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CoSIDA Teleconference:
Be Your Own Media... In Real Time

MELANIE MORAN CHRIS SYME

SHELLY POE: Hello, everybody. Happy Wednesday. This is Shelly Poe at the Ohio State University Athletics Communications Office. Thanks for joining us for today's continuing education membership call, Be Your Own Media -- In Realtime. I just want to say in conjunction with our corporate partners, TRZ Communications and with ASAP Sports, CoSIDA is very happy to bring the information call to you.

Today's audio stream and phone conference call is provided by TRZ Communications, the official CoSIDA conference provider. And ASAP Sports, CoSIDA's official transcript provider, will be providing a realtime webscript of the conference call. You can follow the live transcript at ASAPsports.com/webscripts/CoSIDA. All of this information is available on the cosida.com website, and that's where we will archive the audio and the webscripts following the call.

Barb Kowal, our outstanding director of external affairs, is featuring a Cover It Live blog accompanying today's call. If you have questions at any time, go there and send in the questions, and she will forward that to our presenters. Or you can e-mail her at barbkowal@cosida.com.

Our presenters will be mentioning different downloads as they go through their presentation. You can see those also at cosida.com if you go to the link for today's membership call.

I'm really excited. We have two outstanding experts that are going to share with us

today. The first is Melanie Moran, who is Associate Director of the Vanderbilt University News Service. She is the deputy director of that. She oversees all web and social media presence for Vanderbilt University. She plans and implements public relations efforts for Vanderbilt's Peabody College of Education and Human Development, also the Department of Psychology and the College of Arts and Sciences.

Before she joined the Vanderbilt staff, she worked for several years with the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, managing media relations there. And also served as a Governor -- as assistant to the Governor of Tennessee for communications. She holds a Master's degree in public administration from Indiana University and got her Bachelor's degree in political science at Penn State.

Our other presenter is Chris Syme. Many of you know her as the chair of our CoSIDA New Media and Technology Committee. She's a former communications associate at Montana State University and also Eastern Washington University. She has more than 20 years experience in communications and is currently running a successful consulting business in Bozeman, Montana. You can find out more about that at CKSyme.org.

She specializes in realtime media communications, reputation, brand building, and media training. She was the engineer of a successful reputation recovery effort at Montana State that has been featured in Athletic Management magazine and is also a frequent contributor to Social Media Today, Montanabusiness.com and writes a blog followed by many in college athletics. She has presented at several of our CoSIDA national conventions. She and her husband live in Bozeman, Montana, and farm in northeast Montana.

I didn't know till yesterday she is a former college student-athlete. She played both volleyball and tennis, which I was kind of impressed with that. We really appreciate them sharing their expertise with us today, and I believe we will start with Melanie, who will give us a little information



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about very interesting decision that they made at Vanderbilt.

MELANIE MORAN: Great. Thank you. Thank you all for listening today.

What I'm going to talk about today is our recent announcement of our new football coach, James Franklin, and how we went about that.

As you heard, I'm in the university side of the house when it comes to communications, and we were involved very heavily and worked absolutely hand in glove with athletics communications on this announcement. And I'm hoping that, as I go through kind of what we did, you can listen for lessons learned that you can take back to your universities about how the athletics office and the university can work together on big announcements and big news for the institution.

So just strategically, why was the announcement of the new football coach so important to Vanderbilt? Over the last seven or so years, the university's gone through a lot of changes, all with the goal of elevating our stature among our peers, from going after bigger research grants and getting them to attracting top faculty to attracting top students. So in that pursuit of excellence, the time had come for us to apply that to football.

So the messages that we were pursuing here is we're changing the culture of Vanderbilt football. The university is excelling across the board, and the time has come for us to excel in football. But we needed to really re-engage our fans after the last season and after the last couple seasons.

And also to communicate really to everyone out there that this initiative to change the culture of Vanderbilt football was not just an athletics initiative. It had very much the top leadership of our Chancellor Nicholas Zeppos, our Vice Chancellor David Williams, and across the board, it was an institutional priority. As such, my office was heavily involved.

Tactically, we wanted to make sure that this was communicated not just via traditional athletics channels, but through all the channels we use to communicate university news to our students, to our faculty, staff, alumni, parents, and prospective students because really in so many ways our athletics programs are the face of the university. They are what keep Vanderbilt on people's minds throughout the year, and we wanted to be sure that this message got out to all those audiences.

