CLICK FOR THE CAMPUS STORE:
DEVELOPMENT OF AN ONLINE PUBLIC RELATIONS
CAMPAIGN FOR THE AU CAMPUS STORE

by

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Abstract

College students are constantly checking their social media, spending hours a day on the internet, which creates a great opportunity for businesses to successfully market to this demographic in an inexpensive and effective way. As our society becomes more technology savvy, it is important that the AU Campus Store increase use of technology so as to quickly and easily connect with its target audience of the Ashland University students, who are more likely to buy textbooks on the internet due to lower prices. The goal of this study is to examine what the effect of increasing and updating the Campus Store’s social media would be on the sale of women’s apparel. By implementing social media posts and analyzing their effects on students’ interest in AU apparel, the researcher developed a social media public relations campaign that can continue to positively affect the women’s apparel sales for the Ashland University Campus Store. This was found through the examination of how many “likes” an Instagram picture receives as well as presenting these posts to students and having them fill out a survey on how their buying behaviors were affected by the new social media marketing,
Click for the Campus Store:

Development of an Online Public Relations Campaign for the AU Campus Store

Public relations combines business and creativity to create campaigns that will market an idea in a way that will attract consumers’ attention and get them to use a product or service. It involves creating a personality for the brand that leaves a positive impact on consumers. A public relations campaign that combines marketing and focuses on the value that is given to the consumer provides a business with a plan to make it successful with its target market.

The Ashland University Campus Store sometimes receives a bad reputation because students believe that the prices are too expensive for textbooks. Ashland University’s Campus Store has recently begun to have more competition in selling textbooks as well as university apparel. Online book retailers are able to sell textbooks at more competitive prices than what the Campus Store is able to offer. Since money is a major concern for college students, many tend to look to online retailers first for their textbook needs.

The Campus Store does sell other products that students may need or want. Want to represent your school through wearing apparel? That is a market that the Campus Store serves, but a similar situation to textbook sales is being created with university apparel. Businesses in Ashland, Ohio, most notably Walmart, are now selling their own versions of Ashland University clothing. While their inventory is not an exact replica of the bookstore’s inventory and is not the same high quality, some people are turning to these businesses for their clothing due to lower prices.
How can the Ashland University Campus Store compete with these new competitors while still making a reasonable profit? While it is the internet that is their greatest competitor, there are ways for the Campus Store to use the internet to its advantage. With so many different forms of social media, it has become a prominent way to advertise a business. It is an inexpensive and expeditious way to get information out to consumers. This thesis will provide an analysis of the Campus Store’s current situation and offer a public relations campaign that will improve its business techniques and attract its primary target audience of Ashland University students. The goal of this thesis is to create a campaign that can advance the bookstore’s reputation with the public, specifically with the female members of the AU student body, while also keeping the business profitable, which will in turn keep the bookstore competitive with the new businesses that are selling similar goods. By combining both public relations and marketing strategies to create a campaign for the Ashland University Campus Store that will better advertise its apparel to the female population of undergraduate students at the university, focusing on social media usage, this campaign will improve many business aspects for the store.

The following is the research and work that went into this small public relations campaign. This thesis is separated and organized like a public relations campaign professional in the workforce would do for a company. The chapters are the Statement of Principles, Literature Review, Business Situation, Objectives, Target Audience, Pretest Results, Strategies, Tactics, Budget, Posttest Results, Evaluation, and Limitations and Future Research. With this information, the Campus Store should be able to repeat the steps taken or improve upon them in order to continue towards generating more positive results in sales and image.
Statement of Principles

“The AU (Campus Store) is the one stop for all your campus needs including textbooks, AU clothing and gifts, school, art, and dorm supplies, general reading books, and technology products.”

(Ashland University, 2015)

The Ashland University Campus Store prides itself on being able to provide a wide range of items for its students. The college age men and women do not even need to leave campus in order to get most of the supplies that are a necessity for their courses. It is an easy and quick way to get needed materials, a fact that the Campus Store emphasizes in its marketing.

This public relations campaign will further encourage the reputation of the Campus Store being a one-stop shop for students. Undergraduates usually view the store as a place to purchase textbooks but rarely focus on the other interesting items that are sold there, especially the clothing and accessories. Showing off relatively ignored parts of its product line, emphasizing female accessories, this campaign will bring attention to the Campus Store.

It is important that this research coincide with the goals of the Campus Store. Ms. Jill Hiltner, Merchandise Manager, is in charge of the clothing product lines that are sold. Her hope was to emphasize her new boutique style of products in time for voucher season, a time for Ashland University students to exchange their extra food swipes for coupons to the Campus Store.

This boutique-like area of the store is a new business venture and has not had any marketing attention. This product line will be highlighted for the AU Campus Store through a social media public relations campaign, combined with marketing strategies and tactics.
Literature Review

Almost every college campus has a bookstore. While they began as stores for students to buy their textbooks for university classes, these stores now sell other goods such as university apparel, supplies, and lifestyle items that students may need on a daily basis. As the internet becomes a more popular tool for students to quickly and easily buy these same supplies, often at a cheaper price, the school bookstore needs to use technology to positively affect their sales, instead of letting it be used negatively towards their business. This is where public relations and marketing can be effective tools in the success of the Ashland University bookstore.

