

Thesis Project:
Unleashing the Power of Social Media Marketing within the Non-Profits,
through the Lens of Social Cognitive Theory

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Abstract

While many organizations still struggle to effectively incorporate the present-day promotional framework of social media marketing, research reveals that non-profit organizations are lagging even further behind when it comes to the implementation of effective social media and interactive marketing strategies. The interactive marketing strategy model incorporates technology and media-based tactics designed to enhance marketing strategies within any industry. In this project, the primary researcher explored why non-profits are struggling to incorporate these specific strategies, and considered it through the lens of social cognitive theory. The purpose of this project was to focus on a specific non-profit organization and apply the social media marketing research within the literature review to create an interactive online and social media presence. As a result, an online web presence was established in an effort to increase brand recognition, and ultimately, increase growth in membership numbers for the organization. The researcher worked with the non-profit, Pennsylvania state-recognized diploma program Buxmont Christian Educational Institute (BCEI).

Keywords: Social Media, Social Media Marketing, Non-Profits, Interactive Services, Web, Facebook, Twitter, Blogging, WordPress.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Technological advancements, increasing competition within the online market sphere, and the introduction of social media into the cultural landscape over the past decade have made it increasingly important for organizations to develop an interactive social media marketing strategy. This is particularly significant for non-profit organizations. A study conducted by McMahon, Seaman and Buckingham (2011) concludes that in order for non-profits to effectively compete for market visibility, they will need to begin implementing interactive services, including the integration of social networking and Web 2.0 capabilities in an effort to stay relevant and maintain credibility in the online marketplace (McMahon, Seaman & Buckingham, 2011).

With this study at the forefront, the primary researcher has arranged to work with an education-based nonprofit organization, Buxmont Christian Educational Institute (BCEI). BCEI, established in 1989 by Terry (MS Ed) and Pauline Johns, serves as a state-recognized diploma program for home-educators in southeastern Pennsylvania. The Johns' provide educational guidance and curricular resources to home-educating families, as well as assess the scholastic progress of elementary and secondary level students through yearly evaluations and educational competency testing to measure overall academic growth. Once students have met the state-mandated requirements, they receive an official high school transcript and are eligible to apply to any college or university. They are also provided with the opportunity to participate in the yearly graduation ceremony.

According to the BCEI board, membership numbers have been declining for the past few years, and some board members believe this is due in part to the rise of cyber-based Charter schools. While there is no doubt that lack of organizational growth takes into account many other

factors, a quick Google search for the competition spits out a listing of the top five Pennsylvania cyber-based and standard charter schools, (PA Distance Charter School, PA Virtual Charter School, PA Leadership Charter School, Agora Cyber Charter School, Commonwealth Connections Academy), and reveal website home pages that are colorful, engaging, interactive and user-friendly. In addition, all of the websites highlighted at least one form of an active social media platform. Although the researcher does not consider all of the potential factors as to what is stunting the growth of memberships, including a family's motivation for choosing the use a cyber-based charter school or a growing cultural movement towards online learning, a viable and interactive web presence cannot be ignored if BCEI wishes to compete within the current education provider market.

The primary researcher will apply components of the research discussed within the literature review to the project by focusing on the research, development and implementation of an interactive social media marketing plan for BCEI. The researcher's primary goal will be to increase membership through the visual enrichment of the organization's website and through the development of a robust, interactive social media presence in an effort to increase resource benefits for its users. References to an interactive website and engaging social media platforms within this project should be understood, not as individual units, but as two components of an integrated social media marketing plan.

Current Studies

Ready (2011) notes that non-profits are clearly behind the curve when it comes to social media marketing, yet many are realizing the need to increase strategic efforts in this area. Some non-profits have even begun prioritizing the measurement of their online ROI. Ready (2011) states that "well-defined and measurable objectives lead to more effective evaluations of the

organization's overall strategy” (p. 154). Some of these objectives include establishing clear and measurable goals, identifying value through customer service, new prospects, market research, and selection of proper metrics, determining the audience, using analytics to measure results and making modifications as necessary” (Ready, 2011, p. 154). Additionally, a study of thirty-eight non-profit managers conducted by Pope, Asamoah-Tutu and Isely (2009) revealed that all subjects listed either the lack of staff, time, funding, a clear marketing message, or the basic knowledge of what to do as barriers to their ability to market their organization effectively (p. 192).

Research of the literature continues to reveal an ongoing struggle in the arena of marketing for non-profits. Through this project, the researcher will attempt to apply a solution for a specific non-profit as a way to conduct primary application of the recommendations found within the literature review.

Potential Deficiencies

There are several potential deficiencies to be considered within the applied study. First, this project will focus on one non-profit organization. While the methods and principles applied within this project are not limited to this organization, exact results are not guaranteed to be replicated across all non-profit organizations. Another potential deficiency is the lack of a qualitative viewpoint as no prior survey will be conducted to measure user impressions before and after the project is implemented. Due to constraints on time and other resources, numerical data through the examination of website analytics will be the measure of user interaction, in addition to social media metrics which measure “impressions” by the amount of times content was viewed or shared.

Significance of the Study

This applied study will display proven results through numerical data which will assist other non-profits in understanding the significance and impact of an interactive and engaging online web presence. It will also reveal the components needed to develop and implement a social media marketing strategy.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this project is to research, develop and implement a social media marketing strategy through the general lens of social cognitive theory, and through the specific framework of the interactive services theory, for the state-recognized, non-profit diploma program Buxmont Christian Educational Institute (BCEI). The projected goal of the strategy is to increase membership, maintain social credibility and build an interactive online web presence. The applied theories will illuminate how social learning and imitation impact and influence customer interaction within technology-based interactive services.

Methodology

The applied studied will be conducted through quantitative data analysis. The researcher will collect and analyze data for two months prior to and after the website and social media platforms have been implemented. The researcher will track growth and activity including a specific tracking of website traffic, page interaction, social media interaction, and the corresponding increase of memberships for BCEI. This research is guided by two hypotheses:

H₁: An updated and interactive website layout and design will increase user-traffic to the site and interaction within the site.

H₂: An online social media presence will increase awareness of and interaction with the organization.

Preview

The following chapters will address the components of this study. Chapter two will provide an overview of the literature relevant to the topic including a look at the impact of Web 2.0 on the web presence of non-profit organizations. Chapter three provides a detailed overview of the methodology considered through the lens of social cognitive theory and the primary framework of interactive services theory. Chapter four will showcase data analysis in the form of screenshots both prior to and after the applied study, and website analytics after the application. Finally, chapter five will provide a conclusion including an account of the limitations present within the applied study, with recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

As noted within the introduction, the increase of technological innovation, growth and creativity demand that companies increase online visibility and interaction, both through website and social media platforms. A study by McMahon, Seaman and Buckingham (2011) found that nonprofits often find themselves at the back of the pack due to lack of resources – both financial and skilled staff resources – and even the lack of interest or concern from a managing head of department.

To review, the applied study will be pursued as a hands-on project, focused on researching, developing and implementing an interactive social media marketing presence for the non-profit, educational organization, Buxmont Christian Educational Institute (BCEI). The project will encompass the creation of a social media presence and introduction of a revised website. The goal is to track a measurable increase in membership, enhance the organization's online marketing capabilities, and develop a robust online interactive web presence to increase the appeal and benefits for its users.

