Use appropriate key phrases

Website - unified look with a content-rich message

- Content is the most important aspect of a web site. Goals and objectives of URI should be revealed on website.
- What differentiates URI from other universities? Identify the differences on our website.
- Share important and meaningful info with prospective and current students

Facebook - be effective, creative

- Include meaningful information on Facebook (pictures and links about vital info regarding the school, athletics and student clubs/organizations).
- Create a Facebook page, specifically for a prospective student’s parents
- Marketing plan for URI should include the use of video uploading. Demonstrates to potential students what is currently going on at URI.

Blog

- Create a blog that targets its specific buyer personas and is maintained by enthusiastic students/staff who are passionate and have an authentic voice. Current students who are passionate about URI are the best candidates to maintain/ create a blog. Most authentic voice and can provide the incoming students with the information they really want to know about in an honest and real voice.
- According to Davis Meerman Scott, “you are what you publish”. If we want to make potential students feel like we are a student- oriented school, we should have students uploading our blogs

frequently. Student blogs are fun to read because it shows potential students what their day/life can look like if they enroll in URI.

YouTube

- Reveal and sustain our presence on YouTube by creating a URI Page imitating “Best Practices” of other universities. Include URI- produced videos and student-produced videos.

Twitter

- You have to put yourself out there as an interested member of the community. Students/professors/employees should identify themselves as part of the community.

Current Profile of the University of Rhode Island

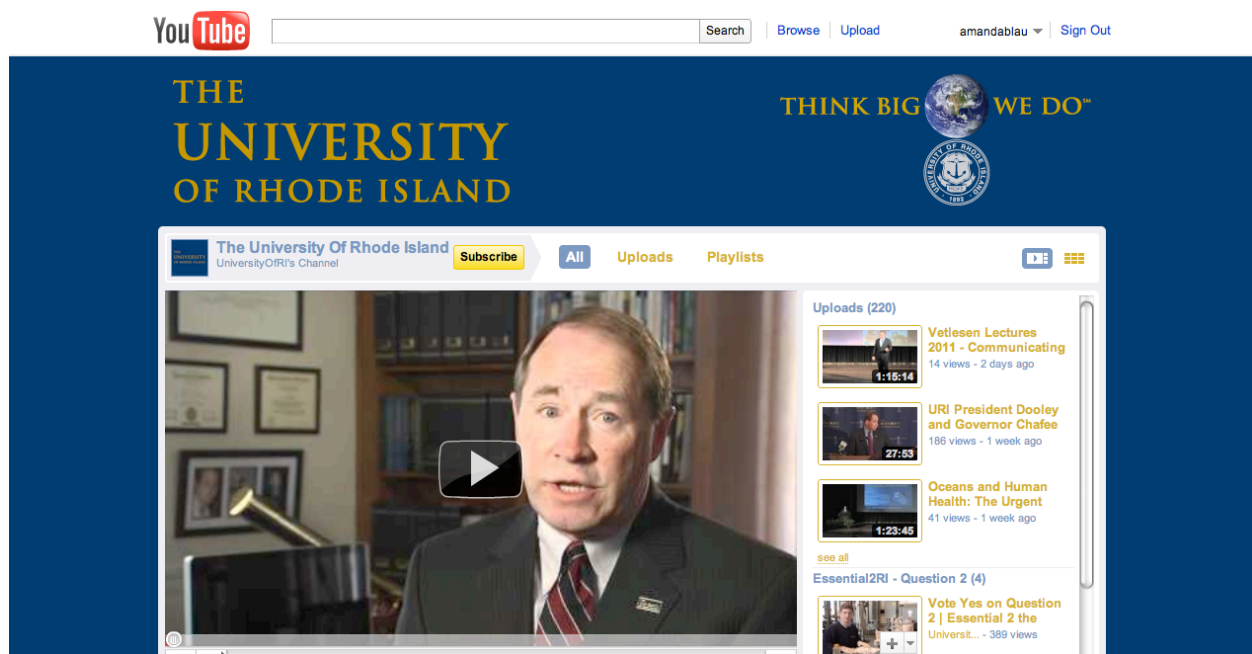
The University of Rhode Island employs a mix of traditional and new media techniques to market itself to target audiences. Traditional marketing tools include printed brochures, television and radio advertisements, and billboards all revolving around our new “Think Big. We Do.” campaign. These channels are used to promote both the “big picture” and the university’s niche programs. Our media buys are scheduled based on key recruitment periods.

The printed brochures have transformed from a large, thirty-three page book to a more concise three-panel, fold-out pamphlet. The newest print brochure being sent to accepted students is four, 8.5” by 11” pages that expands to a map of the university. The billboards are located throughout Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. The TV advertisements for this include some major networks, as well as cable.

URI’s new media marketing includes the use of its Web site, as well as online advertising, and a social media presence. The online advertisements are focused on college search Web sites, like Princeton Review and Peterson’s, and some experimental ads on YouTube, Facebook, and LinkedIn. These ads are used to promote specialty programs. The printed brochures all include links to various Web pages for URI. The University of Rhode Island’s Web site receives over 1.5 million hits per month. A college or universities Web site is one of its most valuable marketing tools.

One social media site that URI uses is YouTube. Currently, URI is not using its YouTube channel effectively. Although it is accessible through URI’s homepage, it is not easy to find by searching on YouTube. Searching for “The University of Rhode Island” or “URI” brings you to individual videos, not the university’s channel.

The URI YouTube channel has a generic blue background with the gold “The University of Rhode Island” logo and video of Dr. Dooley titled “Message from the President December 2010.”



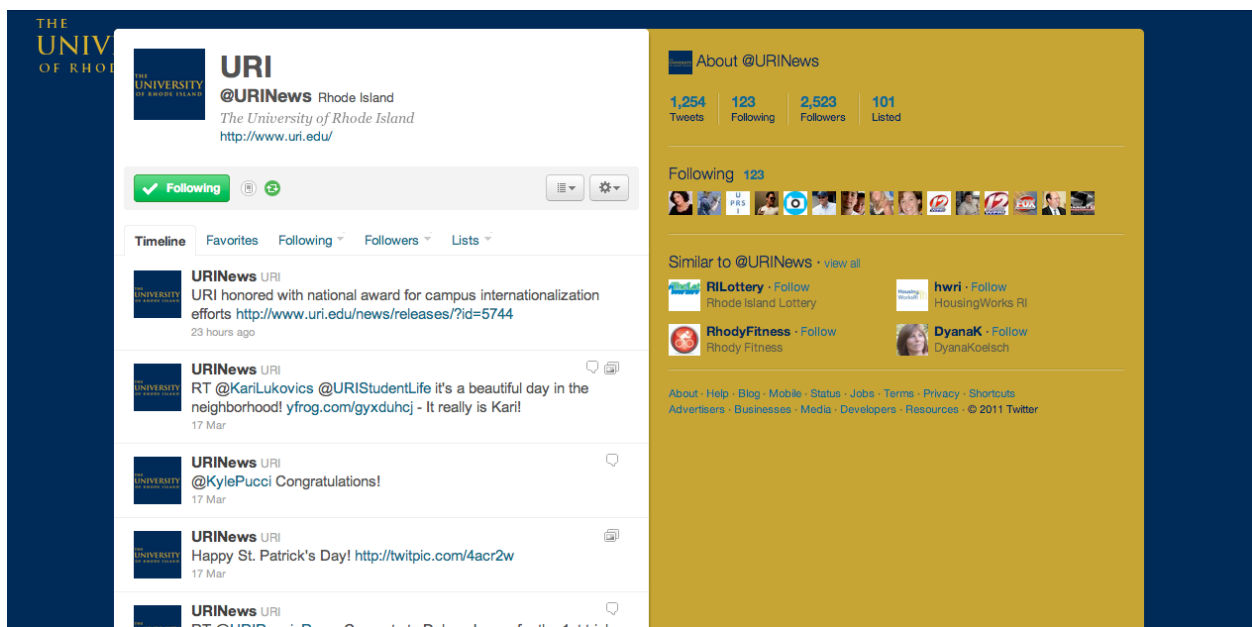
This video discusses what improvements the University is making and different research initiatives we are taking part in. Currently, there are 219 University-produced videos uploaded to the channel. Some titles include: URI President Dooley and Governor Chaffee; Oceans and Human Health: The Urgent; and Negotiation Starting Salary for Women. There are 4 videos under the category “Essential2RI - Question 2,” 49 videos under the category “URI Live! Archived Videos,” and only 4 videos under the category “Student-Produced Videos.” The order of videos is as stated above; URI-produced to student-produced.