Because it was an institutional priority, that's where the decision came that that first announcement would come from the university rather than from our athletics office. It would come first from us, followed up absolutely immediately with communication from our athletics office to all of their audiences.

So in talking about how we planned this, we knew that there was so much chatter out there about our coaching searches, there is really with any head coach search. And given all the players involved, we knew that it would be pretty unlikely that we would break the news. We knew it would probably leak out there somewhere, and we wouldn't be the ones really bringing this story. So we wanted to see how could we have exclusive content? How could we generate interest? And how could we really connect directly with our fans rather than relying with our traditional means of press releases and press conferences to get the word out?

So given all that, we made the decision to make the very first announcement of the coach's identity on the university's Facebook page. That would be followed up immediately with the press release, with announcements on athletics, but we went first to Facebook because that's where our fans are. That's where they were discussing this issue, and we wanted them to get the word first.

So we put that plan in place, and we worked hand in glove again with athletics. So there weren't really any turf issues there. We were all on the same team and on board with this approach. All of our efforts were driven to one website that was set up specifically for Coach Franklin that lived on the main Vanderbilt web presence. It's called Vanderbilt.edu/coach, and that's still a live website.

Again, we wanted a central resource that really played up the importance of this announcement. All of this was supported by the university's video team. We have a really topnotch video team. Our photography staff is excellent, and also our web team. Working closely with all of our counterparts in athletics to get this done.

After the initial push, we got all of that out there. And then, of course, the people who are on our Facebook page are interested in football, but then they're interested in other things about the university. So the ongoing dialogue and the day-to-day announcements we pulled back from, and athletics then took that over. But the

university's involvement didn't end after the main announcement. We followed up with videos and tweets, photos, more information on Facebook.

Just recently, we did a behind the scenes video of what went on in our signing day war room. If you haven't seen that, check it out, it's [YouTube.com/Vanderbilt](https://www.youtube.com/Vanderbilt). What we're hearing it's kind of gone a little bit viral. We're hearing that people haven't seen that side of signing day. We were able to do that because we were partnering university with athletics.

All of this comes back, of course, to relationships and how are we able to make this happen? How are we able to cross silos and work together? The university had partner -- university communications had partnered closely with athletics communications in 2008 when we went to a Bowl game for the first time since 1982. And because that was, again, a university-wide important event and it was something that we hadn't done in a long time, we needed to pull all those resources together. So the need and needing to have video experts, have photography experts, have web experts contribute to an athletics event helped drive some of these partnerships.

And the really positive experience that we all had with that and getting to know one another really well laid the groundwork for what we did with the coach announcement.

The other thing, lesson learned from this is just stepping back, when you're looking out across your campus and want to go do something new, saying who is doing this really well here at our institution? In this case, our athletics office had an excellent social media presence already in place for years. They do a really great job with blogging, and they're heavily involved in Twitter. So we were all speaking the same language, and we could learn from their successes, and they also could learn from ours.

And we're trying to, again, through those relationships to step back and say we all have really overlapping audiences. The people that are interested in coming to Vanderbilt as a student are also going to be interested in our football and basketball teams. So how can we reach those different audiences with our different channels?

Another example of looking for who's doing what well at the institution happened just last week. Different people across campus are interested in using Google ads to promote their Master's programs. Athletics is interested in using them to sell tickets and raise awareness. And it

turns out at Vanderbilt the expertise in Google ads right now is at our medical center. So the head of marketing for the medical center put together a meeting for our athletics communications director, for me, for our school of business, and we all got around the table and learned from them what they're doing well and also how we could band together to strategically use these ads.

I thought that was just a great example. You don't usually -- you wouldn't usually see sports marketing sitting with the same people who are marketing surgeries, but it happened, and everyone agreed that it worked out really well because the med center folks were talking about what they're expert at. They're sharing with us, and we can share what we are expert at with them.

Another piece I wanted to highlight for you all is the idea of integrating your content across all the different platforms that are available to you. So the new rule of the day is the content that we produce is super fluid, and the more fluid it is, the better. And by that I mean, the profiles that you write about your athletes or about your school don't just live in your media guide anymore or even just on your website. But they have the potential to tell your university's story across all the different channels, across the university's website, letters to parents, on the alumni website and publications on all the social media platforms.