The applied study will be considered through the general lens of social cognitive theory, and through the specific framework of interactive services theory. The components that will be considered within this literature review include an overview of recent web-based tools and technologies currently available to marketers, a closer look at the interactive and influential role of social media marketing, and how non-profit organizations are integrating these evolving strategies into an organizational marketing approach.

Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura (1986, 1977) defines social cognitive theory as “providing a framework for understanding, predicting, and changing human behavior... identifying human behavior as an

interaction of personal factors, behavior, and the environment” (p. 15, p. 26). The idea behind this theory, as stated in Bandura’s “Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication,” is that “human self-development, adaptation, and change are embedded in social systems” (Bandura, 2001, p 267). Bandura explains that humans have the potential to learn through observation and adopt certain behaviors depending on how motivating the factors are, or what meanings they personally assign to various actions and symbols. People are both the producers and products of their society. Essentially, “social cognitive theory devotes much attention to the social origins of thought and the mechanisms through which social factors exert their influence on cognitive functioning” (Bandura, 2001, p. 274).

Bandura states that three psychological processes are necessary for individuals to acquire new behavior. In sequence, the observer needs to first take note of the modeled behavior, then encode and mentally represent it, and finally, be able to translate the mental representation into an applicable action (Bandura, 1986). Additionally, social cognitive theory takes into consideration that an individual’s action does not include all behaviors he or she observes, recognizing the critical role of motivational incentives for specific behavior adoption. Unsurprisingly, individuals are more likely to adopt a modeled behavior if it results in expected outcomes, rather than unrewarding or punishing outcomes (Bandura, 1986).

Wrapped within this theory, as discussed in “Social Cognitive Theory; An Agentic Perspective,” is the idea of human beings as agents of experiences, rather than mere undergoers, employing the tools of sensory, motor and cerebral systems to carry out tasks which provide meaning, direction and satisfaction within their lives (Bandura, 2001). As agents, individuals explore, manipulate and influence the environment, producing experiences through regulation of

motivation and activities. Finally, these experiences are “dependent on the types of social and physical environments people select and construct” (Bandura, 2001, p. 5).

Currently, some research that has applied to this theory within communication studies is Bandura’s (2001) application of social cognitive theory in media-based mass communication. Bandura evaluates the impact of social cognitive theory and media-generated mass communication on three levels:

1. Media can implant ideas either directly or through adopters. Analyses of the role of mass media in social diffusion must distinguish between their effect on learning modeled activities and on their adoptive use, and examine how media and interpersonal influences affect these separable processes.
2. Media both teach new forms of behavior and create motivators for action by altering people’s value preferences, efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and perception of opportunity structures.
3. The effect of the media may be entirely socially mediated. That is, people who have had no exposure to the media are influenced by adopters who have had the exposure and then, themselves, become the transmitters of the new ways (Bandura, 2001, p. 286).

These observations appear to go hand-in-hand with a 2007 study conducted by Vanessa Ratten and Hamish Ratten. In “Social Cognitive Theory in Technological Innovations” Ratten and Ratten acknowledge that the adoption process of technology, emphasized through social cognitive theory, includes the encouragement of individuals through making certain they will be able to apply the requisite skills and confidence to use a new or existing technology (2007).

As highlighted, social cognitive theory provides the model by which to examine an

individual's interaction with technology and social media platforms. Research as it relates to past and current user behavior, adaption and recent change will be explored further within this text.

Interactive Services Framework

While social cognitive theory serves as the overarching theory for understanding, predicting and changing human behavior, paired with this perspective is the interactive services framework, which will streamline the focus of this project and corresponding research. Defined by Bolten and Saxena – Iyer (2009) in “Interactive Services: A Framework, Synthesis and Research Direction,” interactive services encompass “services that have some form of customer-firm interaction in an environment characterized by any level of technology” (p. 92). The theme of interactive services is the idea that “the nature of customer participation is critically important for the effective creation and delivery of interactive services” (Bolten & Saxena – Iyer, 2009, p. 91).

Interactive services framework seeks to define behavioral roles for both the consumer and the service provider. Consumer behaviors that must be considered include the following: participative behaviors (including information sharing), consumer search, usage, social networks and word-of-mouth. Actions and strategies by the provider, or organization, include innovation, service design, service execution and delivery (Bolten & Saxena – Iyer, 2009). Both the role of the consumer and the organization are crucial to online interactive engagement.

Customer participation relies primarily on a sense of emotional gratification, a need to control the service experience, and perceptions of the trustworthiness of the organization. Information sharing by the consumer includes reviews, feedback and tracking of activity across social networking sites and websites. Consumer search can also be tracked, at minimum, within a

website (Bolten and Saxena-Iyer, 2009, p. 95). Social networks and electronic word-of-mouth marketing are perpetuated by the desire for social interaction, economic incentives, concern for or interest in other consumers, and the potential to enhance one's self-worth, according to Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) in "Electronic Word-of-Mouth via Consumer Opinion Platforms: What Motivates Consumers to Articulate Themselves on the Internet" (p. 39).

Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) recognize that consumers are becoming increasingly more knowledgeable, actively engaged and even more demanding of service organizations. They are ever-present in social networks and online communities, and with this added ability to participate in the creation, value and delivery of interactive services, they are reshaping the marketplace and business practices. In essence, "a purposely constructed social media background involves individuals in conversation related to the organization, giving individuals the opportunity to relate and form an attachment to various portions of the organization" (Schwartz, 2013, p. 28).

With an understanding of these consumer behaviors, organizations can focus on the marketing of creative services which is defined by Berry et al. (2006) as "an idea for a performance enhancement that customers perceive as offering a new benefit of sufficient appeal that it dramatically influences their behavior, as well as that of competing companies" (p. 6).

Bolten and Saxena – Iyer (2009) recognize the challenges and need for further research that lies ahead for marketers. They highlight the fact that consumers are already on information overload, and marketers will need to work even harder to "coordinate strategies and create synergies across channels for interactive services" (p. 101). They predict that the marketing industry will see new systems theories emerge due to the rapid growth of the service sector,

overlapping disciplines and increasing competition within the service marketplace (Bolten & Saxena – Iyer, 2009).

Interactive services should also be considered under the umbrella of what is known as Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC). According to Smith, Berry and Pulford (1999) in “Strategic Marketing Communications,” IMC is defined in three parts:

1. “Management and control of all market communications.
2. Ensuring that the brand positioning, personality and messages are delivered synergistically across every element of communication and are delivered from a single consistent strategy.
3. The strategic analysis, choice, implementation and control of all elements of marketing communications which efficiently (best use of resources), economically (minimum costs) and effectively (maximum results) influence transactions between an organization and its existing and potential customers, consumers and clients” (p. 2).

Expounding on the second point referring to brand positioning, and considering it in light of the interactive service application, an organization’s website is one of the most crucial areas for consumers to engage with the brand. A study of 80 undergraduate business students in 2009 revealed that when less-experienced users found website use and navigation overly difficult, they used this as a negative argument against the website and the brand (Yuping & Shrum, 2009). They also found that when it came to more-experienced Internet users familiar with navigating websites, the expectation of interactivity was prevalent among these users and encouraged more brand engagement (p. 7). They concluded that regardless of the level of internet-user experience, interactive websites are still far more persuasive than one that is less engaging (p. 8).

