

**Teacher's Guide to Standing the Test of Time and Technology:  
Principles of Public Relations Management in the Age of Social Media**

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*Lessons from the Arthur W. Page Center for Ethics and Integrity in Public Communication*

**Rationale and Overview**

The social media revolution has changed everything... or has it? This module is designed for students to apply ethical theory and lasting principles of good public relations as our media landscape changes dramatically. The students read an essay about the Page principles and chapters from their introductory communication text, including one on social media. Using knowledge about classic principles of ethics, the students take time to engage an organization via social media before being quizzed on the readings and asked to reflect upon their online experience and how the ethical and public relations principles apply in social media contexts.

This module assumes that the instructor and students have covered classic ethical principles prior to starting the module. While ethical principles are included in most introductory communication and public relations texts, elaborating on these principles in the context of other chapters and activities is more likely to lead to higher-order learning outcomes such as application and evaluation. This module offers an opportunity to build ethical thinking into the analysis, application, and evaluation of social media in public relations. The Page Principles reinforce this goal. The module was designed for courses that use the following text: *Converging Media* by John Pavlik and Shawn McIntosh. This module is adaptable for use with other texts.

**Module Format**

This module can be used in online courses as well as hybrid courses. Students are usually given one week to complete the entire module online using a course management tool. Any combination of face-to-face and online delivery would work depending on how the course is designed and delivered. The only technological requirement is that students must plan to engage organizations online and allow enough time for the organizations to respond online. Students define the nature of “social media” and “engagement” as part of the assignment. Most often,

students elect to use Facebook as their social medium. Instructors may want to encourage students to branch out and try other forms of social media.

### **Learning Objectives**

- Identify classic principles for public relations management
- Identify organizations using social media for public relations
- Engage at least one organization using social media for public relations
- Apply classic principles of ethics to public relations actions observed online
- Evaluate principles of public relations as they apply in social media contexts

### **Key Concepts**

For consistency, the definitions for the key concepts are taken directly from Pavlik & McIntosh (2011, p. 53-55) whose textbook is used in this module.

- golden rule: A basic ethical principle in Judeo-Christian belief, which dominates most Western societies, often cited as ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.’
- golden mean: One of the oldest ethical principles, the Golden Mean was espoused in different forms by Aristotle and Confucius, each of whom said that finding a balance between two extremes is the most ethical way .
- categorical imperative: Immanuel Kant stated that actions should be decided on moral laws that would apply to everyone.
- utilitarianism: This philosophical approach states that what is most ethical is what does the most good for the greatest number of people.
- veil of ignorance: In order to better understand fairness [Twentieth-century philosopher John] Rawls advocates the parties step behind a 'veil of ignorance' in which they are no longer in their usual roles. They must stake out a basic position not knowing what role they would have after it is decided.
- discourse ethics: Noted German social theorist and scholar Jürgen Habermas... says that communication is at the foundation of how we understand the world and that when we try to communicate with others to truly arrive at a shared meaning of an issue, without the use of

coercion of force, that in itself is an ethical act.

### **Material Needed: Readings**

- Chapter 2: Media Literacy and Ethics in the textbook *Converging Media* by John Pavlik & Shawn McIntosh (or any other overview of classic ethical principles and theories).
- *Arthur W. Page: A Man of Vision, Valor, and Values*, by Pamela Jo Brubaker (available [online](#) from the Arthur W. Page Center).
- Chapter 9: Social Media and Web 2.0 in the textbook *Converging Media* by John Pavlik & Shawn McIntosh (or any other overview reading on social media).

### **Module Activities**

The recommendation is that this social media module is open for one week. Students should finish the readings first. Then use most of their time to engage at least one organization online using social media. Their understanding of the readings will help them identify online public relations activities and social media examples. The last portion is a “quiz” with a series of questions that include multiple-choice questions based on the readings as well as five open-ended activity questions.

