USE THE "FORCE"
PULLING A RABBIT OUT OF A HARD DRIVE
PROS AND CONS OF USING TECHNOLOGY, ONLINE RESOURCES TO REACH STUDENTS

ANY SUFFICIENTLY ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY IS INDETERMINATE FROM MAGIC.
ARThUR C. CLARKE

WE LIVE IN A SOCIETY EXQUISITELY DEPENDENT ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, IN WHICH HARDLY ANYONE KNOWS ANYTHING ABOUT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY.
CARL SAGAN

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Wouldn’t it be great to be able to cast a magic spell on the students at your institution and make your events and meetings successful? Would you like to be able to hypnotize residents and student organizations into instantly knowing, understanding and following all policies? How about having a magic wand that makes people care about the so-called “no-name” artists you bring to campus? We programmers know the artists we book are great, but if they have not yet made it through the gateway of radio and TV exposure, they do not seem to draw the audience they should based on their talent.

This is where we are supposed to say we have that magic wand you are all seeking, but if we did, we would be lying. (Sorry!) However, we do have a magician’s starter kit you may borrow. Use it well and your audiences will be amazed by the seeming feats of magic you create.

Beware, though; although there are many benefits to being a magician, if you do not understand your own magic and how it works, you could end up accidentally performing the equivalent of cutting your assistant in half without knowing how to put them back together.
Interactive Presentations

In employing technology in event promotion, using common desktop programs is an easy way to get the word out. Think of the captive audiences to be found waiting for an event to begin; creating a slide show using Microsoft PowerPoint or similar presentation software and projecting it on a screen before a comedian or movie not only gives you one more method to get promotions to your students, but it also creates a cozier, more welcoming environment and focuses attention where the action will be—on the stage. It is also easy to add movie clips and sound bites to the slides, making them interactive.

Take that same slide show, expand it to cover the entire semester, and post it to a Web site or burn it to a CD and you have your own interactive event calendar. Because of the wide reach and compatibility of desktop programs, your project will be versatile and effective. Remember to consider how the program appears on different media; PCs, Macs and Web sites might all display graphics in different ways, so a quick test of some slides will help you lay out your entire presentation.

If you make a limited number of CDs, you can post the presentation online and include the link to other promotion or individual handouts. Make sure you have written permission from artists before you post and/or distribute anything that belongs to them, though. Most NACA artists will not mind the extra (free) publicity, so getting permission should not be difficult, as long as you have proper documentation.

Web Sites

We all know Web sites are suitable vehicles to get information to computer-savvy students. However, I would be willing to bet that many of your Web sites do not offer much more than the standard times, places and locations of events. Would it not be easier for your audience to be able to watch clips or download music tracks right from your site, rather than visit an external link? If you decide not to create an entire presentation on CD as described above, you can still get digital media to your audience. The trick here is to make sure your Web site is appealing (ask your students what they think of it on a regular basis), is updated regularly (find a reliable person to be responsible for regular updates, but make sure they are not the only person with access), and meets your college or university’s guidelines (ask an administrator if the college has a style guide and if it applies to your Web site).

Instant Messaging

If you were to visit the rooms of students at your institution and peek on their computer screens, you’d most likely find an instant messenger icon in the task or menu bar. If you do not have an instant messenger account set up for your programming board, office or staff, (and your institution allows you to use such applications for official college business) you are missing out on an easy way to keep in touch with your audiences. There really is no magic to it. Post your event calendar, upcoming deadlines and events, or links to other important information, on your away message or in your profile and your audience can instantly be kept in the loop.

Use a program such as Trillian (www.ceruleanstudios.com/) to incorporate different types of messengers into one program. (At this point, Trillian is compatible with the Windows platform, only.)

Online Communities

Once again, if you could visit student rooms and peek at their computers, you’d probably find a link to their MySpace.com or Facebook.com pages in their browser bookmarks. Within those two online resources lie many valuable event-promotion tools, but also a few very real-but often overlooked-risks.

THE TRICK HERE IS TO MAKE SURE YOUR WEB SITE IS APPEALING, IS UPDATED REGULARLY AND MEETS YOUR COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY’S GUIDELINES.

Associate Director for Programs
L.A. Pittenger Student Center - Ball State University
Muncie, IN

Professional position available July 1, 2006. Responsibilities: support the development and maintenance of a strong and effective University Program Board (UPB); provide direction and supervision of the university’s efforts with Late Night program; provide supervision to the Assistant Director of Campus Programs with university wide programs, such as Family Weekend and College Bowl; work with student volunteers, Student Center staff, and other appropriate university departments; contribute to the educational aspects of the Student Center; provide the campus community with a variety of social, educational, and entertainment events. Minimum qualifications: master’s degree; two years of professional work experience in college student programming, student activities, or closely related area; demonstrated ability to communicate effectively orally and in writing. Attendance at evening and weekend events as needed. Preferred qualifications: master’s degree in discipline represented within student affairs administration; at least three years of professional experience in college student programming, student activities, or related area; demonstrated ability to manage effectively diverse operations. Salary range: $40,000 to $43,000.