The student videos are all over 10 minutes long and have a range of topics. The first video is about a student’s brother who is serving in the military. The second video is titled “Awktober” and is a student sitcom about awkward situations they have experienced. The third video,

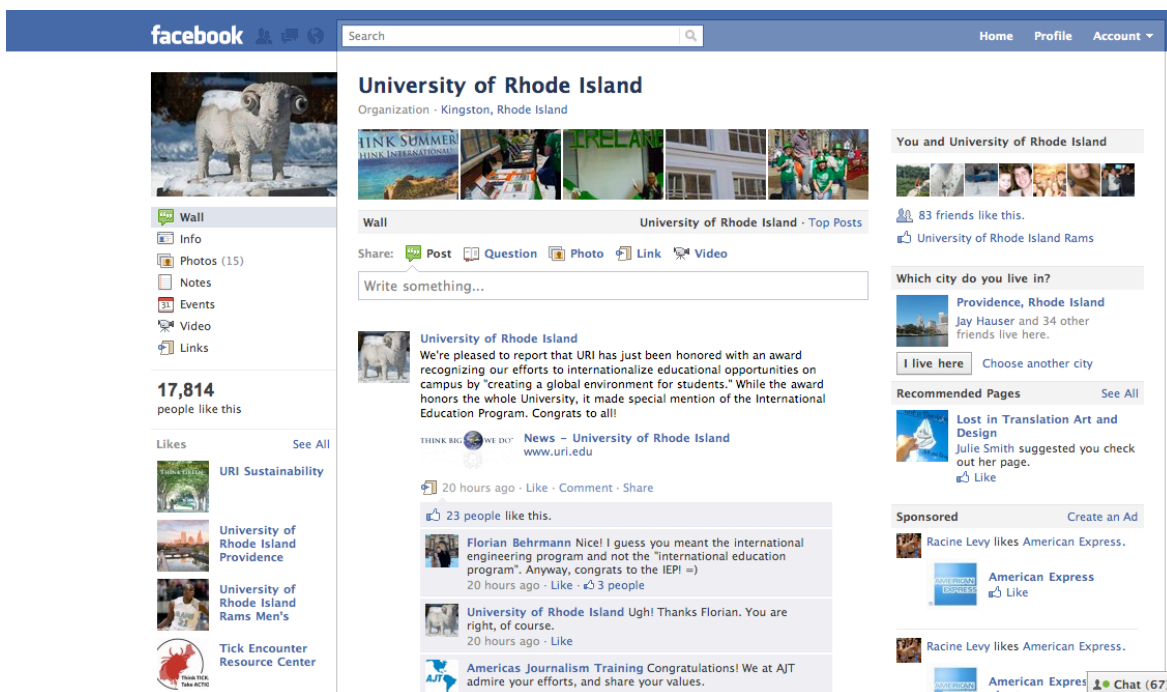
“Cooking with Tal,” is about cooking on a college budget and eating healthy. The last video, “Gospel Deaf,” is a documentary about a student who traveled to Fiji to complete an internship teaching deaf kids how to dance to hip-hop.

The URI channel has 45,518 total views with 375 subscribers. They are six other URI affiliated pages including: URICOP, urioie, URIanimation, urifilmmedia, URIvisualizations, and URIProvidence5162. All of these affiliated pages can be found at the bottom of the main channel page.

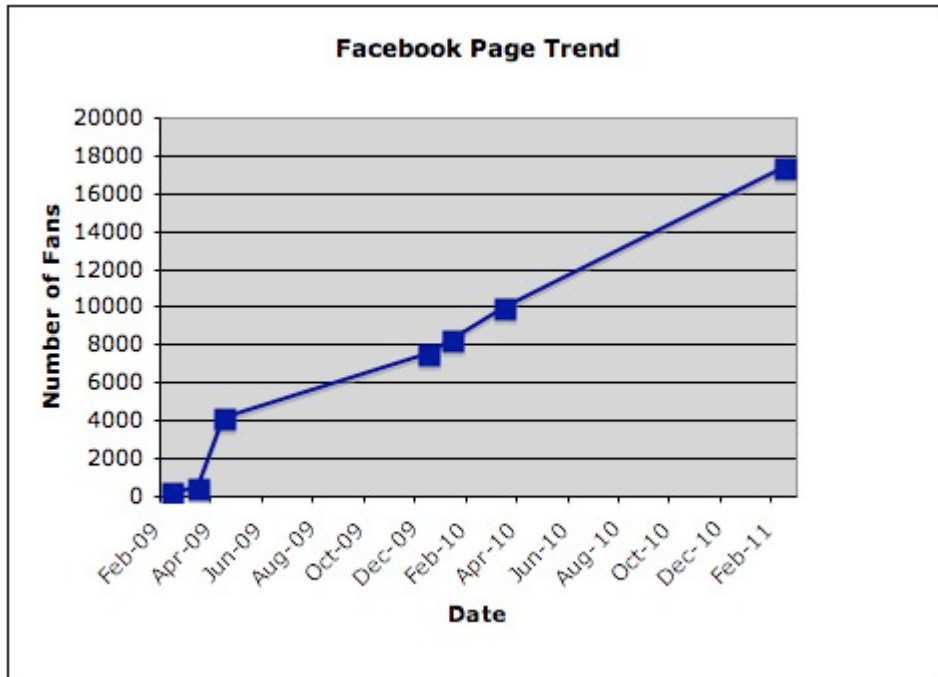
URI’s main Twitter page is @URINEWS, which targets stakeholders and influencers. Similar to the YouTube channel, the Twitter account had a plain blue background with the gold logo. @URINEWS is following 123 people, mainly local news accounts, if followed by 2,523 people, and is followed by 101 lists. Often, this account tweets news release headlines and a link to the release. More recently, there has been responses and frequent two-way communication with followers.



URI's dominant social networking site, not surprisingly, is Facebook. Like every other college and university, Facebook is primary medium for reaching prospective students, parents, and current students. URI's Facebook as developed significantly since its creation in February of 2009. By the end of February, the page had 185 fans. Updates on the page were sporadic for the first few months since there was no designated person responsible for posting content. By the end of March, the page was up to 381 fans. In April, postings were made on a daily basis. On April 20th, the student intern in the Office of Communications and Marketing invited all of her friends to the page. The page gained 777 new fans in one day. This was more than double the total fan base to that point. The surge continued through April 25th as the page picked up 2,200 new fans. By the end of April, URI's Facebook page had 4,123 fans. It was during this quarter of growth that BlueFuego.com recognized URI as the third-fastest growing Facebook page among all colleges and universities in the country. With a growth of more than 1,300 percent, we had the highest increase among schools our size. By the end of 2009, the page had a total of 7,500 fans.



