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Recruiting and engaging generation Z: an integrated marketing communications plan for West Virginia University Visitors Center

Kathryn (Kallie) Priscilla Nealis

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**Recruiting and engaging Generation Z:
An integrated marketing communications plan for
the West Virginia University Visitors Center**

Kallie Nealis

**Project submitted
to the Reed College of Media
at West Virginia University**

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science in Journalism

**David Smith, M.A., Chair
Steve Urbanski, Ph.D.
Elizabeth Oppe, Ph.D.
Terrance Jackson, M.S.**

Department of Journalism

**Morgantown, West Virginia
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Student Recruitment, Higher Education**

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ABSTRACT

Recruiting and engaging Generation Z: An integrated marketing communications plan for the West Virginia University Visitors Center

Kallie Nealis

The purpose of this professional project is to provide a guide of marketing and communication strategies for organizations to implement in an effort to succeed in their goals involving improving overall success and awareness of the organization. The main component of this professional project is an integrated marketing communications (IMC) plan designed on behalf of the WVU Visitors Center and their IMC goals. Examined and outlined in this IMC plan is the target audience (Generation Z), as well as overall campaign objectives, creative strategies, media objectives and evaluation procedures that are grounded in and seek to expand upon the theoretical frameworks of narratology and “sense of place.” While the majority of its contents are related to communication initiatives on behalf of student recruitment in higher education, this IMC plan can also be utilized by other organizations, including those that are unrelated to education.

DEDICATION

To my parents, Audrey and Greg Nealis.

Nothing parallels to the love and support you both provided me throughout my academic career, and for that, I will always be grateful.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my warmth and gratitude to those who encouraged and motivated me throughout the creation of this work from start to finish:

My committee as a whole for believing in my dedication and will to complete this project.

My Chair, David Smith, who happily took on this leadership role with an open mind. Thank you for leading the committee and myself with nothing but optimism and continuing to motivate us until we reached our goal.

Dr. Steve Urbanski, who selflessly agreed to be a member of my committee and remained dedicated to its success, even from oceans away. I'm not sure how I would have made it through graduate school without your sense of humor and drive to make sure I truly grasped the content and concepts presented in class.

Dr. Elizabeth Oppe, whose sense of empathy and compassion never ceased to impact my work and daily life.

Terrance Jackson, Danica Wilburn and Brandi Underwood, who supported me in taking our day-to-day work and transforming it into something more.

The WVU Visitors Center, who agreed to be the subject for my IMC plan.

WVU Brand, who permitted me to include their vision in my IMC plan.

My Mom, Dad, family members and friends, whom without their patience and emotional support, this wouldn't have been possible.

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Introduction

Through its tours, events, social media accounts and other services, the WVU Visitors Center strives to educate prospective students on West Virginia University and provide them with positive experiences and information to encourage them to attend the university. To aid in improving WVU Visitors Center's impact on university enrollment, this professional project presents an integrated marketing communications (IMC) plan that enables the Visitors Center to better reach its audiences from before they step foot on campus or in the Visitors Center, to the time they make their ultimate decision on where to pursue their higher education degree.

Although this IMC plan was created on behalf an organization within a higher education institution, the plan as a whole was formatted and structured in a way so that it can be molded and implemented by organizations of various types, or that are unrelated to education; its main components include defining integrated marketing and communications, an executive summary, learning about the WVU Visitors Center in its entirety, a target audience analysis, a SWOT analysis, campaign objectives, creative strategies, media objectives and strategies, a measurement and evaluation plan, concluding thoughts, as well as visuals to support the written content.

The overall graphic design and visual elements of the IMC plan were chosen carefully in order to represent the WVU Brand guidelines as of July 2018. By designing the IMC plan to withhold many of the major visual characteristics of the WVU Brand, which are also explicitly defined within the plan, this IMC plan then serves as an example of the type of design that is recommended for the Visitors Center to keep in mind throughout its marketing and communication initiatives. However, this is another element that can be further altered and personalized to be of use to other organizations.

To provide the structure and support necessary in order to identify the ultimate objectives, strategies and goals of the proposed plan, an extensive literature review is included throughout the IMC plan. Lastly, in addition to the literature review that reinforces the suggested methods of action offered in the IMC plan, this plan is grounded in the “theory of narrative,” or “narratology,” as well as “sense of place.”

Please refer to the next page to view the WVU Visitors Center Integrated Marketing and Communications Plan.

Three yellow diagonal bars are positioned around the title text. One bar is on the left, one is at the top right, and one is at the bottom right.

INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

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WHAT IS AN IMC PLAN?

“Integrated marketing communications” or “IMC” is defined as a method to achieving objectives of a marketing campaign by utilizing a well-coordinated use of various promotional methods which reinforce one another (BusinessDictionary, 2018). An IMC plan uses a comprehensive framework, which employs a multitude of communication disciplines, such as advertising or public relations, to strategically provide consistency, clarity and maximum communications impact (Higgins, 2018, p.10; Kitchen & Schultz, 1998). It also relies on a dynamic and ongoing two-way dialogue between marketers and consumers, the necessity to maintain a consistent message throughout all marketing outlets and takes all aspects of a brand’s relationship between themselves and the consumer into account (Higgins, 2018, p. 22; Tetteh, 2008).

IMC PLANS AND THEIR IMPACT ON STUDENT RECRUITMENT PRACTICES

Colleges and universities are advised to incorporate a mix of media channels into their recruitment strategies to ignite engagement with students (Hanover Research, 2015). Yet, it is also no longer sufficient to utilize email, direct mail, websites or other marketing strategies if they do not work in harmony for the same goal or objective (Hanover Research, 2015). Therefore, a defined IMC plan would be a beneficial, effective recruitment strategy for higher education institutions to implement in order to marry both the digital and offline worlds (Hanover Research, 2015).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The WVU Visitors Center is the first stop for many prospective WVU students along their college search. Through a multitude of services, the Visitors Center provides the opportunity for prospective students and their families to get a feel for what life would be like as a student of WVU.

