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### The Direction of the Media Profession

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## **The Direction of the Media Profession**

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There is no denying that media has changed. Media has changed in big ways that has had a major impact on our everyday lives. People are going online to get the information they want, when they want it. You can download television episodes for viewing and articles that you want to read. No longer do you need to buy a publication or tune in for a television show when it is on—and you can skip through the commercials. As traditional media continues to transition into the new formats that consumers prefer, the direction of the media profession will continue to evolve, as well as the educational requirements for these new professionals.

### CHALLENGES

A main challenge in this new age of media is responsibility for reporting over the new platforms. Social networks are congested with an outpouring of emotions and thoughts during times of conflict. While professional reporters use social networks to update the news and share their professional opinions, sometimes their voices can be lost in a sea of noise, as those who are not professionals but have the same tools eagerly spread their own messages and opinions. It is a challenge for new media professionals to break through the noise and be heard when the tools to create content are so ubiquitous.

New social media content providers will need a solid education in critical thinking and information analysis; they will need to be able to research in depth and be able to quickly validate information. Information spreads so quickly in the social media age that the line between validated information and general opinion quickly becomes blurred. Professional news organizations no longer have a monopoly on producing content and information; and to excel, new media professionals must have the skills needed to separate fact from fiction and establish credibility.

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Distraction is also a major challenge. All media consumers have competing distractions for their attention. One no longer has to be in front of a computer at a desk to receive information. It can be delivered through their mobile device, a laptop with a remote WiFi connection, or over a cloud-based application. New media professionals have to understand usability and how to make their messages as persuasive to get users to take an action—especially if that action is intended to convert that user into a consumer of their content.

## SKILLS OF THE NEW MEDIA PROFESSIONALS

It is important that new media professionals understand how to analyze basic usage metrics, such as open rates, click-throughs, and conversions. Although reporting on these metrics might not be part of their responsibilities, it is important for them to understand how the content they are producing is being consumed so they can produce the most persuasive copy and the most engaging headlines. Understanding these metrics will help them become better content producers and overcome distraction—one of the main challenges in the age of new media.

Analyzing metrics will also enable social media professionals to contribute to reporting on social media marketing efforts. It is imperative that the social media professionals understand the impact they have on the bottom line. They will need to be able to report on click-throughs and conversions, which is crucial for management to understand how social media marketing efforts impact returns on investment. Because social media is best used for long-term marketing goals and building brand awareness, it is sometimes difficult to show an immediate impact on sales through social media efforts, such as Facebook® and Twitter. If the social media professionals can quantify their results, not just how many followers they have gained or lost, but in the financial impact of their efforts, they will be successful.

As technology continues to evolve, virtualization and cloud-based applications will rapidly develop as people are able to share their ideas across a flat playing field—instantaneously; and social networks will continue to evolve with a long-tail effect, aggregating people with similar interests and specialized knowledge, on platforms where a sea of users can share ideas and thoughts.

When the economy suffers through hard times, companies must do what they can to survive. Because of this, companies will want to tighten their belts and add new media skills to the tool belts of their existing employees. They might need to bring on a new media professional as a consultant, particularly in the area of social media, to train their employees so the new media work can be kept in-house and the responsibilities of current

employees can be increased. Project management skills and learning how to motivate team members are crucial for new media professionals since the best working opportunities may be on a consultant basis. Because virtualization simultaneously connects and disconnects human beings, new media professionals need to understand the factors that motivate human behavior if they are brought on to work with a team within a corporation.

## TRENDS

Mainstream news outlets are using social networking sites to connect with their viewers, who might not even be accessing their news with traditional technologies like watching television, listening to the radio, or reading the newspaper; but, instead, are retrieving their news information over the Internet on a personal computer, Apple® Mac, or a mobile device. Another trend is for consumers to take information from a blog or other consumer-generated content resource. This is challenging the traditional mainstream media to the point of that they have supported the creation of the Internet Content Syndication Council, which has proposed guidelines for Internet news reporting by non-professional journalists.