So taking a step back and looking at your content as a standalone and thinking, not what can I write for my website, but what can I write that will tell this program's story well, or what video can I create that will tell this program's story well? And who are all the different people that are interested in it, and where are those people?

So the idea of thinking of the content as the driver rather than where it lives and looking for opportunities to partner with other people on campus to get your content out, I think, is a really fantastic opportunity that has just presented itself really in the last couple of years because of the advance in our communication tools.

The last piece I wanted to hit on before I turn it over to Chris and before we start taking questions is with this sort of two-way communication that we experienced using Facebook and social media and that, I think, Chris is going to talk about a little bit more. When you're opening yourself up to this two-way communication, as you all probably know, it's not always going to be pretty, and it might get a little

bit ugly.

You have to decide ahead of time what you're willing to allow and what you aren't. In our case, when we first announced on Facebook, the comments were overwhelmingly negative, and we had a sense that that might happen, but we have a policy already in place where we don't censor comments unless they're using hate speech or vulgarity. So we let it ride.

Once we started putting more about the coach up there and they saw photos of him and his family and the video of the press conference, the conversation changed. But it was a little hairy there for a little while. So just be prepared, when you open up the door, that it won't always be pretty, but it is worth it for that engagement with your fans.

And that's all I have for right now.

SHELLY POE: Those are some great points. Thank you very much. We'll now turn to Chris Syme.

CHRIS SYME: Thanks, Shelly. Thanks, Melanie. I was really excited to hear that story. I get so excited when I hear stories of collaboration across campus because, as an SID for many years, one of the things that I'm always concerned about is our willingness to use all the tools on campus to get our story told. That's a great story. I was so glad to hear Melanie talk about collaboration across campus, and I'm glad it's working. That's a lesson for us all, I think.

I wanted to quickly thank CoSIDA for putting this on, especially the work of Barb Kowal and Shelly Poe. Also, my cohorts on the New Media Committee who have provided a lot of feedback for me so that we kind of got a handle on what we wanted to talk about a little bit today.

I did put some reference information up, or Barb did. There's a slide deck there. On slide share, also on PDF form. There's a lot of bonus content in that, and what I mean by that, not necessarily going to cover all that information today because we wanted to leave a lot of time for people to ask questions. But I will do a cursory look at some of that stuff.

Also wanted to talk about a couple of things that have happened just recently that are very exciting for sports communicators. One is the Vanderbilt announcement of their football coach on Facebook. What an exciting thing that is to me to want that fan engagement. I know a lot of us, especially those of us that are older and have been in SID for a while, we're not as concerned about the fans necessarily sometimes as we are about

the media. I think that's a really good lesson for us all.

The other thing is something that just happened recently, and I think Barb has a link there to the news article that was put out there yesterday by Chris Fried from Miami about the social media day they're going to do on Friday. If you haven't read this or heard about it, I would really suggest you take a look at this news story. It's a really exciting thing that Miami is doing and shutting down their website for a day and communicating strictly with their fans via social media.

I exchanged a couple of e-mails with Chris, and he's really excited about this. It would be a good idea for us to all watch. I know he's going to do some blogging about this postmortem, so to speak, and that's a really neat thing.

For the main part of what I'm going to talk about today, it's more about kind of the -- not the negative side of social media necessarily, but the need for us to be really prepared in realtime for what comes at us. And I learned this lesson very powerfully in my first year at Montana State.

I had done my graduate work in crisis management before I came to Montana State, and if you can see, if you've got the PDF in front of you there, get access to it, there's a timeline on the third page there, and you can kind of get an idea of how this all brewed.

There was a series of incidents that happened that were very unfortunate that created kind of what I would call a perfect storm. And what I mean by that is that Bozeman, Montana, is a small, rural town. It's not a large city. And the university is really the only show in town. And so for the -- these kinds of events to happen in Bozeman, it was pretty devastating to the reputation not only of the athletic department but also to the university.

And one of the first things that we did was we realized that we had a challenge on our hands that could either sink us or could send us up higher. We decided to try and get a strategy going that would actually make us stronger and not get panicky about it. I'm going to come back to that.