Traditional marketing methods such as billboards, mailouts or phone calls are not always the best ways to reach or encourage today's tech-savvy prospective students to choose a specific university (Lenore-Jenkins, 2016). Therefore, colleges and universities have turned to digital media platforms to recruit prospective students, just as prospective students themselves have begun to utilize social media and other digital media platforms to assess and select institutions for their degrees in higher education (West, 2016, p. 3).

This proposal contains the main ideas, structured plan of action and strategies behind an integrated marketing communications plan to benefit the WVU Visitors Center and their efforts to recruit prospective students of today's generation, "Gen Z," to choose West Virginia University as their future home and place to earn their higher education degree. The IMC plan will seek to reach key objectives, including improving organization awareness and traffic of prospective students through the Visitors Center.

By utilizing numerous forms of media, this IMC plan will implement a multitude of strategies and tactics to fulfill specific objectives on behalf of WVU and the Visitors Center. Additionally, the graphic design and visual elements of this IMC plan are meant to serve as an example of the WVU Brand guidelines, which are explicitly included within the plan.

Finally, to keep the WVU on the forefront of prospective student's mind when making their decision of where to attend college, a series of evaluations will be used before, during and after the execution of the IMC plan to measure the overall success of each objective proposed. That said, this plan benefits the Visitors Center on a variety of levels and serves as a learning experience to gain target audience insight and improve recruitment tactics to target the new generation of prospective students.

ABOUT THE WVU VISITORS CENTER

MISSION

Through guided campus tours, academic appointments, class visits and other events, the WVU Visitors Center introduces potential WVU students and their families to programs, places and people with the goal of them ultimately choosing West Virginia University as their higher education home (Home, 2018).

STAFF

As of July 2018, the Visitors Center staff included the following members:

- Director, Danica Wilburn
- Outreach Coordinator, Brandi Underwood
- Social Media and Marketing Graduate Assistant, Janee Avery
- Group Tour Coordinator Graduate Assistant, Ryan Minnigh
- 10 tour guides (Our staff, 2018).

The employee who will hold the majority of the responsibility of executing the initiatives of this IMC plan will be the Social Media and Marketing Graduate Assistant, with the supervision of Outreach Coordinator. The tour guides can also be influential in the execution and promotion of IMC initiatives through their interactions with students and families on tour, in the Visitors Center and through their personal social media accounts, as well as within the personal messages included on the postcards sent to prospective students after tours that thank them for visiting.

Additionally, the Visitor Center interacts closely with WVU admissions on a daily basis and is also a part of University Relations at the University.

VISIT OPTIONS

Scheduling a Visit

To schedule or learn more about campus visit opportunities, prospective students and others visiting West Virginia University can contact the WVU Visitors Center on-site at the front desk, by calling the main number or sending a message to the Visitors Center email account, all of which are provided on the website (Contact us, 2018).

Prospective Student Guided Campus Tours

Guided campus tours regularly take place Monday through Friday at 9:30 a.m. and 1 p.m., as well as Saturdays (excluding home football games) at 10 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. (Guided tour, 2018). Each guided campus tour experience, with the exception of Saturday tours, begins with an admissions presentation (Guided tour, 2018). During this presentation, an admission counselor discusses housing and dining plan options, scholarship opportunities, tuition costs and other information geared towards prospective first-year freshman students (Guided tour, 2018). The presentation is followed by a two and a half hour walking/driving tour of all three of Morgantown's campuses, including taking a look inside a classroom, the Mountainlair Student Union, the Student Rec Center and a residence hall (Guided tour, 2018).

Prospective Transfer Student Tours

Condensed guided campus tours specially designed for prospective transfer students, or students coming in with 29+ hours of transfer credit, are offered every Friday at 10 a.m. (Guided tour, 2018). This tour also includes an information session with a transfer admissions counselor that takes place before the tour (Guided tour, 2018). This tour does not visit a dining facility or a residence hall (Guided tour, 2018).

Prospective Graduate Student Tours

For those interested in applying to graduate school at WVU, guided campus tours are offered for prospective graduate students every Monday at 1:30 p.m. (Guided tour, 2018). Unlike the other guided campus tours, graduate tours do not include an admissions presentation. The tour guide tailors the information on tour to what graduate student life is like in Morgantown to the guest's program(s) of interest.

Self-Guided and Virtual Tours

For those unable to attend a guided campus tour, the Visitors Center offers both self-guided and virtual tours. Those interested in touring campus in-person can utilize the self-guided tour option. Before embarking on tour, visitors should first stop by the Visitors Center to obtain a campus map and a parking permit for campus lots (Self-guided tour, 2018). If the Visitors Center is not open, visitors can access a campus map and PDF guide on their main website (Self-guided tour, 2018). Students can then download an audio track, recorded by an actual tour leader, to guide them around campus (Self-guided tour, 2018). This tour typically takes around two hours to complete (Self-guided tour, 2018).

If a student is unable to travel to campus, a virtual tour would be the next best option to view campus. Prospective students can access a link to take both WVU campus and housing virtual tours on the Visitors Center's main website (Tours, 2018).

Large Group Tours

Group tours are offered Monday-Friday at 9 a.m., 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. to group sizes of 10+ (Large-group tour, 2018). Organizations or groups interested in scheduling a group tour must complete a Group Tour Visit Request Form on the Visitors Center's website (Large-group tour, 2018). They can also contact the Visitors Center through telephone or email to speak with the group tour coordinator (Large-group tour, 2018). Groups must provide their own transportation for their visit and chaperones must also accompany the group at all times (Large-group tour, 2018).

Academic Appointments

If a student is interested in meeting with a specific academic department, attending a class, gaining more information about their financial aid opportunities and more, the Visitors Center can also schedule academic appointments for prospective students (Schedule a visit, 2018). These appointments provide more of a one-on-one, personalized experience for prospective students and their families, and are only scheduled Monday through Friday (Schedule a visit, 2018).