Public relations is not a practice that can be easily defined and many times it is confused with marketing. The most recently agreed upon definition promulgated by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) is, “Public Relations helps an organization and its publics to adapt mutually to each other. Public Relations is an organization’s efforts to win the cooperation of groups of people. Public Relations helps organizations effectively interact and communicate with their key publics” (Butterick, 2011, p.4). According to the most current definition, marketing is the “multitude of activities that facilitate exchanges between buyers and sellers, including production, pricing, promotion, distribution, and retailing, which are all focused on providing value for consumers and other stakeholders” (Babin & Harris, 2014, p.7). Multiple studies have been done on how each of these disciplines are used on their own and how they connect with one another. Many university level courses struggle to explain the difference to students and how the two can be used together successfully. It has been found that while each practice can do well on its own, the combination of public relations and marketing is often the most effective method (Moody, 2012). Ernest Barbaric, an instructor at Mount Royal University, said, “There should be
an overarching marketing strategy for any company under which you need to have a digital marketing strategy that plugs in seamlessly so that it integrates with everything that you do. That’s a key point: You can’t have a social media person doing their own thing and the PR department doing another thing, and a communications partner doing a third thing. All of that needs to flow together and it has to be governed by this overarching strategy” (Soat, 2013, p. 49).

Public relations and marketing combined together will create a campaign that will attract students’ attention.

As the field grows and the demand increases, public relations professionals are constantly trying to keep up with the changing markets. In this society, people are constantly finding new ways for how they can best be reached and affected by a message. With this constantly changing field, it is important to consistently be prepared for the next big advancement. In today’s culture, social media are a large aspect of public relations because they cannot be controlled through a marketing campaign. People are free to speak their mind about a product or service and their message, positive or negative, could be seen by thousands of people within minutes. It is the public relations team’s challenge to ensure that any message is caught quickly and turned around to show a positive aspect of the company. Good news will travel fast, but bad news will travel faster. Keeping a good flow of communication to and from the consumer as well as maintaining an equally advantageous relationship with them is important to the success or failure of a company (The PR professional, 2012).

While social media are a great way to get in touch quickly and easily with customers, businesses need to be prepared to adjust to these channels of communication. For example, as of May 2012, Facebook added a fee for a business to get advertisements to pop up while people are roaming around the site, where this used to be a free way to get information out to customers
(Soat, 2013). While this does not mean that it is impossible to get your product out on Facebook now without paying a fee, it is more difficult. Social media are an effective tool for PR professionals and marketers alike in getting information about a product or service into society but it is important that a business not get too comfortable with one form of social media and not pay attention to the other types.

It is important to be creative when using social media so that the business stands out against the millions of websites and posts online. Public relations is about making the brand prominent and ensuring that people see value in the product or service. Many females today are creating pictures that are artsy and fashion forward, posting these photos on their social media sites. To sell clothing and apparel, the Campus Store needs to feed into this trend and show how their products can add a new edge to a woman’s wardrobe.

When a company has very little competition, it has the luxury of doing business its own way and not worrying about how the customer feels they are being treated. Businesses with competitive pressure, like the Ashland University Campus Store, do not have that same luxury. It is important that the Campus Store use a market orientation, or an “organizational culture that embodies the importance of creating value for customers among all employees” (Babin & Harris, 2014, p. 10). This means that the company needs to press excellent customer service in order to keep consumers coming back and to inspire brand loyalty. Most brands are working on using relationship marketing, or a way to create a strong correspondence with customers so that they will come back to shop there again.
Situation

The first step to take when planning a change in the use of social media for a company is making sure that their reputation online matches the mission statement that they have for their business (Soat, 2013). The Ashland University Campus Store focuses on the same mission statement as Ashland University itself. At the store, employees are constantly working to make sure that “extraordinary things happen on ordinary days.” This involves trying to set itself apart from other university stores as well as from other competitive stores in the area.

As sites like Amazon take part of the textbook sales, it is important for the Campus Store to highlight the other items that they sell on campus. Emphasizing that they are a one stop shop located in the Hawkins Conard Student Center for quick shopping needs is an important selling point for the store. The convenience of the store is ideal for students and should be emphasized in marketing.

The AU Campus Store is constantly trying to update their clothing, sticking with the trends and finding items that students will want to buy. Its Under Armour™ items are top of the line and are extremely popular with athletes, as well as the student wanting to work out on campus. Ashland University students often wear school clothing to classes. The students themselves, wearing the products, can be a great marketing tool for the store.

While sales are not struggling, it is important for the Campus Store to continue to update its product lines often so that the consumers’ interest stays piqued. Incorporating a new section of the store, which they are turning into a boutique style shop, is the Campus Store’s newest business exploit. A boutique is “a small store selling fashionable clothes or accessories”
(Boutique, n.d.). Often times a boutique has a more specialized market and is seen as a chic type of store.

The AU Campus Store’s new business venture highlights jewelry and scarves that are currently in style. They are unique pieces that females can wear to complete outfits and make them look up to date. It is currently very fashionable to wear smaller pieces of jewelry in excess. This new line pushes the idea of simple but elegant jewelry. It can all be mixed and matched to create a look that is unique to each consumer but still highlights the line itself.

This is an up and coming section, just in time for the voucher sales for students, which they are hoping will be extremely successful. While “voucher season”, or when students can trade in their meal swipes for gift cards to the Campus Store, is one time of the year where students are attracted to the Campus Store, there are other times that could easily increase sales. With a boutique style shop, this is ideal for Valentine’s Day presents from males. With academic and athletic ceremonies at the end of the school year, as well as Greek Life formals or semi-formals throughout the year, females are looking for accessories that are up-to-date. This creates a wide range of opportunities for the Campus Store to entice students to the store.
Objectives

Every good public relations campaign has clear objectives that the campaign hopes to successfully accomplish. Keeping these objectives simple and easy to measure is an important part of the process because it will help to determine what parts of the campaign should be repeated and what can be adjusted. For this campaign, there are two objectives.

The first objective is to increase awareness. Social media are constantly being used to get the name of brands out to people so as to create a personality for the brand, which attracts more customers. The Ashland University Campus Store is known for being the “Bookstore,” but as it tries to change its image in the minds of students, it would help if students were aware of the changes happening.

It is ideal for a business to establish positive awareness and interest in a product when it is first introduced into the product line of the store. With an increase in awareness of the products being sold and how students could wear these clothing pieces in a stylish way, it will help the Campus Store with the second objective, which is to increase the sales of female clothing.

