



P.O. Box 4071  
Madison, CT 06443  
(203) 421-5169

www.catholicschoolmgmt.com

CATHOLIC SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

# Letter<sup>SM</sup>

A publication of  
Catholic School  
Management, Inc.

**January 2014**

**Volume XXXV, No. 3**

## **The Intentional Use of Social Media in Catholic Schools for Both Marketing and Instruction**

Any discussion of social media and its place in the Catholic school must first be approached with an understanding of generational research in order to understand why these tools cannot be ignored either in academics or advancement. Generational Theory, as attributed to Strauss and Howe in their 1991 *Generations*, puts forth the central idea that people in a particular age group tend to share a distinct set of beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors because they all grow up and come of age during a particular period in history. Why is this important? The significance of this concept helps us to understand aspects of the mindset of the different constituent groups served by a Catholic school. In the case of social media, a relative “newbie” to our current technology-propelled culture, we turn our attention to those constituent groups that are primarily composed of Generation X and Generation Y, the latter also known as the Millennials. GenX represents the constituent group to which many Catholic school parents belong, commencing with a birth year between 1961 and 1965 and concluding by 1981 to 1985. Catholic school students, and some of our youngest parents at this writing, largely fall into the GenY, or Millennial, time frame, commencing between 1982 and 1986 and ending between 2004 and 2008. Both of these generations see themselves as distinguished from other generations due to the rapid growth and presence of technology in their lifetimes. Furthermore, the way these two groups engage with social media is influenced by their generational values and preferences. Although GenX’ers tend to be independent and somewhat skeptical, which causes them to carefully measure what they post, see, or read online, they also view themselves as “technosavvy” and needing to be aware of the latest social media tools. GenY, on the other hand, is extremely confident in and fond of multitasking; therefore, their trademark codependence is fed by social media, which allows them to share everything they do while never losing touch with friends, family, or popular culture.

The second understanding necessary for a discussion of social media is clarity as to the distinct purpose or goal for social media use in marketing the Catholic school as well as its incorporation in the curriculum. For the purpose of marketing,

Richard J. Burke, *President*  
Jacqueline Abrahams  
Shirley A. Arnold  
Edward J. Barrett  
Joseph W. Bracco  
Albert E. Catelli  
Lois J. Cavucci  
Carol Cimino, SSJ, Ed.D.  
Michael M. Denison  
Lois K. Draina, Ph.D.  
Donald L. Edwards, Ed.D.  
Rachel L. Ellingson  
Richard E. Feitel  
Gary J. Gelo  
Frank A. Glowaty  
Stephen J. Hammond  
Susan R. Hoffman  
Joseph D. Hollowell  
Marianne B. Johnson  
Jennifer C. Kensel  
Kevin M. McDonough  
Richard J. McGrath, OSA, Ph.D.  
Aline P. Norwood  
Deborah L. Papa  
G. Joseph Peters  
Thomas H. Posnanski  
Kim R. Pryzbylski, Ph.D.  
Maria J. Ribera  
Mary Beth Riley  
Mary Lou Schoone  
Charmaine S. Torma  
Robert S. Webb  
Nicholas M. Wolsonovich, Ph.D.  
Frederick Zilian, Ph.D.

the goal is deceptively simple. Catholic schools can be marketed for three things only: image, enrollment, and resources. Yet, the only one of these over which marketing can have direct control is perception of a school's image. A desirable image will incline potential students and families to enroll, and a desirable image will encourage donors to invest. So, if image deals with perception, whose perception is important? Exactly! Schools market to people; therefore, marketing needs to be targeted at locations that are populated by your desired constituent groups. In the case of potential Catholic school parents and their middle and high school-age children, whose opinions are known to influence the parents' decision to enroll, we need to market where we find these two generations. Where do we find them? You got it – we find them online using social media to communicate, share, collaborate, and create. As further proof of this generational habit, eMarketer, a research firm devoted to the state of the digital marketplace, provided the statistic in an August 2013 online article (*Digital Set to Surpass TV in Time Spent with US Media*) that “adults will spend an average of 2 hours and 21 minutes per day on non-voice mobile activities, including mobile internet usage on phones and tablets – longer than they will spend online on desktop and laptop computers, and nearly an hour more than they spent on mobile last year.” Can you think of any major social media tool that does not have an associated mobile app?