Other Visit Options

The Visitors Center also hosts and assists with various annual and semi-annual recruiting events in conjunction with WVU Admissions. These events include Junior Preview Day, Go First Friday, Discover WVU Day and Decide WVU Day (Decide WVU Days, 2018; Discover WVU Days, 2018; Junior Preview Days, 2018; University Relations, 2016).

DIGITAL MEDIA PRESENCE

The WVU Visitors Center uses its main website and social media accounts to communicate with prospective students that prefer doing their research on a university through online or through social media platforms, or who may be unable to travel to campus for a physical tour.

Website

The main website of the Visitors Center (www.visit.wvu.edu), provides various resources for prospective students, including:

- Information on its services for prospective students and their families
- Online tour registration
- A virtual tour of the Morgantown campus
- A virtual tour of all residence halls on the Morgantown campus
- Self-guided tour directions and campus map
- Links to other WVU websites or resources (Home, 2018).

Social Media

For prospective students and families that are on social media, the Visitors Center has a business page on Facebook, as well as Twitter and Instagram accounts which it updates regularly, via the handle “@VisitWVU.”

FINANCIALS

The WVU Visitors Center does not currently have room in its allotted budget to provide funding for any paid media initiative or strategy. That said, integrated marketing communications initiatives on behalf of the Visitors Center must explore all avenues to target its audience through unpaid tactics strategically.

COMPETITION

Because of the nature of the services they offer for prospective students, the visitor centers at each university are typically judged upon the visit experience of potential students and their families. This can span from whether or not a university has a physical visitor center, whether those visitor centers have a social media presence, to even the accommodations or services a university has to offer visiting students. Furthermore, the competitors of the WVU Visitors Center would be the services and or visit experiences offered by other universities.

Specifically, the WVU Visitors Center's main competitors would be the university visitor centers or accommodations offered for prospective students by other universities within the states with the highest recorded number of students attending WVU. Based off the latest headcount enrollment data gathered in Fall 2017, the states with the highest number of WVU attendees were West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Virginia, New Jersey, Ohio and New York (Division of planning, 2018). Therefore, the Visitors Center would seek to increase the number of students attending WVU among these competing states, as they make up a significant portion of the current WVU student population.

Additionally, with diversity being one of WVU's primary values, visitor centers of other universities in states with the lowest number of WVU attendees are also significant competitors (Vision and values, 2018). According to the enrollment data gathered in the Fall of 2017, the states with less than 10 WVU attendees were Alaska, Hawaii, Iowa, Idaho, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota and Wyoming (Division of planning, 2018). That said, the Visitors Center should aim to encourage students from these states, as well as from international territories, to use its resources in order to increase the diversity among the student body.

Moreover, visitor centers or established programs geared explicitly towards visiting students and their families of other universities should define their competitors based on their most recent enrollment data, as well as their admissions goals or values (i.e., diversity).

TARGET AUDIENCE

Organizations, specifically higher education institutions, typically do not have the resources or time to be able to reach everyone with a message (Hubbard, 2018). This is why it is crucial that they identify a *target audience*, which is made up of individuals who share similar characteristics or needs that an organization aims to serve and is the intended recipient of a communication or marketing message (Hubbard, 2018). By explicitly defining the target audience of the WVU Visitors Center, a target marketing strategy can be developed and implemented to segment messages to the target audience, thus allowing the Visitors Center to better connect with and prioritize the needs of that audience (Amerigreen Energy, 2017).

When recruiting students to attend higher education institutions, the population that visitor centers aim to target is made up of high school students that plan to apply to college within a few years (Tilearcio, 2016). Today's high school students are beginning the college evaluation process earlier than in previous years, with some students starting to build their lists of potential colleges and universities as early as their freshman year of high school (Lenore-Jenkins, 2016). Therefore, it is vital that **the target audience be made up of high school students, from their freshman to senior year** (Lenore-Jenkins, 2016).

Furthermore, because this age group of high school students contains those who were most likely born between the years of 1999-2004, they fall under the category of Generation Z or “Gen Z” (Sehl, 2018). By having a thorough understanding of the primary qualities of Gen Z, institutions enable themselves to create more efficient and effective marketing when developing strategic communication methods to reach this target audience (Lenore-Jenkins, 2016). This strategy is also essential for higher education institutions when countering shrinking budgets and striving to rise above the competition of other colleges and universities (Lenore-Jenkins, 2016).

GEN Z

There are various factors to consider when crafting messages that target Gen Z. Gen Z consists of the teenagers of today and is often referred to as “the fastest growing cohort of tomorrow’s trendsetters” (Sehl, 2018). In addition to growing up during one of the most accelerated periods of technological advancements in history, census data shows that this generation is also the most ethnically diverse population to date (Jenkins, 2018; Patel, 2017). Furthermore, studies show that Gen Z shows a more significant interest in content regarding environmental issues, as well as representing racial, gender and sexual orientation equality (Nanji, 2018).

Another unique characteristic of Gen Z is that they have not lived through a time where the Internet did not exist (Patel, 2017). In a 2015 study by Common Sense Media, teens were reported to spending an average of nine hours a day consuming and using social media (Willett, 2016). The following platforms are in order from most to least popular among Gen Z social media users of 2016: Instagram with 59%, Snapchat with 56.4%, Facebook with 52.8%, Google+ with 42%, Twitter with 35.4% and Pinterest with 26.6% of respondents stating that they used them (Google, 2016).

Gen Z has never known an ad that was not targeted or a cell phone that was not “smart,” and because they understand that brands have more access to consumer data, they expect highly personalized interactions through social media (Sehl, 2018). They also typically select smartphones as their screen of choice for maintaining their digital lives, and unlike previous generations, they tend to take a multifaceted approach to social media through focusing and fragmenting their time across social channels by sharing certain types of content on specific social platforms (Patel, 2017; Perlstein, 2017). That said, it is crucial that digital marketing content be optimized for smartphone screens, as well as tailoring social media posts to each social platform while maintaining the same overall message or presence across the web when communicating with this specific audience (Perlstein, 2017).