In January of 2010, the page picked up an additional 712 new fans, the fourth-highest monthly total to that point. Students and parents began using Facebook as a means for finding out about weather conditions and cancellations at the University. In March 2010, the page topped 10,000 fans. In the 10- month stretch from May 2010 through February 2011, the page gained 8,894 new followers. At the start of this project in February 2011, the page had 17,303 fans. The page sees an average of 890 new fans each month. With more and more interaction from followers, the page is being updated more regularly, sometimes twice a day.



Situation Analysis

Today, it is considered crucial for a business or company to have a social media presence. It has been proven by a variety of experts and various case studies that social media is an effective tool for marketing and promotion. Research shows that 96 percent of the millennial generation has joined a social network, and the numbers are only increasing. Facebook hit 200 million users in less than a year. Social media has officially become part of our everyday lives and has started a revolution around the world. People seem to want to stay connected and receive immediate answers and reviews. Popular outlets include: Facebook, Blogging, Twitter, LinkedIn, Foursquare and YouTube. Through social media, a company can target a niche audience or demographic that they are trying to reach.

Currently, URI uses many different forms of social media. For the purpose of this analysis, we will focus on: Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. By reviewing how URI currently communicates with prospective and current students, we will be able to see where improvements need to be made in order to better our communication with target audiences.

The University of Rhode Island's Facebook page has 17,954 followers as of March, 2011. This number is larger than the number of students who even attend the University! This Facebook page is impressive; one of URI's best social media sites. It contains daily posts that are conveyed in a general tone, and any topic you can think of is highlighted. One downfall of this page is that there are not many pictures or videos for students to view. It would be a good idea to link the YouTube channel to this Facebook page.

Another interesting Facebook page that pertains to this project is The University of Rhode Island Admission Office. This page has pictures posted of buildings around campus, athletics, URI students, Campus Life, study abroad and more. Even though these albums are relevant to those looking for information about URI, it would be helpful if more albums were created. This Facebook page posts frequently.

The University also has a Facebook page for transfer students. This page has a link to the University's student clubs. . This page is current and depicts current events, jobs, internships, and information on registering for classes. Also, useful information is listed, such as Ram Tour dates, how you can receive help from Peer Mentors, and fun activities going on around campus.

Twitter, although not as popular as Facebook in the college demographic, is still one of the social media sites that started a revolution and is now an important marketing tool. Twitter is based on the use of "tweets" to convey a message. According to author David Meerman Scott, author of the book, "The New Rules of Marketing and PR", "the social nature of Twitter, a service for friends, family, and co-workers is to communicate through the exchange of quick, short messages." What makes a tweet unique from other forms of social media is that a tweet is a status update in which the message displayed is under 140 characters. This leaves the messages short and to the point. Tweets displayed are public, although are usually geared toward followers. A user's followers are personal pages of people or organizations that are interested in your tweets. As a user of twitter, you, too, can follow others.

Twitter allows an organization to see who is interested. Currently, the University of Rhode Island has an official Twitter page, @URInews and several other pages of different organizations, centers and individuals throughout the University. For the purpose of this analysis, we are going to focus on the top three university sites that would be appealing to incoming freshmen, the target audience for this class project.

First, @URInews is the official twitter site of the University of Rhode Island. The site appearance matches up to the University's main website color scheme, although the logo is not representative of the current "Think Big, We Do" campaign. This twitter account is the official one linked on URI's main site. It appears to be a fairly active site, generating approximately two to three tweets daily. Currently, this site has 2, 574 followers holding the highest amount of followers out of all the twitter pages affiliated with URI. The tone of the tweets seems to be targeted to a general audience, much like the Facebook page. The majority of people "following" URInews are current students. One aspect that seems to be working for the page is the communication with other users of twitter. It seems

as though the page answers people that directly tweet to them and also retweet other posts involving URI, creating a strong interactive presence. Most tweets that come from URInews seem to be reminders of upcoming events going on at the URI campus.

The second twitter account that would appeal to URI prospective students is the URI admissions page, @URIAdmission. This page is designed to link prospective student to information regarding the application process as well as URI student life (although there is also a separate twitter account for that). URIAdmissions tweets are generally informative, reminding followers of upcoming open housing and important deadlines. The activity is not as regular as @URInews with tweets averaging about three- four a month. The tone of this page appeals to the prospective students, as their target audience and is direct and informative. Currently, the page has only 49 followers, with the majority of them being other URI pages. One thing that this page does right is that it links back to the official URI Facebook page and updates on new information posted there.

The third twitter account is Rhode Island Rams account, @GoRhodyRams. This account is the official URI Athletics page. This is probably the most active twitter page out of the list with about four to five coming in daily. The audience of the page is all URI athletic fans and the messages are usually updates on upcoming games of a variety of sports, scores, rankings and other important information. The page currently has 1, 456 followers with the majority being current students. The page's tone is a school spirited conversational tone which makes content more lively and interesting.

If a prospective student were to currently view the University of Rhode Island's YouTube page to learn more about our school, he or she would not find an extensive range of information. For instance, the majority of the video clips about the university are told by current students who do not seemed interested in what they are saying. In order to attract a perspective audience, the student delivering the speech needs to sound more engaging. If current students have no enthusiasm in their tone of voice and mannerisms while advertising our school, it is not going to send a positive message to upcoming or transferred students. Furthermore, our YouTube page interviews are all done the same way. There is only one featured student seen in and around the Quad area. There is only one are of the University receiving

attention. This could assume that the quad is the only “worthwhile” area to view to perspective students. Something that attracted a majority of my friends to our school was being so close to the ocean. We have beautiful beaches that are not advertised on our page. Our page needs more assortment of what our school has to offer to attract all potential students.

In addition, the YouTube page colors do not stand out enough. The page has no personality or school spirit. None of the captions jump out at the reader or grab their attention. The set up of the website seems to focus predominantly on the teachers of the University and their opinions, rather than the students. Our target audience is not receiving the necessary attention to attract viewers. The target audience needs to be focused on the student’s sense that is who we are attracting. The videos of different sport teams, Greek life, clubs, attractions, and so forth that makes up the school is very difficult to find. This makes it hard for perspective students to find a niche were they can see themselves in our community. Instead, our page highlights the videos of lectures by professors or educational crisis, which will not attract senior students in high school to apply.

There is a link for student produced videos that seem much more personable. It gives students a chance to practice filming or art and shares it with a community. This is a great way to create a closer niche within our University. If we could get more students and organizations in our school to post videos that have a range of hobbies, unique activities, or organizations that our school offers we can help reach a broad audience and create a bond that new students are searching for.

Despite research, it is still difficult to measure just how well URI communicates with prospective students through social media. In a Facebook message generated to about 20 students, all responses showed that they had heard about URI through friends or high school advisors. While it was a small survey, this clearly indicates that URI is not affectively reaching out to perspective students. URI has a strong social media presence, but it is not being used in a way that would attract or interest current and prospective students. There is a way to use Social Media to generate a sense of school spirit and not only initially attract a new student but retain those students that have doubts about the University. Competitor schools seem to engage students through creating fun and attractive websites linked to interactive social

media sights. The main goal of URI's social media sights should be the students, not the general audience. By simply adjusting URI's current social media presence, the University will be taking the first steps towards improving the way we communicate with prospective and current students.

Competitive Analysis of Major Universities

University of Delaware

The University of Delaware's main web page features social media icons in the middle of the page, as opposed to the bottom. They incorporate Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Blogging. Their Facebook page has a customized “Welcome” page, instead of a wall of comments. This welcome page links to their Twitter and YouTube accounts. This official UDel Facebook page “likes” other UDel pages, such as UD Honors Program, Blue Hen Says, and UD College of Engineering. This Facebook page also publicizes events, organized by month. All questions and comments are responded to with a personal tone and in a timely manner. The pages’ discussions that have the most responses are the promotions and giveaway. The Blue Hen Says Facebook page is more student-oriented and run by students. It contains job postings, events, and videos.