A study of 420 online consumers in 1999 reveals three main components internet users seek in a website: information placed in an enjoyable context, organizational ideas reasonable for the strategic purpose of the website, and efficiently executed design for web users (Li, 2011, p. 14). Li also highlights results from a 2003 study which reveal that users were drawn toward websites that featured unique interactive services, such as videos and virtual tours, regardless of creative strategies (p. 15).

Tying together the concept of social cognitive theory and the nature of interactive services, this project should be viewed as a three-step process. Since the objective of this applied study is to develop and enhance the non-profit organization's web presence and interactive services capabilities, the idea is to first *understand* and measure current user behavior through website analytics. Behavior will then be *predicted* through the exploration of research on current trends and developments within online social networks, social media marketing and non-profit marketing strategies. Finally, the application of research-supported, online interactive services should exhibit a *change* in user-behavior through an increase in the amount of online participation and frequency of web-based interaction.

New Technologies

The year was 1999, and D. Dunucci was among the first to predict the evolution of the World Wide Web into what it has become in this current day.

“Today's web is essentially a prototype – a proof of concept. This concept of interactive content universally accessible through a standard interface has proved so successful a new industry is set on transforming it, capitalizing on all its powerful possibilities. The first glimmerings of Web 2.0 are beginning

to appear, and we are just starting to see how that embryo might develop” (p. 32).

Dunucci (1999) describe the ways in which this new multi-faceted web will interact regularly with an array of electronics, influencing the way interactive programming will be woven through the medium of TV, in the car via maps and traveler information, cell phones through the access of stats and information, and hand-held games enabling gaming over the internet (p. 32).

Web capabilities have increased substantially in the past thirteen years, and Murugeson (2009) provides a concise definition of what we now accept as the official version of Web 2.0.

“Web 2.0 is both a usage and a technology paradigm. It’s a collection of technologies, business strategies, and social trends. Web 2.0 is more dynamic and interactive than its predecessor, Web 1.0, letting users both access content from a website and contribute to it. Web 2.0 lets users keep up with a site’s latest content even without visiting the actual web page” (Murugeson, 2009, p. 34)

Murugeson (2009) further explains that overall website creation and interface management is more flexible, able to be updated quickly, and incorporates creative collaboration while establishing social networking groups, held together by common goals and interests. Knights (2007) extends these concepts even further in “Web 2.0,” by recognizing that we are now experiencing a “humanizing” of the virtual world through the increased customization of end-user experience and the efficiency of information sharing (p. 30). Murugeson (2009) also notes that businesses are among those most reaping the benefits of the web through the use of market research, information gathering on competitors and of generating revenue (p. 35).

While the functionality of Web 2.0 may be well understood by current internet users, it is important to consider the significant growth it has undergone within the past decade, and the rate at which it continues to grow. With the constant development of new applications and user-friendly interfaces, as well as the implementation of intuitive content management on the back end, it is important that non-profit organizations realize the extent to which they must pick up the pace to compete in the online arena.

Social Media Marketing

Social media has become quite the buzzword in recent years, and encompasses a variety of social networking platforms including Blogger, Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, Twitter, Pinterest, and YouTube among others, as well as a variety of copycat sites. Yet, before delving further into the research of the “what” and “how” of this digital medium, organizations should consider the very important question of “why.” Dr. Stuart Schwartz, professor of Strategic Communication at Liberty University, answers that question quite eloquently:

“The virtual cloud surrounding an organization is much like a culture, and in an age of social media a corporate culture is not just internal; it extends to the external, to the characteristics of the types of customers it attracts and shaped by the content of their communication and conversations” (Schwartz, 2013, p. 61).

For the past few years, businesses and organizations have found a way to channel this new medium, sustained heavily by user-generated content, into their overall marketing strategy. Hersant (2011) provides a clear definition of social media marketing in the article “9 Best Practices of Social Media Marketing:”

“Traditional marketing often involves force-fed messages being seen by millions of people who may or may not care about what you have to say, but

social media marketing is about targeting specific customers and engaging them with something that is direct, memorable and meaningful to them” (p. 21).

Schmidt and Ralph (2011) view social media as not only a way to market products, services and companies, but also as a medium to collect data on products and competitors. They highlight four main social media platforms they believe are important for companies to use. First, social networks such as Facebook, MySpace and LinkedIn, and online communities are important for interacting with the customer. These sites enable organizations to market products, post discounts and run competitions that draw traffic to both the Facebook page and the company website. Secondly, blogs should be used by organizations to promote a corporate “face” for the company, and as an effective means for interactive public relations. However, if a company is unable to regularly maintain a blog, it is recommended that it be removed completely or it could make a company look careless and unengaged. The third platform is a microblog, such as Twitter, due to an organization’s opportunity to stay visible on a daily basis. Companies are able to share products, industry insight, relevant links, photos and videos. Another advantage of Twitter is that consumer sentiment can be measured on some level. Any mention of the company can be easily tracked within a Twitter account. Finally, the RSS feed or Really Simple Syndication is lesser known, but primarily serves to filter data from across the web, alerting a user when a topic they pre-selected as relevant to them is available and where it can be found (p. 3-7).

Schmidt and Ralph (2011) continue with the idea that social media marketing is similar to any other marketing tool and must be used purposefully to be effective. “Social media is like a

new frontier with endless possibilities, but not all options are profitable ventures so choose wisely” (p. 7).

In order to implement social media marketing effectively, an organization should apply all of the following practices within its approach: create a measurable goal, generate a consistent message, encourage conversation, reach out to the consumer base, make it easy to find the company online, share links that are relevant to the consumer, listen and respond consistently, and be prepared to interact via social media at a minimum of once a day (Hersant, 2011, p 22). However, authors Evans and Mckee (2010) in their book *Social Media Marketing: The Next Generation of Business Engagement*, state that marketers need to take social media marketing a step further and begin to see it as social business. Social business essentially “listens” to what consumers are talking about, encourages information sharing and discovers the products or services people are interested in, then ties it back into the business in a way that shapes a customized user experience for a given consumer base (p. 6).

Essentially, social media marketing increases the level of relationship-building with consumers. Vlastic and Kesic (2007) state that relationship-based marketing is focused on the long-term aspect of satisfying consumer needs, and can be successfully carried out by using technological and data platforms to create a personalized approach. Additionally, their own survey research revealed that consumers prefer to conduct business with companies that use interactive communication, believe it is easier to receive the information they need from these organizations, expect more customized offerings and believe interactivity to be a characteristic of a modern company. Finally, these results spanned across a variety of industries with statistical consistency (Vlastic & Kesic, 2007, p 112 - 118).

Integrating social media marketing into the company's overall marketing strategy has become critical within the past few years.

“Social media is growing in popularity. Companies can choose to embrace this new tool and use it to their advantage. Companies that choose not to use will still be affected by it as they cannot prevent the members of the social media from talking about them to the vast number of participants” (Schmidt & Ralph, 2011, p. 7).

