Conversation Station Digital Media Style Guide

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Conversation Station Digital Media Guide

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Honors Research Project

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# Table of Contents

Abstract........................................................................................................................................... 2

Description/Rationale .......................................................................................................................... 3

Literature Review ................................................................................................................................. 4

Introduction to Materials .................................................................................................................... 19

Overview .......................................................................................................................................... 19

References ......................................................................................................................................... 23

Appendix A: ....................................................................................................................................... 25

  SWOT Analysis of Conversation Station Social Media Accounts ..................................................... 25

Appendix B: ....................................................................................................................................... 27

  Conversation Station Interview ........................................................................................................ 27

Appendix C: ....................................................................................................................................... 28

  Conversation Station Digital Media Style Guide .............................................................................. 28
Conversation Station Digital Media Style Guide

Ciara Davis

Abstract

[Ciara Davis] Public Relations: McKenna Vietmeier : 3 Credits:

[Conversation Station Digital Media Style Guide]

This style guide serves as training material for online communication strategies at the Conversation Station, an afterschool nonprofit organization for students in rural Ashtabula County (Orwell). By utilizing this guide, board members of the Conversation Station will be able to understand the importance of online engagement with the community to accomplish goals, hire communication liaisons based on the skills and knowledge necessary to perform tasks in the guide, and hold the liaison accountable by the fulfillment of tasks detailed. The style guide will also insure that despite communication liaisons coming and going, the Conversation Station’s online character remains consistent. By reviewing resources, including interviews with Conversation Station board members and analyzing the organization’s online commutation, and performing a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis on the nonprofit, I was able to create a style guide that encapsulates the organization’s mission, goals, and values so that they can be represented throughout the Conversation Station’s online communication platforms.
Description/Rationale

The Conversation Station is a nonprofit organization for students in fourth through twelfth grade in rural Ashtabula County run completely by volunteers. With very limited resources, the board members provide activities, snacks, games, and programs with funds they raise through events, donations, and grants. For the past 17 years, the Conversation Station (CS) has gotten by with a somewhat traditional and outdated style of outreach to the community with very little input from younger generations. Recently, the CS has decided to consult a communication liaison to run online communication and public relations. This includes email newsletters, the organization’s Facebook account, and website, along with various other mediated communication when needed. Though this is a step in the right direction, there are significant challenges that come along with the decision.

The Conversation Station board members have very little knowledge about online communication and the capacity of what can be accomplished for a non-profit when these platforms are utilized strategically. When asked about their social media usage and knowledge of mediated communication online, none of the board members had any experience with platforms other than Facebook, to keep up with family and friends. Therefore, they are not aware of certain functions and tasks a person should be able to perform when hired for the job. When the Conversation Station began to hire people for the position, they chose people with very little skill and understanding, according to Pat Hunter, in charge of interviewing applicants. I think this is because the board members simply did not know what skills and experience an applicant needs to fulfill the job. Yes, they knew how to log into Facebook or access email, but there is a lot more to strategically using online communication platforms than basic level knowledge. Because of the Conversation Station’s limited resources, they need to make sure that the person hired has
experience and skills, but also need to conceptualize just what they expect from a communication liaison. This problem is what led me to decide that my honors project needed to focus on the Conversation Station and its great need for direction when it comes to online communication.

There are three main needs that this project will fulfill for the Conversation Station. First, the board members of the organization will be able to understand the strategic uses of online communication platforms, and appreciate its role in accomplishing important goals, such as increasing the number of students who visit the Conversation Station. This will help them realize that these channels are worth utilizing and including in the budget. Second, when it comes to hiring a communication liaison, my project will help board members understand what skills and knowledge a potential employee needs to have, so that the most qualified applicant can be chosen. Finally, when an applicant is chosen, my project will ensure a smooth transition from one liaison to the next. It is very important that though the position may change hands, the Conversation Stations’ communication style remains consistent. Instead of the board trying to explain to the new employee exactly what needs to be done, my project will demonstrate and thoroughly explain in detail. The board will also be able to keep the liaison accountable by understanding what should be expected from them according to the guide.

**Literature Review**

In order to accomplish my Honors Project, I first had to gather background information. I used all of the resources that I could take advantage of, including, websites, scholarly articles, and even some class lectures. Gathering this information has helped me to prepare my project,
and has also helped me to apply skills that I have learned in my major to real-life situations, like helping a local nonprofit.

The Situational Theory of Publics developed by J. E. Grunig in 1958 asserted that problem recognition, constraint recognition, and level of involvement predict communication behavior, attitude changes, and behavior changes for publics (Aldoory and Sha, 2007). A public is a group of people who relate to an organization, demonstrate varying levels of activity, and may or may not interact with others concerning their relationship. If a person is highly involved in an issue, meaning the problem is very personally relevant, they will analyze related issues more often, and will prefer more, and better, arguments. These highly involved individuals will actively seek information and will attend and comprehend messages more than those of low involvement. Problem recognition is the extent to which the public recognizes a problem facing them. Individuals with increased recognition tend to seem more information and analyze the issue more, even under conditions of low involvement. Constraint recognition is the extent to which public perceive factors that keep them from taking action or changing their behavior. The higher the constraint, the lesser the communication.

There are different publics, each with different levels of problem and constraint recognition, and levels of involvement. First is the active public, with low restraint recognition and high problem recognition and involvement. This public actively seeks information about the issue, which leads to more organized cognitions, stronger attitudes about a situation, and causes engagement in behaviors to share and become activists. Second, the aware public has high problem recognition and involvement, but due to higher levels of constraint recognition, don’t act. Finally, the latent public has low problem recognition, even if their involvement is moderate to high.
The Situational Theory of Publics will help me identify target publics for the Conversation Station’s online communication. Once I have identified these publics, I can use the theory to decide how the publics will best be reached; whether that be through awareness-based content for people who do not know about the Conversation Station and what it does for the community’s youth, or more active-based strategies for people who already know about the CS, and need to be persuaded to take action and support the organization.

