Online Presence and Social Media: The JSPH Experience

The use of social media by organizations of all types is on the rise. According to a recent issue of *The Economist*, on average, Americans spent almost six hours surfing social networking sites in the month of October 2009. Membership on these sites is increasing: Facebook currently has over 350 million users worldwide, up from about 10 million two years earlier.[1] Usership of social networking sites is highest among teens and young adults, with nearly three quarters of online teens (73%) and young adults (72%) using social network sites. Among adults 30 and older, some 40% were using social networking sites in the fall of 2009.[2] According to a recent survey by Pearson and a survey research group at Babson, more than four out of every five professors use social media in their classes.[3] The leadership team at the School of Population Health recognized early the value of social networking tools to connect the Jefferson community with colleagues across the country and around the globe. The School was, therefore, an early adopter of social media and carefully cultivated a web presence reaching beyond the traditional Thomas Jefferson University website.

JSPH needed to create a completely new website to complete its transition from a department within Jefferson Medical College to a new freestanding academic entity. To coordinate JSPH's online activities and support its nascent online academic program, Dean David B. Nash convened a Digital Strategy Work Group (DSG) in 2008. The group meets regularly to discuss the evolving facets of social media and explore options that would benefit the School, its prospective students, and its network of colleagues across the nation. The group drafted a digital strategic plan outlining the use of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, the Nash on Health Policy Blog, the JSPH web site, and Jefferson Digital Commons (JDC). As JSPH emerged as a new school with new degree programs, the digital strategy work group wanted to ensure that the School's online presence was integrated seamlessly to maximize opportunities to highlight new programs and attract students, in addition to showcasing existing research and executive education offerings. The DSG continues to chart a course through the changing social media landscape.

Nash on Health Policy Blog

One of the early initiatives of the group was to develop a blog entitled *Nash on Health Policy* (http://nashhealthpolicy.blogspot.com/). Initially authored solely by Dr. Nash, this was the first blog to emerge from within the Jefferson community. Dr. Nash and the work group were interested in mapping out a new approach to the blog that would keep the content current and enable more frequent postings. DSG solicited advice from an outside consultant and tackled considerations such as generating blog traffic, branding, creating content, and administering the blog. *Nash on Health Policy* was revamped in September 2009 to include postings from faculty and staff, as well as guest commentaries from selected Health Policy Forum speakers. These commentaries explore a wide range of topics related to population health, and the new incarnation of the blog offers faculty and staff an opportunity to share their unique perspectives on topics of interest with a broad community. A future goal for the blog is to conduct a more sensitive analysis of the blog's readership via Google™ Analytics, a program that generates reports and statistics about visitors to a website. The DSG is always looking for ways to engage readers in the conversation and encourage comments and opinions.

Facebook, YouTube, Twitter

JSPH has an active Facebook page where faculty, staff, students, and other community members can post content and read alerts about the latest events sponsored by JSPH. This has been critical in reaching the student population and promoting academic and continuing education programs. JSPH's Facebook and YouTube pages provide opportunities to post visual media in the form of photos and short video clips. In addition, the Facebook page is linked to JSPH's Twitter account, and updates on Facebook automatically post to Twitter using a service called Ping, a network utility that links accounts and social media profiles. JSPH has experimented with live Twitter feeds from educational conferences and special events (eg, 2010 Grandon Lecture, Future of Healthcare in Pennsylvania conference) to reach out to those who cannot attend in person.

Jefferson Digital Commons

Jefferson Digital Commons (JDC) is a repository designed to showcase the work of departments, faculty, and students. JSPH uses JDC to post publications such as the *Health Policy Newsletter,* and the *Prescriptions for Excellence Newsletter.* Additionally, visitors will find *Health Policy Forum* podcasts; audio and video recordings of conferences and other educational programs, and related slide sets. All JDC items and publications can be easily located through a Google™ search. Academic and Instructional Support and Resources (AISR) works closely with JSPH to help connect and interface JDC postings with other social media postings. Recently, AISR assisted JSPH by posting Health Policy Forum podcasts to iTunes University. This will allow JSPH programs to reach another audience while creating a synthesis of information between JDC, the JSPH website, and other social media venues.

Future Directions: Social Media Policy

The DSG recently explored and analyzed social media policies of various institutions. Some of the considerations for educational institutions when crafting a policy on social media use include: disclaimers, copyright, procedures and guidelines, use of personal information, and appropriate content. The group is currently developing social media policy and procedures that could potentially be shared throughout the University. The Group will continue to explore new ways to improve the School's visibility online and generate interest in its academic and professional continuing education programs. ∎

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