



Social Media: Supporting Media Run-&-Maintained by Volunteers

Electronic media have made communication easier.

Sometimes easier than we would like, but often not as easy as we think.

Create what is essential – for the rest, go with the flow. Control and create the essential messages that must be delivered. Allow – and even promote – appropriate optional elaboration. Volunteers do not always have the time or bandwidth to meet specific deadlines, or create the high message flow espoused by social media gurus. But whatever content is produced will carry weight with those that follow the content creator.

If you can't let go – at least loosen your grip. You can only control the content you create. You do not even have the resources to create all the content that you need to engage alumni. Besides, you can no longer stop people from creating content and publishing it to the world.

Create safe and simple playgrounds – or support them. The difficulty of providing and maintaining secure university servers, development environments, and creation tools is tremendous. The expense is enormous, but justified for official university branded content. However, these things are available for free (or almost for free) on the Internet. (No university can control Facebook, or even Linked-In.) It benefits the university to support – or even provide – “free” but mentored places in the Cloud for non-branded and lightly-branded alumni-related content. This can be done inexpensively. It also means that alumni-created content will not be lost when alumni die or stop a paid service. It even means that content will not be lost when the University IT budget is axed.

Engage alumni artists, coders, and writers. Members of this group are often overlooked by the university unless they become rich and famous. They may also be the type of people who do not work well in the committee-style projects of many alumni organizations. Yet they can be energetic, intense, and creative. Electronic media is a vehicle to involve them. They may be short on treasure, but rich in time and talent.

Everyone has different tastes – respect them. Everyone has different eyes and sees differently. Everyone has different ears and hears differently. Tolerate vision and voice (visual and textual content styles) that are different than yours – better yet, support those styles that resonate with the intended audience of club, class, or affinity group.

Don't rely on Facebook – do understand WordPress and Blogger. Social Media companies such as Facebook and Linked-In are in flux trying to monetize their eyeballs, which means that their policies have been and are likely to change. (For example, the changing definition of a Facebook “group” has destroyed some online communities.) This can seriously impact the reliability of the “free” part of their messaging. It has been said that only 16% of the people who like a Facebook page see any given post. Nonetheless some people and organizations rely on a Facebook page as the primary online presence. In contrast, WordPress and Blogger were designed for the slower pace of blogs, but have morphed into tools for creating websites. It is said that 1/5 of all websites are created with WordPress.

Blogger is a proprietary free service provided by Google, but tied to a particular user's Google account. A long-term issue for a website based on Blogger may be transferring the site to another webmaster, especially when change is sudden. A similar free (but advertising supported) service is available through *WordPress.com*. An upgrade (for a fee) will remove advertising. *WordPress.org* is free open-source software that can be installed on any server; it allows greater control than *WordPress.com*. An organization can purchase low-cost hosting contracts from companies such as GoDaddy.com. Many of these hosting contracts include “one-click” installation of multiple instances of WordPress. Services may be priced on an a-la-cart basis, but are much less than a university's IT infrastructure.

Understand “cobbleware” and know when it is appropriate. You can “cobble” together a variety of low cost or free services for non-profit organizations, if they require little bandwidth or through put. This “cobbleware” is reliable within its limits, so may suit small components of a volunteer alumni organization. They may not be suitable for volunteer organizations that have sufficient funds to pay for more robust IT solutions and the maintenance thereof.