By using social media to show off new clothing items, this will help to establish the Campus Store’s products into the mind of students as more than just a place to buy their sweats. If ladies view the products as something that they could dress up or down, they will feel that they have more use for it, which in turn will encourage them to buy more products. Increasing the sales of the product can only positively affect the sales of the Campus Store.

These goals are quantitative and measurable. By looking at the objectives, one will be able to see if the campaign were successful. The intentions are clear and analytically based. The
more detailed and restricted the objectives, the easier it is to tell if they have been met. These objectives discernably illustrate how the modifications to the current work of the Campus Store can improve the store’s overall results.
Target Audience/Market

The target audience is one of the most important aspects in determining if a public relations campaign will be successful. Knowing the exact group of people who will benefit from whatever event, service, or good is being offered will help to determine what steps a public relations professional will take to create a strong campaign.

It is imperative to have a strong knowledge of the target audience for a business in order to plan the proper communication techniques for each group. “Gaining a thorough understanding of your primary and secondary audiences, which are directly related to accomplishing your objectives, is the only way that you can formulate successful strategies and tactics” (Wilcox & Reber, 2013, p.40). While defining an audience may seem to be tedious, due to the fact that the audience for most businesses seems to be very obvious, this step cannot be overlooked because it sets up the framework for the rest of the campaign. Knowing what type of consumer a business is trying to reach will help in deciding how to formulate and execute the appropriate message.

From a public relations viewpoint, The Ashland University Campus Store has multiple audiences that it can reach out to in order to sell their products. The four types of markets are the Ashland University student body, potential future Ashland University students, parents of Ashland University students, and members of the Ashland community. Each of these audiences needs to be communicated with differently in order to best address its wants and needs from the Campus Store. As each market is unique in how a message can reach them most effectively, communication with each group will need to be planned out accordingly. Age, economic status, gender, and lifestyle are all factors that need to be analyzed when defining the audience for the Campus Store.
This campaign has a primary target market of the Ashland University student body, specifically the female population. The Ashland University student body serves as the most prominent audience for the AU Campus Store. Due to the convenient location of the store, which is the first floor of the Hawkins-Conard Student Center in the middle of the campus, students are constantly passing by the Campus Store. These students are the people who will be able to use almost all of the services and goods that are offered. They need to buy products like textbooks and school supplies while they also want to buy apparel with their school name on it. This makes this group a target audience for the Campus Store to try to reach with its public relations campaigns.

Marketing professionals use an AIO, which stands for Activities, Interests, and Opinions, approach to analyzing a target market, while public relations professionals often use channeling, or “tapping a group’s attitudes and values in order to structure a message” (Wilcox & Reber, 2013, p. 40). Both approaches begin with a focus on the market’s activities. Approximately 21 percent of the female population is involved in Greek Life on Ashland University’s campus (U.S. News, 2015). Each sorority has two formals each year, and many of the women also attend the fraternity formals. Meetings are held every Sunday in which these women need to dress up in business casual clothing. Sports teams compete in NCAA Division II and many of the teams have winning records every season, with a special pride in the women’s basketball team who won the 2012 National Championship game. Almost every major has a club or organization dedicated to it. Many great causes have organizations on campus also, such as Diversity, Relay for Life, Community Service, and Academic honorariums. Most Ashland University females are involved in more than one group on campus while also maintaining jobs or internships on and off campus.
The second category to analyze is the market’s interests. The most popular majors are education, nursing, and exercise physiology. With females being 51% of the school’s population (U.S. News, 2015), there are females in every major that Ashland University offers. With fashion merchandising being one of the majors on campus, a larger focus is on fashion than in most private universities. As females who are taking the opportunity to go to college, these women are interested in finding success and working hard to achieve it. They are constantly looking for the next big thing, whether it be in the workforce, technology, or fashion.

The third factor to analyze is the market’s opinions. This generation is very open to new technological advances and feels that changing with the times is important to success. They feel that women should be confident in their intelligence, looks, and abilities.

Most commonly, students at Ashland University range from their late teenage years to their early twenties. Since the university is a private institution, the cost of tuition is higher than that of a public university and about 82 percent of the undergraduate population was granted need-based financial aid in 2013 (U.S. News, 2015). This percentage indicates that although the students are paying for a private institution education, the majority are not located on the upper-socioeconomic scale. Through the wide range of opportunities offered, students form an attachment to the university and the relationships that are created through those opportunities.

The student body of Ashland University is very similar in that these students are interested in the small school atmosphere and the prospects that come along with that intimacy. Ashland University students feel a connection to the school not only for the relationships they create with friends and professors alike, but for the majors, teams, and organizations they can become involved with on campus.
In order to determine the state of the Campus Store’s social media connection to the students of Ashland University and yield data to measure the effectiveness of the campaign, a short pretest (See Appendix A) was administered to female undergraduate students in a select sample of business classes. These pretests were not mandatory for the student to fill out if they felt uncomfortable answering the questions, but anonymity was ensured. The following results were found:

- There were 37 participants in the pretest.
- All participants were female.
- There were ten freshmen, ten sophomores, nine juniors, and eight seniors.
- The majority were fashion merchandising majors (23). The other majors included: Business Management; Journalism and Digital Media; Psychology; Biology; Theater; Public Relations; Graphic Design; Marketing; Political Science; and Finance.
- When asked if they were aware that the AU Campus Store had an Instagram, the majority said No (27).
- Of those who said Yes, six said that they followed this Instagram account.
- All participants who said Yes to following the Instagram account were freshmen or sophomores.
- When asked if they were aware that the AU Campus Store had a Facebook, the majority said No (24).
- Of those who said Yes, two said that they followed this account.
- Both participants who said they followed the account were seniors.
It was clear from these results that the AU Campus Store needs to get information regarding products into the student body and make its accounts better known to students on campus. The results indicate that the focus should be on highlighting its Instagram account, as that seems to be the more popular form of social media with the younger classes. As seen in Appendix B Figure 1, Instagram is quickly becoming one of the most popular forms of social media for students attending college. This creates a huge opportunity for the Campus Store to generate a strong social media presence. As many of the students do not currently follow the accounts, it is important to get some attention on the Campus Store’s social media, which will in turn affect sales.
Strategies

It is no longer a question whether a business will use social media to market and communicate its brand, but rather how they will be used. What media are the particular target audience using the most? What will show off the product in the best way possible? Should spokespeople be chosen to influence others to use the product? Who will be the early adopters? Social media are not a simple form of marketing like many people assume due to its accessibility. Every word, image, and punctuation need to be carefully processed and thought through so that potential customers will have the exact feeling that the marketers are trying to put out through their message.

