

# Preface

Volume 9, Special Issue (2012)

In the summer of 2011, I introduced a new course on social media strategy and management for communications managers into the curriculum of the McMaster-Syracuse Master of Communications Management. I approached teaching this course with some trepidation, given the rapidly changing nature of the field of study and the fact that the strategic and managerial thinking in the world of professional communication on how to develop new practices for social media was just beginning.

Social media is part of a broad digital communication revolution that, when combined with the growing power of mobile computing platforms such as smartphones and tablets, is completely changing the communications management game. Strategies based on the old “broadcast mentality” prevalent when the only technologies available were founded on gatekeeping and effective one-to-many distribution channels such as newspapers, radio, television and magazines, just don’t work anymore.

We see this mirrored in changes to the *Excellence Model* of public relations practice developed by James and Larissa Grunig, that move the theory from promoting a two-way symmetrical model of communication to a dialogical one based on constant feedback. This was prescient for it is becoming increasingly obvious that social media communication operates along the lines of an interpersonal model much more than it does the mass communication one, despite its one-to-many distribution possibilities.

The course I taught was an absolute pleasure, as every course I have taught in the MCM program has been. The students were an incredibly devoted, bright and enterprising group of leading communications professionals from across Canada and the United States who challenged one another and me with great questions about big ideas. It was a true idea factory, a hot house for innovation. When the summer residency ended, we were all a little saddened – not only by the fact that we would say goodbye to friends, colleagues and peers the time with whom we cherish, but also because we felt that being part of this social media management class had meant being part of history. It was the first time that a group

of professional communication managers and entrepreneurs gathered in Canada to brainstorm around what social media and digital communication make possible, what the future might bring and how to manage it strategically for our organizations, governments, clients and stakeholders.

The MCM program is Canada's premier professional master's degree for executives, entrepreneurs and exceptional junior practitioners on the management fast track. A highly selective program, the MCM accepts approximately twenty leading practitioners a year from Canada and the world. Students gather for six residencies at McMaster University over a two and a half year period, completing their degree while they work. The program is research intensive, and we encourage the students to produce case studies and presentations that are ready for submission to scholarly journals or conferences. Since the programs inception, five students have submitted to and won the prestigious Arthur Page Society Competition and numerous others have published in scholarly journals.

The case studies, opinion pieces and book reviews that the students produced for my social media strategy and management course were excellent and inspired me to invite the class to edit a special issue of the *McMaster Journal of Communication*. The MJC is a fully peer-reviewed international student journal that began publishing in 2003 and has since evolved into a premium venue for graduate students from across Canada and the world to share ideas on the evolving, intersecting fields of communication studies, professional communication and new media.

Katharine Blanchard, Wendy McLean-Cobban and Amber Wallace responded to my call, volunteering to serve as editors. They have done a splendid job of assembling this issue of high quality thinking, opinion and research by making a general call asking current MCM students and alumni to submit manuscripts. Following rigorous peer review and careful editing of the accepted manuscripts, they have produced an insightful compendium of MCM thought on the topic of social media management and strategy.

I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I have.

Alex Sévigny, PhD, APR, MCIPR  
Associate Professor and Executive Director,  
McMaster-Syracuse Master of Communications Management