Social Cognitive Theory, as described in Bandura’s article, "Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective" (2001), explains that knowledge can be learned by observing others experiences and interactions. By learning through others, individuals can remember the events and consequences of the experience, and use them as a guide for their own behaviors. From a communication perspective, especially on social media, individuals can see other’s experiences through written posts, videos, and photos. From there, they can decide to seek out similar experiences in hopes of positive consequences, or to avoid experiences due to negative consequences.

Applying this theory to my project, I understand that my style guide should press upon the importance of demonstrating positive consequences that comes with becoming involved at the Conversation Station. This means that it is important to show positive experiences that have happened because of the organization, so that individuals may be interested in having similar experiences. For example, the CS may want to post personal stories from alumni of the organization’s youth volunteer group that stresses how serving the community positively shaped their lives. This will cause members of the audience who see the posts, videos, and pictures to seek out opportunities for the same benefits for their children with the Conversation Station. In this way, I think social cognitive theory will be widely applicable to my project.
With an eye on creating persuasive content, I looked to Aristotle’s “rhetoric” which is a cornerstone of communication theory. In the treatise, Aristotle introduces ethos, pathos, and logos, communication models of persuasion. Each model appeals to the audience in a different way, and strengthens the argument. Demirdögen’s study (2010) describes each of the three persuasive models.

Ethos is the character a speaker wishes to present, and is focused on charisma and credibility of the communicator. Pathos is the mood or tone of the message that appeals to passions and emotions. Logos is the argument a communicator wants to advance, and appeals to the audiences’ intellect or reasoning. Logos depends on the ability of the audience to process information in logical ways. So sum up, persuasion using ethos focuses on the personal character of the speaker, while pathos focuses on putting the audience in a certain frame of mind, and logos is the proof, or appeal to proof, provided by words of the message itself.

The Conversation Station wants to persuade their publics to support them by volunteering and donating. The organization also wants to persuade students to become members and participate in programs. My project will include logos, pathos, and ethos into the style guide to help the communication liaison persuade. For example, the liaison could appeal to logic on the Conversation Station’s website, social media, and email newsletters by informing audiences that volunteers at the Conversation Station are all background checked, and go through an interview process. This appeals to the audience’s rationality in understanding that the CS is safe for kids, because the volunteers have been checked for criminal activity.

Social exchange theory is the assumption that exchanges in the social world are limited to sided, mutually contingent, mutually rewarding transactions (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). In other words, when individuals decide to act in society, they analyze the costs and benefits.
“What’s in it for me?” From a communication perspective, while persuading an audience, a communicator must lay out the benefits to audience members and persuade them that they outweigh the cost. For example, if someone was considering a communicator’s side of an argument, they would have to be convinced that the communicator’s argument had more benefits and less cost to them than the opposing side, for them to agree.

For my project, I can apply social exchange theory by explaining throughout my style guide that audience members need to be convinced the benefits of supporting the Conversation Station outweigh the costs. A main goal of the Conversation Station is to increase volunteers, student members, and monetary donations. To achieve this goal, we want audiences to feel that the cost of supporting is low, while benefits are high. For example, the communication liaison may express that volunteering at the CS for three hours per week is worth knowing that a child’s life is being changed through programs at the nonprofit. A liaison could illustrate this by filming a series of interviews with students from the CS, talking about how a special volunteer at the CS touched their lives. Social exchange theory will definitely be important when explaining that in order to persuade the audience to become involved, the CS must show that the rewards outweigh the costs.

Publics choose to utilize social media and other forms of online communication for many different reasons. Uses and Gratifications Theory asserts that audiences are not simply passive viewers, persuaded by media channels. Instead, audiences choose channels and message selections, and interpret and respond to them. Differences in motivation, societal structure, individual attitudes, initiative, and involvement mediate potential effects of the media, according to a study by Alan Rubin (2009).
There are five assumptions of Uses and Gratifications Theory: Communication behavior is purposive and motivated. People are relatively active participants who select media and their content. Social and psychological characteristics, societal structure, social groups and relationships, and personal involvement mediate communication behavior and effects. Media compete with other channels for selection, attention, and use. People are usually more influential than media in media effects process. According to Rubin (2009), motivation for audiences on the internet includes entertainment, social interaction, to pass time, escapism, and to gather information.

There is a practical application of this theory for my project. When providing suggestions and examples for future online content, I will keep uses and gratifications theory in mind. Without considering what motivates the audience, engagement will not increase on the Conversation Station’s online platforms. I will be sure to discuss the importance of keeping audience motivation in mind, especially on social media, to draw people in by appealing to their interests.

The article “Social Media and Social Service: Are Nonprofits Plugged in to the Digital Age?” by Lauri Goldkind (2015), touches on an issue that I noticed in my discussions with Pat and Gary Hunter, and while looking at the Conversation Station’s social media. The article discussed how non-profits have not made much of an effort to utilize social media on a whole, and in turn have not seen the positive effects that it can have on various aspects of an organization. I think that the Conversation Stations struggles with this turn towards the internet, and how it can help the organization. The article discusses two main goals that social media is effective in helping to accomplish in organizations. The first is fundraising and resource development, and the second is policy advocacy and social change. Fundraising with social
media versus other channels (such as events), is less expensive, more efficient, and easier to reach and connect with people. With social media, less manpower is needed, and an organization is able to reach many people with a few posts and pieces of content. Social media is also advancing to focus on target audiences that are most likely to donate to the cause. The article discusses a study that was done on Facebook Causes and Nonprofit Times’ 100, to measure fundraising success. The study found that the success of organization’s fundraising was not related to its financial capacity, but instead its web presence. I think this article will be beneficial in explaining and defending the importance of utilizing social media when I am meeting with the Conversation Station Board.

