MPPR-755-02: DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY
GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY: MPS-Public Relations and Corporate Communications
Wednesday, 5:20 pm – 7:50 p.m. | Spring 2015

Instructor: Mark Stojack
Downtown campus, room C220
• Office hours are by appointment.

COURSE OVERVIEW
This course will provide students with a general understanding and working knowledge of
digital communications strategies and tactics for the modern business environment. Students
will learn to approach various communications challenges in an integrated fashion by
leveraging digital channels to augment and enhance traditional communications and marketing
tactics. The course will survey emerging and existing technologies and teach students how to
best use these sites and interact with online communities on both a personal and professional
level. The class will highlight specific digital case studies, encourage hands on participation and
offer an analysis of effective online communication and strategies. Students will leave the
course with an increased knowledge of and hands-on familiarity with the practical applications
digital communications, and how these lead to success.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
By the end of the semester, students will:

• Learn how to analyze complex public relations and communications challenges, create
digital solutions and provide strategic counsel.
• Develop comprehensive strategies designed to best integrate digital tactics into
traditional communications plans.
• Gain an in depth understanding of the modern media landscape and evolving
communications practices in an effort to gain strategic competitive advantage for
organizations and in personal brand development.
• Develop a familiarity of effective online tools and methods such as narrative definition,
content development, online community building, engagement strategy, search engine
optimization (SEO), monitoring, measurement, interpreting analytics, mobile
communications, video, etc.
• Review actual case studies of effective digital and integrated campaigns to identify best
practices and provide relevant examples to draw parallels for coursework.

REQUIRED READING
Title:  Can’t Buy Me Like: How Authentic Customer Connections Drive Superior Results
Author(s): Bob Garfield and Doug Levy
ISBN-10: 1591845777
Publisher: Portfolio Hardcover
Year: 2013
Price: $19.80 (Amazon)

Title: *To Sell Is Human: The Surprising Truth About Moving Others*
Author(s): Daniel H. Pink
ISBN-10: 1594631905
Publisher: Riverhead Trade
Year: 2013
Price: $8.79 (Amazon)

Beyond the assigned readings, I encourage you to read/follow the following content outlets on a regular basis:

Mashable ([http://mashable.com](http://mashable.com))

TechCrunch ([http://techcrunch.com](http://techcrunch.com))

eMarketer ([http://www.emarketer.com/Articles](http://www.emarketer.com/Articles))

AdAge ([http://adage.com](http://adage.com))

AdWeek ([http://adweek.com](http://adweek.com))

Digital Buzz Blog ([http://digitalbuzzblog.com](http://digitalbuzzblog.com))

MediaBistro ([http://mediabistro.com](http://mediabistro.com))

Buzzfeed ([http://buzzfeed.com](http://buzzfeed.com))

Reddit ([http://reddit.com](http://reddit.com))

**ATTENDANCE**
As outlined by the university, missing more than two classes will result in a final grade reduction of one level (for example, an A will be converted to an A-). *Absences for classes, beyond the initial two, will result in further reduction of the final grade.* If you are absent for more than four classes, you will be in danger of failing this course.
Punctual attendance is critical. If you have to miss a class – family emergency, medical emergency or other act of God – you must let the instructors know in advance and work out a proposal for making up whatever work you will miss. Exceptions will be made only in extraordinary circumstances.

**CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE, CLASS PARTICIPATION AND OTHER GUIDELINES**

A successful class depends on the active engagement of all students. Students should turn off all cell phones, pagers or other communication devices while in class. Class discussions should be respectful and considerate of others’ views and opinions. What happens in class stays in class unless you receive permission from the instructor to share something.

**Teamwork**

Teamwork will be an important part of this class. You will find that the ability to collaborate will assist you tremendously as you rely on your classmates to brainstorm ideas on presentations, papers, final projects, etc. There will be several opportunities to engage in team activities throughout the semester that will benefit the entire class.

**Common Courtesy**

The use of mobile devices such as smartphones and tablet devices in class is prohibited unless specifically related to current lessons or coursework. Otherwise please turn off these devices. On occasion we will have guest speakers. They will certainly appreciate this, as well. We will have a break during class when you can check messages. During class, opinions are welcomed and viewpoints are encouraged as long as expressed constructively and respectfully. You are welcome to bring food or drink to the classroom.

**Contacting Me**

I do not hold regular office hours, however, I am available by appointment throughout the week. The best way to reach me is by my Georgetown email address (see directory) or by cell 312.613.1971. I will do my best to get back to you within 24 hours.

**ASSIGNMENTS**

There are four graded assignments for this class: 2 papers, 1 mini presentation and 1 final oral presentation.

