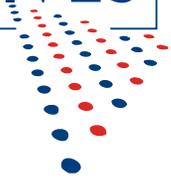


PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVES



A HIGHER EDUCATION
PRESIDENTIAL THOUGHT LEADERSHIP
SERIES

2014-2015 Series:

Inspirational Innovation

CHAPTER

8

To Tweet or Not To Tweet



PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVES

To Tweet or Not To Tweet

Dr. Walter Kimbrough, President, Dillard State University

Over the course of the past decade, higher education has been profoundly impacted by changes in technology. Distance education, MOOCs, and even campus e-alert systems have exploded in the past decade. And then there is social media.

Think about how quickly this has occurred. I became a president in 2004. That was the year Facebook was founded. Two years later, Twitter is created. Apple introduces the iPhone in 2007. Four years after that, in 2010, Instagram is launched and the iPad is presented.

You hear these words every day. You see icons representing the social media platforms on television, in your newspaper, and on websites. Chances are, you will use at least one of these every day as a president.

For me, someone who has never been president at a time when Facebook did not exist, I have grown with social media, learning it along with the rest of the world, including students. Just when you start to master one area, something new comes along and then you have to debate whether or not you will use this new tool, or keep what you have.

At times it is overwhelming, particularly because social media is a great way to gather news and information. In New Orleans, due to the economy, our local daily newspaper moved to a print version three days a week, with tabloid papers three additional days. Their major vehicle for disseminating the news? Social media. In essence, to keep up, check your tweets!

The Center for Marketing Research at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, in their annual study of social media usage at colleges and universities, found that more than half of presidents use Facebook and Twitter, and a third host a blog. This level of participation is much greater than that of Fortune 500 CEOs, which makes perfect sense given the population college presidents primarily serve.

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But there are still many presidents who are still unsure of social media and might believe that it is not a good use of their time or something that is the providence of the young. Maybe some are just rebelling because people are now calling the pound sign a hashtag!

However there is a role that presidents can and should play in the social media sphere. I'd like to offer a few ideas about how presidents can use social media. With a variety of avenues available, there is definitely a way to be engaged in this space in a manner that it is comfortable to each president. And even if entering the social media sphere is disconcerting initially, the benefits far greatly outweigh the discomfort.

Blogging

A president's blog can be a great vehicle to tell your institution's story. As traditional media organizations downsize, often losing reporters dedicated to higher education, we have entered an era where all who work at a college or university have a responsibility to tell their story. Whether discussing a new campus program or initiative; talking about accomplishments of students, faculty, staff, alumni, or trustees; or providing commentary on national issues, you are the editor of that page, and therefore you have complete control of the content.

The key though for blogs (as well as all social media) is that it must be authentic. Simply stated, if you are not going to write it yourself, don't do it! Sure you might have staff review or edit, but the thoughts and ideas should be yours.

If a blog is done well, you will have people who routinely visit it to learn about the happenings of the institution. This includes reporters (who are stretched further these days and appreciative of quick leads), as well as foundations, who will scour websites especially for institutions which are seeking grant funding.

There are a number of platforms that can be used to support the blog, whether it be campus supported, or a number that are provided free of charge. I would suggest for those interested in a blog to set up on an independent site. I learned this lesson when I lost about six years of blogging when I left my previous institution because the college's platform could not be transformed to another platform, and in addition, that content belonged to the college.

Finally, be sure there is a mechanism to promote the blog. You can't simply expect people to find it. So maybe there is a link from the institution's homepage or from the president's homepage. In addition, it is helpful to have a blog platform that allows easy linkages to additional social media vehicles, like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.

Facebook

The demographics of the typical Facebook user have changed in its decade of existence. It is now more and more of a place where college students aren't as active as their parents and grandparents. In short, Facebook has grown up quickly, and becomes a great place for you to reach an older demographic.

Based on my interactions with people on Facebook, they typically consist of alumni, parents, and other relatives of students, colleagues, and other higher education influencers. This group is very interested in what is happening on campus, as well as higher education news and events. Introduced primarily as a means to share photos, the power of Facebook still resides in its ability to share powerful images.

I have primarily used Facebook to share pictures from campus events, having our media staff upload via a shared drive event pictures which I then share via Facebook. Our staff also maintains a Flickr account, a photo- and video-hosting site started in 2004 which serves the same purpose. This gives us several avenues to share our campus news.



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As newspapers, magazines, and television have evolved, they have provided more content online which we are able to connect to social media sites. Facebook is a great platform for sharing these news stories. The great part of this is that it is quick and easy to do. If there is a great television story about a gift to the university, with an interview of the donor, there is generally a link to Facebook. You simply have to click the link and share to your Facebook timeline. It takes less than a minute to do.

At this point you should realize that one of the keys to successful social media usage is being aware of what's going on. Your media staff should track all the news stories about the institution and make sure you are aware. Years ago they would do clip files of the stories, but today they can easily send you links via email of the stories. They may also use news services like Meltwater to receive periodic reports of media mentions.