UDel recruits social media savvy students for its Social Media Team. The team of students is responsible for generating beats for the student-run Facebook and Twitter profiles, as well as the main UDel Facebook and Twitter pages. Projects include attending campus events for arts, athletics, and academics, as well as writing short posts and posting pictures or videos about life as a Udel student. Team members attend monthly meetings and compose short, weekly posts based on assigned beats. This team is responsible for editing and distributing UDel’s Social Media Guide.



University of Connecticut

The University of Connecticut effectively uses and targets social media very well. After searching UConn’s homepage, I was able to quickly find the social media icons. Once you click the

social media icons on the homepage, you are then brought to a social media directory. In list format: facebook fan pages, twitter accounts, and YouTube videos and channels are all easily accessible with a click of your mouse. For example, if I were a hungry freshman at the University of Connecticut, I could go to the social media directory and become a fan of UConn Dining Services. This also allows students to find other students that have the same interests and hobbies as they do. Students are able to become a fan of the specific school they belong to, university admissions, career services, and alumni among many other pages. UConn also displays their name and message very well and consistently throughout all of their social media pages. This allows the university to look professional to the users of their site and to guests. One may also think of this as a universal theme or branding. As an unfamiliar to UConn's website, one is quickly able to browse and find social media links effectively.



University of Kentucky / Texas A&M

The University of Kentucky is ditching some of its traditional media and turning instead to social networking tools like Facebook Places and online outlets like Pandora to build awareness among prospective students. The school has integrated both social networking and online advertising into its marketing mix.

Kelley Bozeman, marketing director, said the integrated, tech-based approach is a far cry from the traditional means of reaching out to prospects. “We’re doing a lot of out-of-the-box marketing here,” said Bozeman.

Bozeman saw the new Facebook Places feature as an opportunity to connect with recruits. The application lets users check in via cell phone and alert friends, family, and other interested parties about where they are and what they're up to. To get students to use the "Daily CheckIn" service, the school created a grassroots marketing campaign centered on the installation of 5-foot-tall, wooden icons on campus. The "pointers" encouraged students to check in at various locations across campus, every day. Students check in from a campus or sporting event, for example, and the activity shows up on their Facebook newsfeed, which is then shared with their friends. One of those pointers was positioned outside of the university visitor's center, where 10,000 students pass through annually. Visitors are encouraged to check in as soon as they start their college tour in order to spread the word.

The investment also dovetails well with the university's other interactive media strategies, which have been given top priority over traditional methods. "We dropped TV altogether this year," said Bozeman, "and put our dollars into interactive advertising." The school buys advertising on social networking sites, where it can target specific geographics and demographics.

Texas A&M University ran an integrated social media campaign on their campus using 4 of the most popular social media platforms: Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and FourSquare. In an interview with Collegewebeditor.com, Diane C. McDonald, Director of Social Media at Texas A&M University, described how they approached the campaign, what the strategic goals were, and what resulted from the campaign. Here responses are listed below.

Innovative Approach:

They took an integrated social media approach to leverage their strong presence on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and FourSquare. They promoted the hunt on Facebook and YouTube, distributed clues on Twitter and rewarded winners for check-ins on FourSquare. They wanted to pull together all of their existing channels into a cohesive social media package in order to build a stronger brand.

Strategic Goals:

1. A business development goal of partnering with the Collegiate Licensing Company to promote corporate sponsors of their FourSquare program. The primary sponsors were the Texas A&M MSC Bookstore and Adidas. They donated all the prizes at no cost to the university.
2. On the social media front, they wanted to integrate all of their platforms and grow their Twitter and FourSquare following.
3. They wanted to leverage social media to encourage the university's nearly 50,000 students to explore their 5,200-acre campus like never before. They wanted students to use technology to make real-world connections while learning more about their campus.

Campaign Results:

“The student connections and exploration of the campus were the overwhelming student rewards for participating. Several students met and became friends though the hunt.” Approximately 80 students received prizes donated by Adidas, the Texas A&M MSC Bookstore, and other campus partners. Texas A&M University stretched its social media presence by 10 percent over a period of three days. The number of followers on Twitter increased to more than 8,700 follower and the FourSquare program had more than 6,350 friends. Also, with the high-volume of student participation, the campus bookstore saw a dramatic spike in customer traffic.

The Ohio State University

The Ohio State University is continuously rated as one of the top universities to have fully embraced social media and be using it effectively. They have everything from a First Year Experience Web site, to a variety of social media accounts and a successful viral YouTube video. Back in May 2010, Ohio State opened a new student union and to celebrate, a flash mob broke out. The video was brilliant and got other people thinking about how they could create the next big university YouTube sensation.

Vanderbilt University

Vanderbilt's "Social Media Handbook" is rated as one of the best social media policies among colleges and universities. They encourage everyone on campus to get involved, give tips and examples for its use, best practices and how-to's. Vanderbilt University shows that it fully embraces a transition to social media through all aspects of the university. Vanderbilt also has an aggregated site for all their social media platforms. It is called "get.social@vanderbilt." It allows you to view each platform information separately, or all at once in chronological order. Someone could also access this aggregated information on their iPhone or Android cell phone.

Bates College / University of Texas - Austin

Bates College has aggregated all of its social media platforms on a single web page, similar to UConn. The Bates Social site features links to athletics and professors' blogs, as well as Facebook and LinkedIn groups for alumni, and lists of Twitter accounts from individual students to clubs. "Bates Social was developed to provide a tool for both internal use and visitors seeking to connect with Bates people or learn more about the college," said Bates spokesman Doug Hubley. It is a simple way for colleges and universities to organize all their social media information.

Much like Bates College, University of Texas has a link to a Social Media Directory, where users can find any one of the hundreds of Twitter, Facebook, or Blog accounts associated with the university. The page is overwhelming, but does underscore how much the university has embraced social media platforms. One blog in particular that is done well is the "Longhorn Confidential," written by eight students who tell the behind-the-scenes story of college life. In addition to adopting social media, UT has taken it one step further into the mobile realm. They have recently designed an iPhone app. This type of program is a financial commitment, but is extremely user-friendly and easily accessible.

The University of Texas at Austin also has a great First Year Experience Web site. These sites are designed to help students in their first year better connect with their classmates and the university. A First Year Experience page should be attractive, simple and straight forward. Obvious and easy to find content will keep a college student's attention. It should include visuals, appropriate pictures and attractive graphics; topics that are easy to find, clear navigation bars and lists; and pages that are easy to navigate through. Wordiness will turn a college student off. Being too wordy can be intimidating - something that a first year student should never experience. Social media accounts should be easy to find and should be obviously managed by the school. Some schools only have their News/Media Relations department and Athletics department as the only school accounts. For prospective or newly admitted students, these departments alone may not cut it in enhancing the overall school experience. First Year Experience sites must have frequent questions answered. Keeping first year students engaged with a school and each other before and during their first year is critical to retention.

Social Media Tactics of Competitors

With URI's goal of improving social media used at the University it is important to take a look at what competing schools are doing with their online networks. There are many new ways to utilize social media networks. Yet not all are appropriate for universities, including URI, in reaching their target audiences. To help URI with its reform we have reviewed some of the top competing schools and their best tactics in social media.