Interestingly, research reveals that consumers are beginning to view social media as a more viable and trustworthy source regarding information on products and services over information provided by an organization through various public relations and corporate communication channels (Smith et al., 1999). Since it appears that opting out of social media is no longer an option for organizations, utilizing it as a marketing platform, encouraging conversation with the consumer, respecting their role as informed buyers, and encouraging interactivity across online channels will serve to enhance one's brand and maintain credibility among the competition.

Non-Profit Marketing Strategies

Now that the revolution of technological capabilities and social media marketing have been considered, an understanding of how it is impacting marketing approaches within non-profit organizations will be explored.

Research reveals that many non-profit organizations often struggle to market themselves through web-based channels and social networking, and many still struggle to create and implement even a basic marketing plan. Yorke (1984) contends in “Marketing and Non-Profit-Making Organizations” that many organizations limit the definition of marketing to merely

“selling” or “promotion” when in reality, it truly encompasses an organization’s corporate philosophy (p. 17). A study conducted by Dolnicar and Lazarevski in 2009 reveals that non-profits are more prone to disregard market research in the belief that their product or service is needed by the market. This theory is supported by several other researchers within the study (p. 276). The study seeks to reveal whether non-profit marketing could be enhanced by customer-centric focus and to compare how this applies across international markets. In order to conduct this study, 1,451 non-profit managers from a variety of organizations were invited to participate in the research. Screened by whether or not their organization had a marketing plan and if they were familiar with it, only 140 were selected due to budget limitations within the study. Representatives from three countries – the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia – were interviewed in reference to current marketing practices and the importance of marketing within their organization. Seventy percent of respondents claimed that marketing contributed to the overall success of a non-profit, but only twenty-six percent found it to be crucial (p. 284). Additionally, only one-third of respondents said their organization had a clearly defined marketing strategy, while one-third stated they had at least a formalized one, and the rest of the respondents relied on the measurement of key performance indicators (KPI). Only twenty-nine percent stated that their organizations actively conducted market research, with merely seven percent of those undertaking it more than once a year. At the conclusion of the study, they found that marketing within non-profits appears to be stuck where it was twenty years ago, with the organization as the focus and the main channel of promotions being traditional advertising, public relations and fund-raising (Dolnicar and Lazarevski, 2009).

A study by Atchin (2001) supports these findings by revealing how non-profit marketing managers rate their own marketing skills. After surveying a group of participants across a variety

of organizations and educational backgrounds, Atchin found the highest rated skills among them were writing press releases, grant proposals and producing publications. The lowest rated skills among them included running telemarketing and direct mail campaigns, conducting focus groups and surveys, and website management. Atchin surmises three plausible reasons for the lack of skill sets. One reason is that only twenty-two percent held a formal degree in business marketing, fifteen percent held a degree in communication studies or media, and the rest were comprised of backgrounds in education, social work, law, fine arts and English. Secondly, the salaries in non-profits are not nearly as competitive as the corporate world and are more appealing to volunteers and those seeking a career change. Lastly, Atchin believes that a large component of the issue may be non-profit leaders who are not fully committed to the idea of applying a marketing strategy as they do not appreciate its application to their overall approach (Atchin, 2001).

An additional challenge is that nonprofits serve three distinct markets - the consumer, the volunteer and the donor or funder – making it difficult to package their message effectively for all audiences (Padanyi and Gainer, 2004).

Research conducted by Pope, Asamoah-Tutu and Isely (2009) notes that while an increasing number of non-profits are jumping online, many are not utilizing the all of the internet's capabilities. Most still rely on one-way communication rather than relationship-building interaction. Not surprisingly, nonprofit websites struggle for visibility in search engine optimization mostly due to a shortage of resources, time and expertise to maintain a current and interactive website. In fact, the lack of those very resources was listed as the main reason for the overall absence of a strategic marketing approach by non-profit managers (Pope, Asamoah-Tutu & Isely, 2009, p. 192-193).

By contrast, a recent report by Ready (2011) reveals that non-profits are beginning to realize the advantage of developing a marketing strategy or at least as one that incorporates social media (p. 150). According to survey results from the Nonprofit Social Network Theory Survey in 2009, nonprofits are regularly utilizing social networking sites for traditional marketing and market research (Ready, 2011, p. 151). Ready also refers to research by a University of Massachusetts study conducted by N.G. Barnes pertaining to the Forbes list of top 200 nonprofits. The research indicates that these top non-profit organizations are the ones leading the way in learning, using, and monitoring social media, and have been since 2007. By 2009, ninety-seven percent of these groups were incorporating social media. The past few years show these same non-profits all use at least one form of social media regularly, which included anything from blogs, podcasts and message boards to social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and Foursquare (Ready, 2011, p. 152).

Conclusion

While a variety of studies pertaining to each of the facets discussed in this review exist, the focus of the present study is to synergize all of these concepts into an applicable and manageable strategy for the organization the researching is assisting. Many of the web-based tools, technologies and social networking options discussed within this text are constantly being re-developed and tweaked to fit the ever-changing demand of online users and social systems. However, the overall marketing strategies and concepts remain the same. There is much room for further research within the field of integrated and interactive marketing services as it appears to be the direction in which many, if not all, industries are headed.

Research reveals that larger non-profits are regularly engaged in some form of social media marketing while smaller non-profits seem to be behind the curve in understanding the

importance of creating and sustaining a viable marketing strategy. Yet, of those that acknowledge the importance of implementing one, or even attempt to implement one, the struggle with lack of time, resources and properly-trained personnel continues to be a challenge. However, through the lens of social cognitive theory, it should only be a matter of time before leaders within smaller non-profits are motivated to learn through the observation of their peers and industry leaders, and move towards the adoption of strategic social media marketing behavior.

Next, the methodology and overall strategic approach of the project will be discussed, taking into consideration what has been revealed concerning industry-specific practices and trends.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This section will present the researcher's application of the study, taking into consideration research pertaining to industry trends and standards in order to validate the project. As noted in the literature review, the onset of Web 2.0 has enabled the option of a more interactive and social web that many organizations, including non-profits, are embracing.

Evans and Mckee (2010) highlight the marketing opportunities available through Web 2.0 or what some refer to as the Social Web. Among them are the opportunities to learn about user habits and understand the market, the ability to identify specific influencers and the capability to quantify the impact of social media in order to market more quickly. Additionally, in what is referred to as the Social Feedback cycle there is a link provided "between the basics of social media marketing and the larger idea of social technologies applied at a 'whole-business' level (Evans & Mckee, 2010, p. 4).

With these opportunities in mind, an organization, specifically a non-profit, must look at how it will engage user interaction within its online presence, and establish an online interactive presence, both through its website and social media platforms. In the words of Kent and Taylor (1998), "As off-putting as a technological revolution might be in such a press-the-flesh environment, meaningful technological advances can be integrated to your benefit rather painlessly... The trick is to realize the technology, at hand and forthcoming, must be used to keep in touch and not to distance ourselves - from clients, peers, the media" (p. 323).

For an organization to effectively keep "in touch" with those using the web, tracking website analytics is vital order to track and measure the how and what of user activity. With an analytics program, an organization can monitor actual online page usage, while social media

analytics, built into the networking platforms, can help measure user impressions in addition to interaction.