TARGET AUDIENCE PROFILE

The following is an example of a potential member of the target audience.

MEET MADDIE

AGE 16 years old	GRADE Highschool junior	SOCIAL @mlp2002	LIKES Beauty Blogs and Netflix
GENDER Female	LOCATION Cleveland, OH	DREAM JOB Travel blogger	DISLIKES Bandwagon-ers and inequality

SWOT ANALYSIS

The strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats of the WVU Visitors Center are defined in the SWOT analysis below.

Strengths

- One of a kind: Only organization that provides daily guided campus tours for prospective WVU students of all levels, that are led by knowledgeable, highly-trained tour guides who have completed at least two semesters at the University (Be a tour leader, 2018; Tours, 2018).
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: WVU works with all communities on campus to ensure an inclusive environment for all students, which the Visitors Center promotes on tours and through marketing efforts to make students from all backgrounds, interests, etc. feel welcome (About, 2018).
- Flexibility: Offers opportunities for visitors to register for tours in-person, on the phone or through their website (Guided tour, 2018).

Weaknesses

- Location: The WVU Visitor Center, where tours commence, is physical located off-campus (Home, 2018).
- Limitations: Only offers overall, general campus tours versus various tours for specific areas of campus, colleges, etc., and is closed on at-home football game days and occasionally during periods of WVU's seasonal breaks/recesses (Schedule a visit, 2018; Tours, 2018).
- Landscape: Because of the nature of West Virginia's rolling hills, portions of the tour route may be difficult for those with physical accessibility needs.

(SWOT Analysis continued)

Opportunities

- Technology: Potential to offer additional tour options utilizing technology advancements (i.e. via social media or creation of a smartphone app).
- Events: In addition to their tour, WVU events (i.e. concerts, sports) can enhance a family's visit to Morgantown.
- Enrollment: U.S. college enrollment rates are predicted to annually increase throughout the next decade (Statista, 2018).

Threats

- Expense: Students may not have the financial means or resources to attend a college visit or afford college period.
- Unpredictability: Events can occur at any time that could paint the University in a negative light or harm its reputation, such as its ongoing party-school reputation (Sieczkowski, 2017).
- Weather: West Virginia experiences all four seasons, which could prevent families from being able to travel to campus/attend tour due to inclement weather.

CAMPAIGN OBJECTIVES

The goal of this proposed IMC plan is to improve the overall future success of the WVU Visitors Center in attracting students to visit the University and choose WVU for their higher education career.

The overall campaign objectives of this proposed IMC plan are:

1. Improve the social media presence of the WVU Visitors Center among high school students by 25 percent from May 2019 to May 2020.
2. Increase the amount of appointments scheduled through the Visitors Center among high school students by 50 percent in the duration of May 2019 to May 2020.
3. Raise the Visitors Center's online registration for campus tours by 15 percent among high school students between May 2019 to May 2020.

CREATIVE STRATEGIES

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONSISTENT BRANDING

Maintaining a consistent brand or design is essential for a successful social media presence (Chamberland, 2017). The most recognizable companies in the world are known for keeping their branding consistent across all platforms (i.e., Coca-Cola, who uses mostly red in their posts, which makes them stand out from their competitors) (Chamberland, 2017). Because social media platforms are highly visual, it is very important to create a well-branded digital media presence to ensure that the target audience is able to recognize it or associate it with the university quickly and easily (Chamberland, 2017). Consistent branding is also known to often increase the level of trust or dependability of an organization (Chamberland, 2017).

That said, it is recommended that the content, tone and voice of a university's visitor center's social media accounts reflect the feel of branding of the university, as well as the message that it wants to send its audience (Chamberland, 2017). Once that style is decided upon, it should then remain consistent across all platforms (Chamberland, 2017).

WVU BRAND

As one of the first, most influential voices of West Virginia University for prospective students, it is crucial that the WVU Visitors Center mirror the branding guidelines of the University. The most important aspects of the WVU Brand that this IMC plan will focus on grasping is the voice and graphic language of the brand. By employing the voice and graphic language of the University throughout all aspects of this IMC plan, the Visitors Center allows itself to represent WVU accurately while remaining consistent with other marketing messages disseminated by the University.

The main differences between the Visitors Center and other WVU departments, such as the official WVU accounts across social media platforms, is that the Visitors Center will focus its marketing and communications efforts to serve as an informational guide to inform students of all that the University has to offer, especially on behalf of the first-year experience (e.g. living in the residence halls, welcome week activities).

Voice

There are **six personality** traits make up the voice of WVU and aid in the attempts to make content more memorable, emotional and approachable (Personality, 2018):

The voice of the WVU Brand utilizes spirited and inspiring phrases, using verbs that end with “-ing,” as well as using the words “go” and “first” as often as possible (Flexibility, 2018).

PIONEERING

Resourceful and entrepreneurial, proactively forging new opportunities

TIRELESS

Hardworking and determined, undaunted by obstacles

PASSIONATE

A legacy as a fiercely loyal, spirited community

GROUNDLED

Unpretentious and real, with a true sense of self

INNOVATIVE

Cutting-edge and relevant, focused on staying ahead

CARING

Selfless and dedicated to the community, supporting each other and those in need

Follow these five tips to best capture the WVU voice:

1. Be confident, without being arrogant
2. Be bold, without being aggressive
3. Be direct, without feeling trite
4. Be challenging, without being implausible
5. Be inspirational, without being sentimental, (Getting it right, 2018).

For examples on how to best execute these tips, see Appendix C.

Graphic Language

The WVU Brand Center breaks its graphic language down into four main parts: Photo, color, elements and type (Graphic Language, 2018). When using photos, they must be selected carefully in order to represent WVU authentically (Photo, 2018).

WVU's photo language consists of four categories:

1. In the moment
2. Student interaction
3. Sense of place
4. Details (Photo, 2018).

Below are examples that demonstrate the WVU Brand photography style (Photo, 2018).