Best Practices

Best Practices for consideration by URI:

- Universal theme within the all the social media pages/branded look
Technologically advanced and organized
- Controlled messages/student voice

- Specific message for audience-(parents, students)

- Implement a Student Social Media Team-student invited
Implement a Student Handbook re Social Media

- Facebook should be student friendly and student focused
Visually appealing with photos
- Engage student and faculty bloggers

- YouTube-videos highlight the University

Our Competitors

We investigated the following competitors: the University of Delaware, University of Vermont, University of Connecticut, Boston University and UMASS Amherst. The following highlights key tactics to be considered by URI to more effectively utilize social media to attract and retain students.

The University of Delaware

The University of Delaware (UD) has fantastic and well-organized social media sites that are constantly updated and active. Their Facebook pages are student friendly and focused with specific messages for target audience.

The UD student Facebook page effectively reaches students and provides them with updated information about entertainment and other on campus events, such as appearances from the MTV's "Buried Life" and sorority fundraising events. The info section of the student page describes it as a page "for University of Delaware students, by students!". This section of the site also includes a brief guideline as to what should be posted to the page in their 'UD Facebook Wall Policy'. URI should find new ways to keep students actively informed about relevant activities and events at the University to retain students.

There are two various Facebook pages, one specifically for the parents and one designed for the students. Each site provides information that is useful to these specified audiences. They even have numerous Facebook pages for alumni. Facebook pages are also very visually appealing with many current photos displaying many different aspects of the University.

Pictures included are recent and relevant to those viewing the pages. The student Facebook page has pictures of current and upcoming events at the University and encourages students to post pictures. . A significant amount of pictures are of food and places on campus to eat. The photos look appealing, as eating good food is definitely a major concern for students.

URI has many exciting events and activities as well that should be displayed in a way so that students will continue to stay involved. Posting pictures after an event on campus could be an opportunity for students that attended to comment with their feedback. This tactic will give URI a better feel about the things students like and what URI should be doing to retain students.

Aside from still shots taken at the University, UD utilizes YouTube very well. Their YouTube account has a variety of videos that would be of interest to the various targeted audiences of parents, students and prospective students.

The idea of YouTube videos is another great way to get students involved with social media at the University. By inviting students with expertise in the area of video directing and editing, the University can proudly display the work of its students.

The University of Delaware incorporates a universal theme throughout all of its many social media pages to provide a truly authentic and branded look. The sites are all highly technically advanced

and well organized. All social media sites follow similar layouts and have almost the same color schemes through out. Some pages are set up a bit differently but this gives each social media platform its own personalized appeal. If URI enhances its sites, they would be more attractive to its viewers causing more frequent visits.

The University of Delaware strongly encourages its students and alumni to become involved in social media. This gives their pages a student voice to which its readers and followers can easily relate. They also provide a well organized and detailed social media team policy and guidelines handbook. It provides substantial information for those just getting started with social media at the University as well as tips and tactics for those already using social media. The layout and page set up makes it very easy to find what a reader is looking for and to understand the information given.

If URI can develop its own social media policy book that includes supervision from faculty and staff, it will be easy to monitor students who are invited to run and participate on the sites.

University of Connecticut

The University of Connecticut (UConn) has used one great practice of integrating their student blog into admissions. This gives student during the admissions process to really engage in the Universities social media and gain a better sense about the school from a current students' perspective.

The links also are very student friendly and linked to other useful pages. There are many links to separate areas of interest. For example, under their Facebook links there are numerous links for all majors. This practice allows it to be easy for viewers to navigate directly to specific pages.

The University of Connecticut has truly utilized the use of videos very well. They offer many different options for their virtual tour. As former prospective students the virtual tours were one of the first things we looked in to when researching schools. It allows viewers to get a real-life sense of what the campus and school is actually like.

University of Vermont

The University of Vermont (UVM) Facebook is very interactive and often invites students to their page. They have done things such as encourage students to upload pictures from recent snow storms to their Flickr account as well as to the UVM Snow Globe. This is a great practice since students love taking pictures and sharing them with friends and other students on campus. URI could have used this idea last year during the flood! In the future, URI should definitely encourage students to upload pictures to their social network sites more often.

The University of Vermont links Twitter with their Facebook creating an integrated approach. All their social media sites, including YouTube, has a UVM theme integrated with their homepage. The sites have some interesting posts and are updated frequently but not in such a way that is annoying to the audience.

Boston University

Boston University (BU) is the next school to be noticed for its social media strategies. The BU Facebook page is very student friendly and focused on keeping students and parents updated about what is happening at the University. For example, their Facebook page has an entire section designated toward informing students about all upcoming events including everything from sports, entertainment and creative writing events. URI could adopt this idea as a way to continually update the URI community on what is happening at URI.

The BU Facebook page is constantly updated with different pictures that are taken by Boston University students. These pictures allow both current and perspective students, along with parents, to see what is happening with the University. Updating the Facebook page is something that URI should be constantly doing. It will draw more interest because people will be able to see the great things happening here.

BU has their own YouTube program called BUiverse, which is a place where both students and professors can upload videos. Professors can upload class lectures and different class projects to and it also allows students to post things for other students to see. These pages are also updated constantly to

with the goal of attracting and retaining students. This tactic should be considered by URI as it could be a way for URI to create a new online image to reach students in useful ways. The method would also provide students with an easy way to view class lectures. A personalized YouTube website would allow parents of perspective students to see what exactly is happening at URI.

The University of Massachusetts at Amherst

The University of Massachusetts at Amherst (UMass) has a student-friendly Facebook and targets future and current students. The Facebook has tabs for “Future students” and “Class of 2015” – another way to attract students. The UMass Facebook has photos of the school, its athletics, campus, residence hall and other fun things around the campus. These are all visually appealing to potential students because they see how UMass is and what they are about.

The Future Student tab also has information about UMass, such as fun facts about the school, a discussion board where potential students can post questions about the admission process or anything else that is on their mind. This tab also contains five categories of pictures: Campus, Athletics, Residence Halls, Famous Alumni and Best College in Town. These pictures can help potential students see what UMass looks like and give them tangible reason as to why they should attend.

The University of Massachusetts has a YouTube page with unified colors and the same branded look as the Facebook and UMass website. The YouTube page has videos of each individual college within UMass. This gives potential students insight into UMass and what they provide in classes and departments.

UMass has a branded look within each of their social media sites. Each page is the same color, has the same messages and is user friendly to anyone viewing their sites. All pages are effectively linked to one another for easy navigation throughout. URI should duplicate this effort, as we strive to enhance the Universities social media tactics.

The University of Massachusetts has a student voice within each of their social media sites. On

Facebook, actual current students are responding to inquiries from potential students. Personalized biographies about the students actively responding to these Facebook questions are listed. This allows potential students to easily relate to the current students by gaining a better understanding of the students major and interests. These bios create a student voice to clearly attract future students to this University. We, at URI, should consider this tactic of inviting students to participate.

Recommended Tactics to Integrate Social Media

Our recommendations are divided into two stages; work to be done throughout the summer and work to be done at the start of the fall. Based on a thorough analysis of colleges and universities with a notable social media presence, we would recommend the following steps be taken to enhance the University of Rhode Island's new media initiative.

Stage 1: (Spring thru Summer)

1. Organize a social media committee to develop a university-wide handbook and strategic plan. The handbook, modeled after Vanderbilt University, Tufts University, and the University of Delaware, could include an introduction to social media, the university's policies on social media, steps for getting started with social media, best practices for each platform, detailed instructions on how to create an account for each platform, and contact information and resources. This handbook should be made available to all university departments, faculty, and student groups. The purpose of this handbook would be to help anyone in the URI community effectively use social media to reach their intended audiences. A social media strategic plan would help those using the tools effectively define goals, target audiences, measure success, and evaluate the effectiveness.