The primary focus of the applied study will be to re-structure the website, establish a social media presence and measure results over a pre-determined period of time for BCEI. In an effort to systematically apply these updates and changes, additional work will be required in the updating and reorganization of current web content, creation of a blog page tied into the site, and training an individual to maintain the new site. The researcher will be managing the social media accounts for the two-month long duration of this project, as approved by the organization, in order to closely monitor the impact of various posted content.

Strategy of Inquiry

The strategy of inquiry will be processed in a quantitative approach through the gathering and measurement of data specific to web analytics and social media analytics. According to Thomas (2003) “quantitative methods... focus attention on measurements and amounts (more or less, larger and smaller, often and seldom, and similar and different” (p. 1). The goal is to track growth and activity in website traffic, page interaction, and social media interactions over the period of two months. Ultimately, these efforts will increase membership numbers for this organization, though these numbers will not be tracked for this study as there is not enough time to collect the data.

This research is guided by two hypotheses:

H₁: An updated and interactive website layout and design will increase user-traffic to the site and interaction within the site.

H₂: An online social media presence will increase awareness of and online interaction with the organization.

Research Design

For this project, the researcher will apply what has been learned through the literature review regarding social media marketing and interactive services, in addition to the researcher's experience with digital interactivity gained throughout her graduate studies. Also, the technical application of this project will be considered within the following sections.

To measure the aforementioned hypotheses, current website analytics will be obtained from the organization, providing an overview of the two months of activity on the site prior to the project. According to Marek (2011) a website analytics program is very important to understanding one's user base. She cautions to start small when it comes to the areas one tracks as the data can be overwhelming if not approached with careful planning. Marek advises that in the beginning an organization focus on a handful of metrics specific to its needs before incorporating a larger examination of additional analytics (Marek, 2011).

One of the most widely-used, free analytics program to date is Google Analytics. P. Ushkov (2011) explains why and encourages organizations to implement this tool:

It comes with a whopping price of zero dollars and includes tools and reports to give you everything you ever wanted to know about your website's or blog traffic and marketing effectiveness... Before Google Analytics became available, you had to pay some serious money for other tools only to get a fraction of what's included with Google Analytics at no charge (p. 38).

With the system for measurement established, the researcher will implement one of the most widely used, no-cost content-management website platforms currently available:

WordPress. According to Jones and Farrington, over fifty percent of all websites are developed and powered through WordPress. The authors note the remarkable affinity for this website

development system over other well-known platforms such as Drupal, Joomla!, and ExpressionEngine. It reveals not only the appeal of the platform through the significant adoption and implementation rate, but also indicates WordPress's longevity as a CMS (Jones and Farrington, 2011).

With a focus on the influence of social media for organizations, Evans and McKee (2010) state that "social business" or the "social web," offer a "viable approach to driving changes in deeper business processes across a range applications..." (p. 4). With this in mind, the researcher will create an official Facebook page and a blog platform for BCEI. These two social networking platforms were chosen for this non-profit organization based on their ease of use and relevance to the organization. The updated website will incorporate a blog, both of which can be tied into and promoted through the Facebook page. Additionally, these two platforms are primarily content-based, providing additional outlets of information sharing for the organization while relaying the message in a consistent form.

Dunay and Krueger (2011) reveal that Facebook currently has over 500 million active users with an increase of 250,000 registrants every day. A few of the reasons why it is so crucial for an organization to incorporate a Facebook page includes an increase in attention from search engines, the capability to target a digital audience and attract unlimited fans and potential new members. Facebook is also used to engage with an audience, sync the company blog, track fan promotion and interaction, and promote a worthy cause or event (Dunay & Krueger, 2011, 143).

Finally, a blog page will be incorporated into the website, utilizing the WordPress platform. Advantages of implementing a blog for an organization are the added capabilities of timeliness, relevance, consistent branding and messaging that will increase search engine results. Also, shorter posts are more likely to be read and draw traffic back to the site. According to

Holtz and Demopoulos (2006), search engines often place blogs above other website results in an online search, increase an organization's overall web traffic and serve to foster awareness of an organization (p. 68).

Method

A case-study approach will be utilized for this research project. Yin (2009) "The case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events – such as individual life cycles, small group behavior, organizational and managerial processes, neighborhood change, school performances, international relations and maturation of industries (p. 4). The case study method applies to this research project as it seeks to observe current organizational processes relating to the organization's online web presence. Within the project, the researcher will introduce a new set of organizational standards pertaining to BCEI's online web presence, and observe the data over a period of time. Finally, a comparison of both sets of data, before and after the project application, will indicate whether the hypotheses have been proven or disproven.

The study will parallel similar research efforts relating to case studies conducted on social media and the social web. One example is a social media case study, as reported on by Finberg (2012) which applied new social media technologies within accounting firms. Four firms were selected, and each was given a different social media networking tool to incorporate into their business marketing strategy. The networking tools applied included Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube. Only one firm integrated all of three of these tools, one applied two and the other two used one. The results garnered from the application of these social networking sites were considered over approximately a year. Finberg reveals that all the firms reported positive results including increased interaction with clients, increased brand awareness, and enhanced

hiring capabilities (specifically through LinkedIn). One firm completely reworked its website to better incorporate interactive features such as the company blog and a blossoming social media presence (Finberg, 2012).

Procedure

The following section highlights the technical and detailed application of the project specific to each component outlined under research design.

Website

The researcher will build a WordPress site for the organization based on the current website's content and any additional needs as expressed by the organization. The sites will be crafted with special attention to the concept of interactive services framework, as outlined in the literature review. Before the new site is implemented, data will be collected for a two-month period prior to application and will highlight the following areas: traffic to the website, unique and returning visitors, where visitors are being directed from on the web (social media sites, Google, etc.), the top three page hits (interaction), and the average amount of time users stay on the site. The observation and collection of data through web analytics, specifically Google Analytics, will provide the numbers needed to measure growth.

Social Media Platforms: Facebook and Blog Page

The organization currently has no social media presence. As stated previously, the researcher will create an official Facebook page and a blog platform for the organization. The researcher will work with the organization to further define the target market, determine the type of content to be posted, and make recommendations for effectively interacting with current members and online users. The researcher will work with the organization to determine the areas of measurement most relevant to the organization. Recommendations will include measuring the

number of users actively interacting with the page, tracking the demographics to see if they align with the organization's target market, gaging how much the organization is being "talked about" on Facebook, how many times a link, photo or other posted information is "liked," commented on or shared.

Additionally, a blog will be created and tied into the website to help the organization move away from the mass email messaging and provide time-sensitive information that cannot wait for the quarterly newsletter. The blog will be updated once a week, and measured by the number of hits on the page as well as comments and feedback.

Ethical Consideration

This section outlines areas the researcher currently believes to be relevant for ethical consideration. In accordance with federal law, permission to conduct this study was obtained from Liberty University and the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

This study does not involve participants and will focus on the numerical growth of the organization. Additionally, the researcher will not see or process any new membership forms derived from this applied study. The growth and measurement charts tracked within this project will only be accessible to the researcher for the duration of three months, at which time the organization will change the account passwords. The website analytics will be tracked through a Google account set up specifically for the organization's usage. The researcher will have access to this account for the duration of the study, after which the organization will re-set any associated passwords.

Conclusion

The aforementioned sections have outlined the intended course of study and application based on current industry trends and resources. In working with the organization to implement

these tools and technologies, the researcher will make recommendations based on the current findings. However, the overall needs as defined by the organization at the time of application will be taken into consideration and the methodology refined accordingly.

