



Social Media Survey Report Draft





Introduction

In an age where interactivity and collaboration represent the new trend in communication, SEAL Canada and Finalsite decided to take action. In the spring of 2010, they collaborated on a project to examine current uses of social media within Canadian independent schools.

The goal of the survey was to obtain a national snapshot of social media use in SEAL Canada schools. We wanted to collect and review communication goals, target audiences and the perceived risks and advantages of using social media in our school communication efforts. The results from the survey help us better understand how schools are prioritizing and resourcing this new area to inform policies about internal social media use.



Methodology

SEAL Canada's Executive Director sent all member schools a cover letter explaining the mandate of the project and requesting that each school complete the 30-minute confidential survey.

The multiple choice questionnaire included 16 questions that were targeted to all member schools and four additional questions intended for boarding school members only. Some questions allowed for qualitative response. Schools were given three weeks to respond to the survey. A two week extension was granted to schools that had not completed the questionnaire to enhance participation and strengthen the report.

Data about the school type (e.g., day, boarding, gender, school size, and grade offerings) was collected. Although there are many social media options, the survey focused on usage of Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, and blogs.



Observations

A total of 42 schools (47% return) responded to the survey. The following section identifies the highlights of respondents' feedback:

1. Respondents

Day/Boarding						
Day - 28		Boarding - 0		Both - 14		
Gender						
All Boys - 6		All Girls - 8		Coed - 28		
School Size						
< 200: 7		200 - 500: 13		> 500: 22		
Grades						
K - 6 1	K - 7 0	K - 11 0	K - 12 18	7 - 11 0	9 - 12 1	Other * 22

* Schools who did not fit into the grade ranges provided

2. Social Media Use

	Active Account	Reserved Name
Facebook	68.9%	11.1%
LinkedIn	46.5%	4.7%
Twitter	38.1%	19.1%
YouTube	34.1%	14.6%
Blog	50%	2.4%



3. Social Media Policies

- <25% of respondents have social media policies in place;
- ~ 40% of respondents are interested in suggested policy guidelines from SEAL Canada;
- Some schools list blogging guidelines on their site;
- Some schools use their Technology Acceptable Use Policy as their guideline.

4. Target Audience

The following table lists the most commonly identified social media tool for communicating with a particular constituent group (i.e., > 30% of respondents responded):

Social Media Tool	Current Students	Prospective Students	Prospective Parents	Current Parents	Young Alumni (<40 yrs)	Alumni (>40 yrs)
Facebook	30.2%	32.6%	34.9%	34.9%	69.8%	41.9%
LinkedIn					51.3%	43.6%
Twitter			31.6%	36.8%	36.8%	
YouTube	36.8%	31.6%	36.8%	34.2%		
Blog	50%	35%	37.5%	50%	37.5%	

- One school reported using Facebook ads for marketing purposes.



5. Social Media Goals

The following table lists the most commonly identified social media communication goals (i.e., > 35% of respondents identified these goals for the social media tool):

Social Media Tools	Overall Communications	Student Recruitment	Build Alumni Relations	Fundraising	Build Awareness	Current Families	Current Students	Faculty and Staff
Facebook	39%	36.6%	92.7%	41.5%	53.7%			
LinkedIn			80.8%		50%			
Twitter	75%	45.8%	58.3%		50%	59.3%	45.8%	
YouTube	45.5%	59.1%	45.5%		59.1%	40.9%	50%	36.4%
Flickr	50%				40.0%	60%	50%	40%
Blog	60.7%	42.9%	39.3%		67.9%	78.6%	60.7%	53.6%

6. Resources and Sustainability

- The Admissions, Advancement or Alumni Directors were the individuals most commonly identified as being responsible for the day-to-day use of all social media tools surveyed;
- Although 50% of respondents indicated that the “Communications Director” had overall responsibility for the “social media strategy,” comments reveal that in some cases there is: (1) a lack of clarity regarding the individual who has ultimate responsibility; or (2) social media responsibility is shared with other areas/people (e.g., advancement, alumni, admissions, marketing committee, technology director, head of school);
- 63% of respondents who have a blog update the school blog > 1x/week;
- 39% of respondents who use Twitter “tweet” >1x/week;
- 34% of respondents who use Facebook make posts >1x/week;
- >45% of respondents who use LinkedIn, Facebook and YouTube post new content <1x/week;



7. Perceived Risks

The following table summarizes the most commonly identified perceived risks (i.e., >35% of respondents):

Social Media Tools	Negative Comments	Lack of Participation	Inability to Sustain	Insufficient resources	Lack of Comfort
Facebook		50%	40.9%	43.2%	43.2%
Twitter				51.4%	60%
LinkedIn			52.2%		56.5%
YouTube	46.7%	43.3%			60%
Flickr	38.1%				52.4%
Blog			37%	63%	44.4%

8. Social Media Preferences

- 66.7% of respondents indicated that Facebook was the most valuable social media tool;
- Blogs were identified as the second most valuable social media tool (15.6%);
- Facebook was identified as being valuable for the following reasons:
 - Easy to reach wide audience;
 - Maintaining alumni relations;
 - Build awareness;
 - Promote social activities;
 - Perceived to be personal;
 - Easy to centralize content (e.g., photos);
 - Less resource intensive;
 - Number of Facebook subscribers.

9. Boarding

- >50% of boarding schools are not using social media as a marketing tool;
- When used, social media is used to target the international market more than the Canadian boarding market.



