

Social Media Strategy

Student Success Centre

ABSTRACT

This strategy details the creation, implementation, and integration of social media for the Student Success Centre (SSC) and gradual phasing out of previous SSC related social media



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Introduction

Social media has given rise to a new way of marketing centered around engaging people in a conversation. By joining the conversation, we are better able to understand how individuals spend their time, which topics and issues they find of interest and tap into these sources of information in order to direct our service delivery. In this sense, social media is essential to reaching a public audience directly. If implemented correctly, it has the potential to spark conversation, generate interest, and create a reciprocal relationship between McMaster students and the Student Success Centre (SSC).

This Social Media Strategy aims to promote engagement through:

- *Education* – Increasing awareness and understanding of the SSC and its programs
- *Engagement* – Increasing student use of the centre, their attendance at events, and encouraging open dialogue regarding SSC services
- *Loyalty* – Creating a strong and long-lasting relationship with students

Social media offers the opportunity to conduct in-depth research at virtually no cost. By getting involved with online communities, the SSC can gain insight into issues deemed important by students and the community. As well, the use of social media will help the SSC observe what content resonates with our audience and identify current trends in order to determine areas for promotion. Using this form of promotion, the SSC can create a stronger relationship with students thereby increasing quality and support for the services provided.

Currently¹, SSC information is available through a diverse range of social platforms. Careers Services, the Office of Community Service-Learning and Civic Engagement (OCSLCE), First Year Experience Office (FYEO), and the recently launched SSC First Generation Program all have an existing presence on social media². As a new office combining these three departments, it is essential that the SSC promote itself as a primary source of information. This strategy will detail how the three departments can work together towards cohesive and collaborative online communication with the goal of engaging in one centralized promotional effort on behalf of the entire office. In order to educate and engage students, the ultimate goal of this strategy is to amalgamate

¹ As of December 6, 2010

² For full information on existing social media accounts, see Appendix A



existing accounts into a singular SSC social media presence. This merger shall be done over a series of three phases detailed later in the report.

Target Audience

The services and programs provided by the Student Success Centre are available for current McMaster students as well as alumni up to five years after graduation. As such, the social media strategy will target all students associated with the McMaster network. Within this group, the primary target audience will be defined but not limited to McMaster students between the ages of 17-25.

The successful use of Facebook and Twitter by other McMaster units and organizations such as Titles Bookstore and the MSU, solidifies the notion that social media is a powerful communication tool within the McMaster student community and therefore supports our strategy to utilize social media in order to connect with our target market.

Information will be provided to the entire undergraduate student body within this general platform; however, the SSC will segment the market in order to target the needs of specific groups of students. For instance, while the SSC Facebook fan page will promote content relevant to all undergrad students, there will also be specific discussion forums for students at individual levels of study. Specific program-related accounts, such as the SSC First Generation program, will also distribute more specified information. This segmentation will allow for customized targeted marketing efforts.

Content Strategy

Social media is about engaging people and the key to engagement is good content. Through social media, people are creating, reading, saving, tagging and sharing content. To ensure that SSC related information is being redistributed, the SSC must make a point of producing content that students will find valuable and worth sharing.

Since there are a variety of existing social media accounts related to the SSC, one of the first steps is to adjust existing accounts in order to verify affiliation with the SSC. The acronym SSC can be used when publishing information on pages and when commenting on other wall posts; however, all titles of groups, pages, or accounts will use the formal title of the office.

To ensure consistency among all social media platforms, the Student Success Centre can be described as follows:



Student success is at the core of the services and programs offered by the Student Success Centre at McMaster University. Our long-standing commitment will support students from the time they accept their offer of admission up to 5 years after graduation in the areas of student orientation, academic skills, leadership, service-learning, volunteerism, educational planning, employment and career transition.

Information regarding the SSC's operations should always be followed with links to the SSC website, Facebook, and Twitter accounts.

In order to relate to students, the tone of posts and tweets will be casual. All content will discuss the SSC in accessible, informal language and will refer to services as "our" services or things that "we" are doing. This will facilitate a more personal connection between the SSC and students. Graphics and photos posted on SSC social media should be professional and high quality, particularly when posting the official logo of McMaster Student Affairs or the SSC Phoenix. The only exception to this rule is the posting of real-time twitpix³ that can be of lower quality based on the mobile device used.

Social Media Tools

This strategy focuses on utilizing the social media tools that have the most McMaster users and student generated conversations. Platforms were chosen based on the amount of McMaster student involvement and level of connection with the target market. The two primary platforms used by the target market are Twitter and Facebook. Though there is a wide array of social media tools available, these social media sites will form the basis for the SSC social media strategy.

