

Poppe the Panther Gets the Word Out at Portland Community College



Presenters

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I. The Ah-Hah Moment

A history lesson: Other than the odd home basketball game, our mascot wasn't being used. The Panther (who we later learned was named Poppe) spent more time in a plastic bag in some basement closet than outside frolicking and interacting with people. We'd never seen him; didn't know what he looked like. All we knew is that he was a Panther.

Last summer, we had just completed a Web Features meeting. We mused half-heartedly that wouldn't it be great if we put Poppe the Panther to work on Twitter or Facebook. Gabriel set up an account for both in seconds. Updating and getting started took seconds too. We thought it would be a fun way to deliver our school news and events announcements and connect to younger audiences.

II. The Results

Since we started, the Panther has quickly become a mini-celebrity. Poppe is popular among not only students body, but also the staff and faculty, who take it upon themselves to create Poppe videos and characters and photos to share with others.

In a few weeks we had thousands of followers from all over the world on Twitter. As we speak, Poppe is now one of the top-3 in mascot tweeters in the world, surpassed by only Wally the Green Monster (Boston red Sox) and the Ohio State Buckeye. We've been doing this for just three months.

On Facebook, we are now above 600 friends and growing. The interaction has been overwhelming. From new media like the creation of Poppe on Second Life to Poppe interactive pictures, friends and followers are having fun.

Mascot PR in Social Networking

Plus, it takes very little time for a staffer to tweet or Facebook. Since we have material already written – news releases, web features, event announcements – we have built in material he can tweet about.

III. What's the secret?

Poppe doesn't speak as if he is the college; rather he is a proponent of the college who keeps his own personality. He talks, tweets and writes in a character "voice" in similar tone as LOLcats. He's fun. He's hip. He's entertaining. We do this by making engaging and funny videos; and taking pictures of Poppe at events and popular hang-outs. Sky is the limit.

IV. Is there a down side? (hint: Not really)

Not everyone will get your mascot and how he talks. 99-percent will, but a few will voice their concern. For us, it was how he talks and writes. The grumpy ones feel he should write/talk in perfect English. The reality is that to keep the humor, and mimic the way people sometimes write on social networks, Poppe had to adopt the slang and lingo. We used LOLCats because it's huge and hilarious. A natural fit.

In total, we've received three complaints out of about 3,300 followers on Twitter and Facebook.

The biggest challenge will be to get stakeholders on board. Our president, Preston Pulliams (pictured), was on board immediately. We are lucky.

But if leaders are skeptical, simply do a trial of your mascot Tweeting. Get him/her on Facebook and see what happens. Then report back the results to your leaders. You and they may be surprised. We were.

The Future

Bottom line, to keep up, you may have to do things that would seem immature counterintuitive to what you do normally. Social networking is the future of connecting with your community and using the mascot – in conjunction with regular Facebook and Twitter efforts – gains credibility with the younger crowd as well as connect with the general audience.



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We have only scratched the surface of Poppe. When we can build our photo and video database we plan PhotoShop and Poppe video contests, and much more. To publicize programs, new classes, cool special events we can use Poppe. The best thing about using your mascot is that you are not limited.

We are excited!