

Social Media Plan for the University of Wisconsin-Madison

Office of Admissions and Recruitment

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Background

Founded in 1848, the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW) is the flagship campus of the University of Wisconsin System. It is home to more than 40,000 undergraduate and graduates students (UW Facts), 21,000 faculty and staff (Working at UW), and 446,000 alumni (Wisconsin Alumni Association). It is a very large and diverse higher education institution, and I am proud to be a small part of its thriving ecosystem. Since September 2019, I have worked in the Office of Admissions and Recruitment as a remote applications reader, where our team makes decisions for the more than 43,000 first-year applicants. With many students and families interested in UW, there are social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to disseminate information. While these accounts are successful for admissions and prospective students, the social media accounts designated for the entire institution are a solid representation of what “is” UW and its stakeholders. I will adapt certain elements from the university-wide social media platforms into a social media plan for the Office of Admissions and Recruitment. This paper will also examine UW’s social media plan, focusing on successes and what can be improved; and how digital wellness can be incorporated in a positive manner, as defined by Rogers-Whitehead.

UW has an extensive social media plan with general guidelines posting content individually and on behalf of the institution. By searching through the web page, there are links to several subsections related to social media, including use of trademarks, copyright, appropriate use of information technology resources, and disciplinary procedures. There are also guidelines and basic information on best social media practices, safety and security, and appropriate behavior when posting content on public and private pages. I noticed an inconsistency with the social media guidelines and social media brand and visual identity pages that can also be addressed when improving the social media plan for UW. On the social media

policies and guidelines page, it mentions the social media guidelines apply to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, Foursquare and personal websites and blogs. By digging into UW's social media platforms, I found UW's Foursquare has not been used actively since 2012 and Flickr is not as active as other platforms. Additionally, Instagram is not mentioned, but has a very large network of 141,000 followers and nearly 2,300 posts. However, on the social media brand and visual identity web page it shows the primary social media platforms are Facebook (307,000), Twitter (187,000) and Instagram, which collectively have more than 635,000 followers.

One detail I noticed in the social media policies and guidelines web page is that they are adapted "from a document created by our peers at the University of Michigan" (UW University Relations). While the policies and guidelines are defined well and clearly cited from a source, it is shown that administrators and leadership have taken significant time to adapt to the needs of UW, its employees, students and stakeholders. UW also has a social media statement online that is unique to the institution. It mentions the social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Pinterest are "produced and maintained by University Communications at UW-Madison" (UW Social Media Statement). UW does not regularly review content on social media, but has the right to remove content, for example, that is threatening or violates intellectual property rights or privacy laws. If users do not want information made available via these sites, they should not post content on the social media platforms.

An innovative feature that the institution has developed is a landing page called #UWSocial. According to its web page, #UWSocial connects its social community by sharing and showcasing content from students, faculty, staff, alumni, parents and visitors by filtering the best posts from Twitter and Instagram using #UWMadison (#UWSocial). While not all posts are showcased, the majority of the content on its landing page is a positive representation of UW.

Measurable Goals

As mentioned previously, the Office of Admissions and Recruitment utilizes Facebook, Twitter and Instagram as social media platforms. With these platforms already well established, I will seek ways to improve the structure of posts, in addition to making suggestions on how to add Snapchat as a regularly used platform. The Office of Admissions and Recruitment will be on social media because it will increase awareness of prospective and admitted students and their families who seek information before arriving on campus. It is most important to answer questions about applications, programs of study, campus life and extracurriculars so students and families know how much UW has to offer.

By looking at each of the three social media platforms and rounding to the nearest hundred, Facebook has 5,400 followers, Twitter has 5,200, and Instagram has 4,000. These are solid figures for each platform, but given the 43,000 applicants each academic year, it is a reasonable assumption that the numbers could be increased. By looking at the social media platforms used by admissions and UW communications, it is confirmed that these three are the most popular to be used to get students and families engaged.

At first glance, the platforms are designed very well and have active posts each week with at least a few each day. Over the past few weeks, the content has been relatively the same with a majority of the posts being notifications for virtual information sessions with admissions staff and volunteers. There is also content with general information, news and articles from the UW, and notifications for incoming first-year students about setting up emails and their school account. The summer is a quiet time for admissions as a whole, but during the fall, winter and spring months, activity is much greater as the staff posts information about application due dates, college fairs, and on-campus tours.

The overall goal for each of the three already established platforms is to get more than 10,000 followers, just as UW's main accounts have amassed well more than 100,000 followers on each. This will not happen overnight, though, as incoming and prospective students and their families must take advantage of social media posts by admissions. This being said, within one year it will be our goal to increase the following on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram by 50 percent. By this time next year, that would bring Facebook and Twitter to roughly 8,000 followers, and Instagram to 6,000 followers.

When considering the specific content of each platform, the office posts and the same content and same that is unique to the platform. Recently, the office has been hosting live information sessions on Facebook and Twitter and then posts the final product on Twitter for more traffic. Moving forward during the summer and beyond, it should be a goal that there are at least four unique posts a day during the work week to increase awareness about UW admissions. These posts can be specific to admissions or can be news and articles from UW highlighting stories across campus and from alumni. Especially during busy times in fall, winter and spring, these numbers will need to be met to drive awareness for students applying and making sure their applications are submitted on schedule.

Snapchat will be a new venture that admissions will pursue, as it is not used by the office. Since the platform is used in real time, these posts will not be as frequent, but will have important information regarding visits to campus, information sessions, and general inquiries. Almost like stories on Facebook and Instagram, Snapchat will set a goal of have one or two posts per day for the first two months. Following a review of traffic on the platform and if it is used often, the posts could be increased to three per day, especially during the admissions seasons. Additionally, Snapchat will be able to share stories from followers who directly mention UW

and admissions. This will further build brand awareness to a larger audience and show followers that admissions is proactive in engaging with its students.