Facebook

The social network of Facebook has gained immense popularity worldwide. The goals of the SSC Facebook presence will be to drive referral traffic, build relationships with students and learn more about our target demographic. There exists a large population of students actively involved within the McMaster Facebook community. For instance, over 8,400⁴ students "like" the official McMaster University Facebook fan page. As well, the McMaster Marauder was created as a personal Facebook account for athletics promotions, connecting and engaging almost 900 students⁵.

³ Photos taken from a camera phone and posted directly to Twitter (<http://twitpic.com/>)

⁴ 8,422 as of December 15, 2010 (<http://www.facebook.com/mcmasteruniversity>)

⁵ 898 "friends" as of December 15, 2010 (<http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100001417398591>)



Given the online population and level of engagement between McMaster students and Facebook, the SSC Facebook presence will be developed through an official SSC fan page. Although Facebook users are able to have profile accounts as well as create fan pages, Facebook has stated that the use of profile accounts is meant to be for individuals only. Conversely, fan pages are designed for corporate and promotional use and will therefore be the most appropriate form of SSC Facebook presence.

Facebook Fan Page

The “like” button provides another opportunity to build relationships with students. The SSC fan page will be more official and therefore titled “McMaster Student Success Centre”. According to recent studies, approximately 20% of “likers” are students. The ability to “like” a page drives referral traffic, publishes information on various Facebook feeds, adds data to user’s profiles, and opens a new communication channel between the SSC and students. All of these benefits are derived from a single-click user experience. Once a student “likes” the SSC fan page, relevant activity will be published to the “likers” as a group. For example, the SSC could reward its followers by running contests and promotions for its “likers”, making it beneficial for students to become Facebook fans of the office.

The customized url for the SSC Fan page will be: facebook.com/MacSSC

Usage:

The fan page will be created using the personal accounts of the SSC employees who will act as administrators. The pre-existing profile accounts will be used so that the SSC fan page can be “suggested” to existing friends and McMaster networks. Settings will be adjusted so that the page administrators are not visible, ensuring that there is still a separation between the employees personal and professional accounts.

The SSC fan page will aim to have approximately three-four Student Success Centre generated posts per week with the timing and frequency being subject to the events and promotional campaigns being run. The SSC fan page will also share one-two posts per week from related sites (ex. local and university media).

The tone of the site will be more professional since it is a direct representation of the SSC office. Discussion forums and the main wall will be used to generate and observe student opinions. The main wall will also be used to post relevant website articles (ex. link to Maclean’s Annual University Report) allowing students to comment on or “like” the posts directly. Videos and photos from SSC events or trips will also be uploaded to the fan page in a timely manner and the people involved or in attendance will be tagged accordingly. The tagging feature will increase the amount of referral traffic and help increase SSC presence on various Facebook feeds.



Twitter

The 140 character micro-blogging site of Twitter has gained popularity due to its ability to connect people through a simple one-click process. The SSC twitter account will be titled “McMaster Student Success Centre” and will be accessed through @StudentSuccessCtr.

Usage:

The Twitter page will post at least one tweet per day. Tweets will be used to publicize SSC events and services. During events, tweets, twitpics, and bubbletweets⁶ (i.e. videos via twitter) will be sent out to update followers in real-time. The SSC will follow all students who follow the account and will actively create connections with other McMaster Twitter accounts (ex. McMaster Alumni). To increase connections and cross-promotions over Twitter platforms, the SSC account will not only tweet original information but also re-tweet (RT) relevant messages. For instance, if the Student Health Centre tweets a de-stress event during exams, the SSC account can RT that information to acknowledge that students are studying and provide SSC followers with useful information. All tweets will end with #SSC so that tweets associated with the SSC can be searched and grouped together. Specific events (ex. Career fairs) will also have agreed upon hashtags (ex. #MacCareerFair2011) so that people can tweet about the event in real-time. Other taggings (ex. #McMaster, #McMSU, #GoMacGo⁷) will also be used so that tweets show up on aggregator such as those on the MSU website. Mentions (@StudentSuccessCtr) will also be used to create direct connections with other accounts and respond to students who raise issues or questions. The tone of the tweets will be both personal (in accordance with Twitter style) but maintain a professional tone.

MaInsiders

MaInsiders is an online niche network comprised solely of McMaster students. The forum is therefore essential to the promotion of SSC as a McMaster service.