According to Guo, Chao and Saxton’s article, "Tweeting Social Change: How Social Media Are Changing Nonprofit Advocacy" (2014), there is a pyramid for social media-based advocacy. The bottom of the pyramid is “reaching out”. This is where an organization brings awareness of an organization’s cause to current and potential supporters. At this stage content is mostly informational and publicized. The focus is on gaining new connections and getting the word out about the organization. The next, middle part of the pyramid is “keeping the flame alive”, which is where the organization sustains consistency and momentum, making sure that supporters don’t lose their passion for the cause. The focus is on building and deepening ties of supporters. The posts and content are more community oriented than at the first stage, and are focused on relational advocacy, which is relating with the supporters through interactive dialogue and community building to strengthen ties. The third and final stage at the top of the pyramid is “stepping up to action”, where the organization attempts to mobilize the supporters by facilitating wants, and directing actions. The article did caution organizations, however, warning not to push too many calls to action. This pushes the supporters away because they feel
overwhelmed and used by the organization. I really think that the Conversation Station’s social media could benefit from knowledge of these stages, and could use this information to shape goals and objectives for its social media.

"Can Social Media Campaigns Backfire? Exploring Consumers’ Attitudes and Word-Of-Mouth towards Four Social Media Campaigns and Its Implications on Consumer-Campaign Identification” by Arli, Denni and Dietrich (2017), discusses how word-of-mouth and social media are related, which I think is very important for the Conversation Station because it is located in such a small town. Where there is a small population, it seems that everyone knows everything about not only the people, but the businesses and organizations too. Now that social media is being used, we are able to take advantage of that small town word-of-mouth, to make sure that the community sees positive and useful things about the Conversation Station on social media so that they are spreading good information and news, not negative. Arli et al (2017) discuss how emotion dictated by word-of-mouth affects sharing and online presence, and that influence will affect how consumers (or donators, parents who want to send their kids to the Conversation Station, etc.), will identify with the organization. It is important that there is a constant positive flow of ideas and opinions between word-of-mouth and social media.

Therefore, on social media, the Conversation Station needs to make sure that there are positive, interesting, and beneficial information for the community.

In preparing my digital media style guide, I found detailed information from my Multiplatform Production Class, taught by McKenna Vietmeier. In week 12, we discussed popular social media and its uses. There are a few tips from Ms. Vietmeier’s PowerPoint that I think are useful for my project. Firstly, post differently on each social media. Every social media has different uses, audiences, and styles; therefore every social media used should have carefully
thought out posts especially for that platform. Secondly, be consistent with posting. When an organization has a social media presence, it is important that they post consistently to use each platform to the best of its capability. Finally, develop a style guide and a social media plan. Both of these ideas are big parts of my project. A plan will incorporate all the social media being used to organize what will be posted where, and when. A style guide is a guide for a social media team, or in the Conversation Station’s case, a social media liaison. The style guide discusses how to integrate and post social media for a specific organization. It also explains why each social media needs to be used, its strategy, and examples of how the organization would use each social media. For example, if I thought the Conversation Station should use Twitter, I would discuss how Twitter is used, its style and strategy, and then make five examples of Twitter posts that the organization could post. I am very excited to have found this PowerPoint as a background information resource because it aligns so well with my project! This PowerPoint will be very useful when I am actually helping the Conversation Station Social Media Liaison learn how to use each platform, and what content is best shared on which social media.

The PEW Research Center provides a social media factsheet with a lot of data about social media. Seven out of 10 Americans use social media, so clearly it is very prevalent in our lives. The graph below shows that at least 69% of adults used at least one social media in 2016, up from just 5% 10 years prior in 2006.
The graph below shows adults who use at least one social media by age. In 2016, 86% of young adults 18-29 used at least one social media, 80% of 30-49 year olds, 64% of 50-64 year olds, and 34% of individuals ages 65 and over use at least one social media site.

The following graph shows the percent of US adults who use social media in urban, suburban, and rural communities. 60% of adults in rural communities use at least one social media, which is important for me to know because the Conversation Station is set in rural Ashtabula County. Knowing this helps me to understand the barriers that the Conversation Station has when it comes to reaching the community.
The following graph shows the percentage of adults who use each popular social media platform. 68% of adults use Facebook, 28% use Instagram, 26% use Pinterest, 25% use LinkedIn, and 21% use Twitter, according to April 2016 data. For rural communities, 65% of adults who use social media use Facebook, 25% use Instagram, 20% use Pinterest, 15% use LinkedIn, and 15% use Twitter.
This final graph below shows how frequently users use each popular social media platform. 76% of users said they use Facebook daily, 15% said weekly, and 7% said less often. 51% of users said they use Instagram daily, 26% said weekly, and 22% said less often. 42% of users said they use Twitter weekly, 24% said weekly, and 33% said less often. 25% of users said they use Pinterest daily, 31% said weekly, and 43% said less often. Finally, 18% of users said they use LinkedIn daily, 31% said weekly, and 51% said less often.

This PEW Research Fact Sheet was a pivotal resource for my project. It includes a wide scope of data that is useful, especially in the breakdown of what social media is used by whom, and when. I will be able to look at the research and decide what social media platforms the Conversation Station should have, who the target for each platform is, and what should be posted.

