

Please Like Us: Selling with Social Media

Semester Blog Project

In this class you wear multiple hats. First, as all UW students do, you'll take on the roles of scholar and critic, in our case examining the rhetoric of social media (including Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, LinkedIn, SnapChat, and other venues) as they are used for selling and promoting products, organizations, people, and causes. Your other role, however, is unique to this class: Social Media Expert/For-Hire Consultant.

This blog is your consulting business' web presence. (Normally, in a business, you would also have a bigger, more comprehensive Web presence, but for our purposes, we'll stick with a blog.) You will both analyze and actively engage with social media writing as you consider the rhetorical situation as it applies both to the marketing efforts of organizations and to your own academic work.

Your Area of Expertise

In this new role, each of you will choose a related group of individuals, companies, or organizations that are active in social media and track, analyze, and critique their marketing or promotion efforts over the course of the semester. For instance, you might choose to examine a group of cosmetic companies or a chain of coffee shops. Those interested in policy and politics might follow individual politicians or lobbying groups. You could follow churches or food brands; or you could track celebrities working to create and maintain a brand or authors promoting new books, or perhaps sports teams or airlines, venture capital firms or yoga studios. Analyses and comparisons of these campaigns, along with related posts, will be posted on your individual blog.

In choosing, you should consider the following qualifications for your organizations, individual, etc.: The organizations/causes/people you choose to follow must have an active (though not necessarily effective!) social media presence. This means that you must demonstrate that each of campaigns you're tracking uses social media (FB or Twitter, for example, or they have YouTube channel, or they utilize Pinterest) at least twice weekly. Further, you should consider variety in your choices. While the organizations you track must be related, they should be diverse within an industry (you should consider the "discipline" within which you will be working) as we are going to be comparing and contrasting. For instance, following Coke, Pepsi, and Mountain Dew (three huge companies with similar budgets, with very similar target buyers, etc.) would likely not yield analysis that furthers the larger conversation. However, an examination of Pepsi alongside of World Classics (a European soda company), and a small, regional organic soda producer would likely have more at stake and allow you to explore with more nuance.

Sample prompts:

1. The weekly round-up—Write a comparison/contrast post of the three social media campaigns you're following. What did each organization (or individual, etc.) do on social media this week? What was especially interesting (or not)? What venues did they employ? What rhetorical appeals did they rely upon? You should provide analysis for at least one specific example from each individual or organization. Was there a stand out among the three for best (or worst) this week?
2. What patterns are you beginning to notice among your three individuals or organizations? In what ways has your understanding of their audiences and/or purposes shifting as you perform your weekly close reading of these feeds? At this stage, what advice would you offer your three organizations, and why? Finally, take one post from any one of your organizations from the past week that you feel was not as successful as it could have been. Describe the problem as you understand it, and then rewrite the post to be more successful.