Usage:

Postings on MaInsiders will occur based on events rather than on a regular basis. Events and services will be posted either on the MaInsiders home page or on the appropriate thread (ex. Academic). All questions, concerns or response posts can then be answered on the forum creating a connection between students and the SSC. Chad Fullerton, one of the founders and current administrators of MaInsiders, has agreed to

⁶ <http://www.bubbletweet.com/>

⁷ According to Alumni Advancement, #GoMacGo is becoming the official McMaster hash tag



assist SSC with its promotions on the network. All staff will submit their MacInsider usernames so that their accounts can be upgraded, identifying them by their SSC positions when they post on the site. All online signatures should include links to the Facebook and Twitter accounts.

LinkedIn

It is essential for the SSC to create and maintain a presence on the professional social network: LinkedIn. This presence will require limited maintenance and postings. The main action that will be taken will be to create an official Student Success Centre (SSC) LinkedIn profile and enable other students on LinkedIn to create professional connections with the SSC. The profile can be used as a point of referral as well as a promotional tool for professional opportunities. It will also allow current and former SSC employees to list the SSC as a registered and official employer, increasing the promotion of the office. The profile created will be “share-able” and “like-able” through the LinkedIn network and will include links to Facebook, Twitter and the official SSC website (studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca)

Youtube

McMaster has an official Youtube channel called McMaster UTV⁸. Since this is an already established and centralized channel for all McMaster departments, SSC related video content will be aired as part of McMaster UTV under a newly created SSC channel. Using the official McMaster Youtube network will benefit the SSC because viewers are familiar with the site and aware of its authenticity⁹. Posting SSC content on McMaster UTV will also open up cross-promotional opportunities with the other channels and programs.

Website Integration

Social media is used to grab people’s attention and often as a point of redirection to the official website. Therefore, social media and the SSC’s website must work cohesively to cross-promote information to students. The current website for the SSC is a temporary interface. As the official site is being developed, Twitter and Facebook¹⁰ buttons linking directly to SSC social media accounts will be incorporated into the site. A Twitter feed¹¹ will also appear on the website homepage.

⁸ <http://www.youtube.com/user/McMasterUTV>

⁹ 45,026 views as of February 16, 2011

¹⁰ The Facebook button will be linked to the SSC fan page

¹¹ The site will use an automatically generated Tweet stream from the “List Widget” offered through Twitter

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The soft launch of SSC social media will generate a strong presence in the McMaster community by creating connections and attracting a student audience. Therefore, by time the SSC officially launches its website in July; promotional efforts will be more successful because they will reach an already established audience.



Figure 1 An article abstract taken from Mashable's homepage demonstrating one-click social media applications

When developing the new website, the following social media tools will be considered and integrated where possible:

- Mobile compatibility which will focus on how the SSC website will display on mobile devices such as cell phones
- “Tweet”/”Share”/”Like” buttons¹² will be added at the end of each article, similar to those that appear on Mashable's website¹³, enabling students to share SSC information with a single click
- Metrics of how many times a post or article has been shared
- Re-tweeting and advertising Blog posts from new site
- Embedding Youtube videos into site

Promotion of Social Media

Online Promotion

Online promotion will be implemented through the use of creative communications campaigns. McMaster University Alumni Association has had great success with weekly trivia questions to generate responses and engagement with its followers. Incentives have also been successful (ex. “Like” the SSC on Facebook and be entered into a draw to win a gift certificate for Hospitality Services). Similar contests could also include photo competitions or post/tweet contests. Campaigns will be focused on drawing students to our network of social media and getting them to respond to the content. These promotional campaigns and engagement techniques can be constructed and scheduled during the weekly social media meeting (See Administration section).

Direct promotions of social media will include

¹² Button code can be generated through sites such as <http://www.addthis.com/>

¹³ <http://mashable.com>

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- Connections between all SSC social media
 - Twitter account will link to the Facebook accounts, updating them automatically
 - Facebook fan page will link to Twitter, tweeting all information that is posted
 - Tweets and posts should often include links to SSC website articles, postings or events
 - Facebook fan page will also host SSC Youtube videos
- Online signatures
 - SSC staff will include Twitter, Facebook, and website links in their personal signatures
 - Email and online forum signatures (ex. MacInsiders, LinkedIn) should list Facebook and Twitter accounts
- Website
 - See above (i.e. Twitter and Facebook buttons, Twitter feed etc)
- Tag people in pictures on Facebook
 - Create connections with McMaster students and drive more traffic to the site
- Online polls and contests
 - Make it beneficial for students to engage with SSC social media through contests and other promotional tools

In addition, an official SSC e-blast will be sent to all students in our network with links to our fan page and Twitter account. This email will be sent out right before Welcome Week 2011 (early September) in an effort to engage students when they are still responsive to McMaster generated e-mail.