The researcher will also act as an instructor within the organization in order to familiarize individuals with the tools and technologies so that the changes may continue to be applied, and ideally, enhanced as technology continues to develop. Finally, the researcher will work with BCEI to establish a social media marketing strategy specific to the organization's needs, and assist the organization in tracking and understanding the impact of the results as it pertains to its online web presence.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis

The primary researcher met with the organization leaders to discuss and propose a simple and easily-managed Social Media Marketing Strategy, (see page 34), to help establish an effective online presence through its website and a social media platform. Below is a look at the previous website and an overview of the analytics from Dec. 1, 2012 – Jan. 31, 2013.

Before:

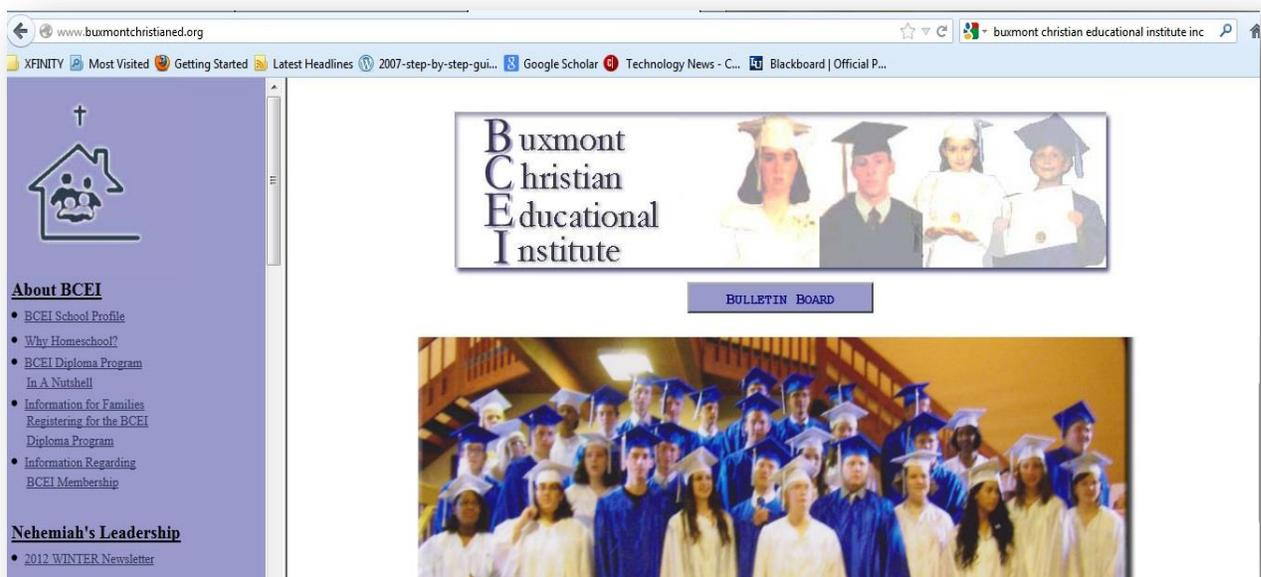
The website tracking program previously in place compiled measurements in a different manner than Google Analytics. The compiled numbers do not exclude "GoogleBot" or other crawler hits. According to Google, "crawler" is a generic term for any program (such as a robot or spider) used to automatically discover and scan websites by following links from one webpage to another." These crawlers are often included in website traffic numbers and provide hundreds of "hits." Google Analytics is able to reduce the count of these hits.

Therefore, looking at the numbers in comparison to the Google Analytics tracker would be misleading. Due to this discrepancy, the primary researcher compared the analytics from December 2012 through March 2013, using the former tracking system. The analysis revealed that page hits have held a steady average and showed little increase over those months. However, the organization leaders noted that November through March are the slowest months for BCEI. April is when members begin to seek out information on evaluation requirements and graduation preparation. Additionally, this site has not been promoted in any way.

Another issue with the previous program is that there was no clear measurement of which pages received the most traffic, the average amount of time spent on the site, where traffic was being referred from and how many pages were viewed per a visit. These measurements are important to understanding the overall effectiveness of a site and are included in the "after" chart results.

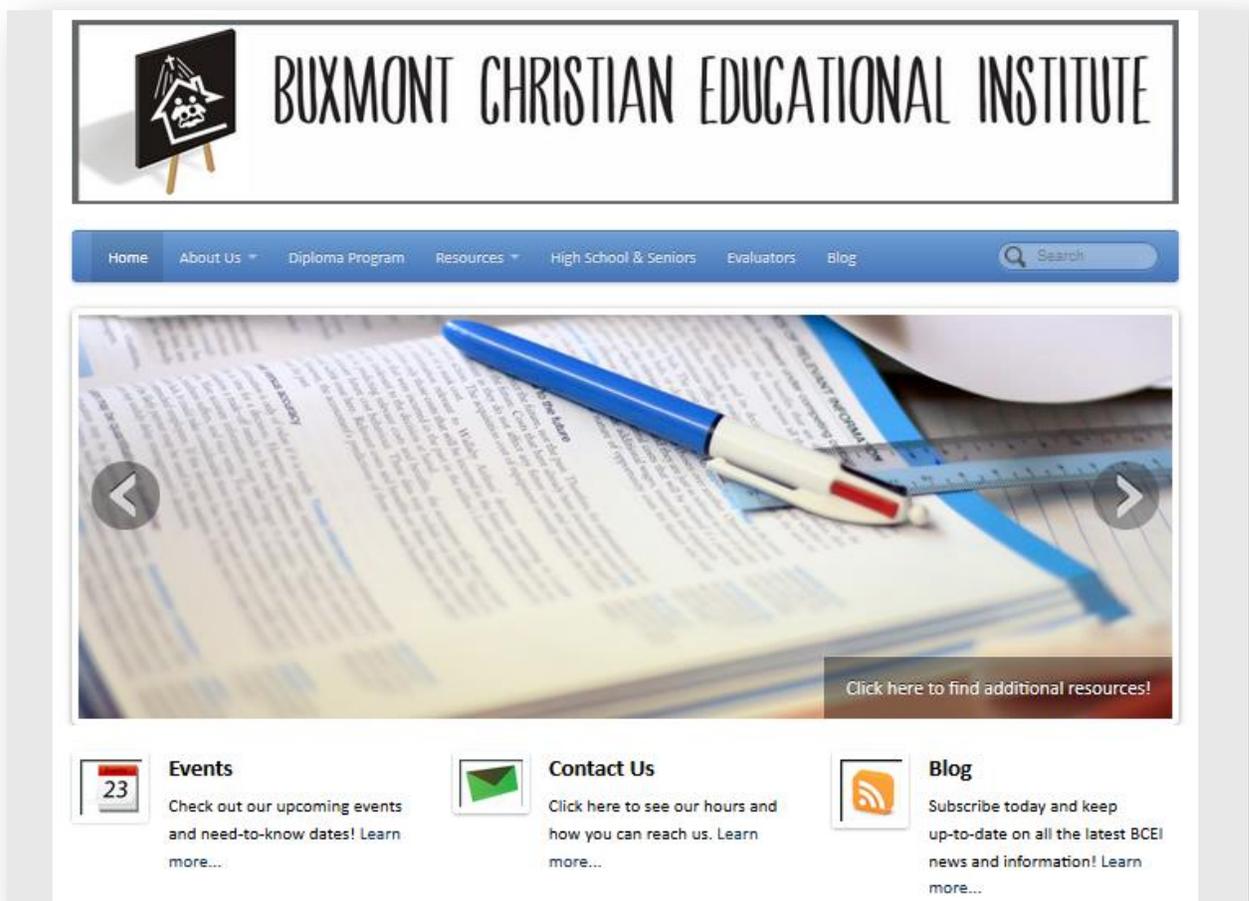
Website Before

This is the screenshot of the original website before it was removed. If this image were to be copied and stacked it would provide a demonstration of how far one had to scroll to view the entire left-hand column of links. The links from the left side opened up in the right-hand window. Pages consisted of long block of text with no clear sections or organization. The primary photo of the graduation class was extremely blurry and somewhat distorted.