I also drew from an article in the Non-Profit Quarterly called, “How Nonprofits Use Social Media to Engage with Communities.” There was a variety of telling statistics and useful
information in the article. The Case Foundation, in collaboration with Social Media Nonprofits created a survey to help advance conversation around how nonprofits use social media to engage their communities. They received 480 responses from nonprofit professionals who are involved with running their organizations social media and online communication efforts. 88% of nonprofits said their most important communication tools were email and their websites, even though 97% of them were on Facebook. 47% said that the reason their organization values engagement with the community is to get donations. 18% said that commenting and retweeting (Twitter) is important. Half of the respondents reported that they had 1 or less social media staff, while the other half was split between having teams, and “winging it”. The biggest challenge that was reported was the lack of man power, followed by moving beyond simple “likes” on a page, to more engagement from followers or members. 74% of nonprofit professionals use social networks as a megaphone, announcing events and activities and sharing organization-centric information. This means that instead of engaging, they are only talking about their own organization and sending one-way communication, which is not at all ideal. Only 53% actually follow the practice of posting issue-centric content to establish thought leadership in their nonprofit areas of focus. 70% of respondents said that Facebook Insights topped the list of most popular social measurement tools, followed by 43% arguing that the most popular social measurement tool was Twitter followers. 60% of respondents said that there was no benchmark for what an average engagement rate is on Facebook, with 22% saying that the average engagement is 2-4%. However, only nonprofits with highly active communities can hope to attract that number of engagement.

The article provided some tips for nonprofits on social media as well which I found useful for my project. The first tip is to make posts and other content into a conversation. Engage
with followers, and don’t make everything all about the organization. Secondly, Nonprofit Quarterly recommends to get visual, using pictures and videos to keep people entertained. The next tip is to share the load and have a plan. Organize who does what when it comes to social media, and have a thought out plan for what content is shared when, and where. Finally, Nonprofit Quarterly argues that the future and present is mobile. Make sure that every platform being used, especially the website, is viewable on mobile devices. This article is a very interesting addition to my background information because the survey comes straight from nonprofit professionals, who work in the nonprofit world every day. This means that a lot of the data that Non-Profit Quarterly provided will help me to understand the Conversation Station when it comes to their social media usage as well. A lot of what was discussed in this article was very similar to issues with the Conversation Station’s social media.

Currently, the Conversation Station does have a Facebook. However, it could use some redesigning and guidance so that the organization is getting optimal use out of the platform. Facebook provides some tips for nonprofits to use the website to excel. The first tip is to “find your voice.” Be personal and authentic, taking time to post directly to the page. They suggest to speak in first person on posts, and share candid personal stories from members of the organization. Second, encourage two-way dialogue. Ask questions in status updates, or by sharing photos and videos. Respond to comments on posts, and repost people’s comments that are constructive and friendly about the organization, and thanking by name. Next, get visual. Use photos and videos to capture messages and engage the audience. Create Facebook events to highlight fundraising activities, and celebrate milestones such as reaching fundraising goals. The following tip is to share exclusive content, which means to make sure that content is tailored to each social media being used. The final tip is to link social medias and websites together, to
make it easy for audiences to connect on different levels. This article from Facebook will be very useful to my project, when I am performing my SWOT analysis on the Conversation Station’s already existing Facebook page. I can use the advice that Facebook has provided as standards for the page. That way, I have a reference to look up to when making suggestions for edits of the Conversation Station’s Facebook page.

The Conversation Station has had a website for the past eight years. However, it is cluttered, unorganized, and could be designed to get more users. Network for Good, a blog about nonprofit marketing, includes an article titled, “10 Tips to Improve Your Nonprofit Website.” There were a few tips that really stood out to me which could be helpful for my project. Firstly, the article suggests to look at the organization’s website from the visitor’s perspective. The mission of the organization, navigation, and the actions we want them to take must be very clear and simple to figure out. The description of the organization has to be concise. The final tip that stood out to me was “three clicks and you’re out”. This means to make sure everything we want visitors to do on a site is no more than three clicks away. According to the article, “research indicates that you lose 40% of visitors with each click.” This article really had some great information for my project. I will be able to use the advice that is given when I am performing my SWOT analysis on the Conversation Station’s website, to make sure that I add thoughtful and knowledgeable suggestions to update and advance the nonprofit’s website.

I was able to gather information critical to preparing my digital media style guide by performing a literature review. I studied the Conversation Station, which is the organization I am working with, spent time reviewing all of their mediated communication, such as email newsletters, Facebook, and the website. I was also able to utilize information I learned in class about social media, as well as some academic sites and articles. Finally, I was able to read up on
how nonprofits can utilize different social media platforms on Facebook, LinkedIn, and sites geared towards nonprofit work.

Introduction to Materials

The following style guide is a training tool for the Conversation Station’s communication liaison. The style guide will be used by board members during the hiring process, to ensure than an applications qualifications match the skills and knowledge he or she will need to accomplish tasks described in the style guide. When a person is hired for the position, the guide will provide an in-depth understanding of the characteristics of communication for the Conversation Station, and the tasks associated with the job. Using the guide, the liaison will have a clear understanding of the Conversation Station’s voice online, and the general style and structure of each platform the organization is active on. When a new liaison is introduced, the guide will ensure a smooth transition to keep the Conversation Station’s voice unified and the tasks consistently accomplished. The style guide should be kept on a flash drive and saved on the office computer at the Conversation Station, for quick retrieval when needed. The communication liaison will receive a copy by email.