**Digital Diagnosis (Assignment #1):** Select a company or organization with which you have some familiarity. Explore the organization through all various available digital channels (.com, social, offline, video, 3rd party content providers, etc.). Conduct a top-line evaluation to identify what is working well and what could be improved upon. Consider areas of tonality, user experience, content breadth, digital footprint and overall impact.

**Brand Framework (Assignment #2):** Leveraging the tools learned in class, each student will
develop a brand framework for a selected organization. The brand framework will highlight an organization’s 1) unmet user need; 2) real marketing/communication challenge and; 3) true brand capability. This framework allows an organization to better define its role in a crowded digital communications space.

Mini Presentation (Assignment #3): Class presentations that will be assigned throughout the semester. Assignments will include research and analysis into a variety of topics (people, trends, platforms, news, etc.) specific to digital communications. Presentations of 5-10 minutes each followed by a brief Q&A session.

Final Project Presentation (Assignment #4): The culmination of your learning will be a final presentation, the specific details of which will be shared midway through the semester. The class will be divided into 4 teams of 5. Each team will be responsible for producing a presentation no more than 60 minutes in length followed by a brief Q&A to be presented in the final 2 classes. The presentation will be evaluated on each team’s ability to demonstrate course-long comprehension of the materials presented, as well as an articulate, compelling, and professional client-ready presentation.

Class Social Network Contribution
Each week, beginning week 2, you will be expected to develop your own personal brand by regularly posting links to relevant websites, blogs, items of interest, news developments, etc. to Twitter. You may choose to use your current Twitter handle or feel free to create a new one. Every student will be expected to follow one another in order to build a foundational following. Points will not be determined based on quantity of posts, but rather points will be assessed on quality, tonality, audience engagement (e.g., retweets) and appropriate cadence of posts.

Class Participation
Your participation score will be based on conversation in class, as well as your contribution to Q&A sessions for your classmate’s presentations.

GRADING
Your course grade will be based on the following:
30 points = Assignments & Mini Presentations
15 points = Class Social Network Contribution
15 points = Class Participation
40 points = Final Project Presentation
100 points = Total

Total 100 points
Graduate course grades include A, A-, B+, B, B-, C and F. **There are no grades of C+, C- or D.**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
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<td>A-</td>
<td>92.99-90</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>89.99-88</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>87.99-83</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>82.99-80</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>79.99-70</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>69.99-0</td>
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The instructors will provide a warning by mid-semester to any student who appears to be on track for a poor final grade.

**UNIVERSITY RESOURCES**

Georgetown offers a variety of support systems for students that can be accessed on main campus or at the downtown location:

- MPS Writing Resource Program  
  202-687-4246  
  [http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu/](http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu/)

- Academic Resource Center  
  202-687-8354 | arc@georgetown.edu  
  [http://ldss.georgetown.edu/](http://ldss.georgetown.edu/)

- Counseling and Psychiatric Services  
  202-687-6985  
  [http://caps.georgetown.edu/](http://caps.georgetown.edu/)

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES POLICY**

Students with documented disabilities have the right to specific accommodations that do not fundamentally alter the nature of the course. Students with disabilities should contact the Academic Resource Center (202-687-8354; arc@georgetown.edu; [http://ldss.georgetown.edu/index.cfm](http://ldss.georgetown.edu/index.cfm)) before the start of classes to allow time to review the documentation and make recommendations for appropriate accommodations. If accommodations are recommended, you will be given a letter from ARC to share with your professors. You are personally responsible for completing this process officially and in a timely manner. Neither accommodations nor exceptions to policies can be permitted to students who have not completed this process in advance.

**GEORGETOWN HONOR SYSTEM**
All students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic and personal integrity in pursuit of their education at Georgetown. Academic dishonesty in any form is a serious offense, and students found in violation are subject to academic penalties that include, but are not limited to, failure of the course, termination from the program, and revocation of degrees already conferred. All students are held to the Honor Code. The Honor Code pledge follows:

In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown University Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and To conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.

PLAGIARISM
Stealing someone else’s work is a terminal offense in journalism, and it will wreck your career in academia, too. Students are expected to work with integrity and honesty in all their assignments. The Georgetown University Honor System defines plagiarism as "the act of passing off as one's own the ideas or writings of another." More guidance is available through the Gervase Programs at http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/honor/system/53377.html. If you have any doubts about plagiarism, paraphrasing and the need to credit, check out http://www.plagiarism.org.

SYLLABUS MODIFICATION
The syllabus may change to accommodate discussion of emerging topics. Also, the schedules of guest speakers may require some shifting of the agenda. The instructors will make every effort to provide as much advance notice as possible for any alterations.