Send letter of application, resume, official copy of transcript of highest degree earned, and the names and contact information for three references to: Larry Markle, Search Committee Chair, L. A. Pittenger Student Center, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306. Review of applications will begin immediately and will continue until the position is filled. (www.bsu.edu)

Ball State University is an equal-opportunity, affirmative action employer and is strongly and actively committed to diversity within its community.
Imagine the possibilities, though! With these two resources, you can create online communities where your programming board or residence life staff is able to promote events, share pictures of former events, upload video clips and sound bites that students can obtain anytime night or day, or post information about your policies and procedures. Watch your crowd numbers increase as students link your group to their own friend networks. Applaud as students understand how to use items like petty-cash vouchers correctly, or finally turn in their housing forms on time. Just remember, though, this magic show has a darker side.

Warnings Worth Heeding

Like life, Web sites such as Facebook and MySpace lose some magic when terms like "formal policy" and "accountability" come into play. You need not have a rabbit in your top hat or white doves up your sleeves, but a clear and understandable policy with regard to the use or abuse of technology cannot hurt. Educating your campus community will not diminish the possible uses of these online media, but will allow for students and staff to make appropriate decisions on how they should use these Web sites, specifically regarding the information they posted and what they keep confidential.

As a safeguard, students, staff and faculty alike may wish to configure their settings to limit the number of people who may view their accounts. Also, while offices such as student activities or residence life may use these resources as tools for getting up-to-date information out to students, answering questions and publicizing events, postings should be supervised by staff to ensure accurate information is disseminated appropriately to the student body. Postings are available 24/7 and can be viewed from just about anywhere, so keep in mind that if you share sensitive information that is viewed by someone who is not trustworthy, your magic can be used against you.

The Dangers of Too Much Information (TMI)

- Facebook and MySpace postings can be read by just about anyone anywhere.
- Providing personal information such as addresses, telephone numbers, etc. in online postings or communities can be dangerous to personal safety and financial security.

Legal ramifications and courtroom precedents are sure to follow when information is displayed inappropriately or confidentiality is violated, and some institutions are beginning to formalize policy with regard to use of such media. Students at Penn State University and other Big Ten schools were in for a rude awakening when they learned that Facebook.com was being used as an investigative tool by campus police (Lash, www.collegian.psu.edu/archive/2005/11/11-10-05tdc/11-10-05news-09.asp, and Horan, www.collegian.psu.edu/archive/2005/11/11-10-05tdc/11-10-05news-10.asp).

In essence, Facebook serves as a giant directory through which users can obtain biographical information on other users. Directory information is public and can be shared unless the user restricts the information to those people they know. With that understanding, why, then do many users post cell and home phone numbers, PO box numbers, street addresses and class schedules along with pictures of themselves, their interests and other personal information on a public Internet directory? The answers given by many who do can be amazingly naive: "Well, I thought it was private." "I thought only the people at my college or university could see it, so it had to be safe," or "All my other friends have their information posted."

On the positive side, though, these sites offer an option to post parties and events, which can be a valuable tool when trying to build an audience for an on-campus event. Even so, if your intent is to promote a party in your home or dorm, be wary of who can see that information. Not all who view your posting will see your event as just another friendly gathering. They may consider it a great opportunity to sneak into your home during a party andfurtively improve their own CD or DVD collections, or worse.

Ask a student who just lost their wallet or purse, which includes their student ID card, if they are on Facebook or MySpace and watch their reaction as they realize how exposed they might be. As if you just performed some horrible illusion, you see them experience an "Aha!" moment. When their party is crashed by unwanted guests and a fight breaks out, ask them how people might have heard about the event to know when and where to show up.
The Dangers of TMI

Students can be the objects of an unwanted kind of a magic show if they provide too much information (TMI) in public areas of Cyberspace. Before they realize it, POOF! They're the victims of identity theft. WOOSH! They've lost valuable belongings. Or even worse, they're abducted by unscrupulous readers of their online musings. Unfortunately, to students who have not yet experienced their own "Aha!" moments, these risks may be perceived as mere parlor tricks conjured up by an overly cautious administration.

Balancing Risks with Rewards

Should you stop using these online resources because of such risks? Should administrators conduct regular online inspections of content to see what information students are posting?

We think not. Our magic wands are put to better use in lightly tapping students on the shoulder to let them know the risks and rewards that come with using online media. Posting advisory information on your organization's Web site is a start. Informing parents and guardians of incoming students of risks can also be beneficial. The campus newspaper and faculty can also assist in educating students in online safety.

Unlike magic tricks, which lose their luster once you find out how they really work, understanding how some online resources work and are actually used might seem a little frightening. But in the hands of a trained magician, they are valuable tools and can effectively serve your events, meetings and office operations.

References

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Editor's Note: Specific software is mentioned in this article for illustrative purposes and does not imply endorsement on the part of the authors or NACA.

About the Author

K. Dex Tuttle is assistant director for Programming at Pennsylvania College of Technology. He holds a bachelor's degree in computer science from North Dakota State University and is currently pursuing a master's degree in college student affairs at The Pennsylvania State University. While a student at NDSU, he served on the student programming board. He later worked at the school as coordinator for Campus Programs and Student Organizations. Active in NACA, he held several positions in the former NACA Upper Midwest Region. He also held the position of Educational Exhibits Coordinator for the 2005 NACA National Convention in Minneapolis, MN. More recently, he served as a Showcase Selection Committee member and as assistant CAMP coordinator for the NACA Mid Atlantic Region.

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