### **Multiple-choice Questions**

1. Which of the following is NOT one of Page's principles for public relations management?
  - a. Tell the truth.
  - b. Prove it with action.
  - c. A company's true character is expressed by its people.
  - d. Public perception is determined mostly by what the organization says. (CORRECT)
  - e. Manage for tomorrow.
2. According to the text, what did Comcast do to improve customer relationships after being rated low in customer satisfaction and being insulted on sites such as [ComcastMustDie.com](#).
  - a. filed law suits for libel
  - b. outsourced their customer-support functions to better trained technicians in Canada
  - c. monitored and responded to bloggers engaging them in conversation (CORRECT)

- d. hired an actor to play a sleeping Comcast technician in viral YouTube videos
  - e. edited negative information out of references to their organization in Wikipedia
3. According to the text, when Internet users apply folksonomies and tagging to serve as filters, classifiers, and reviewers of information, which social media function are they serving?
- a. conversation
  - b. curation (CORRECT)
  - c. creation
  - d. collaboration
  - e. copyright

### Activity Questions

1. In which social media format did you participate? With which organization did you choose to interact?
2. Name two of Arthur Page's seven principles that your experience illustrates (note: your examples may be positive or negative, meaning they can show how you think the principle was or was not applied well). Describe your experiences and explain how the principles you named apply.
3. Name two ethical principles that apply to your experience. Again, explain how what you observed either upholds these principles or serves as a negative example.
4. Arthur Page worked for AT&T from 1927 to 1955. Do all seven of his principles still stand? Why or why not?
5. How have social media changed the way professional communicators can apply these principles?

### Sample Responses

These answers are from the pilot run. Names have been changed for privacy, but otherwise these answers represent actual responses with only minor editing (e.g., ellipses indicate where longer passages have been shortened). The pilot did not include a question on classic ethical principles.

#### *Sample Response #1*

In what social media format did you participate? With which organization did you choose to interact?

*I participated using Facebook, a very popular social-networking site with over 845 million active users. I interacted with Hawai'i Women in Filmmaking (HWIF), "a creative and safe space where film and media-makers connect, create, mentor, and inspire current and future generations of women to explore and pursue careers in the field of filmmaking. Our mission is to promote greater visibility and public awareness of women works in film, video, television, and related media arts..."*

*Last semester I met HWIF at a booth at the Ka Leo Arts Festival. Last week I decided to "like" their page on Facebook. As an aspiring filmmaker, I am very interested in what they have to resources and opportunities they have to offer film students.*

Name two of Arthur Page's seven principles that your experience illustrates (note: your example may be positive or negative, meaning it can show how you think the principle was or was not applied well). Describe each experience and explain how the principle applies.

*HWIF excellently portrayed "listen to the customer." I posted questions about their future plans and activities on their wall "Are there any women's film festivals coming up in Hawaii? Also is Hawai'i Women in Filmmaking planning any workshops (developing stories/screen writing, directing, camera work, visual effects) for students, particularly college students?"*

*Within an hour they replied through comment "yes, yes and yes, many plans :)" Immediately after I had gotten a notification of their response, Malia, one of the organization's leaders, privately messaged me to explain more about their plans.*

*Malia: “Hi Robin, it's Malia from Hawai'i Women in Filmmaking :) we certainly would like to offer all you asked for, but as we are still a super small organization, we don't have all the resources needed. Yet, it's great to know there is a demand. Would you be interested in helping us with planning all of the above? May not happen 'tomorrow' but soon enough!”*

*Me: “Yes I'm very interested :) Will HWIF come to UH Manoa again?”*

*Malia: “Our 'home' is the arts at marks garage, but i am always on campus, at least almost always : ). am leaving tomorrow for like two weeks, so we may talk once i am back. If u have time, come to our event tonight!!”*

*A day later she accepted my friend request to keep in contact.*

*I communicated to HWIF about what I want out of them/what they currently offer for film students. Malia further explained how although they cannot satisfy my interests now that they are glad to hear that there is a demand and even asked for my potential involvement to make these demands possible. Listening to the customer effectively communicates what the customer wants out of the organization. Not only does it allow the company to know what the public wants, it allows the customer to be more involved in shaping the company. Although they cannot offer the services I want now, I was satisfied when she explained that the organization's limited resources hinder them from fulfilling my requests and that they are working on it.*

*This transitions into “prove it with action.” Within a week, HWIF posted 26 statuses (links and pictures) on their wall. They post 3-5 statuses a day; however, there haven't been posts from Monday, March 19, 2012 to Wednesday, March 21, 2012 (most likely because Malia explained she would be gone for two weeks). A few statuses advertised the events they put on at Marks Garage in Chinatown such as guest speakers, film screenings, and open discussion panels. They post pictures of their events. They also post*

