



Chapter 10: Social Media



In the 21st century.....

- It's a wired world. The Internet has become the world's dominant form of communication.
- Yet, the Internet hasn't replaced human relationships. This is true both for:
 - Societal communications
 - The practice of public relations

The Internet is but another tool in the PR arsenal.



Defining the Internet

What is it?

- The Internet is a cooperatively run, globally distributed collection of computer networks that exchange information through a common set of rules.
- It began as the ARPANET, developed by the Department of Defense during the Cold War in 1969.
- The World Wide Web was developed in 1989 by physicist Tim Berners-Lee to enlarge the Internet for multiple uses.

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Defining the World Wide Web

- The World Wide Web (www) is a collection of millions of computers on the Internet that connect using information in HTML, or hypertext markup language.
- Multimedia can be combined using sound, graphics, video and animation to create a powerful tool in cyberspace.
- Worldwide users in 2015 = 3.2 billion
- The Internet explosion has taken new forms

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The Internet as communications medium

- The Internet has transformed the way that people communicate and contact each other.
- Virtually all organizations have websites today. PR departments utilize interactive specialists and groups to manage web operations.
- Journalists embraced the Internet as a primary source for research and reporting
- Personal contact with a journalist via a relationship is still the best way to get your message heard

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Public relations' Internet challenge

- Familiarity with Internet and its use are requisites for practice
- Practitioner Internet usage tremendous growth expected, practitioners face these challenges:
 - Demand to be educated than sold
 - Quest for conversation
 - Need for real-time performance
 - Need for customization

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The Internet, the social media, and the future of PR

- The Net may not have lived up to the 1990s high expectations of it being a principal medium of commerce.
- It, however, appears to be providing much more promise as a medium of communication.
- Many public relations departments acknowledge that a Web site is an organization's "first face" to the public.
- Departments have continued to add interactive specialists and groups to help make the Net a significant vehicle for communication.
- Agencies have departments to help clients navigate the Net.
- Familiarity with it and mastery of it and some of the newer social media have begun to contribute to make the practice even more successful and effective.

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Other areas of "cyber-practice"

- ❖ Beyond the Internet, PR work has become prominent in:
 - E-mail
 - Websites
 - Blogs
 - Online media relations
 - Online monitoring
 - Product promotion
 - Investor relations
 - Webcasts

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With opportunity comes challenge

- Organizations can now “go direct” with investors, consumers, the media and other publics.
- In this setting, there is no filtering of the message by third parties such as the press.
- This poses both a tremendous opportunity and challenge for PR practitioners in the 21st century.



E-mail: the dominator

- >90% of adult Internet users surveyed regularly use email
- The number of email accounts will reach five billion by the end of 2018
- E-mail has become far and away the most pervasive organizational communications vehicle.
- It is the internal method of choice for newsletters, bulletins, announcements.
- E-mail tends to produce more honest and immediate feedback for employees. Face-to-face best; email viable alternative
- E-publications have now replaced many print publications.



Guidelines for e-mail newsletters

- These are mostly used for external communication to customers, investors, or the media.
- When designing an e-newsletter, remember these guidelines:
 - no more than one page
 - link content (*links to other material*)
 - regular dissemination
 - More immediate and interactive than print
 - Allow for feedback
 - Job-relevant information



Developing a winning website

- “First face” of organization to public
 - Serve multiple functions (e.g. find information, conduct business)
 - Permit organization to speak in its own voice
 - Make websites as navigable as possible
 - Have a clearly identifiable “Media” icon and organized subsections
- In many ways, the organization’s website is the most important public interface. Before developing one, answer these questions (pg. 384):
- What is our goal?
 - What content will we include?
 - How often will we edit?
 - How will we enhance design?
 - How interactive will it be?
 - How will we track use?
 - Who will be responsible for the site ?
- ❖ Search Engine Optimization

In summary, your website is a first line of communication to the public. It requires full-time attention.



A question for you.....

What is a "sticky" website?

Answer:

One that provides the information that visitors seek.

- The more this objective is achieved, the more "sticky" your site becomes.
- "Stickiness" is measured by the amount of time visitors spend at the site and how many pages they view.



Instant Messaging/ Texting

- IM is closely related to conversation
- Texting is sending 160 characters or fewer messages from cell phones using Short Message Service (SMS)
- Person-to-person messaging most common
- IM growth is fueled by mobile technology



Blogs: the latest phenomenon

- Weblogs, or blogs, are used to communicate personal views on every topic imaginable.
- Bloggers recognized as bona fide news sources in 2010
- Embraced by professional communicators, print and broadcast media; encourage dialogue.
- People turn to blogs for information

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PR practitioners can use blogs to:

- Deliver information, such as product uses, sales data and consumer tips.
- Interest potential consumers in a firm's expertise.
- Expand readership by registering on blog search engines.
- Monitor any blogs that are deemed influential. These may be negative.