Overview

In order to create a guide that correlates with the core values of the Conversation Station, I gathered information about the organization to understand the background, mission, and goals through content analysis of the online communication platforms, and an interview with key members of the board at the Conversation Station.
Looking at the Conversation Station’s website, I was able to find some basic information. The organization is a self-funded, not-for-profit for students in fourth to twelfth grade in rural Ashtabula County (Orwell), Ohio. Adult volunteers and mentors offer a free snack and beverage to each student every day, and there is no membership fee. There are many different activities and events for students at the Conversation Station such as pool, video games, cards, basketball, a craft corner, Legos, pinball, foosball, ping pong, air hockey, puzzles, karaoke, and much more. They also have monthly birthday parties, a “good news” club, special craft tutorial days, and even opportunities for students to earn volunteer hours both in the Conversation Station and out in the community. The Conversation Station also has a mission statement up on its website, with very clear morals and values that have been set forth for the organization. It reads: “To provide a place in rural Ashtabula County where school-aged children, teens, and adults can gather, share ideas, have fun, and learn from each other. To also provide programs, activities, and services that will benefit the community and passers-by in a safe, wholesome environment which promotes the love of God, family, and traditional values. “The Conversation Station’s website is going to be very important to my project, because it provides the core information about the organization, which I will need to make sure is represented on every social media for the nonprofit.

Gary and Pat Hunter, two founders and board members of the Conversation Station, discussed with me the goals and needs of the Conversation Station in regards to social media, as well as how my project could benefit the organization. We also talked about some of the issues the Conversation Station faces when it comes to social media.

The Conversation Station has had a website for the past eight years. It is very basic, with simple information about the organization, past events, upcoming events, and information for parents and students. Recently, the Conversation Station website has been edited with more
pictures and a new design, but the design and layout is not legible when viewed on a computer, and is very hard to use on mobile devices as well. The Conversation Station also has a Facebook that is updated when there are upcoming events. Currently, they have 342 “likes” on the page. Besides a website and a Facebook, the Conversation Station’s only other form of reaching the public is through emails which is not done often, unless there are very large fundraisers coming up. They also have the opportunity to have a section in a monthly newsletter.

Pat and Gary Hunter had a few goals for the Conversation Station’s Social media. First, they would like more response from their followers and website users. When posting on Facebook, they may get one single like, one single comment, and possibly (but not often) one single share. This is cause for frustration, because the board members just do not understand why they are not getting more feedback and response. This goes along with the second goal, which is to find a way to spread the word about the Conversation Station and its events. They are hoping to raise “likes” and followers, and possibly add more social media platforms so that more and more people can know about what the CS does for children in the community. Finally, Pat and Gary Hunter said that the board would like more organization when it comes to social media. They have recently hired a social media liaison who has some experience with social media. The board would like to make sure that there is communication and feedback between the liaison, board members, and the staff, so that everyone has a clear idea of the Conversation Station’s social media presence. It is important that everyone knows what is being posted and shared on every platform, so that everyone is on the same page.

Pat and Gary Hunter also discussed some of the needs for the Conversation Station. Most importantly, the non-profit needs community support and involvement. Without the community’s help, the Conversation Station would have no volunteers, and very little donations. The
community not only includes the residents, but also the many businesses in the village as well. The CS also is also in need of more volunteers to watch after the children and pass out snacks after school. Finally, but also very importantly, the Conversation Station needs donations and grants to stay open. Because it is a non-profit, it relies on donations and grants to pay rent and electricity, to purchase snacks, pay for events, and keep the building updated.

The final topic that Pat and Gary Hunter and I discussed, was how my project can best help the Conversation Station. One of the Conversation Stations goals was to organize their social media, which my plan will be perfect for. My project will help the organization to map out their social media posts and updates, including dates and deadlines, in an easy to access, simple guide. This will improve communication and help the board, liaison, and after school coordinator to understand exactly what the Conversation Station’s social media is presenting to the community. The board also expressed goals and needs of more responses on social media, getting the word out about the non-profit, community support, and an increase of volunteers and students. My plan will include a SWOT Analysis and a guide that will help to restructure (and add to) the Conversation Station’s social media for optimal outreach, community engagement, and response.

This interview was crucial for my project, because it was so important to hear from the board members of the Conversation Station about their goals and needs for the social media platforms. It was also very important that we discussed how my project could best help the Conversation Station, so that I can tailor to those needs.
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Demirdöğen, Ü. D. (2010). The roots of research in (political) persuasion: Ethos, pathos, logos and the Yale studies of persuasive communications. *International Journal of Social Inquiry, 3*(1), 189-201


Hunter, Gary and Pat. (October 20, 2017). Personal Interview with Ciara Davis.


Appendix A:

SWOT Analysis of Conversation Station Social Media Accounts

STRENGTHS

- Already 360+ followers on Facebook (pretty established in comparison to having to make a brand new Facebook)
- Conversation Station Facebook page administrators are members of 8 Facebook groups where they can strengthen ties within the community, and share activities and events going on at the CS.
- Memorable and easy website domain (www.conversationstation.org)
- Most people who know about the CS have a positive view of the organization (Based on Casual Research from The News (local newspaper), word of mouth, Facebook)
- Unique and powerful story to share
- Strong Community support

WEAKNESSES

- Very low website interaction
- Very little posting on social media (biweekly, weekly)
  - The posts are not in the “voice” they should be
    - Little/no organization personality, or branding
- Administrators/Members of the board have little knowledge of social media
  - More traditional, offline-based approach to engagement and advertisement (set in those ways)
- Unprofessional photos (pictures of a picture, or of paper flyers, etc.)
- No clear plans, goals, or strategies for public relations or social media
- Disorganized, limited, messy website & Facebook
- Slow responses to messages; could also be handled in a more appropriate tone.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Access to free advertisement on community email list (Who does this reach? How many people?)
- Budget for social media/public relations to pay for the website, prizes for possible contests, FB boosting, etc.
- Access to alumni, supporters, parents, and children through email/phone which if taken advantage of, could bring donations, volunteers, and other support.
- Networking with other local nonprofits in the community, such as the library, country neighbor (community resource center), who also do kids programs
K-12 school less than a mile away, with plenty of resources and children that could come to the CS.