The Student Success Centre will also reach out to other departments and offices on-campus in order to create connections (ex. MSU, Daily News) and cross promote information. For instance, asking the MSU VP Education to tweet about the Continuing Education Fair or working with the McMaster Daily News to write articles on initiatives and programs being organized by the SSC and in return posting the article on our wall.

Offline Promotion

In order for the SSC to effectively promote its social media, the online and offline promotions need to work cohesively. The offline promotion of SSC social media will be intended to direct students to the SSC Twitter and Facebook accounts, thereby engaging them in the SSC network.

Offline promotions will include:

- Integrating Facebook and Twitter icons and account names into posters, pamphlets, and other print collateral
- Promotional incentives for students to join



- ex. Everyone who “likes” the SSC on Facebook is entered into a draw for a Titles giftcard
- Advertising Twitter and Facebook presence in the physical office space
 - ex. Create posters indicating that we’re now on Facebook and Twitter and encouraging people who come in to the office to also follow us through social media
- Quick Response (QR) codes - functions as a real-world hyperlink
 - Ensure that the codes can be scanned by android, blackberry and iPhone users
 - Incorporate QR codes into print collateral linking directly to the website or social media platform



Figure 2 QR code linking directly to the SSC homepage



Implementation of Social Media

Phase 1

- Create accounts
- Register SSC staff on MacInsiders
- Consistent branding
- Delete extraneous accounts
- Incorporate social media into SSC website

Phase 2

- Phase out other accounts, centralize information
- Create connections
- Development of content release schedule for Twitter and Facebook

Phase 3

- All information goes out through official SSC accounts
- Integration into new website
- Investigate other social media possibilities

Phase 1: Introduction

Phase 1 is the initiation phase of the strategy and the introduction of the official SSC social media accounts. This stage is intended to introduce SSC in the realm of social media and begin phasing out other SSC affiliated accounts. The official SSC Facebook fan page, Twitter, LinkedIn and Youtube accounts will be created. All SSC staff registered on MacInsiders will also have their information incorporated into their posting signatures.

In this phase, extraneous social media accounts related to the SSC (ex. The Twitter account for the Careers Mentorship program) will be deleted and followers of those accounts will be redirected to SSC official accounts.

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The official SSC account will be branded and connected as detailed in the online and offline promotion strategy and incorporated into the existing SSC website. Any general information can be re-tweeted/reposted from the official SSC accounts to ensure that there is a centralized source of information and clear sense of flow to the SSC social media presence.

Phase 2: Transition

As part of phase 2, connections will be made with other departments, services, and clubs on-campus to help cross-promote the SSC. Influence is about accuracy and trust. Therefore, the SSC needs to reach social networks that have influence – those who can refer and endorse the quality of SSC services. In this way, creating connections with other McMaster services such as the McMaster Student’s Union (MSU) will allow the SSC to generate a greater social media presence. For instance, the fan page can “like” other groups on campus and the SSC twitter account can tweet “at” certain McMaster affiliated accounts, creating connections and relationships between the SSC and other offices on campus.

A content release schedule for Twitter and Facebook will be created during this time so that all events and information can be promoted through social media in a timely fashion. The content release schedule will aim to make social media an integral part of the SSC planning and overall marketing strategy.

Phase 3: Full Implementation

In the final phase of the strategy all SSC events and services, regardless of whether they are Careers, FYEO, or OCSLCE, will be promoted through a unified social media platform – one voice directed to our target market.

When the new SSC website is launched, the implementation of social media will be further integrated.

At this time, other social media platforms such as Flickr, Ping, Tumblr, or FourSquare will be investigated and potentially implemented.

Administration

All social media accounts for the SSC will be administered by the Social Media Assistant under the supervision of the Marketing Coordinator. The accounts will be created as permanent, long-term promotional tools and will be maintained by incumbents of these positions. SSC employees can send information regarding events or programs to the Social Media Assistant which will be incorporated into the content



release schedule. The Social Media Assistant will moderate and filter content according to McMaster policies¹⁴.

Administration will be held under the Social Media Assistant's personal Facebook profile account. Administration of this account will also be shared with two full-time staff members. As previously mentioned, administrators will be hidden so that there is no public connection between the employees' personal accounts and the SSC fan page.