Before I talk about some of the things we did at Montana State, I'd like to just give a real short primer on realtime communications because that might be something that a lot of you are not familiar with yet. And this will apply to you if you're a one-man shop or if you're a big dog, like the Ohio

State University. These concepts are all the same for everybody.

And I put down some principles in the slide deck that I put up. And these are not absolute truths in that they're never going to change, but they are kind of principles that we need to understand that the culture of communications is operating with right now.

And the first one is that the internet has fundamentally changed the pace of news. It compresses the timeline, and it rewards those who are speedy. There's a little bell curve on that slide there that came out of David Meerman Scott's book, *Realtime Marketing and PR*. You notice there's a point there called breaking news, and those people that get in at that point on that bell curve are the people that are seen as the source of news.

And one thing I really liked about what he had to say is -- that relates to principle two, is that news leaders that get in at that breaking news point have several decisive advantages. And he documented these as data, and I thought that they were very interesting. The one being that early adopters build a larger following than those that come into the party late was particularly interesting to me. The person who comes in first is always seen as the source of the news thread. Whether you're the department or not it doesn't matter. It's the person who comes in first.

It's interesting to me also that there was a sentiment value there in that, and what I mean by that is that the person who comes in first also is seen as more caring. And I'm not sure why that is, but that's also the way it is.

And principle three kind of related a little bit more to us in athletics, and that's that your fan base sets the pace of news. You can't control the speed anymore. And I know some of us are out there kind of wincing at that and shaking our heads, but it is, unfortunately, true that the speed of news is no longer in our control. And so as athletics communicators, I think one of the things that's really important for us to understand is to embrace that and not to get abrasive about it because it's going to work to our advantage. We're going to be seen as a lot more valuable to our fans if we can adopt some of these realtime mindsets.

And all these three principles actually give birth to the fourth principle, which is kind of bedrock, whether it's realtime or regular communication, and that's that you have to have a policy. And somebody who -- and when I say the word director, I don't necessarily mean that's an

appointed or job description kind of a thing, but there has to be a person somewhere in your department that has a passion, for communications and for realtime, because otherwise you're going to kind of get left in the dust. And we'll talk about that.

When you are formulating a communications policy, you have to take social media into the mix. You just can't have a communications policy without social media. And notice in the slide that I have there on policy guidelines -- this came from a new book by Jay Baer and Amber Naslund called *The Now Revolution* -- these four determinants that you're going to have to look at before you have any kind of policy.

What's your existing culture? What is the culture that you're trying to create? What's your risk tolerance? I think that's really important. I know I had somebody send me an e-mail the other day when I said something about how you have to be engaged on message boards, and someone sent me an e-mail saying their AD had told them that they cannot go on the message boards. And I thought that was so interesting because they're allowing a whole very invested set of people to set the message, and they're not getting involved in it.

So some of this is not comfortable, but you really have to determine what's comfortable for you. Also, I think the other thing that's really important is your level of social media savvy that you have on your staff is really going to determine what you're going to do.

I did talk about some cultural road blocks there, and the one that I really want to just point out is that we -- some of us have a fear of losing control of our message. That's one of the things that social media concerns us about the most. And actually, you don't have control over your message. You might think that you do, but you really don't. And I think the determinant that we do have is how we present ourselves and how we act, and if those two are equal to each other, then that is a message that we have control over. The rest of it is just a facade. I mean, we can look at what we want people to believe about us, but if we're not acting accordingly in the communications channels, then it doesn't really matter what we say.

There's a little acronym there also that I use for all my strategy planning, and that's Get A-PIE, make sure that you get buy-in, and you assess the situation first, you plan. I'm going to

kind of skip over this because that acronym will become apparent when I just talk to you a little bit about the specifics of what we did at MSU.

And there's a slide there also on listening levels, and I know Melanie and I were chatting before the call a little bit about tools we use to listen and assess the social media. And I made the comment to her that I'm the queen of free because I don't -- I think that there's enough really good tools out there for listening and assessing your brand and how people are thinking about you without really having to pay for any. There's a list in the level one there of tools that are free that you can use and set up to see what people are saying about you.

