

CASE Awards of Excellence 2010

Judges' Report: Category 12, Best in Social Media

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This year, judging for the Circle of Excellence Category 12: Best in Social Media was held at George School in Newtown, PA, in conjunction with the judging for Category 11: Websites. We're grateful to George School for hosting this year's judging—and especially to Ari Betof, Odie LeFever, and Susan Quinn, who made the arrangements for the judging and even served as chauffeur to those of us staying off-site. Thanks for your wonderful hospitality!

Eight of us judged the social media category. Judges represented colleges, schools, and universities, both public and private. The panel included people with experience in design, web strategy, web content development, admissions, student recruitment, social media, web technology, and marketing. Some members of the panel have considerable exposure on social media, including a significant number of Twitter followers.

According to CASE's website [<http://www.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 2009 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."

Here are the number of entries in each subcategory and the awards given:

- 12a. Best Uses of Social Media in Alumni Programming: 12 entries, no awards
- 12b. Best Uses of Social Media in Fundraising: 5 entries, one award
- 12c. Best Uses of Social Media in Student Recruitment and Marketing: 19 entries, 2 awards
- 12d. Other Uses of Social Media: 25 entries, 3 awards

JUDGING CRITERIA

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

- How well the entry supports 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

Social media is new enough that there aren't a lot of precedents for great uses of social media that have been recognized by CASE. But there are some. Last year, for example, several initiatives that used social media won in various categories, including Flight of the Flyers from Nazareth College [see a description of this campaign here: budurl/xmcz] and Emory University's Blue Pig campaign [see a description of this campaign here: budurl.com/8bzy].

Before we began viewing the entries, we agreed that just having a Facebook page or a Twitter account — or even both of them along with a LinkedIn presence — wasn't enough for an entry to qualify for an award. We wanted to see strategic goals set and accomplished through the use of social media along with, perhaps, other channels. We wanted to see some evidence of engagement on the part of a target audience — blog comments, retweets, wall posts. And we wanted to see something that was new or different, not something that every other college or university was doing.

Honestly, we didn't know what to expect and in general, we were relatively disappointed in the submissions. We did see a number of institutions that thought having a Facebook page or a Twitter presence was significant. It isn't, not today.

From the award-winners, we gain an emerging sense that “best practices” in social media *do* involve multiple channels. Sometimes these are multiple social media or online channels. Northfield Mount Hermon's NMHBook mashup is an example of this approach: it aggregates social media feeds into the school's website. Powered By Orange, OSU's impressive awareness campaign, mashes up social media with many other channels, including banners, signage, and face-to-face events. The College of William & Mary used multiple online channels in its search for a new mascot and did it brilliantly. These are great examples of the kinds of social media-focused programs that institutions should emulate.

In judging social media, as in judging websites, written submissions are essential. 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.

THE PROCESS

In judging these sites, we used a similar process to the one we use 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 manage conflicts of interest similarly to the way we do it in the judging for Category 11: Websites. Judges with a relationship to an institution being judged do not participate in viewing the institution's entry during the first "elimination" round; if the entry survives this round, judges with a relationship to or interest in a site are expected to recuse themselves from judging the site, are not allowed to comment on it during discussions, and don't vote on it when awards are given.

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

There were 12 entries in this category. We didn't give any awards: there just wasn't evidence of any institutions pushing the envelope in any way.

CATEGORY 12B: BEST USES OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN FUNDRAISING

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

SILVER

Children's Hospital Trust Boston Social Media Portfolio:

Facebook (English): www.facebook.com/ChildrensHospitalBoston

Facebook (Spanish): www.facebook.com/milagrosparaninos

YouTube (English): www.youtube.com/ChildrensHospitalBos

YouTube (Spanish): www.youtube.com/user/milagrosparaninos

Twitter: @helpkids

In its entry Children's Hospital Trust notes, "With a small and dedicated in-house team, we have created an integrated suite of social media sites that have allowed Children's Hospital Trust to extend the bounds of its outreach and engage in daily dialogue with a community of over 100,000 patients and families. These channels have not only allowed us to communicate with our key audiences in a much more personal and interactive manner, they also allow us to truly engage a global audience for a fraction of the cost of traditional communications outreach efforts." We were impressed not only with the smart, bi-lingual collection of social media tools, but the fact that these channels are yielding results. For example, the English-language Facebook page is the number one driver of traffic to the organization's fundraising site (and donations were up 44 percent in 2009) and it is adding more fans than comparable organizations. Daily visitors are now in the hundreds. When we viewed the Facebook page, we found wall posts made within the past five hours.

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

There were 19 entries in this category; we gave two awards.