2. Create a social media directory on URI's main web page. The link to this directory should be clearly visible and grab the viewer's attention. This directory, similar to the ones used by Bates College and the University of Connecticut, provides an extensive, yet organized list of all the universities' social media accounts, categorized by platform. It is more effective to direct all audiences to one centralized site, then have your viewers hunt for the information they need. In addition to the directory, all of the university's social media platforms need to be branded in a way that is visually attractive and appealing to students. The social media committee could be tasked with determining a branded look and message.

3. Create a Student Social Media Team. These social media team members will work under the guidance of the social media committee and should have multiple responsibilities. They will help build

the University of Rhode Island's social media presence and provide a student voice for communicating with multiple audiences. They could assist with monitoring the constant two-way communication that results from social media. It is extremely important to respond in a timely and appropriate manner to someone when using social media. The team of students could produce and manage their own blogs and be responsible for generating posts and tweets for the student-run and main social media accounts.

Students would be required to promote and attend campus events, as well as write short entries and post photos and videos to share what life is like for a student at the University of Rhode Island.

4. Create and implement a mobile web site. This tool's purpose is to organize your web site's content when it is viewed using a mobile device. Many colleges and universities have adopted this technology as an easier and financially practical alternative to purchasing and maintaining different mobile applications. Some schools include emergency info, campus maps, athletics, events calendars, daily news updates, campus directories, and social media updates on their mobile web sites.

Stage 2: (Fall 2011)

1. Create First-Year Experience (FYE) and Admissions web pages for the incoming freshman of 2012. Both of these pages should have important content clearly displayed and organized, as well as incorporation of social media platforms. Two examples of a university admissions sites that are vibrant, student-friendly, and organized are the University of Delaware (www.udel.edu/admissions) and the University of Illinois (admissions.illinois.edu). These schools have Facebook and Twitter accounts for both admissions and the specific graduating class. The Illinois Network merges all the prospective student related accounts in a dashboard-like setup to better accommodate and peek the interest of prospective students. First-Year Experience sites provide resources to help students develop a social fit within the school, and increase retention among them. Schools with great FYE websites are Indiana University, the University of Southern Mississippi, the University of Texas at Austin, and the Ohio State University. All of these pages have an attractive, simple and straight

forward look and feel. They are designed to get a student's attention and are easy to navigate through. They are resourceful by answering frequently asked questions and providing information on common topics. Lastly, they integrate social media and make these tools known to site visitors who may not have made an effort to look for them otherwise.

2. Design contests, promotions, and guerilla marketing tactics to promote the university's enhanced social media presence and the student social media team. These tactics should be interactive, integrate social media, and create buzz among the students. Examples of these marketing strategies have been discussed in the competitive analysis of Texas A&M University, University of Kentucky, the Ohio State University, and the University of Texas at Austin. In addition to colleges and universities, many Fortune 500 companies who have adopted social media run promotions and contests to connect with consumers.

3. Integrate social media platforms into the traditional marketing efforts. Include the social media icons and web addresses on all print advertising, brochures, letters sent out by the university, TV ads, Radio ads, and billboards. Since the university will have spent time enhancing their tools, it is important to market them as a resource offered by URI. Although printed materials and campus visits are the most important to prospective students and their parents, during the enrollment process they will transition from traditional to new media, and URI needs to there before and after the transition.

Recommendations

How URI Can Utilize Social Media to Effectively Attract and Retain Students

Social Media is an emerging, dynamic technology that is becoming an essential element to the success of any business. The University of Rhode Island is one of those organizations that must learn how to properly utilize social media in order to improve and stay competitive with other businesses. This section will highlight recommendations as to how the University should utilize social media by focusing on how we can better utilize all social media platforms (primarily Facebook); emerging technologies we should take advantage of (such as Inigral) and how we can better reach diverse groups of students.

Currently, URI has a disorganized presence in terms of its social media look. There are many profiles on Twitter and Facebook under the URI name, but many of these pages have been started by students in order to communicate within a university organization. Many of these pages and profiles are not actively maintained and can often provide outdated and inaccurate information. David Meerman Scott often says, “You are what you publish”. Anything bearing URI’s namesake is a representation of the University, whether officially or not. It would be in the University’s interest to mandate that any form of social media associated with URI is approved by the University before going live online. The Student Programming Office currently does this with on-campus events, and it ensures that everything is marketed accurately through their office. This tactic would give URI a more unified, branded social media presence, while adding credibility to the university. Boston University does this as well, with their Social Media Handbook.

The University of Rhode Island also lacks an active “student voice” throughout their admissions website. Chris Medici, Executive Vice President, Director of Strategic Marketing and Communications for the United Way told us we must reach our audiences differently, and we think we miss prospective students in a significant way. We rely too much on the beauty of the campus and do not convey our vibrant student life and personality. Currently, there is one video created by a student on the admissions website. It is a nice video; it is very well edited and high quality. However, it seems to lack student personality, and it is very general. A nice idea would be to have students create videos specific to a major

or college, depicting a typical day or week of a student in this college or major. Prospective students can virtually follow a student around and put themselves in different shoes. The University of Delaware currently utilizes creative videos, and they are a school with very similar needs to URI.

Another aspect the University lacks is a proactive approach in communicating with students. Presently, we tend to be reactive, and that is never a good way to be in any industry. As previously mentioned, a good way to start being more proactive would be to better utilize Facebook and Twitter. Today, it is apparent every generational cohort is hopping on the Facebook bandwagon. It is a great way to reach many facets of your potential audiences.

Twitter is another social media site that we think is underutilized. This platform would probably be better geared towards prospective students than their parents, but it is significantly underutilized by the University. Twitter requires you to keep things short and concise, eliminating rambling and forcing creativity. The website requires you turn every message you have into an eye-catching headline (if you use it to attract attention to something). People can also be put in lists or groups based on their interests. By placing a ‘#’ symbol in front of a key phrase or idea, the author highlights it and the phrase or idea comes up in twitter search engines more readily. It is very easy to gather people based on their interests and release information. A good way to introduce this technology into Admissions would be to start asking for twitter handles in applications or Admissions events. Admissions can also use Twitter to hold real-time, digital question and answer sessions.

Another underutilized technology is blogging. Blogging provides a personal voice to a company or organization and allows the company to release up-to-date information about things going on within the organization. By better utilizing blogging, URI Admissions can take a more personalized approach. The University of Connecticut has a handful of student bloggers who represent their diverse student population. We are confident that URI can emulate UConn in this respect. Student bloggers can creatively describe their lives, and prospective students are likely to relate to them. Today, blogging is a very popular hobby, and there is no doubt, in our opinion, that there wouldn’t be willing and able students to maintain a Blog for Admissions. This position can also be offered as an internship for Writing majors,

or talented students from WRT 235 can be chosen for the position. Blogs are free to start up, easy to moderate and are serial, so there's always have new content. Currently, we only have the President's Blog associated with URI. This is a nice way to humanize President Dooley, but it attracts parents, not most students.

In order to keep up with the ever-evolving use of social media, URI must seek changes and improve their current use of social media websites. When considering recommendations for URI, it is important to take Chris Medici's advice regarding proper social media use. One of Chris Medici's (United Way VP) main suggestions was to assess what is going on in the organization and the industry. It is extremely important that URI considers all of their major competitors and what their presence is on social media websites, such Facebook and Twitter. Major competitors that we feel URI can learn from are University of Delaware and University of Connecticut. The University of Delaware institutes unique social media ideas that include current student involvement. One important aspect of the University of Delaware's Facebook page is that it is generated by the students. The student-generated Facebook page is a recommendation that URI should take into consideration. One main reason is that prospective students will pay more attention to a Facebook page that is fun and highlights school events and topics of which they are interested. Another important aspect of University of Delaware's social media is the iTunes U application. The iTunes U application allows current or prospective students to download school songs, like the fight song. It would be beneficial for URI to look into this idea. If prospective students were able to buy the URI Fight song or other URI songs, it gives them the opportunity to feel connected to the University.