In terms of color, the WVU Brand utilizes primary, neutral and accent palettes to help identify the University at a glance and set the tone for its communications efforts (Color, 2018).

To maintain consistency, WVU makes use of specific visual elements, in addition to photos, which include diagonal lines and Flying WV backgrounds (Elements, 2018).

The final of the four instrumental pieces of the WVU Brand's graphic language is type, which consists of Helvetica Neue and Iowan Old Style font (Type, 2018).

Helvetica Neue:

**ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
0123456789**

Helvetica Neue Light

Helvetica Neue Light Oblique

Helvetica Neue Regular

Helvetica Neue Oblique

Helvetica Neue Bold

Helvetica Neue Bold Oblique

Iowan Old Style font:

AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIi
JjKkLlMmNnOoPpQq
0123456789

Iowan Old Style Roman

Iowan Old Style Italic

Iowan Old Style Bold

Iowan Old Style Bold Italic

Iowan Old Style Black

Iowan Old Style Black Italic

UTILIZING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR STUDENT RECRUITMENT

The development of social media platforms has given a new advantage for today's institutions of higher education when recruiting students by providing them an outlet to showcase various dimensions of the college experience, many of which no other form of communication has previously been able to do (Bernum, 2017; Weindling, 2017). In Barnes and Lescault's study (2013), colleges and universities reported that using the social media platforms Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, as well as mobile applications, were successful in the practice of recruiting students (see Appendix A for more information regarding the relationship between enrollment and the implementation of social media tactics). While institutions invite prospective students and their families to visit campus, sometimes a full-day visit cannot depict an accurate representation of the fellow students, faculty or the programs offered (Bernum, 2017). However, social media provides a way for colleges and universities to give students and families an additional peek into what it has to offer and engage with them if they have any questions (Bernum, 2017).

Through the use of Twitter and Instagram hashtags, Facebook campaigns and Snapchat takeovers, higher education institutions can promote themselves in new and more effective ways, thus allowing students and parents to get an idea of the institution's academic community and personality (Weindling, 2017). In Eduventures' 2015 Survey of Admitted Students, 57% of respondents stated that they used social media expressively during their college and university search (Reid, 2016). Of those students, 54% reported that social media positively influenced their enrollment choices (Reid, 2016). Experts today argue that it should not be a question of whether higher education institutions should have a social media presence and confirm that students look to social media platforms to find personalized, relevant content that provides engagement between the institution and the student (West, 2016, p.3). Furthermore, colleges and universities need to be where their prospective students are, and they are on social media (West, 2016, p. 3).

CRAFTING MESSAGES FOR GEN Z

Recent studies show that colleges and universities should implement the following three strategies in their social media marketing practices to tap into prospective students of Gen Z's core characteristics and encourage engagement with them:

1. Highlighting real people
2. Valuing social responsibility
3. Involving them in the message (Perlstein, 2017).

First, by involving the target audience in the message, such as utilizing consumer-generated content, they will tend to be more responsive to it (Perlstein, 2017). Examples of this method include reposting a photo on Instagram from a prospective recruit or family while they were on tour or retweeting a positive tweet by a current student that emphasizes a unique or positive attribute of student life.

Second, as the most multicultural generation in history, studies show that Gen Z shows more significant interest in content regarding environmental issues, as well as representing racial, gender and sexual orientation equality (Nanji, 2018; Perlstein, 2017). That said, universities should promote or illustrate examples of diversity across their campuses. For example, highlighting the diversity, inclusion and equality that WVU celebrates on a daily basis would be an ideal strategy to make Gen Z feel welcome at the University (About, 2018). For more information on the specific social issues that Gen Z shows interest in, please refer to Appendix B (Nanji, 2018; Perlstein, 2017).

Lastly, like members of every generation, prospective students want to see that other people like them attend their college or university of choice (Perlstein, 2017). That said, spotlighting real people at the university and telling those student's stories is another promising method for connecting with this audience (Perlstein, 2017). Another approach to this would be featuring a current student's story of when they utilized a service offered by the university or its visitor center, whether it be about their guided campus visit, admissions presentation or appointment experience, and why that experience helped them to decide to attend ultimately attend that university. If exercising this approach, these stories must be carefully chosen and reflect the brand.

BRAINSTORM

The chart below contains a brainstorm of the rational and emotional factors that the target audience would gain from utilizing the services of the WVU Visitors Center.

The **bolded text** represents the rational and emotional factors that complement one another.

RATIONAL FACTORS	EMOTIONAL FACTORS
College visits are proven to be a pivotal component of student's decision to apply to a higher education institution (U.S. News & World Report, 2018).	Going on a campus tour allows prospective students to observe other students interacting with their friends, having fun and living the WVU student experience in-person.
There are various opportunities to tour campus through two-hour tours that take place at least two times a day, six days a week and are free of charge for prospective students and their families (department visits/appointments are also free).	No experience allows students to genuinely picture themselves at WVU in the same way than touring campus themselves.
Scheduling an academic department appointment can give students an advantage over other first-year students by getting to know their potential academic advisors, professors or other faculty of their program of choice before they officially begin classes.	Families who schedule campus tours create the opportunity to spend a day making memories together at the potential future alma mater of a family member(s).

CREATIVE STATEMENT

By combining the rational and emotional factors that complemented one another in the brainstorm above, the following statement was produced:

“All it takes is two hours to picture yourself here for the four best years of your life. Schedule your campus visit with the WVU Visitors Center today.”

CREATIVE BRIEF

Client: The WVU Visitors Center

Strategy Statement

The WVU Visitors Center can help prospective college students decide that West Virginia University is a place where everyone can belong. Schedule an academic appointment or campus tour today because all it takes is a two-hour campus tour to picture yourself here for the best four years of your life.

Why are we advertising?

To increase the WVU Visitors Center's tour and academic appointment attendance, ultimately improving the enrollment rate at West Virginia University.

Whom are we talking to?

Generation Z, ages 15-18, who are interested in pursuing a higher education degree.