And just a little bit about spotting fires out there in media. You need to understand when some of your crucial times are. Obviously, Melanie was talking about the announcement of the new football coach. That's huge. To those of us that have football in our institution, we know how huge that is when you're going to announce a new coach. That's a crucial time to be listening.

Weekends are tough, but I put a couple of things in the slide here. We had a couple of basketball players last year that got involved in an altercation downtown after hours on a weekend, and there happened to be a reporter in the downtown area that immediately got on the blog and twittered and talked about some hearsay. And it was interesting because this made it over to our message, fan message board, and the reporter kind of got called out by some of the people on the fan message board for posting hearsay.

And I'm only saying that because I think that culture was there on our message board because we had helped them formulate that over the last five years. And I'll talk a bit about that.

Make sure that you know what your role is when a fire comes up. Your role isn't to put in your two cents worth. In social media, that's really easy to do, but I think you're going to get into trouble. The other thing is, when you do post during a reputation incident online, make sure that you post on your own accord, even if you're representing the university. Every time you say we, you're talking about the department, and that can get you into a little bit of trouble, I think.

But I wanted to talk real briefly here, lastly, about our road to recovery because I think that it was unique. One of the first things that we did after we had incidents, these incidents back in 2006 and 2007, was the athletic director asked me to take a look at what people were saying out

there. I think that was a very smart thing for him to do.

I think one of the things that helped us in our recovery -- and I'm going to say this up front because it's really important -- is good leadership. We had good leadership at that time in the athletic director's office, and that was really important because he was able to say to me, I know this is your area of expertise. Can you go ahead and take care of this?

So one of the first things and most important things that we did right away was we conducted a sentiment analysis on our fan message board. Up to that time, we had not been on the fan message board at all. People looked at it once in a while, but nobody really liked it because, you know, they didn't talk well of us on there. So one of the first things I decided that we had to do was we had to get on there. We had to be part of the community.

So I got a name and got on there and started answering questions that people had about what we could answer legally and some of the things. I'm making sure that people knew that we were on top of it. But what I did was I logged every single post that was on that message board for a whole month's worth that logged whether the post was positive, whether it was negative, and whether it was neutral. And we logged the posts of individual people so that we could find out who was actually lobbing bombs, as I call it, and who was just engaging in constructive criticism.

And some of it was very angry, but it was still constructive. And that allowed us to understand who we needed to answer and who we didn't need to answer because the people that are lobbing bombs, after a while the rest of the message board just got tired of listening to them and told them to shut up basically.

So one of the things that we did that we found out from that that is key in our recovery was we found out that, once we got on the message board and started to answer people's concerns, that the percentage of negative comments on the board went down substantially. And I think that that -- that substantiates a best practice in reputation recovery that, when you become a part of the community, the community is more open to your trouble, and I think that was very important.

Some of the other things that we did there under realtime tactics that I talked about is that we developed some realtime messaging points that

we were all able to talk about that were okayed by legal on campus because there was going to be a lawsuit involved in this particular firing. We knew that we had to be real careful about what we said.

We put together a team of people in athletics that were from student services, compliance, marketing, communicators, all the different people. We met very regularly and talked about our strengths, our opportunities, and our threats, just an old fashioned slide analysis. And we did find out that our biggest strength, which was our heavily invested fan base, was also going to be our biggest challenge. And we knew that, in order to win them back, we were going to have to get involved in the places that they were at at that time.

And our recovery is pretty well-documented in Athletic Management magazine. I think Barb -- I haven't been watching the blog, so I'm not sure if Barb put that up or not. I won't go into that and read that or talk about specifics there because I think the magazine did a pretty good job, and I also outlined some on the slides.

But what I did want to do before I handed it back to Shelly to field some questions is that I think the most important takeaway that I found from our reputation recovery effort at Montana State was that we had, number one, good leadership, and number two, we had a policy in place. And that helped us and guided us.

And I think, when I did my research at Eastern Washington University, I surveyed all of the NCAA schools on whether or not they had had crisis policies in place. Only 13 percent of the institutions had a policy in place at that time, and that was kind of scary to me. And there was a higher percentage that had to defer to campus crisis policies, but still I think it's worth schooling yourself a little bit and taking a look at that because, honestly, whether you like it or not, the realtime communication something that we're all going to have to live with, and I think it's good for us to embrace it and to go with the flow sort of.