University of Connecticut is also an important competitor to consider in terms of social media. UConn has separate Facebook pages for each of their colleges. This is another helpful idea that URI can utilize by having a Facebook page for each college. It makes it easy for a prospective student to look up current information and locate current students in a specific school in which they are interested.

Another crucial suggestion that Chris Medici made was to properly identify the audience. When considering this recommendation, URI must identify the key players they want to reach. . We feel the

most important are prospective students, the parents of prospective students and alumni. When considering this diverse audience, URI has to realize each audience has to be reached appropriately. The information a prospective student is looking for will probably not be the same for a prospective student's parent. We feel that blogs maintained by current URI students should be created to attract prospective students. Current URI students should write the blog because they are more likely to write about relevant topics pertinent to a prospective student. All of URI's blogs should not be directed to prospective students. Parent blogs can be created to talk about the financial aspect or to discuss what their children could accomplish by attending URI. President Dooley would be considered an appropriate person to post on the parents blog because he can convey relevant information to parent's. Keeping the message consistent is a beneficial tool that URI can take away from Chris Medici.

While investigating our Facebook page and Twitter presence, it became clear that we, as a University, need to step up our consistency. On the Facebook page for URI's newest class of incoming freshman, there was only one post to the wall from URI. This approach is not the way to attract and retain students! URI tells the newly accepted students that they want them to be a part of the "Rhody World" by sending them acceptance letters and information in the mail; however a glance at the Facebook page does not convey the same message. If URI wants the prospective students to be excited about becoming a Ram, they need to show it. The Facebook wall should be littered with posts about how excited we are to welcome our newly accepted students. As David Meerman Scott says, "social media is two ways". It is not enough for URI to have social media pages, they have to communicate and use them. If prospective students are posting on a URI Facebook Page, it is now "social media etiquette" to respond. Not responding to questions and comments posted on social media pages would be like not returning a phone call. It is so important to always keep the conversation constant and have equal participation from each party.

One major recommendation that URI can instill today, is the URI Twitter page, which would be solely used for current and prospective students to ask URI questions. For example, American Express has a Twitter page that is based on answering customer's questions and concerns. American Express is

known for their customer service, and it would only be beneficial to URI to learn from their tactics. By allowing students and prospective students to specifically ask URI questions, it shows that URI is fully involved. The URI Twitter page would allow students to contact URI 24/7. It will be an easy and more efficient way to ask questions and get quick responses.

A form of social media that we feel URI does not use to its maximum potential is YouTube. A fantastic social media website, YouTube has the power to promote URI in a positive light. While searching through URI's website, we found that URI does not have nearly enough YouTube videos displaying student life or the campus. Our major competitors all display YouTube videos that show off what their school has to offer. URI should utilize YouTube because showing is often better than telling. In order for URI to acquire visually pleasing YouTube videos, we should institute a contest. We can offer a prize to a student who comes up with the best YouTube video that depicts life at URI. The prize should be something of significance - an Apple iPad is a suggestion. If the reward is attractive, it will motivate students to create the best video.

Another major resource that URI should consider is Inigral.com, a tool just recently becoming popular with other universities, like Colombia. This would be a valuable tool for URI to consider. . Inigral's goal is to make prospective and current students of universities feel even more connected to one another through Facebook. It essentially takes Facebook and makes it more personal. If the student includes that they are a nursing major who enjoys surfing, Inigral.com connects all the students who are nursing majors and who enjoy surfing at the University of Rhode Island. College can be a difficult and scary time for some students. The use of Inigral can help students get connected to URI's community before they step foot on campus.

We understand that redeveloping URI's social media use can be a daunting task, which is why we recommend that we create separate phases for the project. We believe that URI will be able to revamp its social media more efficiently, if it is clear that there are separate phases. We believe that we are currently in phase one of this social media project. We are developing ideas and using resources to help improve URI's current system. If URI were to use the PRS 442 class in the future, they can implement phase two

of the project. Phase two of the assignment would include carrying out the tasks that are mentioned in our research. Students in later classes can be involved with developing URI's social media pages. They can also be responsible for finding students who are able to blog for URI, maintain the Facebook pages and find candidates for the YouTube project. In the future, we also believe that URI should develop a social media handbook. This handbook would include the different phases of URI's social media use. The handbook would also outline what would be appropriate to publish on the social media sites on behalf of URI.

Every one of our top competitors uses Facebook. The University of Delaware and Northeastern feature student blogs. Many of these universities and colleges are also using Twitter and LinkedIn to send messages and connect to current and prospective students. URI must participate in social media if only to keep up with the competition. Of course, the goal should not be to meet the level of the competition but to exceed it and set a new level of competition. It is our recommendation that the University of Rhode Island initiate a system and criteria to periodically monitor not only the social media activities of our competitors but also emerging social media trends.

We have determined that students who do not use social media are clearly at a disadvantage because they miss out on the interactive nature of social media. Industry leader David Meerman Scott emphasizes the advantage of two-way communication in this book [The New Rules of PR and Marketing](#). On the other hand, we recommend that URI not stop, or scale down their traditional media tactics. Billboards, television commercials, mailings and newspaper ads are a good way to reach these students. Word of mouth is another strong factor in gaining awareness and interest in the university. Even if a student is not using social media technology, with over 150,000,000 Facebook users in the US, chances are good their friends are and are sharing that information through word of mouth.

We recommend a strategic approach when using social media to connect with students from minority backgrounds. Statistically, the use of social media by minorities is markedly lower than that of Whites, accord to research conducted by the marketing firm Defakto Group, minorities in the millennial generation are not far behind. Though John Pavlik's article "Mapping the Consequences of Technology

on Social Media” noted that minorities, particularly Blacks ,use blogs far less than their White counterparts (11% compared to 60%), 71 percent of black millennials have a social media profile, 53 percent use Facebook on a weekly basis, and 40 percent use YouTube (Though twitter use is low at only 7%). A total of 52 percent of Hispanic Millennials have profiles on social media sites, and the same number use Facebook on a weekly basis and 45 percent use YouTube. Once again, Twitter use was low among Hispanics at 5 percent. A total of 29 percent of both Blacks and Hispanics use handheld devices to check and update social media. Asian Americans are much more involved with social media with 71 percent using Facebook weekly, and a total of 51 percent using YouTube. However Asians were still less likely to use Twitter and blogs with only 5 percent using Twitter and an even lower 3 percent using blogs. Hispanics were the second largest user of blogs at 19 percent. This research also shows that 78 percent of U.S companies said that they did not engage in social media tactics to target Hispanics. With the preceding statistics of social media use among minorities, it is clear that the decision of many organizations not to use social media to target minorities is a grave error. What is perhaps most important is that these numbers are steadily growing proving that the impact of these social media efforts to target minorities will only expand.

One argument that David Meerman Scott makes in *The New Rules of Marketing and PR: How to Use Social Media, Blogs, News Releases, Online Video, & Viral Marketing to Reach Buyers Directly* is that an organization must develop persona profiles for the audience that they want to reach. In URI’s case, there are many different types of students that we want to attract to our university. We are interested in attracting athletes, out of state students, in state students, and pharmacy students, just to name a few. It is important to realize that using the same media strategy is not going to attract all of these students. We need to be cautious in our media strategy technique to ensure that we are connecting to different personalities. The URI updated Facebook page on URI sports would be beneficial to the prospective URI athlete, however that same page will probably not attract a student who is interested in URI for our pharmacy program. This is why we must diversify our media strategies so each prospective student is able to connect with a Facebook group, URI Twitter account, etc. that reaches their personal interests.