How does this present a case for social media use in the curriculum? Our GenY students are not only used to being plugged in, but enamored with it. Recent estimates state 75% of Millennials use a social networking site, with more than a quarter visiting once a day. A challenge in designing and delivering today's quality Catholic education is balancing strong academic and faith preparation with the integration of technology that supports overall curriculum goals. Today, this must also include experience with various technologies so that these students will be able to adapt as new technologies continue to come and go. Remember the Palm Pilot? What engages GenY students on their own time to communicate, share, collaborate, and create? The simple answer is once again, social media.

## Social Media and Marketing

CSM consultants emphasize the marketing definition used by Kotler and Fox: *Marketing is the process of researching, analyzing, planning, implementing, and controlling carefully formulated programs designed to bring about voluntary exchange relationships with specifically targeted audiences.* A successful social media marketing program requires:

- Research: Which social media tools are used by your targeted audience(s)?
- Analysis: What type of content appeals to your audience? What analytics do you have at your disposal to understand the reach of your social media efforts?
- Planning: When is your audience most likely to engage with content on a particular social media channel? What schedule and frequency will work best for postings?
- Control: Who is going to listen to and manage your social media channels? What kind of analytics are available from each social media application or other means to allow you to do more of what works and less of what doesn't? What additional tools will be used to manage various social media apps?

Catholic schools are using a variety of social media tools, and research is easily found to learn about the best demographic for these tools, including top types of posts, timing for posts, etc. Determining content is the most challenging task for schools. When targeting current and prospective parents, social media content is largely focused on enhancing overall image, and tends to be most successful when it clearly reinforces the school's mission in action. What does success look like? The end goal is the same as it has been for many years in Catholic schools: enhanced image via positive word of mouth. But now, positive word of mouth equates with higher search rankings due to social sharing, following, and links. This means more searchers are looking for, seeing, and learning about your school. When marketing to prospective middle and high school students, social media use focuses on recruitment; therefore, its success is seen as a contributor to the overall number of inquiries, applications, and visits.

## Common Social Media Channels for Marketing

Blogs, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram, and Google+ are a common lineup of social media tools being used at the current time in Catholic schools. It is vitally important to remember that the target audience, popularity, and specific niche for any tool must be constantly analyzed in order to gauge how effective it is as part of an overall marketing and communication plan. For example, Facebook has undergone a recent shift in audience. Once their parents decided to go on Facebook, kids didn't find it nearly as appealing and moved on to Instagram. Therefore, asking students to post status updates on Facebook to advertise an upcoming Open House might not get the same yield as it did last year. Today, asking mom to update her status might be a better strategy. There are also two significant considerations in choosing social media tools for your school:

1. Start small with what you know you can manage.
2. Don't create a social media channel if you're not prepared to create a plan for posting of excellent content.

## A Case Study on Social Media Content

What does excellent content look like? Here's a typical week's worth of Facebook postings from a Catholic elementary school. Which two do you think received the most "likes"?

1. Family Fall Festival reminder, time and teaser of key activities/give aways;
2. Photo: Mother/Daughter Book Club for Grades 6 & 7, including a bit about the current book;
3. Photo: Author presentation and book signing event including how the author spoke to students about enhancing their own writing abilities;
4. Photo: Awards ceremony for recent scholarship recipients;
5. Announcement for annual 5K Run fall fundraiser;
6. Photo: Parents on furlough from government positions were invited to school for the day to spend time with their children in their classrooms, along with coffee and donuts;
7. Photo: 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade picking pumpkins.

If you picked #s 2 and 6, you are correct! The second post appeals to the GenX penchant for being a good parent (possibly a result of so many growing

up as latch key kids). Reaching out to parents on furlough promotes the idea of community and service, both hallmarks of the Catholic school and showcasing a school's mission in action. If you picked the pumpkin patch, you picked the runner-up because evidence of happy, smiling children is always a winner. And, if you were wondering, it's no coincidence that photos enhance the likelihood of social media sharing. Video is even better, and provides some of the best potential to convey the unique culture and values of a school community. Also notice that there are only seven posts. A social media plan must address daily, weekly, and monthly activities, including, but not limited to, responding/reacting to Google Alerts or others, scheduling posts, capturing photos and video for posting, determining authors/topics for blog entries, and evaluation and response to analytics.

