

FURSCA End of Summer Report

Whitehouse Nature Center: Social Media Marketing Campaign

Trang Ha Tran

Introduction

The primary aim of my FURSCA research project was to successfully design a memorable and effective marketing campaign providing the Albion community (Albion students, faculty, and staff, as well as the City of Albion) with targeted information about the Whitehouse Nature Center (WNC) such as its purpose and goals, operations, daily activities, events, and student projects. At the conclusion of this project, there have been considerable successful outcomes and I have identified some areas for improvement in future social media marketing outreach.

Results

This research project has provided me with important knowledge and experience used by communication experts. I have learned about the importance of audience analysis and understanding for effective message and content creation. Additionally, I gained experience in survey creation as well, using the survey research platform Qualtrics, and analyzing survey data to inform the creation of social media marketing content. Finally, I gained experience in running two social media platforms and adjusting the strategy accordingly.

One of the most useful skills I was able to gain was data cleaning and analyzing. During the first and last phase of the project, I was content with the number of responses from two surveys; however, after consulting with Dr. Price, I noticed there was a moderate amount of invalid responses that most likely were bots or from untrustworthy sources. After identifying those responses and cleaning the data, I utilized Qualtrics and IBM SPSS Statistics to look at the

data and gain insights. This part of the project has changed my point of view towards research and data analysis and sparked my interest in this field.

Through the survey, my understanding of our audience has significantly increased. One of the assumptions I had at the beginning was that the effectiveness of this campaign greatly depended on the content targeting Albion College students. My attitude has changed dramatically after doing this campaign since I discovered that Facebook was actually a vital platform to reach other audience segments, especially with audiences who are not specifically college students. They have shown great interest in our Facebook content from wildlife updates to educational programs. This opened the possibility for more informative and creative content on this platform tailored to this audience. One example of tailoring the Facebook content to the audience is the daily trail reports where I posted pictures of various subjects from sceneries, and trail conditions, to animal status at WNC. It has resulted in an increase in daily interaction with the content, such as reactions and comments on these posts.

As for the social media marketing campaign, I have come up with an effective working timeline for documenting materials, content writing, and posting in order to maintain the audience's attention and engagement on both Facebook and Instagram. It is a challenging process yet I am content with the efficiency of the standard operating procedure I drafted out which will be applied in the school year for Nature Center Assistants (NCAs) who are interested in joining WNC's Inclusive Social Outreach Team. Each day will consist of trail reports on Facebook and story updates on Instagram, followed by a planned and monitored timeline of event and/or activity posts in a shared spreadsheet. It is updated frequently, allowing the team to keep track of progress and daily tasks.

To objectively assess the results, I used Sprout Social to compare two posting time periods, one from June 5 to July 9, a total of 5 weeks that the campaign was carried out, with the previous 5 weeks before the campaign. According to Sprout, both impression, the number of times our content is displayed to users, and engagement, the number of times users interact with our content, have gone up by above 200%, relatively at 34,349 times and 2,355 times in this period. Considering the comparison of the pre- and post-test surveys, the expected result that I mentioned in the proposal is accomplished. There are two main questions that determined this outcome, “In the past month, how many social media posts do you remember seeing from the WNC?” and “What events and activities at the WNC do you remember seeing on social media over the past month?”. With the first question, the survey responses showed an increase in the average from around 2-3 posts to 6-9 posts, while the second question resulted in more options being selected.

One potential issue that I would like to include in this report is the sudden popularity surge that occurred in the last week of the campaign. Due to the unexpected news of an alligator spotting at the Whitehouse Nature, impressions and interactions skyrocketed which somewhat affected the outcome of the research. Ultimately, it is extremely challenging to distinguish the sole effect of my campaign and the viral news.

Conclusion

My first summer working with FURSCA has prompted me with ideas of how this project could be further expanded next year. Since my role at WNC is the lead for the Inclusive Social Outreach Team, I might explore the strategy to emphasize inclusivity in our events and activities promotion, which stemmed from a question I was asked during my FURSCA presentation.

Furthermore, I look forward to entering other social media platforms such as Twitter or TikTok as I have identified the potential of WNC's content.

The results from this research can also be implemented immediately in my and many other Nature Center Assistants' current work. Constantly updating and maintaining the content that the audience is specifically interested in are the two key strategies I will continue now that the campaign has ended. Additionally, monitoring impressions and interactions which can assist with navigating the audience's interest is a tool that needs to be utilized.

Lastly, I would like to thank the Hyde Fellows in Student Research for allowing me to carry out this research which has cultivated my passion and scholar. I would also like to thank Dr. Katey Price for being an incredible advisor which has helped me tremendously throughout the research along with Elizabeth Palmer and Renee Kreger for organizing a successful and meaningful summer program.