*a variety of links of filmmaking and screenwriting competitions, articles about women representation in the film industry, and resources to receive funding for independent filmmakers. Aside of the links, they host three or four events including monthly meetings and community movie screenings with discussion panels. With their limited resources they are progressively putting on events for female and male filmmakers to attend. If they did not create such events, I would only use the HWIF Facebook page as a link resource to articles and competitions, but would not expect much action out of them like workshops and local film festivals.*

*One way I test if an organization is taking action is comparing what they do with what they say in their mission statement.*

*Through their Facebook page, they bring awareness “of women works in film, video, television, and related media arts,” but I would like to see more activities that “connect, create, mentor, and inspire...women to explore and pursue careers in the field of filmmaking.” After listening to the customer, I hope they will prove to me with action that they can provide these resources and opportunities as they described in their mission statement. Once they attain more resources, I am confident they will provide more of what I want and others want along with reaching their personal goals.*

Arthur Page worked for AT&T from 1927 to 1955. Do the principles still stand? Why or why not?

*Yes, all seven principles still stand for public relations and organizational communication. Since 1955, a boom in the world population and the expansion of companies on a global scale would require strong public relations efforts to keep companies and corporations running. Majority of successful organizations/companies are judged on how they keep the consumer happy and know what they public wants. Organizations/companies have public relations departments to handle these matters. Companies with strong public relationships with their consumers will most likely thrive,*

*for example using the two-way symmetrical model. The public's active participation aids in bettering and running an organization/company. Hiding activities from the public not only makes the company look bad, it can lead a powerful company into shambles.*

*Enron, an energy, commodities, and services company that went bankrupt in 2001, for example did not follow the Page principles and screwed over a lot of shareholders and customers. First off they did not tell the truth about their assets and profits. Withholding such important information from the public hid the fact that these assets and profits were fraudulent. They did not manage for tomorrow in which they did not prepare a backup plan in explaining their bankruptcy when they got caught. People who don't understand business have the common sense enough to understand what they did and how they lied to the public. Pulling stunts like this without having public relations in mind can destroy a company from achieving their goals. If consumers were aware of their underhanded practices they would not have invested so much. Telling the truth could have made them change their ways on how to handle business to prevent losing customers.*

*Their underhanded methods even landed people in jail. Overall they did not conduct public relations as if whole company depended on it and got screwed over when they were found out. Consumers had no say in the matter because they had no idea this was going on. A stronger public relations department would have foreseen the potential troubles Enron would run into and could have prevented the bankruptcy and the damage it caused to so many shareholders. After 46 years, the Enron bankruptcy became a prime example of how straying from the Page principles can lead to the disintegration of a powerful company.*

How have social media changed the way professional communicators can apply these principles?



*Social media allows consumers to feel more involved with an organization/company. It gives a company more of a chance to listen to the customer and an opportunity to conduct public relations as if the whole company depends on it. Social media is not one-way like a book or television. Consumers can comment, reply, share, and like status updates, whether what is posted is favorable or not. They can generate discussion by posting a question and can expect both negative and positive responses. Other people read these comments as well and have the opportunity to debate or discuss with other consumers about a product or issue and the organization can use these comments as a means of listening to their customers. Professionals still need to be wary of telling the truth on social media because more followers or fans are able to see what they post. The immediate responses are an opportunity for the company to be involved in discussion as well. A lot of followers get excited when a big company replies to an individual...*

#### *Sample Response #2*

In what social media format did you participate? With which organization did you choose to interact?

*Naturally I chose the most direct source of social media, and that is Facebook. I interacted with an organization that goes by the name of Sanuk, a Southern California based eco-friendly sandal company that has one of the more active PR social media departments.*

*“Sanuk! What’s your general attitude towards your followers or consumers?” This was my post to them.*

*Sanuk’s response, forgive the goofiness:*

*“You mean the happyheads who eat sleep and breathe Sanuks? The ones that walk around town, up hills, through fields, along beaches, down streets each and everyday with*

*massive smiles on their faces? The ones who's toes tingle with every step? The ones who snap amazing photos of their kicks in action to spread the love? Yeah, we love them.”*

*Their followers are called happy heads and so they went on to explain in their own special way what us the consumers mean to them.*

Name two of Arthur Page's seven principles that your experience illustrates (note: your example may be positive or negative, meaning it can show how you think the principle was or was not applied well). Describe each experience and explain how the principle applies.