What is their current perception of The WVU Visitors Center?

The WVU Visitors Center is a place where I can take a tour of West Virginia University if I decide I may want to attend WVU for college.

What would we like them to think?

The WVU Visitors Center is a vital part of my college search because they help me get to know the campus and learn everything there is to know about my ideal major before making my decision on where to attend college.

What is the single most persuasive idea that we can convey?

No other college visit experience compares to that of the WVU Visitors Center in terms of knowledge gained, overall experience and impact on the decision of where to attend college.

Why should they believe it?

Current students have credited their WVU Visitors Center experience to be the deciding factor in choosing to attend WVU because of the personalized services that they offer to inform students on what their own life as a WVU student would be like.

What is the personality we want to convey?

We are authentically passionate about WVU. We are known for portraying the Mountaineer student experience in an honest, inclusive and welcoming manner and aim to pass on the nature of the loyal, diverse, tireless, pioneering and innovative student body of WVU.

What are the media and creative guidelines?

Touchpoints: social media campaigns, emails, postcards, website. Design should aim to reflect the WVU Brand graphic language. Copy should aim to convey the WVU Brand personality and voice, while also remaining informational.

CREATIVE EXECUTION

Below are examples of potential social media posts that reflect the creative guidelines expressed in the creative brief and seek to fulfill the strategies and initiatives of this campaign. While these examples utilize Twitter and Instagram, they could be used across all social media platforms (Twitter, Instagram and Facebook).

Twitter:

WVU Visitors Center
@VisitWVU

Junior Preview is one of our FAVORITE events of the year! 🥰

We love coming together with WVU academic departments to give high school juniors a peek into college life as a Mountaineer! #VisitWVU

WVU Visitors Center
@VisitWVU

Check out this neat #WVU craft. Can't wait to have you here #WVU21! 💛💙

Jadynn® @just_me_Veigel

Can't sleep at 3am? Why not make a dorm room craft? #WVU21

Instagram:

visitwvu
Morgantown, West Virginia

Liked by _mateahhkh, lalalauren2 and 177 others

visitwvu "I took SIX tours before I officially became a student at WVU! Needless to say, I was hooked the minute I stepped on campus and couldn't get enough of the university." - Lauren Simpson, upcoming MS Speech Pathology student & current tour guide. #WhyVisitWednesday #VisitWVU

visitwvu
WVU Oakland Hall

Liked by alexkiing, _mateahhkh and 167 others

visitwvu #DidYouKnow that WVU has 12 residence halls for first-year students to choose from? Pictured here is Oakland Hall - One of WVU's newest residence halls with pod-style living. Take a virtual tour of all housing options offered at WVU by visiting our website/link in our bio (www.visit.wvu.edu)! 😊 #VisitWVU

MEDIA OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

It is vital that the IMC plan implement strategic media objectives to aid in carrying out the proposed campaign objectives. Each objective aims to fulfill a unique need, including increasing website and social media awareness, as well as increasing tour and appointment attendance, thus improving overall frequency of impressions upon the target audience.

Unlike many IMC plans that employ paid media marketing tactics in addition to their earned and owned marketing tactics, the media objectives and strategies of this IMC plan must utilize earned and owned media only. This is due to the nature of there being no current budget in place at the WVU Visitors Center to fund IMC efforts.

The media objectives of this proposed IMC plan are:

1. Improve the followings of the WVU Visitors Center's Twitter and Instagram accounts by 25 percent and their engagement rates by 50 percent among high schoolers from May 2019 to May 2020.
2. Leverage messaging via word of mouth, email and social media accounts to increase web traffic to the main Visitors Center website (www.visit.wvu.edu) by 25 percent among high schoolers from May 2019 to 2020.
3. Increase the amount of Facebook reviews by 110 percent between May 2019 to 2020.

FIRST OBJECTIVE

Strategy #1

Execute contests/raffles that involve and simultaneously promote Twitter and Instagram accounts of the WVU Visitors Center, while also utilizing earned media in the forms of social media engagement and word of mouth.

Tactics

- Hold at least four contests that offer tickets to a WVU sporting event as a prize via Instagram stories. Promote contest through posts disseminated from Twitter and Instagram accounts.
- Choose one follower of the Visitors Center's Twitter every month to win a gift card to the WVU Barnes and Noble Bookstore. Advertise this at Visitors Center, in admissions presentations and on tour.

Strategy #2

Increase interactions between the target audience and WVU Visitors Center social media accounts.

Tactics

- Have tour guides include a message or blurb about following the Visitors Center on social media via handle "@VisitWVU" in their postcards.
- "Like" and comment on at least five posts per day among target audience on Twitter and Instagram.
- Make sure to interact in some way (i.e., comment, Like) to all appropriate engagement from target audience across Visitors Centers Twitter, Instagram and Facebook accounts.
- Add related hashtags to Twitter and Instagram posts or reactions (i.e., #LetsGo, #VisitWVU)

SECOND OBJECTIVE

Strategy #1

Leverage social media messaging via Twitter, Instagram and Facebook account to drive traffic to the main website (www.visit.wvu.edu).

Tactics

- Disseminate at least one message per week across each platform that promotes a service provided by the Visitors Center (i.e., appointments, tours, special events) that include a link to the main website.
- Encourage people to visit the main website within the included messaging of at least two comments or responses via social media per week.

Strategy #2

Utilize existing email messages sent out to guests of the Visitors Center to encourage them to visit the main website.

Tactics

- Promote a contest within email surveys sent to visitors after their tours, with messaging asking them to share their visit experience via a link (included in the email) to a page on the website. Entries give them a chance to win a WVU Barnes and Noble Bookstore gift card and the possibility of having their story featured on one of our social media accounts.
- Within tour registration confirmation emails, include a link to the main website that has a form that allows families to request an appointment via the website.

Strategy #3

Increase word-of-mouth promotion of the Visitors Center and its services for prospective students and their families throughout all University departments.