And I think with that, I'll go ahead and give it back to Shelly.

SHELLY POE: Sure. Thank you very much. We've got a lot of questions coming in on the cover at live blog. So I'll go ahead and start with some of those.

When you have media that simply cut, copy, and paste your press releases, how do you get them engaged in your social media coverage?

I don't know which one of you would be best to address that.

CHRIS SYME: Boy, that's a good question. This is Chris. We have a really good media corps here in Bozeman for the side of town. They are very social, media savvy people. And we do a lot of engaging with them back and forth. As a matter of fact, I remember some press conferences when I would look across the room, and one guy would have his phone out, and I'd have my phone out, and we were having a race to see who was going to put what up on Twitter first.

And I think one of the things that will help that is to Foster relationships with media people that aren't just based on press releases, and it might mean complimenting people on stories that they write. It might mean pitching them story ideas. You know, I think relationships is what social media is all about, and I think, if you build those relationships, it will come.

SHELLY POE: It sounds like you're saying a good dialogue. That's a good way to start a dialogue with them is through that.

MELANIE MORAN: I agree. That's something that, Chris, you've hit on really well. All of these tools, yes, they are in a way microphones that allow us to tell our message, but most importantly, they are speakers that let us hear what people have to say.

One of the things I love about social media is, as a communicator, you're no longer just completely limited to talking about or listening to stories that are absolutely just about your university, but you can give shout-outs to good things that are going on at other schools by the media.

And secondly, to engage the media using social media and get them away from just cutting and pasting press releases is putting information about the bonus content you have on your social media presences in those press releases. You know they're already reading the press releases. So put in there, see a photo gallery of this event on Flickr or watch the video of this press conference on our YouTube site. So just integrating those messages in every place will help drive people to those channels.

SHELLY POE: Melanie mentioned a shout-out. We did get a note from Andy Seeley at Minnesota, and they also made the announcement of their new football head coach via Facebook and Twitter, and they said it went well and certainly

increased their number of followers.

One thing you had mentioned, Melanie, in terms of collaborative effort between university, athletics, when you made the announcement, but then you said you kind of turned over the maintenance of the story to athletics. Can you talk about how that decision was made, and I think in some places there's hesitance of people as to who was going to take over the story long term.

MELANIE MORAN: When we sat down and made a plan of how the story is going to roll out, we did say the university is going to lead this because this ties in with our strategy that this is a Vanderbilt-wide announcement.

But the audience that listens to all Vanderbilt news are interested in things in addition to athletics. We wanted to get the news out there. Here's our new head coach. Here's where you can learn about him. Here are some events he's going to be at. And the day to day, that would continue. No matter what is going on, even without a coach announcement, there will be daily -- or weekly news this time of year about football. Then that goes back to athletics, where the audiences there are just looking primarily for that information.

So it was a very natural development of who would manage what, and it worked out really well.

SHELLY POE: You feel comfortable, you would use that same kind of strategy again then?

MELANIE MORAN: Yes, I believe that we would.

And I wanted to touch on an excellent point that Chris made about engaging in the message boards as a person rather than just as the university. That is really critical, and when things start getting ugly, if you put your name out there, it can really help turn the tide with the negative comments.

And we saw that even with Coach Franklin, when things were so negative, once we started posting photos of him and you could hear him talking, things turned because it stopped just being an announcement, and it became a person.

It came back on our Facebook as well. We were getting some negativity, and someone said, who's posting this anyway? And the person who manages our Facebook said, well, actually, that's me. My name is Jim Patterson. I work here in the news service. Let me know if you have ideas, and that just shut it down.

SHELLY POE: Very good idea.

MELANIE MORAN: Not just throwing rotten vegetables at the university, you know.

CHRIS SYME: And I just wanted to mention too, I concur with that totally because, when we got on our message board after we had to -- after our football coach was let go, one of the things that I learned was, when you're not in the room, people are going to talk about you. And I think that's true with human nature.

But when you take a chair and sit down and look at people in the face and say, I'm here, they tend to not be quite so hostile.

MELANIE MORAN: Exactly.

SHELLY POE: Chris, we have a question here from Richard at Michigan. Other than tracking followers and fans, how can schools measure their rate of growth and return on investment on social media? You mentioned some of the tools.