With a well-defined target audience, it is possible to narrow down the media to the ones that are used by this demographic: Instagram and Pinterest. Each of these social websites provides the Campus Store with different opportunities to show off its products in a way that will make it look up-to-date and stylish.

Instagram is one of the most often used social media websites of the Millennial generation. Pictures can be quickly uploaded to show off an event, a new makeup trick, an activity, or a product. People are using Instagram to present themselves in a certain way to the world, creating an online presence and character for themselves.

Instagram will be used to highlight fresh looks that incorporate a product from the Ashland University Campus Store, showing females that their university clothing doesn’t have to be worn only to dress down. If potential customers see new products presented in a way that will inspire their creative thinking when it comes to dressing in style, they are much more likely to stop by the Campus Store to see what products there are that they can incorporate into their own personal look.
Pinterest makes it quick and easy for a picture or link to reach thousands of people in a post that takes about thirty seconds to create. “Pinterest has become a communication mechanism unto itself, allowing its more than 70 million users to access lifestyle-oriented imagery from their favorite brands, designers, celebrities, and other influencers. There are currently more than 30 billion images on Pinterest, and more than 2 million are posted and shared on the site each day, linking to content around the Web…” (Soat, 2015). Pinterest is used by many women, and sometimes men, as a way to relax. Scrolling through a feed with hundreds of pictures that friends have repinned throughout the week seems like there is not much thought involved. This is a site that many females go to when looking for inspiration of any sort, whether that be in decorating an apartment, creating a piece of artwork, cooking a new recipe, or putting together a cool outfit. While scrolling through the pictures may be one way to use the site, it also gives users the ability to click on a picture that interests them and be quickly taken to a website with more information regarding the pin.

Pinterest is an ideal place for the Campus Store to bring attention to its clothing because it can be used to inspire women to come up with new outfit ideas incorporating the products sold at the store. “You can’t just push products…You have to make a lifestyle-brand-type presence even if you’re not a lifestyle brand” (Soat, 2015). If users were interested in the product and clicked on the picture, the potential customer could be easily transported to an online website where Ashland University clothing would be marketed and sold. People could use that link to either buy items online or to look what is in the store in order to plan out their purchases.

Social media are a quick and inexpensive way to spread the news about a product, so long as it is being used correctly. The right consumers have to quickly get the message and spread it in order to get attention to the product or business. These are the early adopters of the
product. At Ashland, this could mean many different people because it is a diverse school with multiple on campus groups and leaders of each group. This campaign focuses on getting a strong assembly of early adopters in the junior age group at Ashland University because they are upperclassman who still have time in their undergraduate careers. They are beginning to take leadership positions on campus within organizations and underclassman see them as role models, meaning that they will want to follow in their footsteps. By focusing on sharing information through Pinterest and Instagram with an emphasis on early adopters, this campaign will be able to improve the lack of attention on the Campus Store’s new products.

**Pinterest**

Fashion is constantly changing. In the past, consumers have had to wait until a new magazine came out each month in order to see the next hot trend. As social media have become more popular, fashion is moving even faster.

As the internet has developed, consumers have searched for ways to compare and find goods all in one place, on one site. Consumers want to know what goods are available and where, before they make a final purchasing decision. Pinterest is the answer.

Pinterest makes it easy for people to find style inspiration, and where to get that style. Users skim through millions of photos, each with a link to a website or blog. Once they find a photo that they are interested in learning more about, all the user has to do is click on the picture to be taken to the original website of the photo.

If the user doesn’t have the time or cash to buy an item that minute, that is where the “Pin” part comes into play. Users can save pieces to look at later by pinning them into different
categories, which creates a sort of online inspiration board. This is great for both the user and the business because consumers can easily find pieces that they are interested in buying.

With a successful website and social media presence, a business is able to attract more consumers. In just a few short years, Pinterest has been making a huge impact on sales for ecommerce as well as brick-and-mortar businesses. It is now the third most popular social media site, following Facebook and Twitter (Joll, 2014).

Having a presence on this site can lead to big sales. Consumers who find a product that they like on Pinterest are 10 percent more likely to follow through with buying the product than those who just found the product on a website (Joll, 2014). It makes connecting with a target market, especially if that market is highly internet savvy, extremely easy.

Making one’s products stand out against others is part of the “art” of Pinterest. Different types of products should be presented in a way that is both interesting and appeals to their target market.

When consumers are searching around Pinterest, it is important that a site for a store be verified, or recognized as a trustworthy seller by Pinterest. This assures the consumer that it is a credible business. Consumers want to know that they can rely on the brand and products to be of high quality.

Businesses are worried about consumers taking part in a new phenomenon called “showrooming,” which is when a consumer shops for items in a store and then buys them online. This is not as big of a threat as businesses believe. It is because of Pinterest that 21% of its users find an item they like online and then go to the store to purchase it (Sevitt & Samuel, 2013).
this reverse showrooming process that makes Pinterest a great vehicle for the Campus Store’s marketing.