Tactics

- Craft a friendly email to all university departments (i.e., academic, specific programs/divisions, student organizations) reminding them of the services that the Visitors Center offers and to ask them to refer this information onto prospective students who contact them.

THIRD OBJECTIVE

Strategy #1

Encourage prospective students and their families to visit our Facebook page, “@VisitWVU” during their visit.

Tactics

- At the end of admissions presentations, have counselors motivate the audience to check-in at the WVU Visitors Center and/or rate their Visitors Center experience via the Visitors Center’s Facebook page.
- Have tour guides conclude their tours by encouraging families to give them a shout out via a review on the Visitors Center’s Facebook page.

Strategy #2

Use messaging through an email sent to visitors after their tour inviting them to visit the Facebook page.

Tactics

- Invite them to rate their visit experience through a direct link to the Visitors Center’s Facebook page.

MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION PLAN

It is vital to the overall future success of the WVU Visitors Center to ensure that all further marketing decisions are effectual. To do so, a series of evaluations will be administered. Because there is no budget to execute paid measurement studies or strategies, this IMC plan utilizes free solutions for measuring success and data tracking. The series of evaluations will take place before the campaign begins, at its midpoint and after it concludes to measure both the success and effectiveness of the proposed IMC campaign.

DATA TRACKING

The necessary, cost-free data tracking and analysis platforms to measure the success of the overall objectives of this IMC plan for no-cost are the analytic tools provided by the social media platforms themselves. Because these analytic tools are made available through each of the three social media platforms utilized in this plan, any organization who has a Facebook, Twitter or Instagram account can track the success of each platform through analytic tools provided free-of-cost within each platform. Additionally, when tracking data specifically for the WVU Visitors Center, this plan will also utilize VC Admin, which is the data system used to maintain the scheduling and registration of tours and appointments.

Furthermore, the WVU Visitors Center data system VC Admin, as well as the analytic tools of each social media platform, will provide the data to depict whether the strategies implemented on behalf of this organization are successful and if any changes are needed.

DATA COLLECTION AND ORGANIZATION

All data collected from the platforms stated above should be compiled in monthly increments, enabling the tracking of monthly progress and the ability to draw possible conclusions of inflections in data based on the month, time of year, etc.

Individual spreadsheets should be created for the following categories in order to define and organized data:

- Tour Registrations
- Appointments
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Facebook

METRICS

It is crucial to define and track specific metrics on a monthly basis throughout the duration of this campaign in order to define its success.

The following metrics should be tracked on a monthly basis throughout this IMC campaign:

- Total tour registrations
- Total appointments confirmed
- Number of posts disseminated (per social media platform)
- Impressions (per social media platform)
- Profile visits (per social media platform)
- Followers (per social media platform)
- Mentions/tags (per social media platform)
- Link clicks (per social media platform)
- Reposts (per social media platform)
- Likes (per social media platform)
- Replies (per social media platform)

To view an example of how to format a spreadsheet with the above data for a specific category, please refer to Appendix D.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

As one of the top universities in the country, it is vital to the continued success and increasing enrollment rate of West Virginia University to make sure that the WVU Visitors Center does its absolute best to guide prospective students to ultimately choose WVU as their future home. Through conveying the personality and voice of WVU, the visit experience through the Visitors Center and the plethora of opportunities that come with being a student of WVU, this proposed integrated marketing communications plan will be the vehicle to allow West Virginia University to stand out among its competitors and continue motivating students to attend the University for years to come.

The overall purpose of this IMC plan is to provide the framework for the WVU Visitors Center to strategically target its audience, thus encouraging more prospective students and their families to utilize its services. This plan, which is grounded in thorough secondary research, will also improve organization awareness by defining overall objectives, as well as media objectives, strategies and tactics. That said, because the common theme within this IMC plan is to increase awareness for both the organization and its offerings to the public, other universities, even non-educational organizations, can take the structure of this IMC plan and alter it in order to benefit their organization.

In an effort to connect with Gen Z and encourage them to utilize the services of the WVU Visitors Center and eventually apply to the University, this IMC plan will serve as a voice and storyteller of West Virginia University and all that it has to offer. By implementing a strategic IMC plan, the WVU Visitors Center, as well as other organizations who also choose to do so, will assist in aiding the organization in maintaining a prosperous future.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

The following bar graph represents the results from a study that surveyed school officials who can directly attribute their enrollment to their social media efforts (Barnes & Lescault, 2013).

Figure 3

**In your opinion, are any of the following effective
in recruiting potential students?
(% Definitely/Probably)**

APPENDIX B

The following bar graph depicts the importance that Generation Z, Millennials, Generation X and Baby Boomers deem certain social issues (Nanji, 2018).

Marketing to Gen Z: The Rules for Reaching this Vast and Very Different Generation of Influencers by Jeff Fromm and Angie Read

APPENDIX C

Help capture the WVU voice by keeping these tips in mind and asking yourself these five questions when writing WVU content (Getting it right, 2018).

Be confident, without being arrogant.

We believe in our ability and the ability of our students, but we're not out to make other institutions or people look bad.

Good Example

Going first means we're bold enough for big ideas, and smart enough to launch them.

Bad Example

Be the smartest person in the room.

Be bold, without being aggressive.

We don't mince words, and the words we do choose are powerful. However, they should always feel encouraging and hopeful.

Good Example

Innovation will be forged by the fearless.

Bad Example

Innovation will be forged when you stop waiting, and start going.

Be direct, without feeling trite.

Short, simple messages can have a powerful impact. But simple shouldn't turn into blatantly obvious.

Good Example

This is where ideas come first.

Bad Example

Ideas matter.

Be challenging, without being implausible.

We want to challenge current and prospective students to take on the big issues, but keep messages from becoming unbelievable, and losing their meaning.

Good Example

Leaps and bounds belong only to the bold and brave.

Bad Example

Change the world, starting now.

Be inspirational, without being sentimental.

Think half-time speech, not Hallmark.

Good Example

The future will be built by those who are willing to get up and go after it.