CHRIS SYME: Right. I think I can just tell you, Richard, kind of some of the things that we did at Montana State. I use an RSS feeder, which is a realtime syndication, real simple syndication reader, like Google Reader or Net Vibes. And I set up a listening station on that. And so it's actually an extra tab on my Net Vibes, RSS feeder.

And one of the things that I did was I always -- I track Twitter URLs on several different services, including bit.ly because I use TweetDeck. So every URL automatically gets shortened to bit.ly. So I have a bit.ly account, and I can go in and see what's going on. I also use a service called socialmention, that's all one word, and they track mentions of you in all the social medias. Just make sure, when you go in there, it's the typical protocol for doing searches. So if you want a specific name, you have to put it in quotes. And then they will send an e-mail to you as regular as you want it.

And, of course, if you use Facebook and use a fan page, Facebook Insight is really morphing into something that's really sophisticated. I just don't think you can get a better understanding unless you can embed Google Analytics into your Facebook page, which used to be doable. I'm not sure if it is anymore.

And Google Analytics is a great place to see. If you can embed that on your blog, and you can have it embedded on your website. And I think that that's going to give you a good idea of who's talking about you.

If you have a Twitter account, I think it's worth also going on klout.com and just looking and seeing how engaging you are. I don't put a lot of --

I don't think it's the only say on Twitter, but it's interesting because you can get an idea kind of where you're at. I'm not sure if that's what you're looking for, but those are some of the tools that I've used.

SHELLY POE: Some great suggestions. Here is a tricky subject, which I think we all would like to have some tips on. How can you get your student-athletes and coaches on the same page in terms of social media?

CHRIS SYME: Wow.

MELANIE MORAN: I'll wade into this just a little tiny bit, and I'm sure Chris has more to say about it than I do. In my world also, I have that extended to faculty and staff.

CHRIS SYME: That would be very similar, yeah.

MELANIE MORAN: So we have social media guidelines that kind of outline best practices about how to communicate using these channels and how not to communicate using these channels. It's not -- we don't have a strict thou shall not policy, but we do keep an eye on it.

So I guess, number one, be aware of who's out there tweeting and Facebooking and blogging with your university's name on their account. And have some guidelines that you can point people to when they come to you and say they want to start one of these accounts that outline those best practices. Offer to do some hand holding. Be willing to follow up if they start doing inappropriate things on there, and make sure you have a policy in place about what is and is not appropriate.

If they're doing something really, really neat, incorporate that into your messaging. We have a site, the URL is social.vanderbilt.edu, and we pull into that one site all the different official Twitter and Facebook accounts for the university. So you can see it all in one place, and that would be something you might want to do for your different coaches and student-athletes.

But the last thing I'd like to say about this is not everybody needs to do this. Not every single coach needs to be on Twitter or on Facebook. If they're not the type of person that that is -- you know, that that's their style, don't do it. It's better to just not do it than to have an account that's updated once a month, or even worse, in my opinion, to have one that's ghost written. Because all of these communications that kind of currency that drives them, they are an authentic connection with that person.

So if you're ghost writing this for your coach, it loses that and really makes you vulnerable to being called out as having a bogus account. Those are my thoughts on that.

CHRIS SYME: I think some of the -- as a matter of fact, I just sent Barb a link to an article that was in the Mississippi Clarion-Ledger yesterday that Bill Smith tweeted out about athletes who are tweeting. And we've heard a lot of this in the news lately about athletes who might have had a bad game or are disgruntled, and they just go on Twitter and blurt out whatever comes to their mind. And then we had one athlete that was benched or even suspended recently because of that.

I think what we need to do is just educate. It's a lot of -- and I'm not trying to step on any toes here. But a lot of coaches bristling at athletes using social media has to do with the misunderstanding, and because people don't know how to use the media properly, they just don't use it.

And so I agree with Melanie that not everybody needs to be on there, but when it comes to student-athletes, unless you have a policy in place in your department that says student-athletes may not have social media accounts, which I think is way too drastic, then you have to learn how to educate those kids and those coaches to use social media wisely. We do this in student-athlete meetings, and the director allowed me a couple of times to talk to student-athletes about wise use of social media.