When a product is marketed to consumers as if it is exclusive, or a private deal that they were selected to receive, this increases consumer’s interest. It is a typical human reaction to want this product more due to its exclusivity. This could be extra deals offered to loyal Pinterest followers or first looks at new products that are coming into the store.

Keeping the boards updated and interesting is imperative to keeping the consumer dedicated to checking the business’s profile. Posting a new photo every two days keeps consumers coming back frequently. A business’s Pinterest profile should have at least five different boards but no more than 40, because it shouldn’t overwhelm its followers. Pins need to be easily accessible but numerous so posting into different boards makes this process easier. (Joll, 2014)

Consumers should feel as though they need to check the social media of a business daily, which shows the success rate of that business’ social media usage. Pins should entice consumers to want to see the entire store in its brick-and-mortar form. Making sure that consumers understand what differentiates this business from all of the other options should be a priority in the business world. Social media are a great way to show consumers this aspect in a fun and easy way. Catching the consumers’ attention and bringing them in to find out more about the brand is one of the most useful aspects about Pinterest.

Instagram
The AU Campus Store has already created an Instagram account for students to follow. It is under the name of AUBookstore, as it has not been updated yet to show their new store name. The first step to having a strong social media presence on campus is creating the account.

Many of the pictures have only a few “likes,” or students who have seen the photo and marked that they were interested in it, with the average number being three. It is important for the Campus Store to get more followers on this account and to keep people interested, which is part of building up their relationship marketing, or inspiring brand loyalty in customers. There are many ways to go about collecting followers, or getting students to follow the account, in such a small school, that will help to expand the business and make females take note of the new products that are in the store.

A key factor in successfully marketing a brand on Instagram is making sure that the brand stands out just as much, if not more than the products. Consumers should be able to look at an Instagram photo and easily understand what is being sold. The target market should feel some sort of connection to the product that will drive them to take notice of the picture enough to stop and want more information.

Showing the consumer different ways to use the product is ideal in making the post interesting. By showing the accessories styled in different ways, consumers will be able to see that there is a uniqueness to the product, making them believe they can make it their own. A wrist full of bracelets is very stylish currently. Showing an interesting mix of different bangles highlights the product but also encourages the consumer to buy a multitude of bracelets in order to achieve a similar look.
The more creative a photo looks, the more likely people are to stop and take a second notice. By trying different filters, using models, exploring altered angles, or making collages, photos can quickly become more eye catching and will get the product more attention. Artistic photos are very popular on social media right now. Some of the most prevalent photos have beautiful scenery in the background of the photo. While the background may help to make people stop and look at the picture, the product will receive more attention because more people will stop skimming their feed to look at the photo.

An Ashland University Campus Store hashtag would be another way for the business to track the use of its products. Encouraging students to hashtag the same thing when they post a photo of the products that they bought from the store offers a free form of marketing that can lead to a greater awareness of the product. If one student puts up a photo wearing a new Ashland tee shirt, other students may see this post, click on the hashtag and they will be taken to a page where a mass of other products sold in the store are being shown off. This shows the popularity of a brand. Early adopters will latch onto this idea and show how they wear their AU gear. Others will likely follow these fashion leaders.

By reposting some of these photos and tagging AU students in the post, consumers may be more attracted to this idea of putting the hashtag in the caption of their photos. If there is some sort of reward, as in being featured on the AU Campus Store Instagram or even a small coupon, college students will be more likely to participate in the phenomenon. Offering some type of incentive in return for the free marketing will not only encourage consumers to share their brand photos but will keep them happy and wanting to come back to buy more products in the future.
Tactics

With information on how to properly use social media sites to effectively market a product, completing the work is a straight forward process. Combining knowledge of the target market, social medium, and creativity, helped to create posts that garnered students’ attention and interested them in the products being marketed.

It was important to verify that there were no extraneous factors being taken into account when the target market came in contact with the posts. This meant that any models used needed to have a body type that was not controversial and the face should not be shown. This takes away any personal bias about the person featured that could negatively affect the results of the campaign for the product.

Photo 2 (Appendix C) incorporated the idea of showing a person using the product so that consumers could visualize exactly how this product could benefit them. It is a photo of the model from behind, incorporating the idea mentioned above that faces could bring about bias, but still focuses on the product, as she is posed in such a way that it shows off the bracelets on her wrist. The black and white filter adds an old Hollywood glamour feel to the photo which in turns brings an elegant feel to the product. Combining that old fashioned feel with the stark contrast of the red outline, it is more likely to catch a consumer’s eye as they scroll through the Instagram or Pinterest feeds, which are a stream of photos that people have posted in order of the time they were put online.

Photo 4 (Appendix C) highlights the multitude of colors that the AU Campus Store has to offer in these products. It shows how the different types of bracelets can be mixed together to create an original look. While it is similar to the Campus Store’s previous photos of this
merchandise, it uses a person’s hand to show the product so that people can imagine what the jewelry would look like on their arms.

These photos are a great way to market a product because they are eye-catching and follow the guidelines for a successful reputation on social media (Knibbs, 2013). It is especially beneficial for the Campus Store that the photos can be used on multiple social media sites. They do not need to be edited a different way in order to stand out on Instagram as opposed to on Pinterest. The Campus Store can easily connect its social media sites, which would make it so that when they post a picture on one site it will also post on the others, and get the information out in multiple formats in a matter of seconds. This saves both time and money for the business.

