Sunderland College: Social Media - why bother?

Summary

A College in the North East were keen to raise the digital side of the organisation, with a vision of embracing social media to support not only the marketing activity, but also the business side of teaching and learning. With the insight and creativity of a very innovative Marketing Team, coupled with the drive and enthusiasm of curriculum staff keen to use the technologies to enhance the teaching and learning, this has been brought about, bringing success, as well as challenges along the way.

"It's in nearly everyone's day to day life - including your current and potential students"

About Sunderland College

One of the largest further education providers in the North East with five campuses located across the city. Offering one of the region's largest range of school leaver, adult and higher education courses as well as courses for international students.
The challenge

The college was using social media but in a rather haphazard way. They hadn’t put much time or resources into pulling it all together and monitoring it. Due to the spread of cross-college sites, some campuses were using separate Facebook accounts, some weren’t. This made it extremely difficult for prospective students to find out information about the college as a whole. Time and resources were needed into pulling it together and embedding a strategy for successful use of social media.

The activity

Embedded in the Communication Strategy and with SMT backing, the Social Media Policy came about. SMT were keen that staff used social media correctly, ensuring it met safeguarding regulations and as staff were very keen to embrace the technology* the Marketing Team began administering and coaching the social hubs within the college, mainly on the business side ie Barber Shop, Hair Salon, Garage etc. This entailed setting up profiles that were recognised through corporate branding and privacy settings adhered to for safeguarding purposes. With the latter staff were advised not to accept students as their friends and that all Facebook accounts that were linked to their college email address were only viewable by friends. This ensures that the profile is hidden from internet searches and prevents people confusing a college account with a personal one.

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Quote from Matt: Although social media is great for communicating, it is also very public and staff need to use it responsibly. The College's image has to be credited - public sphere is a powerful tool!

It is great to have people excited to be on it.....need to make sure you've got a purpose.

Marketing the business to current and prospective students:

Social media is a powerful tool when it’s used correctly. The Marketing Team know this only too well and are involved in much of the ‘selling the service’ by:

Rolling out termly photo shoots, and with the help of web curation tools like Pinterest, sophisticated FREE adverts are put out there eg:

‘Here are the latest styles you can get at the Barber shop’....this also goes on Moodle as part of the student’s assessment. Hence a 2-way process.
A 2-minute promotional video/teaching resources of a lecturer doing a ‘hot towel shave’ is put up on YouTube which promotes the business and likewise it is on Moodle as an assessment criteria.

A video with the Biology department on ‘heart dissecting’ with clever marketing it got a lot of love on Facebook on Valentine’s Day with the headline "Here’s what’s inside your heart if it's just been broken!"

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Listen to a snippet from the interview

At school promos the video is shared with prospective students “If you are going to do Biology, this is what the lecturer knows about the heart" ....or “here’s who’s going to be teaching you if you come to do Biology" and "this is what she knows about the heart" ....people we were trying to reach were asking question from these short clips... 'Inside the Lab' (see below)

Quote: Campaign for basic skills and employability skills a very successful campaign...highest click rate....

The outcomes

- This initiative took the College to the top 3 for Facebook Engagement;
- The network grew to over 2,000 in a year;
- The College now has a comprehensive Social Media Policy in place;
- Staff are enthusiastic about using and embracing it.

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Business Booming:

The Business side of the college have embraced the use of social media eg Barber Shop, Travel Agent, Hair Salons to name a few. Very quickly they realised that as a business you need to be on social media, not just to promote the service, but to attract the customers. With the help of video/photography skills of In-house
Marketing/Learning Technologists soon they were using short video clips to promote the business* and secure customers which feature on the college’s Facebook, website and Moodle* sites.

Quote from one of The Barber Shop Lecturers:

"I feel that using media is a brilliant way to showcase my students' work and aid them into future employment with salons. It’s also a great way to show how much the student has grown in skills and confidence. When speaking to salons I encourage them to look at the site ie: Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and the Barber Shop's mini-site on the main college website. These online portfolios are one of the best ways to encourage students to my course"

* College guidance is that the Moodle VLE Platform should be used as the main curriculum tool for digital communications in that every student has access to it, it’s a central resource, designed for learning and monitored for safeguarding. There are staff, however, who are finding that communicating with the learners through social media is easier and students are receptive to this.

Listen to a snippet from the interview

- Communications is much easier and quicker
- Positive messages whilst learners are studying can be made into case studies
- Getting stories before they arrive,
- Blogging about experiences in first term is good student feedback.

Listen to a snippet from the interview

By using the social media tools eg Storify, positive messages can be amplified and embedded in the website and they can also be retweeted.

Listen to a snippet from the interview

www.jiscrsc.ac.uk/case-studies
Web curation tools are used to showcase new ranges of treatments for example: 
*Pinterest hair and beauty images.*

**The lessons learned**

There is a great deal more positives than there are negatives coming out of the use of social media at Sunderland College.

When asked if he had any advice for other organisations who are considering using social media, Matt said:

Don’t just advertise, their life is on Facebook. Yes you want to be part of that life but there’s more to life than college, in between self-promotion offer more:

- Share posts from relevant pages
- Post discounts and deals to save money
- Pictures from around the college
- Ask questions (free research)

..and finally last quote from Matt on tracking and costs:

*Listen to a snippet from the interview*

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**Useful links**

- [Sunderland College](#)
- [How to do a hot towel shave](#)
- [Barber shop advert](#)
- [Inside the Lab - heart dissection](#)
- [Sunderland College Facebook](#)
- [Visage Hair and Beauty night at Hylton Campus](#)

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