THREATS

No contact with school, which is the largest resource available to reach kids
Cycle of not enough volunteers, resources, and ideas
  o Leads to very little programming and advertising
    Leads to small amount of children participating
Small, rural, low-income town… who goes on Social Media? Who knows about the CS Page? The website? Who has internet?
Community has very little knowledge of what the CS really is/what it does
The Conversation Station board members are unaware of how useful social media, the website, e-newsletters, etc. can really benefit the organization, so they pay little attention to it, and may not think it is necessary.
Country Neighbor, is a community center in Orwell offering many programs for people of all ages. Often, the Conversation Station and Country Neighbor are competing for the same audience of children.
Grand Valley Local Library also has many events for children. When the library has events, there are less children at the Conversation Station. The library also has Wi-Fi, which draws youth to hang out there instead of the CS.
Appendix B:

Conversation Station Interview

Interviewer: Ciara Davis    Interviewees: Gary and Pat Hunter    Date: October 20, 2017

1. What is the mission of the Conversation Station (CS)?
2. What online communication channels does the CS have?
3. What are some of the goals for the CS in regards to online communication like Facebook, email, and the website?
4. What constraints does the CS have when accomplishing these goals?

Email

5. How often are emails sent out from the CS?
6. To who are they sent to? How many people does it reach?
7. What type of content goes into the emails?
8. Who sends emails currently?
9. Are there any specific goals for email?

Website

10. Tell me about the CS website.
11. How long has it been up?
12. What website platform was it created on? (Wix, Wordpress, etc.)
13. Does the website provide mobile access?
14. What type of content is shared?
15. How often is the content updated?
16. Who updates the website?
17. Are there any specific goals for the website?

Facebook

18. How long has the CS had a Facebook?
19. How many likes does the page have?
20. What type of content is shared over Facebook?
21. Who updates the page?
22. How often is the page updated?
23. Are there any specific goals for the website?

My Project

24. How can my project best help the CS?
25. What specific goals would you like to see my project fulfill?
Appendix C:

Conversation Station Digital Media Style Guide
WELCOME!

Congratulations on becoming a part of the Conversation Station! As our communication liaison, you will share with the community (and those surrounding) our vision for the youth of Ashtabula County through our website, email, and social media, as well as various other mediated communication. Your work will grow and engage our audience, as well as build and strengthen relationships with the community, alumni, parents, and students. This style guide will help you on your way!
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Mission .................................................................................................................. 1
Goals ..................................................................................................................... 2 - 3
Audience ............................................................................................................... 4
Platforms / General Style ..................................................................................... 5 - 6
Facebook .............................................................................................................. 7 - 8
Monitoring Social Media ...................................................................................... 9 - 11
Email .................................................................................................................... 12 - 14
Website ............................................................................................................... 15 - 16
Canva ................................................................................................................... 17
Integration .......................................................................................................... 18
Community .......................................................................................................... 19
Timeline .............................................................................................................. 20 - 21
Summary ............................................................................................................. 22
MISSION

At the Conversation Station, our mission is to provide a place in rural Ashtabula County where school-aged children, teens, and adults can gather, share ideas, have fun, and learn from each other.

We provide programs, activities, and services that benefit the community and passers-by in a safe, wholesome environment which promotes the love of God, family, and traditional values.
GOALS

- Build and strengthen relationships with residents and local businesses in the community, and those surrounding Orwell.
- Grow and engage our audience on social media.
- Increase traffic to our website.
- Maintain relationships with alumni, past/current volunteers, current members, and parents.
- Create awareness for activities, events, and fundraisers.
- Utilize online communication to increase number of volunteers, students/members, and donations.
HOW CAN ONLINE COMMUNICATION ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS?

According to the US Census Bureau, 77% of the US population has an internet subscription. With one post, email, or update, thousands of people can be reached at little to no cost! Today's social media is so advanced, just one click can give insight into audience demographics to target the necessary publics. Social media helps to easily engage with the community around us and build two-way communication, which is vital in our 24/7 world. Online communication is the key to reaching publics effectively, quickly, and cost effectively.
AUDIENCE

Here at the Conversation Station, we serve students from 4th – 12th grade. However, the main audience of our online communications is parents of these children, who make the decision on sending their children, as well as adult community members who attend fundraisers and events.

- Our following on Facebook is mostly community members interested in activities and fundraisers, parents, and alumni, with a few CS member students.
- Our emails are targeted towards the community, school staff, parents, and alumni.
- Our website is mostly targeted towards parents, and students interested in checking out the Conversation Station.
ACTIVE PLATFORMS

* FACEBOOK

* EMAIL - CS.ORWELL@GMAIL.COM

* WIX - CONVERSATIONSTATON.ORG

GENERAL STYLE

On every platform, the Conversation Station strives to be friendly and conversational; a supportive, engaging, and strong community resource, and last but not least, a caring, responsible, and active figure for parents who trust us with their children after school.

Tone is to be easy-going and light. There is to be no text-talk or slang of any kind. Always remain courteous and polite, while encouraging comments, feedback, and ideas. We want to grow and advance, and a great way to do that is contribution from the community!
COMMUNICATING WITH THE AUDIENCE

It is very important to keep a unified tone across all platforms, no matter who is posting, emailing, or responding to our audience members.

* All individuals who reach out to the Conversation Station, whether it be to ask a question, comment, or give feedback, deserve a timely response. Even if it is just a simple "thank you"!

* Any comments/messages made between the hours of 9am and 6pm should be responded to within an hour. Posts made outside of normal hours should be responded to in no more than 24 hours.

* If you are unsure of the answer to a question, or how to respond to someone, please reach out to an administrator who could help you as quickly as possible.

* Even if the information someone is asking for can clearly be found on the platform, STILL proceed to repeat the information! Do not tell them to go look for it, or fail to respond!