It is also increasingly important for marketing managers to understand the functions of the more specialized social media coordinators, e-mail marketing, and search engine optimization specialists. In today's economic environment, companies must do what they can to reduce costs and bring on candidates already possessing these skills. Consolidation of marketing skills is a trend that cannot be ignored, especially as marketing efforts continue to be increasingly focused on digital platforms rather than traditional tools such as print, radio, and television. New media professionals with specialized technical tools in areas such as social media, pay per click, and online banner advertising will need to refine their management and process skills as media managers learn the technical tools at which new media professionals are already adept. In this way, they can continue to progress professionally and take on leadership roles in new media firms.

The evolving media environment means more people within an organization must possess social media skills, such as the ability to respond to customer complaints in a timely manner. Sometimes a complaint may be voiced in a specialized, closed community and would not necessarily come up within a Google™ "search," so larger organizations may need to employ a third-party social media monitoring platform, such as 360i or Radian6. In this way, the conversation can be monitored on a deeper level than the average manager or coordinator would achieve, thus allowing managers to focus their attention on more operational functions important to the organization, including human resources, information technology, legal, and especially public relations.

Because organizations need to keep on top of emerging trends, keeping an eye and ear on the competition through scanning the social media landscape is also important. Understanding what consumers are saying about the competition can identify untapped opportunities for the organization, especially if a product or service is being requested to which the competition might not be listening or not responding to quickly enough. In this sink-or-swim economy, listening is just as important for a new media professional as knowing how to create engaging content.

## RESEARCH

Research should continue in how people are using new media, particularly in the mobile space, which is growing rapidly and cannot be ignored. People will continue to become more and more mobile, using their desktops and laptops in fixed locations less and less. Mobile technology continues to improve, not just in the devices, but in the applications that they support. It is very important for new media professionals to understand this and know how to create content for users in this space. They must understand the best way content can be viewed on a mobile device and hardware limitations. For example, flash animation is not compatible on the iPhone®; hence, the same message would be best served in a format other than flash, or another message should be delivered in its place if a mobile device is detected.

## TEACHING

Teaching needs to embrace technology. Not only must content reflect the latest new media trends, but the methods of engaging students need to be optimized. Distance learning will continue to become grow, as students no longer need to travel to a classroom at a specific time to take part in learning. Interaction will take place more often through Webinars and Skype™ discussions instead of classroom seminars, allowing a greater diversity of experts to lead discussions and answer questions. This will also lead to greater diversity among the student population in terms of interests, industry experience, and sharing of knowledge. The ability to span distances in real time is a feature of the Internet that is well-suited to teaching new media professionals.

At no other time in history have media sectors been scrutinized so closely. The impact of the media is strongly rooted in the quality and value assigned to it by the users. Teachers should be up to date on research in the use of social media, and that knowledge must be shared with students. It is vital for students to understand how, when, where, and why people are using social media and other digital platforms and who these people are. Studies in consumer behaviors must be part of the new media curriculum.

Statistics courses should include analysis of metrics such as click-throughs, organic searches, keywords, tags, search engine optimization, and other indicators of how people are using social media and how this information can be used to make good decisions.

Cultural diversity has a strong effect on use of social media, and students in this field should understand the differences from an anthropological, sociological, and psychological view. International media courses should provide this instruction and guide students in formulating their social media content for different audiences. Political media courses should provide education in international policies involving social media. The freedom of speech and ease of access nature of the Internet requires the social media professional to know where information is coming from and be able to validate it fast.

Ethics is another area that cannot be ignored in training professionals in the social media environment. The professional should be trained in social media guidelines and policies development from a legal and an ethical standpoint.

The new media professional should leave school with a tool belt filled with resources for understanding the audience being reached, where and how to best reach them, how to interpret and handle feedback, what constitutes ethical behavior in content development and management, and how to deliver value to content consumers.