The caption can be just as important as the picture to some consumers. It is important that it is short, uses simple language, and gives people the most vital information first. This is a spot for the Campus Store to offer incentives for coming into the store, to encourage students to express their creativity, and to make students feel like they are missing out on a great product if they let the offer go without looking into the product (Waldron, 2014). Putting in unique hashtags, such as #AUTrendsetter, as well as hashtags that are popular on the Ashland University campus could bring in more followers. As the students tap on the hashtag to view the feed of photos that have used it, the Campus Store’s photos would be a part of this feed and could quickly gain more attention from a larger number of people. Following what students are interested in makes it possible for the Campus Store to keep up with the target market. (Knibbs, 2013) Using the tips and tricks that make a brand successful on social media every time a post goes online is important to making each post even more successful than the last.
What makes these photos stand out more than the past Instagram photos used for the Campus Store? They focus on one specific product, narrowing the consumers’ eye to that item. It does not show a multitude of pieces, such as a new shirt, pants, and new shoes. The emphasis is on just the bracelets, so that consumers can see themselves incorporating this look into their own closets, which would make them more likely to consider buying the item.

Another factor that contributes to the success of a post is the timing of when it is put online. The best times to share a post changes from social medium to social medium. Researchers have worked to analyze the best and worst times according to the reach and the activity, two evaluative criteria used by marketers. This means that these are the moments when the most followers are using the social media site and are open to communicating with others.

There are applications that have been made in order to analyze this type of social media activity. Latergramme is one of these applications, and it uses the amount of activity on a post divided by the number of followers of that account to find the busiest time for Instagram posts. As seen in Appendix B Figure 2, two most popular times of the day to post on Instagram are at 2:00 am and 5:00 pm. Posting during one of those two times will bring the most attention to a business. It will give the best possibility for reaching a large portion of the target audience. According to another analysis application called Quicksprout, as shown in Appendix B Figure 3, Instagram posts are the most successful when posted on a Monday, as activity is heightened this day. Sundays are the least successful Instagram post days so the Campus Store should try to avoid posting information on this day.

Appendix B Figure 4 focuses on the best time for businesses to post on Pinterest. The figure shows the best times to post are between 2:00 pm and 4:00 pm on Thursdays or from 1:00 am to 8:00 pm on Saturdays. These are considered to be the times when the greatest number of
consumers are searching on Pinterest, so the Campus Store will be able to get its message across to a wider audience if its posts are put online then as opposed to other less popular times of the day.

In order to get campus leaders to become early adopters of the campaign, the Campus Store could send each leader of an organization a short email explaining the new line and asking them to follow the accounts. Each campus leader that follows the account could be given a coupon to the boutique section of the Campus Store in return for their help as an early adopter of the products. If the accessories are seen on leaders around campus, those that look up to them as role models will be more likely to join the trend. As these early adopters “like” and repin photos, the posts will receive more activity and attention.
Budget

The most challenging part about selling a public relations campaign to a company is presenting the budget. A business professional wants to make sure that they are getting the most they can for what they are spending and wants to be guaranteed success if they invest in an idea. In reality, most public relations campaigns fail because people are exposed to so many different campaigns on a daily basis. As students walk down a hallway at Ashland University, the walls are covered with posters advertising different campaigns. Mailboxes are filled with information on other campaigns and emails are flooded with even more. For a public relations campaign to be successful it has to stand out against all of the other campaigns on campus.

The positive aspect about social media is that they are not an expensive endeavor. Money can be spent by a business so that their advertisements will pop up on consumers’ social media, based on if a person would seem interested in the product due to their past internet searches. If a business is buying advertisements for every social media site, it can add up, but there are also ways to do similar marketing and public relations at no extra cost using those same social media websites.

Free public relations done using social media is easily attainable for Ashland University because of its small college status. Most students are involved in multiple groups on campus and know many people on campus (U.S. News, 2015). This usually means that they are connected to a large variety of people from Ashland University on their social media. By liking a picture, reposting or repinning it, that message is then shared with even more people. For example, if Student One puts a picture on his/her Instagram the student’s friends are exposed to the message. Student Two sees Student One’s post and is inspired by it, making him or her want to “regram” the photo herself, meaning he/she will post it on his or her own social media. Once Student Two
posts that same picture as Student One, the students who she is friends with are then all exposed, possibly doubling the number of people who have been exposed to the message. This is called the “snowballers” effect in marketing. Social media renders this effect faster and more effective.

This can all be accomplished through FREE work on social media, which will leave more of the budget for other important public relations opportunities, such as the other community building activities that the Campus Store puts on or marketing for specific events of the target audience. The only cost for the Campus Store would be paying an employee to keep the social media sites updated. While an extra wage may need to be added or extra hours added onto an employee’s time sheet, this is an efficient use of the budgeted resources and will give the Campus Store more advertising for less money.
Posttest Results

After the development and execution of a campaign comes the evaluation phase of the research. This is the part of the campaign where the researcher can tell if the campaign is successful or not, based on the data collected. A short posttest (Appendix D) was administered to the same number of students as the pretest and in the same classes. This kept the demographics the same as in the pretest, which made it possible to focus on the female students’ opinions of the photos that were developed for the campaign. Anonymity was ensured to each of the participants.

There were a wide range of responses to the posttest. Where some students thought that a photo focused on a certain product, others said that they felt that the product was not highlighted enough to grab their attention. Some students loved the black and white look of a photo, others felt that it made the picture too dark. Personal preference of the products took more of a role in the results than was hoped for when this survey was created. Due to the third question asking participants to explain their answer to a previous question, some of them focused on explaining about their thoughts on the photo while others wrote their opinion of the product. Ambiguous wording also created an issue in understanding the qualitative data of the third question.

Photo 1 (Appendix C) was a photo posted on Instagram by the AU Campus Store before this study began. The mean score on how likely the participants would be to pin or like this photo was a 3.4 on a five-point scale. The mean score of if the participants wanted to purchase the item from looking at the picture was a 3. While 2 participants felt that the contrasting colors were eye catching, approximately 2/3 of the participants said that this photo showed a poor display of the product and made the scarves look outdated.
The average score on how likely the participants would be to pin or like Photo 2 (Appendix C) was a 4 on a 5-point scale. The average score of if the participants wanted to purchase the item from looking at the picture was also 4. While the results did seem to be sporadic, with 5 participants stating that the photo looked too dark, the majority of the participants seemed to respond well to this photo. Many of them indicated that the photo looked up-to-date and made the pieces stand out. They appreciated the fashion forward look of the photo and the mix of the pieces.