* Engage with our audience as often as possible. Start conversation. Tell our story.
SPECIFIC GUIDELINES: FACEBOOK

According to PEW Research, Facebook is the social media giant (about 1.4 billion subscribers), with 68% of all US adults on the platform. Looking at our audience, 78% of people ages 30-49, and 64% of people ages 50-64 use Facebook. This means that most parents and community members use this social media.

* Facebook is very user-friendly; they make it easy to deliver messages and share content. Posts should be made with engaging the audience and building relationships in mind.

* When posting a photo or flyers, do your best to make sure the picture is of good quality (not out of focus, awkward, not sure what it is, etc). It is worth it to take the extra time and make a flyer online, instead of just taking a blurry picture of one on a table.

* Don't forget to say thank you for positive feedback! NEVER respond to someone with just a "thumbs up" or emoji.

* All minors in photos must have signed media permission slips by a parent or guardian!
Post Schedule:

76% of Facebook users check this social media platform daily, so every day our page should have new content! Research shows that the best time to post is early afternoon, so posts should be delivered between 12pm and 3pm, at least once per day.
MONITORING SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook gives everyone the opportunity to communicate their thoughts and opinions on public pages. This can be great for sharing ideas, opinions and feedback. It can also be a problem that needs to be addressed carefully.

* When replying to someone's comment or message, remember to be timely with your response, and always fully answer a question when asked. If you aren't sure how to answer a question, reach out to a board member.

* Feel free to share positive feedback and comments with the board members, along with any ideas that the public may have for the Conversation Station. The members enjoy hearing what people have to say!

* If the Conversation Station receives negative feedback or comments, please let a board member know as soon as possible, so that it can be addressed in a timely manner. If you feel that a situation needs to be handled immediately by hiding comments or deleting posts, please take a screen shot or copy down the post (including the person's name) before doing so.
Our main goal on Facebook is engagement. We want to not only reach as many people as we can, but also establish two-way communication through messages, comments, and likes.

* For fundraisers and events, aim for a post reach of 600 – 800 people. This can be done through sharing to Facebook Groups, and post boosting.

* When a person comments on our posts, they are sharing opinions or ideas, which is very useful. Sharing content that is interesting or thought provoking. Aim for at least one comment on every post!

* When a person "likes", on Facebook, they let us know that they enjoy the content, and have read it. Aim for 5 likes per post. When that goal is reached, aim for 10% of the people who follow our page to like each post.

* When our followers "share" on Facebook, that post is shared with all friends on their friends list, which means we are able to reach a lot more people! Aim for 5 shares on every event or activity flyer posted. When that goal is reached, aim for 10% of the people who follow our page to share the event and activity flyers.
Another great way to measure social media engagement is Facebook Analytics. This can be found by going to the Conversation Station's Facebook page and clicking "insights". There, you will see a variety of different ways that people can engage with the Conversation Station, such as page views, page previews, page likes, page reach, post engagements, and page followers. The graphs on the page show how engagement has increased or decreased.

Below the graphs, Facebook allows you to see recent posts and their reach, type, target, and amount of engagement for each post. Which posts did people engage most with—videos, flyers, pictures, written posts? Is it worth paying to boost posts? How many more people are reached when posts are shared? When are our followers mostly online? All of this information can be found with Facebook analytics, and it only takes a few clicks!
The Conversation Station has the unique opportunity of being able to have activities and events sent in a community chain-email. This email is currently run by the Superintendent's Administrative Secretary at Grand Valley Local School, and (according to her) is delivered to approximately 460 members of the community, along with about 170 school staff. This means that when we send activity and event flyers or details, our information goes out to about 630 individuals in our community! This email list also includes newspaper journalists, who scour these emails for newsworthy events in the community to attend and report on. It is very important that everything sent out is of professional quality, contains accurate information, and is appropriate for the entire community to see!
• Emails must be professionally written and checked for typos
• Must be clear and concise with a call to action
• Must contain an appropriate signature with contact information for the CS
• Must have event/activity title in the subject
• Your name will be on these emails, representing the Conversation Station!
• Emails about events/activities should go out at least 48 hours before. Emails are only sent out during school days/hours, and there is some delay!
• Do not send a lot of frequent emails, and wear out our welcome in the community chain!
• Always thank the administrator-- they don't have to send out our flyers/information!
EXAMPLE:

An email sent to the secretary...

Hi Arleen,
Could you please send this flyer out to the community about the Conversation Station’s Soup & Paint on Feb. 16th?

Also, Soup & Bread at the Conversation Station this week is Venison Chili, Ham & Bean, Clam Chowder, & Chicken Tortellini with Corn Bread and Ciabatta Bread. We’re located at 18E Main Street if people would like to pick up, or eat in for a chance to win a Soup Basket! They can also call in (440)437-5442, and delivery is free within the village!

Clara Davis
Public Relations Consultant
Conversation Station
18E Main Street
Onwell, OH 44076
(440)437-5442
cs.onwell@gmail.com

How it looks when sent to the community....

GRAND VALLEY,

Please find attached the Conversation Station’s Soup & Paint flyer on Friday, February 16, 2018 (which is a Non-report Day for Students & Teachers).

Also, Soup & Bread at the Conversation Station this Friday, January 26th is Venison Chili, Ham & Bean, Clam Chowder, & Chicken Tortellini with Corn Bread and Ciabatta Bread. We’re located at 18E Main Street if people would like to pick up, or eat in for a chance to win a Soup Basket! You can also call in at (440)437-5442 and delivery is free within the village!

Clara Davis
Public Relations Consultant
Conversation Station
18E Main Street
Onwell, OH 44076
(440)437-5442
cs.onwell@gmail.com
SPECIFIC GUIDELINES: conversationstation.org

Our website is the platform where everything about our organization is located. It is very important that the website is always up to date, and without any errors or typos! Parents will look at the website while screening the Conversation Station to see if they can trust us with their children, so we need to make sure we have everything they need to make their decision!