Bad Example

The future is where your dreams meet preparation.

APPENDIX D

The following is an example of a spreadsheet to be used throughout the duration of the proposed IMC campaign in order to track the success of the Twitter account, @VisitWVU.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
1		Tweets	Impressions	Profile Visits	Followers	Mentions	Link clicks	Retweets	Likes	Replies
2	May	73	61.1k	1,938	34	14	54	69	419	4
3	June									
4	July									
5	August									
6	September									
7	October									
8	November									
9	December									
10	January									
11	February									
12	March									
13	April									
14	May									

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Expanding upon Narratology and Sense of Place

When developing an integrated marketing and communications plan, a large analytical component of the process is to understand the audience thoroughly. In the case of this IMC plan, the target audience is made up of prospective West Virginia University students, who are also now considered to be a part of Generation Z or “Gen Z.” The next step is to strategize the best ways in which to disseminate messages to the audience, in order to influence them significantly enough that they end up choosing WVU to complete their higher education degree.

Developing a relationship between an organization and its consumers is said to be achieved when consumers connect with a brand or organization in an emotional manner (Fournier, 1998). Moreover, Gen Z is said to be different than the generations before them in that they genuinely value realism and connecting with the members of this generation requires taking the time to get to get to know and understand them, and then being real for them (BetterWays, 2017). Instead of being drawn to organizations that aim to exude perfection, Gen Z tends to prefer organizations that instead reflect independence and authenticity, as well as organizations that they can personally feel they relate to (Taylor, 2017). In the attempts to portray these characteristics that draw in Gen Z, this IMC plan is mainly grounded in two theoretical bases: 1) narratology by utilizing storytelling techniques and 2) a sense of place.

Because consistency is considered to be an essential element when designing any marketing campaign, it is crucial that the IMC plan utilize narratology by developing a narrative for all of the content and strategies suggested within the plan to follow (Arruda, 2016; Mangles, 2018). Narratology can be defined as the study of how narrative and narrative structure affect our perception (Felluga, 2002). Narrative is how a story is woven together or takes shape and can become second nature to us in a way that we often barely notice it is there most of the time when

watching a commercial or reading an advertisement (Shmoop, 2018). Storytelling is a compelling technique that when done correctly with strategic planning, as in knowing who the audience is, where they are and what story they want to know, organizations provide themselves with higher potential to create high-quality engagement between the audience and the organization (Mangles, 2018). That said, one way to make storytelling an even more compelling technique to target Gen Z is to employ a sense of place (SoP) throughout the narrative (Hede & Watne, 2013).

A SoP describes relationships between social settings and people (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001) and human–place bonding (Kyle, Mowen, & Tarrant, 2004), with its rootedness, insidedness, and environmental embeddedness (Low & Altman, 1992; Hede & Watne, 2013). Not only can SoP create and reinforce emotional attachments between organizations and their target audience, but it has been said to offer both marketers and consumers the means to embellish narratives in a way that enables the audience to make sense of the world around them and of their consumption experiences (Ooi, 2002; Hede & Watne, 2013). More importantly, a SoP also has the ability to evoke feelings of belonging in consumers with its affective, cognitive, and conative dimensions (Flack, 1997; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001; Low & Altman, 1992), and “burrows into the heart of the symbolic place-consciousness’ of locality” (Flack, 1997, p. 49), or the “geography inside people’s heads,” (Crang, 1998; Hede & Watne, 2013). That said, from a branding perspective, through utilizing storytelling techniques originating about or from the WVU Visitors Center or the University, the target audience becomes further connected with both the place, products and services associated with it (Hede & Watne, 2013).

In order to connect and engage with the target audience on a realistic level and provide them with information that will influence their ultimate decision of selecting a future college or

university, one of the two main components of the narrative structure to be used in this IMC plan will be illustrating the stories and lives of real WVU students. In doing so, this IMC plan will focus on multimodality narratives with the goal of impacting the audience on as many cognitive levels as possible, which combines a variety of semiotic channels in order to effectively tell the story and provide the target audience with a SoP (Ryan, 2014). The second main principal of the narrative structure will be following the voice and graphic language elements of WVU's brand.

Furthermore, by implementing specific narratives with the goal of connecting prospective students with the WVU Visitors Center and the University, this professional project will explore the powers of narrative and sense of place in strategic marketing, advertising and public relations practices.

Summary

This professional project, consisting of an integrated marketing communications plan for the WVU Visitors Center, was created to serve as an IMC guide to aid both the Visitors Center and other organizations who would like to improve organization awareness and use of its services. Through discussing the importance of audience and organization analysis, outlining campaign objectives, defining media objectives and strategies, providing examples of visual or graphic content and explaining methods for data tracking and measurement, the suggestions in this campaign not only help the Visitors Center's marketing and communication goals, but can also be molded to assist the IMC goals of other organizations as well.

Additionally, this professional project was also designed with the purpose of expanding upon the use of the theoretical frameworks "sense of place" and narratology within IMC practices by providing a plan that strategically implements both theoretical frameworks throughout its plan of action. From including creative strategies involving illustrating true stories

from current WVU students or previous visitors, to maintaining a consistent narrative by following the WVU Branding guidelines, this IMC plan provides various examples of how to incorporate narratology and sense of place when connecting with a target audience (mainly Generation Z).

Recommendations

While the objectives and strategies within this IMC plan aim to target Generation Z, a secondary audience that the WVU Visitors Center could also attempt to focus on is the parents of prospective students. Although the student usually makes the ultimate decision of where to attend college, parents can often play some sort of role in the decision-making process as well. That said, it may also be useful to execute IMC initiatives to persuade or educate parents on why their children should visit or attend WVU.

By adding this secondary audience, the objectives and strategies would need to be altered to target more of this audience, or additional objectives and strategies would need to be added. Adding to or modifying the target audience of this IMC plan is also an example of how the project can be of use to other organizations, regardless of whether or not their target audience consists of Gen Z, or if these organizations contain any other various differing qualities.

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