The mean score on how likely the participants would be to pin or like Photo 3 (Appendix C) was 3.26 on a 5-point scale. The mean score of if the participants wanted to purchase the item from looking at the picture was a 3.28. There were 2 participants who felt that the display was boring but not a terrible picture. While ½ of the participants felt that there was too much going on in the picture to focus on anything in particular, the other ½ liked that they could see a lot of merchandise in the photo.

The average score on how likely the participants would be to pin or like Photo 4 (Appendix C) was 3.28 on a 5-point scale. The average score of if the participants wanted to purchase the item from looking at the picture was 3.28 on a 5-point scale. This photo did not seem to have as much of a consensus on if this picture was successful. Participants commented that the picture showed off that the products looked better on a model while others said the photo didn’t have a clear focal point.

By using the numerical data as well as the qualitative, open-ended questions, there were multiple ways for the data to be organized and analyzed. Due to the responses being broader than expected, this creates an issue with analyzing whether the new photos were more of a success than the old. From the qualitative responses, it is clear that students seemed to be more
drawn to Photo 2 because of its dynamic impact and focus on fewer products. Students appreciated seeing the products in use but wanted to see more than just one product in a photo. That is a key finding that the Campus Store will need to take into account in future posts.

The quantitative data offers an analysis that does state that Photo 2 was the most liked by the participants in the study. For both Question 1 and Question 2 it had the highest mean score. Compared to Photo 1, which showed similar products, Photo 2 seemed to persuade students to go to the Campus Store and buy the product. Photos 3 and 4 showed off the same merchandise styled in different displays. With Photo 3’s mean score for Question 1 only being .2 behind the mean of Photo 4, these two photos found very similar results. A comparison chart of these mean results is shown in Appendix E.

While there were not huge differences in the responses to the photos taken before this study and the photos taken for the study, Photo 2 and 4 did have slightly higher results. These photos were created using the research done on what kind of photos this target market is most attracted to on social media. By creating more photos similar to these, especially Photo 2, the Campus Store would likely see increased traffic in the store as well as sales.
Evaluation

Public relations campaigns are constantly criticized for their lack of evaluation, meaning that their success or failure is not always easy to decipher. This is where combining public relations and marketing creates a more complete campaign and analysis of what works for the company.

While it is important to know the difference between market research and media evaluation, these two evaluative traits are often connected. Market research is what “measures the impact of a campaign on public opinion” (Butterick, 2011, p. 137). Media evaluation is “the measure of a PR campaign’s physical results which is often the amount and type of coverage the company gained in the media” (Butterick, 2011, p. 137). If combined, these two traits can analyze the effectiveness of a campaign and show which areas could use improvement if the campaign were to be repeated.

For this campaign, the market research was shown through the results of the posttest. The opinions of a section of the public were shared through the survey, particularly in the last question where the participants were asked to explain their answer as to why they would or why they wouldn’t buy the product being shown. This evaluation technique could also be seen in sales results. As “voucher season” ends, the sales number, whether increased from previous sales terms or decreased, can show if the campaign affected the purchasing intent of the students.

Media evaluation can be seen through likes on Instagram and repinning or likes on Pinterest. As the Campus Store uses its social media sites more often using proper techniques, the accounts will gain even more followers. Students will see it as a specialty store or boutique instead of just as a textbook warehouse.
Another way to evaluate a social media campaign is to evaluate each post individually using the four key metrics for social media success. These metrics are conversion, engagement, reach, and activity. Conversion is the goal behind each post that is put on social media, and every post needs to have a goal behind it. The goal of these posts was to create interest and sales for the new boutique products at the AU Campus Store. Engagement is when consumers like or pin the post. This metric was one that was a challenge in this campaign. Reach has two parts to its analysis: the actual reach and the potential reach. The actual reach for this campaign is about 50 people, because that is the estimate for how many people saw the photos. The potential reach is all of the followers of the AU Campus Stores’ social media plus those followers’ followers because there is a chance that the direct followers would repost the photo and then their followers would also be exposed to the campaign. Activity is a metric that is hard to define with this campaign. This is the key to repeated attention from account followers. Showing a wide array of creative photos highlighting the brand and products, posting them frequently would be the activity metric. For this campaign, the activity metric was low because it only included posting each of the two pictures on the two types of social media one time each. These four metrics are ideal for smaller businesses to use to determine the success of a campaign without excessive funds or time.

These photos did not make an immediate change in the online presence that the Campus Store has built up. Although many of the results from the posttest said that students were interested in the products and the photos, they did not follow through with their interest and go view the Campus Store’s accounts. In trying to keep variables low, the campaign struggled to truly make an effect on its target market. If the photos continued and began to show off more
items in the store, students may have a bigger reaction to the change and will more likely become loyal followers to the social media accounts.

After discussing this campaign with the Campus Store employees, they want to continue this social media work, which can help to improve their brand online. The photos of the new boutique area of the store will be continued, using interesting filters, effects, and colors. The Campus Store personnel felt that although this campaign did not yield as positive results as hoped, with continued time and posts, students would become more aware of the changes being made. The results should continue to improve and will likely increase both the market research and media evaluation.
Limitations and Future Research

This is a public relations campaign that can be broadened and used multiple times with just a few changes to the format. As the campus store expands the product assortment, similar steps can be taken in order to highlight these new products and to pull the consumers’ attention in towards them.

The first limitation of this research was time. It was important to keep the variables to a minimum because there was a time constraint to test them. Given more time, it would be interesting to see exactly what types of posts the target market is most likely to respond to in a positive manner, whether it be just focused on the product or showing off a person and how they use that product.