* The website must be updated weekly with upcoming activities on the "Home" page
* Also on the front page should be 1-2 featured upcoming fundraisers or contests
* The website should ALWAYS have our updated contact information in an easily accessible place. Everything should be easily accessible and easy to navigate to.

* When there is an exciting activity or event, ask volunteers/administration to take pictures, or take them yourself for the website. We want to "show" that the CS is fun.

* Include a lot of visuals. Wording should be as clear and concise as possible. People will not read a lot of text on a website.
IDEAS FOR POSTS...

The website is still currently growing. One goal we have is "show" rather than tell people what we do at the Conversation Station! After each event or activity post photos to the "past activities and events" tab of the website. Don't forget to include a small blurb to describe the occasion!

You should also add enticing flyers and information about upcoming events. We want the CS website to be a site that people are interested in utilizing! Events that are happening for one week only can be posted on the front page on that week. Events that are upcoming should be posted underneath the "Upcoming Activities/Events" tab.

Example of a weekly update, which is posted to the front page of the website:

**THIS WEEK AT THE CS 3/12-3/16**

- **BINGO, THURSDAY**
  Join Mr. Carter for BINGO with fun prizes!

- **EASTER CANDY MAKING, FRIDAY**
  The Conversation Station volunteers will be helping the kids to make Easter chocolates with a variety of molds!

Example of a monthly calendar, which is posted under the "Upcoming Activities/Events" Tab:

**Conversation Station's February Activities**

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<th>SUN</th>
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**SOURP AND BREAD**

Every Friday of the month, the CS will hold Homemade soup & bread from 11am-2pm (or until soup is gone). Rags in 10 &. 10am for a chance to win one for the best. Call 469-557-882 for pickup & FRED delivery to the village.

[conversationstation.org]
Canva is a tool loaded with enough easy-to-use features and functionality that anyone can create a variety of engaging content that gets shared. It is an important part of your job as communication liaison. You will be making many flyers, invitations, posters, and brochures that will be used on every platform we've got! When making these designs, keep in mind the 5Ws: Who, What, Where, When, Why. Our audience needs all of the information about activities and events, so we don't want to leave anything out!
The final step is to integrate our social media platforms to create a united and defined brand persona. Every platform we use MUST invite the audience to check out our website, Facebook, or welcome them to visit us in person!

Remember: We DO NOT cross post (post exactly the same thing) on every platforms! Each platform is unique, with certain content and post characteristics that must be followed for the best outcome (which you should understand by this point in the guide!). This doesn’t mean that we can’t post about the same activities and events on our website, Facebook, and through email... we just have to craft them to fit the specific platforms.
COMMUNITY

Here in Orwell, we are lucky to have a few different outreaches for youth. Part of your job is to keep up with these other organizations! What upcoming events and activities are they having? When? How many people do they draw? What media channels do they use to spread the word?

Because we are a community, we would like to have a relationship with, and collaborate with these other organizations as well! We need to support them and their activities and events, just as they support and encourage us.

Keep up with these organizations on Facebook, and read community emails detailing their events and activities. When the CS board gives you an event to communicate, be sure to check that these other organizations do not already have something similar planned, or on the same date!

Country Neighbor Program, Inc. is a multi-purpose community center providing a focal point for services to help people help themselves by enhancing life skills and supporting individuals and families as they strive for a dignified, independent lifestyle.
http://countryneighbor.org/

The Grand Valley Public Library provides many free and fun activities for youth throughout the year such as movies, afterschool programs, game nights, readings, and more! https://grandvalleypubliclibrary.org/
A timeline is a chart of every mediated communication the organization uses with details of what will be accomplished each day of the week.

It is useful for outlining deadlines, planning out the week, and having a clear idea of what will be communicated to the audience. This chart will also help when providing the board members with monthly communication reports.

Ideally, the following week's timeline should be completed the Friday before.
# Example Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Weekend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Facebook</strong></td>
<td>Post Week’s Activities</td>
<td>Post about Soup &amp; Bread Flyer</td>
<td>Post photos of Valentine’s Day Party, with Description</td>
<td>Create an Event Page for Soup &amp; Paint, Share with Community</td>
<td>Post Chinese Auction Flyer</td>
<td>Update Weekly Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Website</strong></td>
<td>Change Soup &amp; Bread Selections for this Week</td>
<td>Add Photos of Valentine’s Day Party</td>
<td>Email Board Members Draft of Chinese Auction Flyer</td>
<td>Email Chinese Auction Flyer to Community Chain</td>
<td>Email Chinese Auction Flyer to Community Chain</td>
<td>Update Weekly Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Email</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Email Soup &amp; Bread Flyer to Community Chain</td>
<td>Email Board Members Draft of Chinese Auction Flyer</td>
<td>Email Chinese Auction Flyer to Community Chain</td>
<td>Email Chinese Auction Flyer to Community Chain</td>
<td>Update Weekly Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Canva</strong></td>
<td>Create Soup &amp; Bread Flyer for Next Two Weeks</td>
<td>Create “Save the Date” Flyer for Chinese Auction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Start Chinese Auction Grand Prize Flyer</td>
<td>Update Weekly Activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
So there you have it; all that goes into communication at the Conversation Station!

By following this style guide, we are:

* Building & Strengthening Relationships with Residents and Local Businesses in the Community, and those Surrounding Orwell
* Growing and Engaging Our Audience on Social Media
* Increasing Traffic to Our Website
* Maintaining Relationships with Alumni, Past and Current Volunteers, and Current Members/Parents
* Creating Awareness for Activities, Events, and Fundraisers
* Sharing Our Vision with the Community!

We are SO happy to have you join the team! Best of luck as our communication Liaison!