Website After

The updated site includes an organized navigation bar with easy-to-navigate drop-down menus. In addition, the center of the page features a five-image slide show, highlighting the most time-sensitive information and featured updates. Also, the primary main pages are listed at the bottom, in addition to the navigation area for easy and consistent access. Finally, the event calendar can be viewed in both a standard calendar form or in a list view.



Example of Page Layout

On every page but the home page, the right side-bar dispays upcoming events and provides a feed of the five most recent blog posts in order to keep the information consistently visible to the online viewer.

The screenshot shows the website for Buxmont Christian Educational Institute. At the top is a header with a logo of a house on a sign and the text "BUXMONT CHRISTIAN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE". Below the header is a blue navigation bar with links: Home, About Us, Diploma Program, Resources, High School & Seniors, Evaluators, and Blog. A search bar is on the right of the navigation bar.

The main content area is titled "Evaluators" and contains a table with the following data:

<u>NAME</u>	<u>EVALUATOR FOR...</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>TELEPHONE #</u>
PATTI ACHEE	Elem., & Sec.	Chester Springs, PA	(610) 827-7149
TIMOTHY ANGER	Secondary Education	Emmaus, PA	(610) 967-4556
LINDA D. BLOCKER	Spec. Ed., Elem. & Sec.	Harrisburg, PA	(717) 545-6039
DARLA BOAL	Spec. Ed., Elem. & Sec.	Otlanta, PA	(814) 236-1013
LORI BOWERS	Elem & Sec.	Maytown, PA	(717) 426-2222
VIVIAN DIPPOLD	K-8	Lansdale, PA	(215) 855-1968
THOMAS DOYLE	Elem., & Sec.	Harleysville, PA	(215) 368-6195
JANET DUMOND	Secondary	Stillwarter, PA	(717) 233-2222

On the right side of the page, there are two sidebars. The top sidebar is titled "Upcoming Events" and lists:

- March 27, 2013 9:10 am – March 27, 2013 12:45 pm Standardized Testing: Fourth Grade & Above CAT Testing
- April 5, 2013 9:00 am – April 5, 2013 2:00 pm Senator for a Day

 Below this is a link "View All Events". The bottom sidebar is titled "Blog Posts" and shows a post titled "Welcome February 6, 2013".

Event Calendar Options

April →

EVENT LIST CALENDAR

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
				1	2	3
4	5 Yearbook Committee Meeting	6	7	8	9	10
11 Student Council Meeting	12	13 Standardized Testing: Third Grade CAT Testing	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21 Washington DC Trip	22	23	24
25	26	27 Standardized Testing: Fourth Grade & Above CAT Testing	28	29	30	31

Upcoming Events

EVENT LIST CALENDAR

March 27, 2013

Standardized Testing: Fourth Grade & Above CAT Testing

On Wednesday, March 27th, CAT testing will be available for students grades four and above. The fee is \$25.00 per student. Testing should run until approximately 12:45 p.m. Students will be given breaks between tests and a larger break with a healthy snack near the middle of the test. Please note that parents wishing to use BCEI testing need to call *Seton (540) 636-9996* by **March 1** and order the tests. They need to be sure to provide the **child's name** and **grade level** and to be sure that the tests are sent to BCEI at **146 West Broad Street Telford, PA 18969**. Once the test has been ordered, you will need to call BCEI at (215) 723-7226 to let us know the tests are on the way. Once we receive a group of tests, we will conduct a mailing to provide specific details. Parents with questions or concerns may feel free to call during BCEI office hours.

Start: March 27, 2013
9:10 am

End: March 27, 2013
12:45 pm

Venue: Indian Valley
Public Library

Cost: \$25

April 5, 2013

Senator for a Day

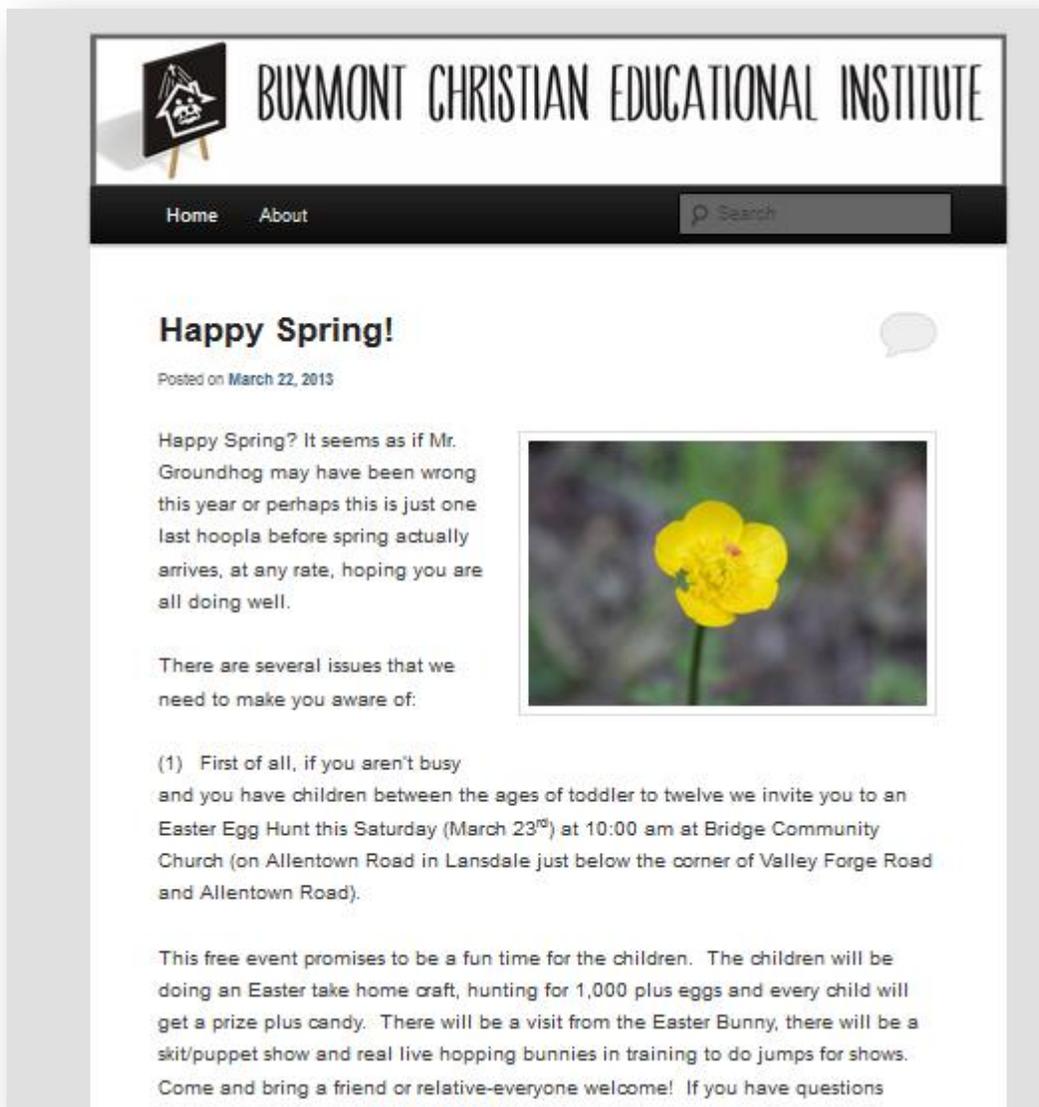
Once again, BCEI students have been invited to participate in the Seminar for Future Leaders at **Montgomery County Community College** in