For future research, it would be ideal to study this topic over a two year long period, giving comparative data to different points in the semesters. This would enable the Campus Store to follow a specific class of students, assess their reactions, and determine how sales would improve based on catering to those students’ interests. With more time, it would be easier to track sales and see if more people would catch on to the campaign as it continued.

The second limitation is that it is impossible in this sort of study to completely separate each variable. While students may shop more in the Campus Store after a campaign, it could be due to the time of the year. There are many other variables that factor into the number of likes and the sales of a product. It would be interesting to find which of these variables has the most effect on consumers.
The third limitation was the bias of the sampling method. It would be ideal to get a sample that was not convenience and more random. This would get a larger array of majors and opinions on the questions and would lead to a more reliable sample.

Researchers may test what types of photos and products students are most interested in, which would enable the Campus Store to provide goods that would be easily marketed. Focusing on who the opinion leaders are for this type of product and why those people are seen as trend setters would make another variable available to the Campus Store. This would enable them to understand what students should be contacted in order to use a type of stealth marketing. Offering more incentives or different times of the year for students to buy vouchers may help to improve these sales and see exactly what students would want to buy if they feel that money is not a factor holding them back.
Conclusion

Public relations campaigns are rarely successful the first time they are introduced to the public. It often takes people time to catch on to a campaign, especially one focusing on a change in a business. Students have a belief that a bookstore is exactly that name, a store for books. The AU Campus Store is working on changing that image on the Ashland University campus. With a focus on the idea of the “one stop shop” for most student wants or needs, the Campus Store is taking that one step further with offering new boutique-like pieces.

With a strong social media presence, the Campus Store will be able to easily reach its main target audience of the Ashland University students. Through improving its Instagram presence with more eye catching photos and implementing hashtags, students will be more likely to stumble upon the site or actually reach out to try to follow this account. As Pinterest is a very new medium for the store, it is important that they build up a base of followers that are opinion leaders on campus, such as presidents, organization frontrunners, and influential upperclassmen. These will be the early adopters and are role models to younger students, which will enable them to persuade other students to follow with the trend.

The Campus Store is a small business with a wealth of opportunities for growth. By focusing on specific target markets at specific “seasons” of the year, such as formal dances, athletics, holidays, and ceremonies, the Campus Store can use their social media and this research to create campaigns that it will be hard for students to ignore. All it takes is a “Click!” and the student will be looking at the same brand online that the AU Campus Store shows in its brick-and-mortar business! Click for the Campus Store and Hurry! These products will go fast!
References


Appendix A

AU Campus Store Pretest

1. What is your class?
   
   Freshman    Sophomore    Junior    Senior

2. What is your major?
   
   ____________________________

3. A. Are you aware that the AU Campus Store has an Instagram?
   
   Yes     No

   B. If yes, do you follow the account?
   
   Yes     No

4. A. Are you aware that the AU Campus Store has a Facebook?
   
   Yes     No

   B. If yes, do you follow the account?
   
   Yes     No
Figure 1. Instagram is quickly gaining popularity in teenagers as the preferred social medium.

The Best Times, On Average, To Post On Instagram

Instagram scheduling service Latergramme looked at over 61,000 posts to determine when they got the best "engagement" – meaning "likes" and comments divided by a user's number of followers. This chart shows the most successful times on average: 2:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.

![Graph](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/25/get-instagram-likes_n_6751614.html)

*Hours listed are Eastern Standard Time.*

*Source: Latergramme*

*Figure 2. There are specific times of the day where a post will receive the most activity from other users.*

Figure 3. Social media can be analyzed by the best times of the day as well as the best days of the week to post.

Figure 4. Pinterest can be very useful for marketing a business, if the brand uses its features to its fullest potential.

Photo 1. One of the first pictures posted on social media of the new boutique style products at the AU Campus Store.
Photo 2. An Ashland University student models the new scarf and bracelets from the boutique section of the Campus Store.
Photo 3. A photo posted on the AUBookstore Instagram account of the accessories in the boutique area of the store.
Photo 4. An Ashland University student mixes a few of the new bracelets from the AU Campus Store’s new boutique collections.
Appendix D

AU Campus Store Post Test

1. Please evaluate the effectiveness of each photo on a five point scale, with five being the most effective. Ask yourself if you would stop to look at and like this photo on Instagram or pin it on Pinterest?
   
   a. Photo One:  1  2  3  4  5
   b. Photo Two:  1  2  3  4  5
   c. Photo Three:  1  2  3  4  5
   d. Photo Four:  1  2  3  4  5

2. Does this photo influence your purchasing intent? In other words, do you want to buy the product shown?
   
   a. Photo One:  1  2  3  4  5
   b. Photo Two:  1  2  3  4  5
   c. Photo Three:  1  2  3  4  5
   d. Photo Four:  1  2  3  4  5

3. Explain your answer to Question 2.
   
   a.  
   b.  
   c.  
   d.  

50
Appendix E

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Author Biography

Alexis Berdine is excited to be graduating in May 2015 with a major in Fashion Merchandising and a minor in Public Relations. Alexis has been highly involved on the AU campus throughout her time in college. She has been a member of the Honors Society for four years and has been on the Dean’s List every semester of her career. She has been inducted into many academic honorariums including Alpha Lambda Delta, Delta Mu Delta, Kappa Omicron Nu, Lambda Pi Eta, Order of Omega, and Rho Lambda. She has also been nominated for two campus awards including Outstanding Campus Leader and Outstanding Female Undergraduate. She is honored to be a part of the Who’s Who Among American College Students for 2015 and to have participated in the College of Arts and Sciences Scholar program. One of her greatest academic memories in college was her study abroad program at the Paris Fashion Institute. In her spare time, Alexis has taken many positions in Delta Zeta sorority, including President for 2014, and has participated on the cheerleading squad and dance team, where she was captain of both her senior year. She looks forward to the next step of her journey where she will be working for Jared the Galleria of Jewelry.