## Social Media in the Classroom

Given the nature of various social media tools, in many cases, some are best suited for older elementary and high school students. Yet, don't underestimate the value of a Smart camera phone and a school Twitter account in the hands of a PreK or Kindergarten teacher. Consider the fact that the ability of a student this age to relate everything that happened in their day, and the desire of the GenX helicopter parent to know everything that happened, may be inversely proportional. Daily tweets from a teacher with photos, key details, questions to ask at home, and a preview of what's next can be a source for enhanced parent satisfaction.

Advocates for social media in the classroom point to heightened engagement, linking to experts, real-world scenarios, and establishment of an online body of work. Although there are a variety of easily accessible resources for educators on using social media in the classroom, an approach to this medium that heightens its relevance to overall academic goals is to focus on its ability to promote higher order and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills. Social media and other web tools provide the opportunity for students to become content producers rather than content consumers. To create is at the top of the revised Bloom's taxonomy of higher order thinking skills. Additionally, social media also allows this generation's desire to multitask to be put to effective use.



Catholic School Management, Inc. is a full-service, comprehensive, consulting organization supporting Catholic Education with research, direct consultative guidance, training programs and publications. CSM provides the highest level of professional and personalized service to Catholic educational institutions both within the United States and internationally.

For more information about services, publications and training programs, write Catholic School Management P.O. Box 4071 Madison, CT 06443-4071 or call (203) 421-5169 or visit our web site at: [www.catholic-school-mgmt.com](http://www.catholic-school-mgmt.com).

© Copyright 2014 Catholic School Management, Inc., Richard J. Burke, President, P.O. Box 4071, Madison, Connecticut 06443

*This material may not be reproduced in whole or in part without written permission. Published in September, November, January, March, May and July.*

*CSM and Catholic School Management Letter are registered trademarks of Catholic School Management, Inc.*

### Classroom Examples of Social Media Use

A poorly designed lesson won't get better just because of social media integration. The goal for the tool must support curriculum objectives. Consider the following objectives and related social media applications:

- Facilitate Global Connections: Provide an option for students to engage in an ePals exchange, iTunes U, or other MOOC (massive open online course) in order to interact with students beyond their classroom walls.
- Experience Real-Time and Hands-On Science: Search and view experiments on YouTube, and then conduct, film, post, and provide voice-over analysis of original experiments.
- Develop Meta-Cognitive Skills: Microblogs that limit the number of characters in a post/comment encourage students to synthesize their thinking. Create a back channel (Twitter, Today's Meet, etc.) for students to use to post their questions, reactions, "ah-hah" moments, etc. during a lecture, video, presentation, or even while completing reading as homework for the next day's class.
- Use of Original Expert Sources: A premium LinkedIn account comes with opportunity to locate experts in many fields and requires students to submit well-crafted, articulate requests for specific information. A Twitter hashtag could be a place for conversations to occur with an expert.
- Encourage Writing and Reading for Lifetime Learning: Establish a VBC (virtual book club) through a wiki, Moodle, or Voki to add a speaking avatar delivering 60-second instructions using teacher recordings. Require students to keep a blog where they post written reflections on class content, Jing animations, and voice-overs of a process such as mitosis, or "in character" blog postings as historical figures.

### Keeping it Safe and Effective

Many school administrators are hesitant to engage in social media use either in marketing or in the classroom for various concerns about safety or privacy. What if a posting is defamatory on a school's Facebook page? What if a student publishes inappropriately? A carefully crafted social media marketing plan and related policies for students, families, faculty, and staff are prerequisites for any kind of social media use. School leaders must first embrace social media and model its appropriate use. A head of school or administrator blog can provide such a forum. Actively teach students about digital citizenship and remind them they aren't just Googling colleges, but colleges are Googling them, too. Their social media footprint will follow them just like a transcript.

With enough preparation to avoid and protect against pitfalls, the advantages of social media use far outweigh the potential negatives. And, there's no denying that the price tag is often equally appealing as many of these tools are simply free. The intentional use and control of social media is a powerful academic and marketing tool for connecting Catholic schools to their valued constituents and publics in a most preferred, timely, and relevant way.

For further information, see *Catholic School Management Letter*, July 2012, Vol. XXXIII, No. 6, "Online Marketing: Key Considerations for Catholic Schools."