Start: April 5, 2013
9:00 am

End: April 5, 2013

Example of Blog Page

The design of the blog is currently quite basic as the organization has only agreed to “give it a try.” The researcher recommended an updated logo to help with the overall branding. This suggestion has been politely refused for the time being.



Analytics After Updated Site

	Website Traffic (Hits)	Unique Visitors	Page views/P. Per Visit	Top Referral Sources	Top 3 Highest Hit Pages	Average Time on Site
9-Feb	52	28	258/5	Direct, Google & Yahoo	Home Page, Event Calendar, Diploma Program	3 mins/51 secs
16-Feb	71	44	280/4	Direct, Google & Bing	Home Page, Diploma Program, Event Calendar	6 mins/40 secs
23-Feb	53	44	264/5	Direct, Google & Yahoo	Home Page, Event Calendar, Diploma Program	3 mins
24-Feb	44	38	178/4	Google, Direct & Bing	Home Page, Contact, Diploma Program	2 mins
3-Mar	45	35	123/3	Google, Direct & Yahoo	Home Page, Contact, High School Info	2 mins
10-Mar	43	35	161/3	Google, Direct & Bing	Home Page, Contact, Diploma Program	3 mins

***Buxmont Christian Educational Institute
Social Media Marketing Strategy***

Value Proposition

To assist Buxmont Christian Educational Institute in increasing online awareness and interaction, and ultimately increasing membership numbers, through the implementation of an updated and interactive website, and the creation of an official Facebook page and blog site.

Target Audience

The target audience includes home schooling families in southeastern PA, specifically mothers, ages 25-50, as well as high school students.

Goal

The goal is to implement and utilize an updated website that will encourage interaction through a visually appealing and easy-to-navigate layout. In addition, to create a blog for the primary use of information sharing in order to reduce the number of mass emails sent out to current members. Finally, to establish an official organization Facebook page that will enable the organization to easily share upcoming dates and deadlines, event highlights/photos, promotions and links to its blog, etc. These platforms will work together in reaching the target audience and consistently provide information that will be accessible them through various online options that all tie back to BCEI.

Strategy and Measurement

Facebook: Facebook will be used as the primary platform for showcasing student/alumni spotlights, events, media coverage, discounts, promos, and photos (events, student work, etc.). It will also be used for sharing links to blog posts and highlighting new information on the website. This page will also provide an opportunity for the organization to engage in feedback and interaction with users. Finally, there is also the option to utilize Facebook Advertising tactics. This page would be promoted on the website and blog, as well as suggested to your own current Facebook friends.

Measurement

- Number of comments/likes.
- Number “Talking About” the page.
- Tracking of demographics (age, location, etc.)
- Level of engagement on the page (which posts are liked/commented on the most, how often people respond to the content, etc.)
- Number of weekly total reach (this number includes fans, friends of fans, and other individuals who may have seen content in their newsfeed because someone liked/commented on/or shared it.)

Blog: The blog will serve as the primary avenue of communication for BCEI, reducing the number of mass emails, and providing updates between quarterly newsletters. The content will highlight noteworthy occurrences— i.e. updated rules and regulations, special events, curriculum highlights, coverage of industry trends and topics, etc. Blog post links will be shared via Facebook and the website.

Measurement

- Track number of post views.
- Measure comments (You will find that people rarely, if ever, leave comments. Many will like/comment on the link via Facebook.)

Chapter Five: Limitations and Recommendations

The researcher faced several limitations and challenges during this project. First, while the organization leaders were initially very receptive and excited about the Social Media Marketing Strategy proposal, they later became hesitant on certain recommendations. Primarily, the use of Facebook. Although the researcher met with the organization leaders for several hours, explaining the advantages of the social networking platform, sharing recent research that indicated the significance of this platform and assuring the use of custom privacy settings, there was still a fear concerning the implementation of the site. The stated reason being they were concerned that people will leave disparaging, threatening or inappropriate comments. Again, the researcher explained that this too could be monitored.

Additionally, the concept of the blog was to reduce the amount of mass email messages and the time involved with sending them out in increments of fifteen to a membership base of over 400, as well as to avoid “blowing up” member’s inboxes with the messages sent as often as two times in one day. Although content for posting to the blog has been requested, the primary researcher continues to receive mass emails from the organization. The organization is still open to the use of this platform, but is convinced that members will not pay attention to information that does not arrive via email as well. The researcher has suggested sending out weekly emails for a month that redirect members to the blog and encourage them to subscribe in order to establish the new location for information sharing.

Finally, the researcher met with many challenges attempting to develop the website. Missing passwords, locked domain names, and hard-to-reach hosting companies were among some of the issues. Too much of the previous website management was outsourced to volunteers and information was not consistently secured in one location. At one point, the researcher was

encouraged to find a free-hosting service to help reduce costs. The service was acquired through Dreamhost, which offered free hosting for non-profit sites, and all the data was transferred. After two weeks the application had yet to be processed and charges were applied to the account. The primary researcher was then forced to cancel this service and return to the original host, where the WordPress platform as not initially supported. After several phone calls and emails to this company, the primary researcher was able to get the required platform implemented. The primary researcher spent several weeks on this portion of the project. The development of the site took many hours, but went smoothly as much of the necessary content was accessible from the previous site.

Overall recommendations for future projects would be to have more one-on-one time with the organization. A major limitation was that the primary researcher was only able to meet face-to-face with the organization one time for about six hours. All communication afterwards took place via email and sometimes through phone calls. The leaders are extremely busy individuals and are often tough to reach. The primary researcher has consistently followed-up with communication efforts via email, and only received responses from time to time. In fact, one of the main reasons Facebook has been put on the backburner is because it has not even been part of active discussion since the first proposal. The primary researcher strongly believes the organization will begin using Facebook once the leaders have a chance to view and navigate the private page created for BCEI.

In addition, the organization needs to designate at least one person to part-time management of its online presence in order to provide consistency across all platforms and increase visibility for BCEI. The primary researcher recommends a high school age intern.

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