CLASS SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 (Wednesday, 1/14)
Course Overview & Building Blocks of Digital
Overview of class expectations, assignments and introductions. Understanding the foundational elements of the digital landscape and what the future might hold.

WEEK 2 (Wednesday, 1/21)
How Digital Drives Our Economy
Investigate how brands (including political campaigns and celebrities) can survive and adapt to the changes brought on by digital.
Reading Assignment for 1/28: Can’t Buy Me Like, Intro, Chapter 1 & Chapter 2

WEEK 3 (Wednesday, 1/28)
Social Media/Content Marketing Overview
Overview of key social media channels (including blogs, publishing outlets) with a deep dive into existing & future trends.

Assignment for 2/4: Digital Diagnosis

Reading Assignment for 2/4: Can’t Buy Me Like, Chapter 3

WEEK 4 (Wednesday, 2/4)

Mobile Overview
Overview of how mobile plays a role in the digital ecosystem, including technologies, user behavior, advertising, marketing integration, and future trends.

Guest Speaker: Dan Hou, VP of Strategy

Final Project: Teams & assignment announced.

Reading Assignment for 2/11: Can’t Buy Me Like, Chapter 4

WEEK 5 (Wednesday, 2/11)

Creating a Brand Framework
An organization’s brand framework and positioning is paramount to creating a successful presence online. In this class we will learn how to devise a solid brand framework that will highlight an organization’s 1) unmet user need, 2) real marketing/communication challenge and, 3) true brand capability.

Possible Guest Speaker

Assignment #2 due 2/18: Brand Framework

Reading Assignment for 2/18: Can’t Buy Me Like, Chapter 5

WEEK 6 (Wednesday, 2/18)

Understanding Your Audience & User Behavior
Demonstrating how to apply user behavior and audience personas to the development of amazing digital experiences, we will use a case study to illustrate these best practices.

Guest instructor to be announced.

Reading Assignment for 2/25: Can’t Buy Me Like, Chapter 6 & To Sell is Human, Intro and Chapter 1

WEEK 7 (Wednesday, 2/25)

Creating the Killer Creative Brief
Experience some of the world’s best “designed” brands and marketing campaigns; explore how tone, voice, and visual appeal can propel a brand forward, all starting with a creative brief.

Reading Assignment for 3/4: Can’t Buy Me Like, Chapters 7, 8 & To Sell is Human, Chapter 2

WEEK 8 (Wednesday, 3/4)

The “Big Idea” (Class held at Huge: 875 N Street, NW. #205)
Review groundbreaking and smart integrated campaigns through a series of case studies. Explore how successful “creative” ideas come to life.

Reading Assignment for 3/18: Can’t Buy Me Like, Chapter 9 & To Sell is Human, Chapter 3
WEEK 9 (Wednesday, 3/18)
Communications Planning
Understand planning of channel mix, content creation, curation, and influencer outreach. Also explore how effective community management is supported by well-articulated editorial guidelines, a mix of social listening tools, and proper cadence of content delivery. Also review elements of search engine optimization (SEO) & marketing (SEM), display advertising, programmatic media, and advertorials.

*Guest Speaker: Zev Kanter, Social Media Strategist*

Reading Assignment for 3/25: *Can’t Buy Me Like*, Chapter 10 & *To Sell is Human*, Chapter 4

WEEK 10 (Wednesday, 3/25)
Crisis Communications
By reviewing key case studies we will explore best practices for digital engagement in the midst of a crisis. We will discuss how to prepare, how to respond, and how to assess the situation in real time.

*Possible guest speaker.*

Reading Assignment for 4/1: *To Sell is Human*, Chapter 5, 6

WEEK 11 (Wednesday, 4/1)
Measurement & Analytics Overview
Review analytics best practices; develop an actionable measurement plan by defining and rationalizing KPIs (Key Performance Indicators).

*Guest speaker: Markus Hammer, Analyst*

Reading Assignment for 4/8: *To Sell is Human*, Chapters 7, 8

WEEK 12 (Wednesday, 4/8)
The Art of the Pitch
Be introduced to the key elements required to deliver a compelling, entertaining, and ultimately persuasive pitch.

*Reading Assignment for 4/15: Can’t Buy Me Like*, Chapter 11 & *To Sell is Human*, Chapter 9

WEEK 13 (Wednesday, 4/15)
Final Project: Presentation by Teams 1 & 2

WEEK 14 (Wednesday, 4/22)
Final Project: Presentation by Teams 3 & 4

WEEK 15 (Wednesday, 5/6)
Final Wrap-up; Review Feedback on Presentations

Note: No class sessions on March 11, April 29