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This We Believe About Social Media in Education

Social media is a broad category of applications that promotes social interaction through web-based and mobile technologies. Current examples include social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn, Ning groups such as NBEAconnect, wikis such as Wikispaces, blogs such as Blogger, and microblogs such as Twitter. Although initial use of social media focused primarily on sharing personal information, these applications have become significant tools for businesses to market their products, enhance communication with customers, and attract new customers.

Social media is an important business communication tool. Online communities provide a unique opportunity for companies to create brand awareness that evolves as social media audiences create content that is shared globally. The expanded marketplace that has resulted affects both large and small companies. Therefore, to be competitive in today's global economy, **we believe** students must be prepared to use social media tools to communicate effectively in the workplace.

Importance to Business Education

Social media is an important element of public relations and marketing strategies to increase brand exposure, create positive interaction with and among customers, and target niche audiences. Second, social media is closely related to technology skills, such as application development, digital communication, web design, and e-commerce. Third, social media is a valuable tool for entrepreneurs to develop brand recognition, increase word-of-mouth referrals, and enhance customer service opportunities. Finally, teamwork and collaboration are aspects of social media that are applicable across *all* disciplines. Corporate America frequently uses social media tools to support employee collaboration.

Therefore, we believe business education students must be prepared to work effectively via social media channels. To that end, business educators should instruct students *about* social media *with* social media not only to help students become effective social media communicators in the workplace but to enhance the teaching and learning experience.

Support of Effective Learning

Social media can enhance student learning by expanding the educational environment. Social media applications provide anytime-anyplace interaction between the instructor and the students as well as among the students themselves. Students can process information and contribute to class discussions at their own pace. Students who may not feel comfortable participating in face-to-face classes may be more willing to share their perspectives in social media learning groups. They can work collaboratively in teams, create online content, and share information in real time. **Therefore, we believe** learning with social media develops the skills students need to succeed in today's global workplace.

Prior to integrating social media into the classroom, business educators must evaluate the social media applications that best meet student learning objectives and then decide which ones most closely align with their institutions' acceptable use policies. Instructors should assess students' current understanding and experience with social media tools. Although many students may have social media experience, educators should not assume all students are proficient with these tools.

Instructors must also consider how "open" their social media channels should be. "Open channel" social media platforms allow public access and information exchange. In these environments, users form relationships by "friending" or "following" each other and potentially can be exposed to others who may not be part of a collaborative network. "Closed channel" social media platforms allow a facilitator to limit access to selected users. When utilizing social media in the classroom, **we believe** educators must conduct transparent class interactions to alleviate any appearance of impropriety. Educators must also establish and communicate clear boundaries about appropriate instructor-student communication.

Student Learning Outcomes

When business educators critically evaluate social media activities and use them to integrate educational experiences that relate directly to student learning objectives, **we believe** students will benefit from several positive outcomes including the following:

- Improving their communication skills by increasing opportunities to compose content and review other students' communication.
- Enhancing their knowledge of marketing strategies designed to create, promote, and evaluate product and/or service brand awareness.
- Creating their own professional brand to expand networking capacity and enhance employment options as they transition from the role of student to employee.

Legal and Ethical Considerations

Social media implementation in schools is not without controversy. As social media evolves, the line between public and private content blurs as do the laws regarding privacy issues and ethical online behavior. To facilitate students' transition to the workplace, **we believe** the educational use of social media should emulate appropriate business practices and policies. Just as companies share responsibility for employees' online behavior and often establish written policies, educational institutions share responsibility for students' online behavior. Potential issues include plagiarizing content by reposting, posting potentially offensive content, and harassing others. **Therefore, we believe** students should be educated about what they can and cannot do during school/working hours and on school/company equipment with social media—for both personal and professional use.

A Call to Action

To support effective education *about* social media *with* social media:

We believe business educators should be knowledgeable about emerging social media technologies that affect business communication, marketing, and information sharing.

We believe business educators should integrate appropriate social media tools into the business education curriculum to support effective learning of course objectives.

We believe business educators should ensure students understand how businesses leverage social media tools to enhance marketing strategies, brand awareness, and customer interaction.

We believe business educators should prepare students to be effective, responsible, and ethical communicators in social media environments.

We believe business educators should encourage students to create their own professional brand to enhance employment-related communication and networking opportunities.

Therefore, we believe business education has the opportunity and responsibility to take the lead in promoting and integrating appropriate use of social media across the curricula to best prepare students to compete in the global economy.