MPPR-755-03: DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY: MPS-Public Relations and Corporate Communications
Wednesday, 8:00 – 10:30 p.m. | Fall 2015

Instructor: Alex Milwee
Downtown campus, room C219
- Office hours are by appointment.

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course will equip students with an understanding of the tools and practices that are required to successfully recommend and execute digital communications strategies in the modern business environment. Students will learn how to approach various communications challenges from an integrated perspective, using digital channels to augment and enhance traditional tactics while also taking full advantage of the unique attributes that keep digital at the cutting edge of public relations and marketing. This class will address emerging and existing technologies, using trending topics and case studies to identify best practices. Students will leave the course with an increased knowledge of the practical applications of digital communications and how they can be successfully implemented.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the semester, students will:

- Understand the basics and definitions of social media tools and online communications.
- Gain a thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and blogs, and how organizations are effectively using them to achieve their objectives.
- Understand how digital channels fit within the overarching communications landscape, and how they can be used together to implement an integrated approach.
- Evaluate the success of digital campaigns and what metrics should be considered for evaluation.
- Develop a thoughtful and comprehensive a digital communications strategy that addresses specific business challenges.

REQUIRED READING

Title: The Thank You Economy
Author(s):   Gary Vaynerchuk
ISBN|Price: 978-0-06-191418-8 | $21.58
Publisher: Harper Business
Year: 2011

ATTENDANCE

Attendance will be taken at the beginning of every class. 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 – please let me know in advance and propose how you will make 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. In some instances our guest speakers will discuss information related to client campaigns, so please remember that what happens in class stays in class unless you receive specific permission to share something or discuss publically.

Given that this is a class on digital and social media, we will be using online tools during lectures and working sessions. My expectation is that you will use your computer and/or devices in support of class activities: in other words, no personal Facebook updates etc., during class. **Your class participation grade will be determined not only by how actively you engage in conversation, but also by how you demonstrate proper judgment when using electronic devices in class.**

All assignments should be transmitted to me via email before the start of class on the day they are due (8:00 pm ET). I suggest that you CC yourself on the email as proof of transmission in the instance of any technical difficulties. Assignments that are not turned in on time will be reduced by one grade for every day they are late.

ASSIGNMENTS

Weekly Trends Assignment
Every week, a team of students will update their classmates on a digital trend that is emerging and/or seems particularly relevant due to current events. These presentations should be 15-20 minutes in length and should include a thoughtful deliverable (e.g. slide presentation / handout). After you've presented, you will then be expected to lead a classroom conversation that further explores your trend and why it is relevant. Weekly trends will be evaluated upon the following factors:
- Timeliness and relevance of content
- Quality of analysis (i.e., don't just tell us about what is happening – tell us why it's relevant and why we should care. What's your point of view?)

The following outlets are excellent resources for identifying trending topics:

Mashable (http://mashable.com)	Fast Company (http://fastcompany.com)	TechCrunch (http://techcrunch.com)
eMarketer (http://www.emarketer.com/Articles)	AdAge (http://adage.com)	AdWeek (http://adweek.com)
MediaBistro (http://mediabistro.com)	Buzzfeed (http://buzzfeed.com)	Reddit (http://reddit.com)

Note: specific assignment requirements and prior examples will be shared during Week 1.

Digital Assessment
Choose a brand or organization that you are familiar with and explore how it communicates through all of its digital channels (.com, social, traditional / earned media, video, 3rd party content providers, etc). Provide an overview of those online channels and share your thoughts on what is working well and where there are opportunities for improvement; be sure to provide concise examples, and to consider the competitive landscape as well as potential vulnerabilities for crisis.

Note: specific assignment requirements and grading rubric will be shared during Week 2.