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Social Networks

- Social networks attract a variety of age groups and interests
- Expanding opportunities for public relations practice
- Public relations professionals must be conversant and proficient in using Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube

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Facebook

- Biggest social networking service
 - 936 million daily users
 - 1.44 billion monthly active users
 - One-third of the American public
- Ideal for sharing news, photos, videos, playing games, supporting causes and connecting with people with common interests

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Facebook for Public Relations

- Attract attention
- Two-way communication
- Conversation monitor
- Interactive activities
- Internal communication
- Halo effect
- Network with media
- Crisis management
- Link to other materials

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Twitter

- Micro-blogging – tweet < 140 characters to alert friends and followers
- Active users = 270 million; one-fifth of all U.S. Internet users
- Multi-person text message service
- Challenge monetizing the product

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Twitter for Public Relations

- Finding your Tweeples – and learning what they think are important
- Finding the Tweetfluentials who might be influential in speaking about brand
- As a news sources – used to break news or pitch stories
- Providing valuable content – tips and insights
- Recycling valuable content – retweeting what other people said about your company or client
- Building a community – tweet daily to engage followers
- Crisis management – issue statements and post updates

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LinkedIn

- Facebook for the professional set
- Connect with like-minded professionals
- Discover business or employment opportunities
- Develop network of contacts

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LinkedIn Public Relations Functions

- Notes – notify others of events, job openings, recommendations
- Groups – forums, alumni groups, conferences
- Answer Forum – advice from professionals
- Polls
- Card Munch – mobile app that scans business cards and turns them into contacts
- Job Openings

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YouTube

- Began as outlet for “15 minutes of fame”
- Organizations use for marketing purposes
 - Target specific user groups
 - Messages must be short and simple
- Some organizations have gotten into trouble because of YouTube posts

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Networking Sites to Consider

- Pinterest
 - Pin pictures on a virtual bulletin board
 - Use site as canvas to create “ideal self”
- Infographics are visual representations of information, data, or knowledge
 - Survey results may be cumbersome in lengthy text format
 - Statistical data can lose fleeting interest of a reader
 - Comparison research has more dramatic effect with visuals
 - Images are a universal language/can target multilingual audiences

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Networking Sites to Consider (cont'd)

- Instagram photo sharing bolsters brands
- Snapchat was the fastest-growing social networking app in 2015. A collection of “Snaps” can be viewed for 24 hours as “Stories”
- Reddit is a social networking news site where members vote content up or down based on importance
- Tumblr is a micro-blogging platform that is less restrictive than Twitter
- Periscope and Meerkat broadcast events for viewers to see and comment on

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Social Media Measurement in the Public Relations Industry

- Content sourcing and methods – standardize evaluations
- Reach and impressions more difficult to come by in social media
- Engagement – business outcomes like sales; other outcomes like blog posts, video comments, retweets
- Influence and relevance – subjective human research
- Opinion and advocacy – qualitative measure
- Impact and value – financial results and reputation impact

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Online Communication Vehicles

- Intranets expand internal communications capabilities. In other words, they are internets for specific organizations, designed to provide the necessary proprietary information to improve productivity.
- Extranets allow the organization to use the Internet to communicate to targeted external targets, such as the media, investors, vendors, key customers, etc.
- Wikis are collaborative websites that combine the work of many authors (i.e. wikipedia).
- Podcasting (named after iPod) makes audio programs available for download to any MP3 player.
- RSS or “real simple syndication” is an easy way to distribute content on the Internet, similar to a newsgroup.
- QR Codes and LBS
- ❖ PR people must remember that Internet technology changes every day. Professionals must change along with technology!

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The Online Dark Side

- In the 21st century, this has become a front line public relations responsibility.
- The net is free, wide open, international and anonymous.
- Internet sabotage: no organization is immune therefore monitoring the Internet is important
- Easy for customers to complain on blogs, start rogue websites, spread urban legends. Anyone can start a movement and ruin your organization's reputation.
- Closely monitor and beware of the web:
 - Discussion groups and chat rooms
 - *Rogue websites* must be monitored by the organizations they attack (*see next slide*)
 - *Urban legends*: refers to a growing body of corporate horror stories from bogus Internet rumors that have taken on legendary proportions. Most are spread by e-mail.
- Public relations professionals adopt "inoculation strategies"
 - Clear communications channels
 - Relay concerns privately before frustrations mount

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The screenshot shows a web browser window with the address bar containing "http://walmartucks.com/". The page title is "Wal-Mart Sucks Wal-Mart,Walmart,Wal-mart,Wal-...". The browser's navigation bar includes buttons for Back, Forward, Stop, Refresh, Home, AutoFill, Print, and Mail. The page content features the heading "Wal-Mart Sucks" in a large, bold, stylized font. Below the heading, there is a welcome message: "Welcome to my WalMart Sucks web site. You are probably here for one of several reasons." This is followed by a numbered list of four reasons: #1. You have a problem with Wal-Mart. Be sure to register your complaint immediately. #2. You stumbled upon our site. Please understand that this is a site of opinions. Not all stories can be verified for truthfulness. A considerable amount of content on this site is from other web sites from around the world. #3. You work for Wal*Mart and you are trying to kiss your manager's butt. #4. You are Wal-Mart management trying to do damage control from the stories posted here and trying to figure out how to get rid of this site. To the right of the text is a photograph of a Wal-Mart store with a sign that reads "ANAL*MART". Above the photo is the text "*Click on the picture to enter*". Below the photo, there is contact information for a Wal-Mart store in Bangor, Maine, and two links: "Banner man targets Wal-Mart on Internet" and "Shopper wins lawsuit against Wal-Mart". The browser's status bar at the bottom shows "Internet zone".

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Summing it all up.....

- As a PR professional, much of your career will involve mastering and monitoring the Internet.
- At the same time, traditional skills will prevail. These include:
 - Writing and speaking
 - Media relations
 - Overall communications knowledge
- ❖ Review Questions:
 1. Do the Internet and social media hold promises for the future of public relations? If so, why?
 2. Define blogs, and discuss their relevancy to the practice of public relations.