Inspired by the successful social media practices of McMaster Alumni Advancement, the SSC social media team will hold brief weekly social media meetings. These meetings are intended to discuss how the SSC can integrate trending topics into its promotions, create tweet/post schedules on Hootsuite¹⁵, plan engagement strategies (ex. trivia, contests etc), address any concerns or issues, and ensure that the SSC information is relevant and attractive to the target audience. Considering that social media is about immediacy and quality of information, these meetings will help ensure that the SSC stays on top of current trends.

Risks and Limitations

The risks and limitations must also be considered when opening promotions up to the public forum of social media. Since students will be able to directly respond and comment on SSC information, there is a risk that the discussions will not always be favourable for the SSC. As such, the accounts have been created with this in mind and many of them have administrative controls (ex. Facebook fan page) ensuring that concerns that are raised does not snowball into larger issues. For instance, negative comments to a posting of an SSC event on MacInsiders were acknowledged and responded to directly in order to control the controversy.

There is also the risk that despite all of the promotional efforts and strategies described; students may still not engage with the SSC social media. If that is the case, this strategy will be revisited and revised in the future.

Overall Measures of Success

As indicated in McMaster's guidelines for social media, measuring activity on social media sites helps determine the tactics that are most successful and will allow the SSC to track progress towards the goals set out in this strategy. For instance, has adding QR codes increased the number of hits to the website or social media accounts? In this

¹⁴ Such as the McMaster Anti-Discrimination Policy and the Student Code of Conduct, see the McMaster website for full details

¹⁵ An online social media platform (<http://hootsuite.com/>)



way, measurement helps determine the effectiveness of the tools that are being used and the return that the SSC is getting from its investment in social media use.

Facebook has its own built-in analytic tool that measures page views, interactions/comments, active users and other demographic data. Tweet Reach will be used to measure the SSC Twitter account. MacInsiders will be measured by the number of views (as indicated on the page) and the number of responses to posts. LinkedIn will be measured by the number of connections that are made to the SSC. Traffic to the website using Google Analytics will also be monitored to determine whether students are being redirected from social media. Measurements will occur on a bi-weekly.

Outlook for the Future

It is expected that in the future social media will be an integral part of Student Success Centre marketing strategy, ensuring that the accounts that are created are updated frequently and generate numerous and loyal followers. Over time, it is hopeful that students will become familiar with the SSC social media accounts, understanding them as an official voice for the office, and will therefore use them as a primary source of information. The ultimate goal for the SSC social media presence is to have a centralized, well-controlled social media presence with a professional appearance and a unified voice for the entire unit.



Appendix A – Current Profile

As of February 15, 2011, the social media presence related to the SSC was as follows:

First Year Experience Office

Website: <http://fye.mcmaster.ca/>

- Links to Twitter and Facebook accounts, not on homepage

Twitter @MACSSC:

- 281 followers
- 860 Tweets
- Last updated: February 20, 2012

Facebook:

- “FYEO-First Year Experience Office” group – 451 members
- Last updated: November 1, 2010

Career Services

Website: <http://careers.mcmaster.ca/>

- Links to Facebook fan page

Twitter:

- @careermentoring
 - 12 followers
 - 0 tweets
- @MacCareers
 - 51 followers
 - 97 tweets
 - Last updated: January 27, 2011
- @JobFairyAtMac
 - 15 followers
 - 0 tweet
- @AskAliAtMac
 - 115 followers
 - 473 tweets
 - Last updated: February 20, 2012
- @DivaAtMacCareer
 - 37 followers
 - 181 tweets
 - Last updated February 15, 2011

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Facebook:

- “Careers McMaster” profile account
 - 81 friends
 - Last updated: November 25, 2010
- “McMaster Career Services” fan page
 - 230 fans
 - Last updated: April 7, 2010

Office of Community Service-Learning and Civic Engagement

Website: <http://servicelearning.mcmaster.ca/>

- Links to Twitter account

Wordpress Blog

- <http://macpopthebubble.wordpress.com/>
- Last updated: February 7, 2011

Twitter @OCSLCE:

- 112 followers
- 32 tweets
- Last updated: September 17, 2010

Facebook:

- “McMaster Ocslce” profile account – 344 friends
- Last updated: September 17, 2010

McMaster First Generation Program

Website: <http://fye.mcmaster.ca/firstgen.html>

- Links to FYEO Facebook fan page

Twitter @MacFirstGen

- 260 followers
- Last updated: February 14, 2012

Facebook:

- Facebook personal account – 473 friends
- Last updated: February 14, 2011