I also use the Google news alerts function. If you go to the Google news website it allows you to enter a phrase that, once it appears in a story, you can receive an email alert. These alerts can be immediate, or done after some predetermined period of time. Again, free, quick, and effective method to get the information you may want to share through social media.

Twitter

For right now, Twitter is the ruling monarch of the social media world. This is the place where you will find today's students. But they may in fact be taking their cues from larger society as a whole. Routinely local and national journalists have their Twitter handles on screen next to their names as they give the day's news. Politicians use this platform to tout their positions on any number of issues, as well as to raise funds for their campaigns. Even religious leaders find Twitter to be a great tool for sharing an inspiring word.

With a 140-character limit, a symptom of a short attention span world, these quick micro blogs provide a great platform for college and university leaders to keep the campus community engaged. I find Twitter to be a great information conduit. This is a great platform to promote campus events, major news and accomplishments, or the status of campus projects.

My first year at Dillard provided me with a great opportunity to use Twitter in a new way for me: hurricane management. Hurricane Isaac hit New Orleans on the anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. During the event I was able to provide the campus community, parents, alumni, and the media with on-the-ground updates about campus damage and when students could return.

As with Facebook, Twitter is a great vehicle to share news stories done by local and national media outlets. Again, a quick click of the Twitter icon will post a story on your Twitter page. In addition, you can connect your Facebook and Twitter accounts so that a post to one goes to the other as well. I have set my Facebook account so that any story I post there will appear on my Twitter feed.

Instagram

Finally, the last social media platform I will explore is Instagram. The newest of the major platforms, it is the one that is gaining the most steam. Primarily a vehicle to post photos and short video, it functions well as a companion for other social media platforms.

For example, if I take a photo at a campus event, I can post it on my Instagram account, and then share it to my other social media platforms. Twitter has always provided a means to share photos, but using a platform like Instagram can serve as a secondary approach to reach your audience.

Instagram is heavily used by a younger audience. I heard one student say they preferred it because they didn't want to have to do all of the reading on Twitter! When 140 characters is a lot, that speaks to another problem. But if a picture is worth a thousand words, Instagram is valuable.

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One thought: try to use the same Twitter and Instagram names. Most experts agree using your name is best, or some version of it (as in President X). But an easy-to-remember Twitter/Instagram handle helps facilitate your engagement with social media.

The Big Picture

The goal of this chapter was to share with you ways that you can more effectively engage a variety of audiences using social media. And while I shared ways that you can use it strategically, being engaged in social media does not mean that you have to post much if at all. All of these platforms are great vehicles to keep current with what happens on your campus, in your community, and the world.

As I shared, today's news is truly a 24/7 cycle, so both television stations and newspapers post constantly via social media in real time as the news happens. But with social media, in some respects, everyone is a reporter. So participating in social media makes sense in this regard as a means for keeping up. And as more and more traditional media outlets end print editions, social media will be where we get our news.

And just as if not even more important, social media allows you an opportunity to know what your students experience on campus. With seemingly no filters (not always a good thing), by following a few students on platforms like Twitter and Instagram, you will learn a lot about which classes they like or are boring, how lunch was today, who did what at the party, etc. Sometimes raw, and at times profane, social media gives anyone interested a close and often personal view of the life of today's college student.

I have been able to learn a great deal about students using social media just by reading their thoughts or viewing what types of pictures they choose to post. In addition, this technology provides a great way to make connections with students to build community.

So get out there in this new space. There is a way for you to be involved that is comfortable for you, and even if you start slow, the message is to start.



Dr. Walter M. Kimbrough—A native of Atlanta, Dr. Walter M. Kimbrough was his high school salutatorian and student body president in 1985, and went on to earn degrees from the University of Georgia, Miami University in Ohio, and a doctorate in higher education from Georgia State University. He has enjoyed a fulfilling career in student affairs, serving at Emory University, Georgia State University, Old Dominion University, and finally Albany State University in 2000 where he became the Vice President for Student Affairs at the age of 32. In October of 2004, at the age of 37, he was named the 12th president of Philander Smith College. In 2012 he became the 7th president of Dillard University in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Dr. Kimbrough was named the 1994 New Professional of the Year for the Association of Fraternity Advisors, and selected as a 2001 Nissan-ETS HBCU Fellow. In 2009, he was named by *Diverse Issues in Higher Education* as one of 25 To Watch. In 2010, he made the coveted *Ebony Magazine* Power 100 list of the doers and influencers in the African American community, joining the likes of President and Mrs. Obama, Jay-Z, Richard Parsons, Tyler Perry, Debra Lee, and Tom Joyner. Finally, in February of 2013 he was named to NBC News/The Griot.com's 100 African Americans making history today, joining another impressive group including Kerry Washington, Ambassador Susan Rice, Kendrick Lamar, Mellody Hobson, and RG III.