As a result, URI must be strategic in what vehicles of social media we use for each message. Messages targeted toward recruiting minority students specifically may do better using Facebook and YouTube. Twitter would not be a good way to go if the target audience for a particular message is minorities. Minority students may not be using all forms of social media, but they are using social media. They should still be included in the message and are still a viable target for social media strategies.

We recommend that the university make a conscious effort to bring a sense of unity to its traditional and social media approach. This may require a tight-knit relationship between traditional media departments and social media. We also recommend a team to tackle this effort and recommend that students be heavily involved in the process. This may require the university to provide some form or incentive whether it is academic or monetary.

Essentially, the University of Rhode Island still has a significant amount of work to do in improving their social media presence. By emulating other school's practices, learning about new media and attracting different groups in the right ways, the University will be well on their way to becoming a stand-out school amongst its competitors.

Conclusion

Described as an emerging and dynamic technology, social media is an essential element to the success of any business. Based on our research and life experiences, it is clear that social media has created a ubiquitous, vibrant marketplace allowing consumers to engage in unique and seamless buying experiences. Likewise, the marketing and advertising of products and services to consumers has been revolutionized given the viral, competitive environment perpetuated by the social media platform. At the same time, astute organizations recognize the competitive landscape has forever changed given the spontaneity and instantaneousness of the social media world.

As a competitive player in the world of academia, the University of Rhode Island recognizes the critical need to satisfy our customers: current and prospective students. In addition, other viable customers to consider are our alumni, the community, to include business and political leaders, and the faculty. With that said, we recommend the University consider the following recommendations to remain a competitive player:

- Establish a committee comprised of faculty, students, staff to develop policy/strategic plan to advance the social media presence at the University.
- Incorporate a student voice in all social media efforts.
- Integrate a unified look among marketing efforts, including social media tactics, allowing for efficient navigation by users.
- Continue to monitor the effectiveness of social media efforts at the University as well as new trends and the efforts of our competitors.

In conclusion, this team of students acknowledges the complexities facing the University as it strategically moves from utilizing traditional marketing trends to the social media platform. By embracing teamwork and a sense of adventure, we are confident the University can effectively and efficiently utilize social media tactics to attract and retain students.

Works Cited

- Fischman, Josh. "Facebook Goes Back to 'Schools' - Wired Campus - The Chronicle of Higher Education." *Home - The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Web. 26 Feb. 2011.
<<http://chronicle.com/blogs/wiredcampus/facebook-goes-back-to-schools/4177>>.
- Focusing Your E-Recruitment Efforts to Meet the Expectations of College-Bound Students*. Rep. no. E-Expectations 2010. Noel-Levitz, Inc., 2010. Web. 26 Feb. 2011.
<https://www.noellevitz.com/NR/rdonlyres/52057241-5FD7-450E-8399-C772C1F9A3F9/0/EEExpectations_FocusingYourERecruitmentEfforts_0710.pdf>.
- Ganim Barnes, Ph.D., Nora, and Eric Mattson. *Social Media and College Admissions: Higher-Ed Beats Business in Adoption of New Tools for Third Year*. Rep. University of Massachusetts Dartmouth Center for Marketing and Research, May 2010. Web. 26 Feb. 2011. <<http://www1.umassd.edu/cmr/studiesresearch/socialmediaadmissions.cfm>>.
- Ganim Barnes, Ph.D., Nora, and Eric Mattson. *Social Media and College Admissions: The First Longitudinal Study*. Rep. The University of Massachusetts Dartmouth Center for Marketing and Research, Nov. 2008. Web. 26 Feb. 2011.
<<http://www1.umassd.edu/cmr/studiesresearch/mediaandadmissions.pdf>>.
- Guess, Andy. "Taking Facebook Back to Campus - Inside Higher Ed." *Inside Higher Ed*. 2011. Web. 26 Feb. 2011. <<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2008/10/24/socialweb>>.
- Kaya, Travis. "Colleges Build Hubs to Track Social-Media Buzz About Their Institutions." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. The Chronicle of Higher Education, 6 Oct. 2010. Web. 26 Feb. 2011. <<http://chronicle.com/blogs/wiredcampus/colleges-build-hubs-to-track-social-media-buzz-about-their-institutions/27284>>.

Lipka, Sara. "Colleges Using Technology to Recruit Students Try to Hang On to the Conversation." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. The Chronicle of Higher Education, 1 May 2009. Web. 26 Feb. 2011. <<http://chronicle.com/article/Colleges-Using-Technology-t/117193/>>.

Medici, Christopher. "Media Communications." Personal interview. 14 Mar. 2011.

Meerman, David Scott. *The New Rules of Marketing and PR: How to Use Social Media, Blogs, News Releases, Online Video, & Viral Marketing to Reach Buyers Directly*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010. Print.

"Minorities, Mobile and Social Statistics." *Upload & Share PowerPoint Presentations and Documents*. Web. 30 Mar. 2011. <http://www.slideshare.net/DefaktoGroup/minorities-mobile-and-social-statistics-4099680>

McCrea, Bridget. "Location Aware: University of Kentucky Mobilizes Social Recruiting." *Campus Technology*. 1105 Media Inc., 09 Feb. 2011. Web. 26 Feb. 2011. <<http://campustechnology.com/articles/2011/02/09/location-aware-university-of-kentucky-mobilizes-social-recruiting.aspx>>.

Pavlik, John V. "Mapping the Consequences of Technology on Public Relations." *Institute for Public Relations*. Web. 30 Mar. 2011. <<http://www.instituteforpr.org/topics/mapping-technology-consequences>>

Pfeiffer, Alice. "Universities Use Social Media to Connect." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 30 May 2010. Web. 26 Feb. 2011. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/31/education/31iht-riedsoc.html>>.

Reuben, Rachel. *The Use of Social Media in Higher Education for Marketing and Communications: A Guide for Professionals in Higher Education*. Rep. State University

of New York: New Paltz, July 2008. Web. 26 Feb. 2011. <<http://doteduguru.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/social-media-in-higher-education.pdf>>.

StudentPoll: High School Students Want Parents to Be More Involved in College Planning. Rep. no. Volume 6, Issue 1. College Bound and Art & Science Group, 7 Mar. 2007. Web. 26 Feb. 2011. <<http://professionals.collegeboard.com/data-reports-research/trends/studentpoll/parent-involvement>>.

StudentPoll: Social Networking Sites and College-Bound Students. Rep. no. Volume 7, Issue 2. College Board and Art & Science Group, 2009. Web. 26 Feb. 2011. <<http://professionals.collegeboard.com/data-reports-research/trends/studentpoll/social-networking>>.

"Top 5 Universities Using New Media Effectively | San Diego State University." *San Diego State University*. Wordpress.com, 11 May 2010. Web. 26 Feb. 2011. <<http://sdsblog.wordpress.com/2010/05/11/top-5-universities-using-new-media-effectively/>>.

Villegas, Nate. "Facebook in Higher Education – Taking an Objective Look at Social Media in the First Year Experience." *Social Media in Higher Education*. Inigral Inc., 3 Aug. 2010. Web. 26 Feb. 2011. <<http://blog.inigral.com/first-year-experience-resource/>>.

Zanders, Tony. "Facebook in Higher Education – Social Media for College Admissions Professionals: The Beginners Guide." *Social Media for College Admissions Professionals: The Beginners Guide*. Inigral Inc., 14 Apr. 2010. Web. 26 Feb. 2011. <<http://blog.inigral.com/social-media-for-college-admissions-professionals-gettingstarted/>>