*My first principle I chose was Listen to the Customer. I posted to Sanuk's Facebook and asked their general thoughts of the customers they cater too, and I received an immediate response that was in-depth and good-humored, which brings me to my next principle.*

*Second Principle (remain calm and good humored)*

*Sanuk posted a very nice message back to me in under five minutes. It was also clever, flattering and good humored. I would say that both these principles were expressed perfectly by Sanuk and proved that Page's principles still apply.*

Arthur Page worked for AT&T from 1927 to 1955. Do the principles still stand? Why or why not?

*I believe they do. Without these principles, customer service and public relations would be a sham today. For anyone running a major organization or even a mom and pop shop these principles are a must. They ensure your consumer or customer remains in the know about certain things. Also with these principles in action you establish loyalty from the*

*customer. I know still today I'm completely loyal to Nike because of the way they handled a certain situation I had with them.*

How have social media changed the way professional communicators can apply these principles?

*I believe it's more direct, no phone calls or waiting. Also more communication on a larger scale. For example Sanuk's one post about a certain sandal goes out to X amount of people and those people can directly ask a question pertaining to the product or anything in general, and in all likelihood the consumer will receive a detailed response.*

*Another example -- my friend and I made a song about a product. My friend posted a tweet about our song on her own personal Twitter account. That company posted to her Twitter post to simply give recognition and hoping we enjoyed the product. How cool and good does that make a consumer feel that the company actually takes note and cares about your use of their product?*

*I believe these principles are showing their true potential through social media, not to mention the new job market for the people running these pages and responding to questions and keeping consumers updated.*

### *Sample Response #3*

In what social media format did you participate? With which organization did you choose to interact?

*I attempted to contact [Department Store] from their Facebook page. I wrote on their wall "I used to be an employee and was wondering what my best option of transferring stores would be?"*

Name two of Arthur Page's seven principles that your experience illustrates (note: your example may be positive or negative, meaning it can show how you think the principle was or was not applied well). Describe each experience and explain how the principle applies.

*I think the main principle that my experience lacked was "Manage PR like the entire company depends on it." If the entire company depended on it, all companies would have someone on staff for their Facebook, Twitter etc. accounts so that they could provide feedback and help to people that use those forms of communication to contact the company. If I were a potential customer, they would have probably lost me to another company since they do not have someone to respond to customers in these situations.*

*I think that this also goes against the Principle of "Prove it with action." [Department Store] is all about the customer service and they try to help customers in any way possible. I think that if they say this and make it their main mission, they should do a more professional job of running their social media sites like they tell customers they do.*

Arthur Page worked for AT&T from 1927 to 1955. Do the principles still stand? Why or why not?

*I think that the principles are just as relevant today as they were back then. All of them are basic and simple. Telling the truth is always important so as to prove transparency with the customers. Actions still speak louder than words today as they did back then. Listening to the customer, remaining calm and patient as well as conducting PR as if the company depends on it all go hand in hand. Without one of these three, it would be very hard to have the other two. Managing for tomorrow is probably more important these days than back then. Information and trends come and go much more quickly these days so it is always important to be ahead. The true character of the company is still expressed by employees today. I think that employees give an inside look at companies to people who otherwise only know what PR tells them.*

How have social media changed the way professional communicators can apply these principles?

*Social media has made it possible for professional communicators to always be able to communicate with and help customers. By means of online networking, companies have the option of always having someone monitor the social media sites and give feedback. Not all companies do this but many do. Social also makes the organization of information easier. Each store location can have its own page on Facebook or MySpace. This way people do not have to call in and know the store code and they can just go straight to the individual store page. Communicators can then know exactly what store and what made the problem or question arise from the customer in the first place.*

## **References**

- Brubaker, P. J. (2010). Arthur W. Page: A Man of Vision, Valor, and Values. Retrieved from the Page Center website: <http://pagecenter.comm.psu.edu/index.php/about-the-page-center/the-page-principles>
- Pavlik, J. V., & McIntosh, S. (2011). *Converging media: A new introduction to mass communication* (2nd Ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.