Tactics

The main tactic that will be used to schedule and prepare content is to create a calendar for each platform. Each month will be scheduled three months in advance, so at any given time there will be three months full of content and ideas ready to be posted on social media. If new stories are brought up, it will be up to the staff to distribute ideas to be written or posted. Ideally the posts will be short and informational and a snap shot of prospective students with occasional stories that are shared from the main UW platforms. By having calendars made, admissions will not have to worry about scrambling to think of ideas and post specific content on time.

In order to build awareness of the three big social media platforms and the newly established Snapchat, I must build awareness of the office's social media presence. As a result of virtual learning and information sessions, students and families will be more likely to stay informed through social media. In many of the posts done already, #FutureBadger is used to create a sense of community of those who are matriculating to UW. This has been widely used during virtual information sessions and could be utilized in materials when college fairs and on-campus visits are permitted. On any given page of information packets, a one-line note showing students and families how to follow UW admissions can be done to increase traffic on social media.

Another way to increase traffic is by sharing content more frequently with specific hashtags and posts. The class of 2023 at UW welcomed more than 7,500 first-year students to campus and a similar number can be expected for the class of 2024. A campaign that I would

establish would be to get the incoming class posting content on social media about why they chose UW. Ideally, students will post on Twitter and Instagram, as well as Facebook, with the hashtag #WhyIAmABadger. This tactic is fairly straight forward and a letter will be sent with their matriculation information or subsequent emails leading up to their arrival on campus.

Students will post publicly on whatever platforms they have, as well as being asked to tag UW in their posts to show what institution they are referring to. If the campaign is successful, it could result it adding hundreds or more than 1,000 new followers on any given social media platform.

As mentioned before, it will be a goal to post at least four times per day about news in admissions or around UW. After every four weeks (or month), the social media team will review the posts from each platform to determine the most popular one. The most popular (liked) posts will be reshared on all platforms to continue driving traffic. With #WhyIAmABadger, matriculating students and prospective students for future application seasons will want to know the reasons behind their decisions to attend UW. Depending on how many posts there are, every two or four weeks admissions will compile 10 to 12 student posts and share them across the platforms. Additionally, each individual post will be liked or commented on by admissions to show they are engaged with their students. This will break the tradition established by UW communications, which is not regularly reviewing content on social media.

According to Statista (2020), in in the third quarter of 2019 Snapchat is used by more than 50 percent of 15- to 25-year-olds who have access to internet, which is right in the middle of the age range for college-bound students. For this reason, a main tactic used for the platform will be allowing student volunteers in admissions to run the account. Since they will be doing work for free or at a lower pay rate, it is ideal since the platform will be new. Students will run the account from their own smart phone by doing tours of campus, answering questions that are

sent, and providing information to prospective students and families. Students will set aside one hour each day to review posts and answer questions and think of new ideas that will be compiled for the brand ambassadors.

The final tactic that will be implemented by the Office of Admissions and Recruitment is a landing page for all social media posts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, as already used for #UWSocial. The landing page will be run by admissions staff and volunteers in the same way that university-wide landing page is used. The hashtag to look out for will be #UWAdmissions and #WhyIAmABadger, with each going to the same landing page. The landing page will be accessible from the Office of Admissions and Recruitment website located near the other social media platform links. Not only will the landing page be easy to access, it will compile positive content from users who are actively engaged with the UW and admissions.

Digital Wellness

While UW Office of Admissions and Recruitment will be actively building its brand to more than 10,000 followers on each of its platforms, it is important that its staff and volunteers are not overusing social media on a daily basis. According to Rogers-Whitehead (2019), digital health can have different meanings, but screen time is most debated because it takes a toll on someone depending on how long they spend on a device, affecting their physical and psychological health (p. 92). Not only this, but UW admissions is committed to the safety and security of all students and followers, including negative posts that can be found online.

With staff and volunteers reviewing content with specific hashtags, we want to find the best, most productive and engaging posts that are beneficial to students and families. However, they may come across negative posts that are diminishing to the brand of UW admissions. In this

case, those running the account should flag the posts and take appropriate action to have post deleted or find the user to make sure nothing else negative is said. The most important thing when interacting with a positive or negative post is to not retaliate; always be positive and take notice to someone's concerns, and ensure them the office will do what they can to resolve the issue or problem at hand.

“[Technology] is a hard distraction to ignore, and even harder if one is lacking in self-control,” especially if someone is a digital citizen, which in that case they “must be able to sift through constant stimuli online” (Rogers-Whitehead, 2019, p. 96). The staff, volunteers and students and families the office reaches to are already engaged on social media, so it is important not to overcrowd their feeds with content, but have enough to make them informed. With the amount of posts per day on each platform, the stakeholders will be able to learn necessary information and reach out if necessary. In terms of use by staff and volunteers, it is ideal to use social media one to two hours per day, breaking up the time if necessary and by each platform. By doing this, all people involved – both producers and consumers – will have a healthy digital wellness while staying informed.

Conclusion

The importance of this social media plan is to build a larger following on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat, and to disseminate thoughtful and engaging content for our audience. Although there is a good size currently, within one year and a 50 percent increase in followers will show that the UW Office of Admissions and Recruitment has the ability to maintain a noticeable brand on campus. Ultimately, it is our goal to attract the best students to proactively learn in their program of study for the next four years and become global citizens.

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