Platform Deep Dive
For this assignment you will make yourself a subject matter expert on an emerging platform that contributes to the vast ecosystem of online channels (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Reddit, etc). While we will discuss most of these channels during our class time together from a top-level perspective, the reality is we could spend an entire semester discussing the ins and outs of each. Your goal for this assignment will be to demonstrate your knowledge of these platforms –capabilities, unique features, key user demographic – and articulate the ways they can be effectively leveraged as part of a comprehensive digital strategy.

Note: This assignment will consist of an individual writing component as well as a group presentation with other class members who chose the same platform as you. Specific assignment requirements and grading rubric will be shared during Week 4.

Final Project
Students will be divided into small groups and given a project brief that will focus upon a consumer product brand or a non-profit / advocacy organization seeking to address a specific digital communications challenge. Students will develop a presentation that details the research, competitive analysis and platform knowledge that forms their strategic

recommendation and present it to the class.

Note: Specific assignment requirements and grading rubric will be shared during Week 10.

GRADING
Your course grade will be based on the following components:

Weekly Trends	40
Digital Assessment	50
Platform Deep Dive	30
Final Project	70
Class Participation	30

Total   **220 points**

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

A	100 - 94		B-	82 - 80
A-	90 - 93		C	79 - 70
B+	89 - 87		F	69 - 0
B	86 - 83			

I 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/

- Academic Resource Center
  202-687-8354 | arc@georgetown.edu
  http://academicsupport.georgetown.edu

- Counseling and Psychiatric Services
  202-687-6985
  http://caps.georgetown.edu/

- Institutional Diversity, Equity & Affirmative Action (IDEAA) (202) 687-4798

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://academicsupport.georgetown.edu) 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 the workplace, 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

DATE	TOPICS	ASSIGNMENT / MILESTONE
Sept 9	**Class #1 – Course Overview**	
	• Introductions • Syllabus review • Weekly trends teams selected • The changing communications landscape	
Sept 16	**Class #2 – The Role of Digital in Modern Communications**	
	How organizations can survive and adapt to the changes brought on by digital	***Digital Assessment Assignment distributed* *Vaynerchuck 1-3*
Sept 23	**Class #3 – Social Media / Content Marketing Overview**	
	Overview of key social media channels; current and emerging trends	*Vaynerchuck 4-6*
Sept 30	**Class #4 – Community Management** *How organizations maintain a constant drumbeat of conversation with their audiences*	***Platform Deep Dive Assignment distributed* *Vaynerchuck 7-9*
Oct 7	**Class #5 – Paid Media + Content Partnerships**	
	The emerging role of paid media and how it's a game changer	*Vaynerchuck 10-13*
Oct 14	**Class #6 – Monitoring + Measurement**	
	How brands use digital channels to monitor online conversation and establish programming impact	***Digital Assessment due***
Oct 21	**Class #7 – Digital Assessment Discussion**	

	As a class, we'll discuss your observations and key learnings as part of the Digital Assessment assignment	
Oct 28	**Class #8 – Websites + Mobile**	
	What it takes to build a world-class digital experience from the ground up; The future of owned platforms – what it takes to make a killer mobile and app experience	*Individual Platform Deep Dive due for all students*
Nov 4	**Class #9 – Platform Deep Dive Presentations**	
	Each team will share their Platform Deep Dive learnings	*Group Platform Deep Dive Presentations due*
Nov 11	**Class #10 – Audience Mapping / Strategy + Insights**	
	How understanding audience insights can crack the code to a successful digital program	***Final Project Assignment distributed*
Nov 18	**Class #11 – The Intersection of New and Traditional Media**	
	How traditional media outlets have adapted to the realities of the digital world	
Nov 25	**Class #12 – Award Winning Work**	
	A walkthrough of some amazing digital campaigns	
Dec 2	**Class #13 – Crisis!**	
	How to manage a crisis in an always-on digital environment	
Dec 9	**Class #14 – Team Presentations**	

Dec 16	**Class #15 – Team Presentations** *Final Wrap-up; review feedback on presentations*	