

CASE Circle of Excellence Awards 2011

Judges' Report: Category 12, Best in Social Media

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Judging for the 2011 CASE Circle of Excellence Awards, Category 12: Best in Social Media, was held at Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec, for two days in April. We're grateful to the university for hosting this year's judging—and especially to Shelagh Pedeem and Laurie Zack for their excellent hospitality. Laurie has served as a judge for these awards for nearly a decade. This was his last judging: he retired in May. I will miss his insights and his contributions to future discussions about the websites we've viewed.

This year, the panel of judges included representatives of American and Canadian colleges, schools, and universities, both public and private. Half of the judges had never participated in one of these panels before. Three work for institutions that won national CASE Circle of Excellence Awards for their websites—and headed the teams that built the award-winning sites. Several are well known in the .edu blogosphere. One judge has earned a gold for social media. The panel included people with experience in design, web strategy, web content development, admissions, student recruitment, social media, web technology, and marketing.

According to CASE's website [<http://apps.case.org/coe-apply/description.cfm?id=137>],

Gold, Silver, and Bronze awards may be given in each subcategory to recognize best practices using social media within new and established programming. One overall category Grand Gold award may also be awarded for superior work. Eligible programs may come from any area of institutional advancement. Programs may be on-going or new in 2010 but must have been in place long enough to have produced well documented results. You may also enter best uses of social media in the following categories: Alumni Relations Programs: Creative Use of Technology and New Media and Fundraising Programs: Technology Applications and Creative Use of New Media.

There are four subcategories in "Best in Social Media." Here they are, with the number of entries in each subcategory and the number of awards given:

12a. Best Uses of Social Media in Alumni Programming: 13 entries, no awards

12b. Best Uses of Social Media in Fundraising: 1 entry, no awards

12c. Best Uses of Social Media in Student Recruitment and Marketing: 7 entries, 1 award

12d. Other Uses of Social Media: 32 entries, 3 awards

JUDGING CRITERIA

On its entry form, CASE promised that judges would evaluate each program on:

- How well your entry supports your overall institutional and/or communications efforts
- Content
- Usability
- Innovation
- Understanding of target audience(s)
- Budget and use of available resources
- Plan to evaluate program
- Results

In the second year for CASE's "Best in Social Media" Category, it seemed that the entries were either very good or pretty bad, with not much in between. This is one indication of how institutions are struggling to make sense of social media and to use it effectively. In general, we observed that when institutions clearly defined the problems they wanted social media to solve, they were able to develop innovative solutions.

As judges, we were looking for the following attributes from award winners:

- Strategy: What's the overall goal? How will social media be used to achieve it? What channels are appropriate? How are they used?
- Integration of tools/channels
- **Clear objectives** across channels and a clear strategy in place to measure results

One positive development this year was that there were more entries from institutions that had clearly thought about integrating their social media across channels into a type of "campaign," taking advantage of different social media platforms. Consider, for example, the University of Nottingham's award-winning effort to cover the 2010 election in the UK, which combined traditional media relations with a 24/7 blogging/Twitter effort.

This integration of communications channels is a positive movement away from what we observed last year, when many institutions indicated that having a Facebook page or a Twitter feed in and of itself was a social media strategy worthy of an award. And it's also a clear indication of growing sophistication about social media as a key channel that must be managed appropriately. Institutions are learning that Twitter is different from Facebook and the rules of engagement are different. Pumping tweets onto a Facebook wall is a fan-losing proposition. So is a one-way communications model that emulates broadcast.

And, as one judge pointed out, "While we can appreciate that at your institution the fact that you have a pretty well-run Facebook community is impressive and it took a lot to get there internally, it's not innovative." We want to know what institutions are doing with Facebook and other social media channels, and how they are leveraging their social media community to accomplish their communications goals.

We were hoping to see more collaboration across communications, web, alumni, and admissions teams than we did, with more integration. And we're still not seeing clear goals behind institutions' adoption of various social media channels, much less metrics that would let them know if their social media efforts had been successful. And we're not seeing great examples of engagement, especially on Twitter (which happens to be the preferred social network of many of the judges).

THE PROCESS

In judging these sites, we used a similar process to the one we used for judging websites. We divided the judges into four groups. Each group viewed the entries in one category and eliminated entries that didn't meet one or more of the characteristics of award-winners.

During the next round, we looked carefully at each remaining site, taking notes and evaluating entries to see how effectively institutions used social media—and what results they got. Then we discussed each of the remaining finalists to determine awards. This is very much an exercise in group process.

In this judging, we managed conflicts of interest similarly to the way we did in the judging for Category 11: Websites. Judges with a relationship to an institution being judged did not participate in viewing the institution's entry during the first "elimination" round; if the entry survived this round, judges with a relationship to or interest in a site were expected to recuse themselves from judging the site, were not allowed to comment on it during discussions, and didn't vote on it when awards were given.

A great written submission is essential for judging this category. Comments in the submissions help us to put what we're seeing on-screen in context. A well-articulated strategy, supported by results, helps us to understand that social media can achieve institutional objectives. We're keenly aware that these award winners will serve as models for other institutions and can help to convince reluctant administrators that social media is a safe channel to advance institutional goals. In this context, results are essential.

CATEGORY 12A: BEST USES OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN ALUMNI PROGRAMMING

There were 13 entries in this category, but we didn't give any awards. We simply did not see evidence of any institutions pushing the envelope in any way.

CATEGORY 12B: BEST USES OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN FUNDRAISING

There was one entry in this category; we did not give it an award.