Summary of Results

- According to respondents, Facebook is the most commonly used and most effective social media tool;
- Facebook and LinkedIn are the social media tools of choice to communicate with alumni of all ages;
- Flickr is not used by most schools as a social media tool;
- Most schools do not have social media policies in place. In some cases, schools use their technology policies as a guideline for social media etiquette;
- More than 30% of schools are using YouTube to target current and prospective students and parents;
- Blogs target current students and parents primarily, and alumni and prospective families secondarily;
- Although Facebook was identified as the preferred tool by respondents, Twitter and blogs were viewed as the most popular tools for overall communication goals;
- Responsibility for social media has not been centralized in most cases and tends to be shared by multiple individuals within the school;
- Respondents indicated a lack of comfort with social media tools;
- The infrequency of new posts could indicate insufficient resources (i.e., time and personnel) to make social media a communication priority or that regular posting has not yet been adopted by the school as a regular communication practice;
- Lack of control was not listed as one of the most common perceived risks associated with social media use;
- Inability to sustain and insufficient resources are common concerns of respondents for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and school blogs;
- Social media is not used as the primary communication tool for fundraising purposes.



Recommendations

While SEAL Canada does not encourage or discourage schools' social media use, we do hope to help all of us better understand the new tools available to market our schools. In light of the competitive nature of our business and the confusion that comes with experimenting with new tools, the national organization has made some recommendations for social media use in schools should our membership wish to enter into the world of new media, or supplement their efforts if they already use the tools currently:

1. Make the Shift

As evidenced in this survey, discomfort with technology is often the driving force for not making the shift to integrating social media into the overall communication plan. The reality is that sharing and collaborating online is here to stay. Those who don't join will be left behind. See Socialnomics author Erik Qualman's video for further details about the growth of social media. (<http://mashable.com/2010/05/07/social-media-stats-video/>).

2. Take a Risk

Integrating social media into the school communication plan represents opportunity. Building brand awareness, or strengthening the brand, with school constituents—whether they are current parents, students and alumni, or future members of the school community—could result in a significant ROI on a number of different levels (e.g., admissions, giving, alumni relations). However, to reap the benefits, schools need to be prepared to try new things, experiment, get feedback, adapt and adjust as required. Creating on-line conversation can be seen as risky and uncomfortable, but if the school is authentic (e.g., no ghost writing), responsive, and committed, it will only serve to enhance the school brand. The first step in entering the world of social media is identifying a social media team and the individual who will have overall responsibility for this area of school communications.



3. Develop a Plan for Success

The social media plan should be a part of the school's overall communication strategy. Strategies should be developed that work for the school based on its own unique community (e.g., school type, history, alumni base, etc.) and not based on what other schools are doing. Goals need to be clearly articulated and progress should be measured using a variety of tools including web analytics, and "fan", subscriber, group member, and "re-Tweet" totals.

Having the support of the leadership team and dedicating the appropriate resources to managing the school's social media plan are critical to a successful outcome. Identify a social media team and the individual who will have overall responsibility for this area of school communications.

Developing on-line etiquette guidelines and setting social media policies will also help the community adapt to this new approach to school communication.

4. Social Media and Risk Management

Recently, we've seen tragic examples of student use of social media. Young people need education on the parameters around the use and application of video, email, texting, and social media applications. In the rising digital age, the stakes of responsibility go up significantly for schools. Students need to better understand the reach and harm of the misuse of these tools. Education on the civility and social responsibility that come with engaging in new media tools is the next wave for our schools and programs about the impact and risk of social media is important for young people.

5. "Think Ripples, Not Splashes" — Mitch Joel, Six Pixels of Separation

One of the great advantages of using social media tools is that the user is the "publisher" and the cost to publish on a regular basis is relatively low in comparison to traditional marketing and communication tools (e.g., print and radio advertising). Schools are therefore in a position to get more "bang" for their advertising dollar and have less pressure to make a one-time memorable impact. Although it's desirable to make a splash in a campaign, the reality is that it is difficult to consistently maintain that level of excitement—assuming success. As Mitch Joel observes in Six Pixels of Separation, "Ripples work in an entirely different way. With less energy, you can toss a small pebble (your ideas) into a big lake and let the ripple effect take hold... it's not as dramatic as a splash, but it sustains itself for a longer period, covering a much wider area."

Going "viral" is not always better and nor is it always realistic. Adapting the strategy that builds a strong following has worthwhile benefits.



6. Share and Learn from Others

SEAL Membership has its privileges. Establishing a national network of school communicators would allow schools to share successes, strategies, policies, and best practices. Adding a social media section to the Leadership Institute's communication module and hosting a social media "best practices session" that addresses social media trends and how schools can best leverage these types of communication opportunities are both worthy considerations.



Resources

1. Print

Six Pixels of Separation, Mitch Joel (Business Plus, 2009)

Groundswell, Charlene Li & Josh Bernoff (Harvard University Press, 2008)

Engage, Brian Solis (Wiley, 2010)

2. Professional Development

[Finalsite Social1212](#)

[Interactive Advertisers Bureau of Canada](#)

[SEAL Canada Leadership Institute](#)

3. Online Resources

[The Growth of Social Media](#) (Video)

[PR Daily](#)

[Daily Blog Tips](#)

[Mitch Joel](#)

[Shel Holtz](#)

[Mashable](#)

4. Social Media Policy Examples

[Radian6](#)

[University of Oregon](#)

[Vanderbilt University](#)

[University of Michigan](#)