SILVER

Northfield Mount Hermon School NMHBook: NMHSchool.org/NMHBook

NMHBook aggregates content from various Northfield Mount Hermon-related sites on the social web. Aimed at prospective students and parents, the site strives to enable a transparent dialogue among staff, faculty, students, alumni, and other constituents. According to NMH's entry, "The page promotes awareness of NMH's robust social media presence and encourages users to explore NMH elsewhere on the web, get opinions about NMH from the public, and participate in the dialogue being fostered by NMH on sites like Facebook and Twitter." One of the first such sites among independent schools, NMHBook incorporates images from an extensive Flickr gallery, with 2,500 daily views; a Facebook page with more than 4,250 fans and approximately 150 daily views; a Twitter feed; and blogs from students and faculty. NMHbook has received an average 1,875 visits per day, with 4.68 page views per visitor and an average stay time of 3.31 minutes. We were impressed at the breadth of content and the fact that the school makes so much of its social web presence transparent and accessible to people in one place.

BRONZE

Brock University Both Sides of the Brain Facebook Application: apps.facebook.com/bothsidesofthebrain

Brock University entered its Facebook application, which is a contest app designed to encourage prospective students to become engaged with the brand by uploading photos and selecting from images that represent the other side of their brain. This reinforces Brock's positioning, "Brock. For Both Sides of the Brain," which means that students at Brock have the opportunity to develop academically, socially, culturally, emotionally, etc. and become well-rounded individuals. The results? Here are some of them: 7,400 signed up for the application and 1,800 prospective students uploaded a profile; 5,800 people used the site per day; and there were 142,000 contest votes from September 21 to January 13. We liked the fact that it was a strongly branded, simple, effective app.

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 25 entries and we awarded two Golds.

GOLD

College of William and Mary Mascot Search:

www.wm.edu/mascot

blog: wmmascot.blogs.wm.edu/

Facebook Group: www.facebook.com/group.php?gidr

Twitter: @WMMascot

YouTube: www.youtube.com/wmmascot

William & Mary's photostream on Flickr: www.flickr.com/photos/william-and-mary/4153486262/in/photostream/

Blog of our former (unofficial) mascot: www.wm.edu/blogs/wmblogs/ebirt/

Facebook profile of our former (unofficial) mascot: www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=1469593984

In February 2009, William & Mary launched a search for a mascot to replace its unofficial mascot. Marketing and communications for the search and selection were primarily focused on the web, relying heavily on a blog and other social media. Through the integration of a mascot search website and social media, members of the William & Mary community were engaged and involved in a process which generated more than 800 suggestions, encouraged more than 11,000 people to offer feedback about a set of five mascot finalists, and earned significant national media attention for the university. The campaign resulted in a significant amount of interaction, including 839 mascot suggestions; comments; wall posts; and likes; and earned media that included a segment on The Daily Show (Jon Stewart is a William & Mary alumnus). The effort is incredibly impressive and includes a YouTube video featuring William & Mary's president introducing the winning mascot (www.youtube.com/watch?v=BZzPwofDnQA).

Oregon State University, Powered by Orange:

www.facebook.com/poweredbyorange

www.twitter.com/poweredbyorange

www.youtube.com/user/OregonStateUniv#griduser/BAB8824D76D689BE

[www.linkedin.com/groups?about=8&gid=533798\(trk=anet_ug_grppro](http://www.linkedin.com/groups?about=8&gid=533798(trk=anet_ug_grppro)

www.flickr.com/photos/tags/bennyonthemove/

Powered by Orange is a broad-based, comprehensive, multi-channel campaign by Oregon State. The hub of the campaign is Poweredbyorange.com, which provides visitors "a collection of resources for learning, connecting and engaging with the institution and with each other, the site offers a set of features that can turn passive viewers into an engaged core of brand ambassadors." The campaign is comprehensive, offering social networks created for the PBO campaign; a blog; a custom Google map; a video series; and a variety of other media, including downloadable tools, wallpapers, posters, signs and other collateral give users a way to brand their workspace or place of business. The breadth of this campaign is truly impressive, as is the execution and the university's "launch and learn" approach to developing PBO. And there are encouraging results, including 55,500 distinct visits to the PBO site since its inception, with the most visits coming on the official launch day of the campaign; more than 10,000 social media connections on PBO-specific networks; and comments and blog posts about PBO.

BRONZE

Tufts University, The Beelzebubs on NBC's The Sing Off:

<http://news.tufts.edu/packages/bubs/>

<http://news.tufts.edu/packages/bubs/about>

In December 2009, Tufts' all-male a cappella group The Beelzebubs ("the Bubs") competed on NBC's vocal ensemble competition "The Sing-Off," which resulted in four nights of prime-time TV exposure for the group and Tufts University. As the Bubs advanced through the initial rounds of the competition, Tufts Web Communications team kept the Tufts community updated on their progress through Twitter, Facebook and a blog and updates to Tufts.edu. When the Bubs advanced to the finale, the University used a social media campaign to urge community members to vote by web/text/phone for the group. This accompanied a comprehensive package that leveraged a variety of web content. Finally, Tufts moderated a live chat hosted on its website where the Bubs interacted with the Tufts community via Twitter and Facebook live during the series finale. This package is a great example of how social media can be used to amplify and leverage an event.