CATEGORY 12C: BEST USES OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN STUDENT RECRUITMENT & MARKETING

There were seven entries in this category; we gave one award.

GOLD

The College of William and Mary: William and Mary Blogs

www.wm.edu/blogs/bloggers

blogs.wm.edu

blogs.wm.edu/author/admiss

law.wm.edu/admissions/blog

If anyone is looking for the state of the art in institutional blogs, this is it. William & Mary launched its blogs in 2008; in 2010, they switched to WordPress and integrated the blogs into WM.edu. The goal of these blogs is to offer a view of campus life through the eyes of faculty, students, and staff (now a total of 63 bloggers, all volunteers!). The blog posts are supported by comments, categories, search, and theme blogs (“Admit It!” for admissions, “Ideation” for the research magazine). The awards entry states: “Our bloggers receive minimal direction. Yet their posts reflect what we hope to highlight—if we had provided a script, it wouldn’t differ from what we read on their blogs.” How about results? Consider: an average of eight posts per week drew about 100,000 unique visitors; during admission season, the blogs are particularly active. We judges appreciated that the blogs are “on message,” yet still authentic (which also says something about William & Mary’s marketing overall). We noted that there was a lot of faculty participation on the blogs and a great deal of interaction via comments. The administrative blogs (like the admissions blogs) were candid and covered topics (process, decisions) that other admission organizations are often afraid to discuss and the student bloggers wrote about many aspects of student life at the college. We liked the extent to which the blogs and blog content are integrated on William & Mary’s website. And overall, the writing is good to excellent. Good results and good comments support the quality of the effort. Finally, we note that when William & Mary staff set out to do something, they set standards that other institutions emulate. This is another example of the excellence of their work.

CATEGORY 12D: OTHER USES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

In this category, institutions could enter social media programs that didn’t fit into one of the other three categories. There were 32 entries and we awarded one Gold and two Bronzes.

GOLD

University of Nottingham: Election 2010: Social Media Impact for Politics at the University of Nottingham

electionblog2010.blogspot.com
www.youtube.com/user/60secondpolitics
nottspolitics.org

The communications and marketing team at the University of Nottingham created a campaign focused on positioning Nottingham as the definitive source of expert commentary on the 2010 UK elections. This involved both staff members in the communications and marketing team as well as faculty with expertise in politics. By live blogging 24/7 during the election season, they wanted to draw the attention of reporters and major media, scholars at other institutions, the general public, potential students, and public opinion influencers. Before the effort began, they developed a series of goals to which they attached specific numbers. For example: “to generate 20 pieces of national and international [media] coverage...”; “... to help increase applications by at least 5%.” In preparation, the team researched reporters, bloggers, and experts, developing extensive lists of media contacts. One staff member worked closely with the faculty experts and bloggers to time tweets and posts in response to developing election themes. Traffic was largely driven by Twitter (123 tweets with 7,779 click-throughs), online PR, and linked

placement of faculty experts supported by their blog posts and traditional PR work. By the campaign's end, 104 blog posts had delivered more than 90,000 page views. The campaign exceeded all the targets set by the office. And: "Every item of national media coverage on Election Day featured a University of Nottingham spokesperson," for a total of 466 national media hits. We were very impressed with this entry. Nottingham had very clearly articulated goals and outstanding results: the university exceeded their metrics. One aspect of the campaign that we particularly appreciated was the use of social media to increase the capacity of their faculty colleagues to reach a larger, more mainstream, audience. The communications and marketing staff used social media to elevate their department to a definitive source of information for their entire country. Finally, kudos to Simon Butt, for writing such a complete and compelling award entry.

BRONZE

Columbia College Chicago: Manifest Urban Arts Festival Schedule Builder

www2.colum.edu/manifest/schedule

Manifest, a celebration of graduating students that also welcomes alumni, parents, and guests to campus, is Columbia College Chicago's largest and most important college-wide event. This entry consists of an online schedule builder that let attendees filter and save events, map them to campus locations via a Google Map, and share them across Facebook and Twitter. The college awarded incentives to site visitors who scheduled and shared events. The online schedule is a response to budget cuts—and it saved the college more than \$50,000 in advertising and promotion costs. While we noted some usability issues with the schedule builder, the concept and execution were clearly a powerful combination for the college: traffic to the Manifest website tripled last year, with more than 50% coming from Facebook.

St. Edwards' University: Give it a Whrrl: St. Edward's Graduation gets Socially Connected

celebrating125years.stedwards.edu/2010/04/23/class-of-2010-to-create-a-live-graduation-storybook-online

www.pelago.com/blog/announcements/2010/05/st-edwards-university-makes-history-with-their-socially-connected-graduation

In 2010, St. Edwards University decided to use the location-based game Whrrl to enable graduates, their families and friends, and other members of the university community to participate in an interactive, game-like graduation experience. Because they were aware that many people wouldn't be familiar with Whrrl, St. Edwards staff developed trial runs to test the technology, incorporated instructions into various communications about commencement, and invited Whrrl staff to demonstrate how to use their tool. In addition, the social stream was displayed in real-time during the ceremony. In all, 180 people participated and another 312 shared the live-stream ended. We really appreciated the fact that St. Edwards was willing to take a chance with a new technology — and admired all that they did to prepare their audience and encourage participation. (Note: Whrrl

was acquired by Groupon in April 2011, making this the first and last college commencement powered by Whrrl. We hope that other colleges experiment with gaming as an engagement tool.)