And I also talked to the basketball coach about it when Twitter first became a big deal, and he said that he talked to his guys about it. He said that he thinks that they had a pretty good understanding. But what happened with the Mississippi State players is something that you are not going to be able to stop, and I think this is one of the things that we need to learn about social media. We have to educate people and let them know how to use it wisely because, hey, kids are going to be there. And you can't just pretend that they're not, and you can't tell them they can't be on there either.

So I think we just need to teach them how to use it well.

MELANIE MORAN: And just to remind -- I agree with everything Chris said. And to remind them that it feels, particularly with students, it feels

as though they're just talking to their friends or they're just talking to people that they know. I've heard that from students over and over again. Why are you even looking at my Facebook? And the answer is because I can.

So just making them aware that what they put on these platforms is not just being read by their friends, and it's reflecting not only on them but also on the university. So make sure that's in their mind when they're doing this for themselves and their lives after they leave the university, just being aware of what you do here can tell your story both in good ways and in bad ways.

SHELLY POE: Kevin from LaSalle kind of asked a question somewhat along those lines. How do you develop policies on negative comments on your Facebook or Twitter feeds? And do you delete them? Do you ignore them? We talked about that a little earlier. Both from the incoming, the audience, and also from your constituent groups, like a student-athlete or something. How do you feel is a good way to develop policies about how to edit those? Or should you?

CHRIS SYME: I'll start out. I'm going to defer to Melanie because she mentioned theirs earlier, and their policy is very similar to ours.

On our Facebook page, I think at Montana State under the info, there is a posting policy or guidelines that talks about hate speech and vulgarity and that kind of thing. We will go in and delete those. We also delete trolls, you know, people who are hocking stuff on our Facebook page.

But the thing that we need to remember is that having a Facebook page and not allowing comments is probably not going to be productive. I got an e-mail from somebody the other day at a really large university saying, hey, our comments are closed on our Facebook page because we're afraid that people are going to post bad things. And I said, people are going to post bad things, but not as often as you think.

I keep a close eye on University of Wisconsin's Facebook page because I think they have a really good one. If they're deleting negative comments, I don't -- I'm not noticing it. But there's a lot of conversation going on there. It isn't all great, but Facebook is the kind of place that's like a family community. Those really negative comments aren't going to fly very well on Facebook. It's not going to turn into a fan message board because the community that's there are fans.

SHELLY POE: Right.

CHRIS SYME: And I've seen it happen on our Montana State Facebook page, where people go on there, and if they're a little negative, I don't have to shut them down because other people will shut them down.

I don't know what Melanie's experience with that is. She probably has more experience with that than I've had.

MELANIE MORAN: It sounds like very similar experience actually. You have to -- if you're going to play in this space, you have to be willing to take comments because otherwise it's not social media. It's just traditional media. So you have to be willing to open yourself up to that. Have a clear policy ahead of time about what you will and will not edit. Put that policy out there so that people know it's there. And really just fasten your seat belt and be ready for a bumpy ride once in a while.

But as Chris said, the community does self-regulate pretty well. And I've learned from other institutions who have gone out there and started deleting things that were just negative or critical, you get dinged so much worse for that than you will someone saying something rude on your Facebook when you start censoring it. That's not the rule of this game. You have to allow those comments.

SHELLY POE: We're closing in on the deadline, but we have time for a few more questions. Melanie, Chuck at the Big East asked, was there any backlash from traditional media members who didn't get the story first when you chose to make your announcement through social media?

MELANIE MORAN: No, I don't -- no, not that I can remember. Probably my colleagues over in athletics would know the answer to that a lot better than I did. Because, really, we pushed the button on Facebook, and the press release went out like 20 seconds later. So it was all out there about as quickly as usual.

And then we had a press conference that afternoon where our traditional media were all there. So, no, I don't think so.

SHELLY POE: Okay. And Evan at St. Leo asks, from a two-person office at a Division II school with 18 sports, how do you decide who is in charge of developing and controlling the social media pages? Is it someone in the communications office? Is it a shared duty with other units in the university? Or is it maybe just an

intern that you hire to do exactly that and that's their whole job?

He's saying that it's very frustrating for him not to be able to spend enough time on getting his Facebook page to the same level as other schools.

CHRIS SYME: Well, I think one thing -- and this is Chris. One thing that I would mention right up front is that we're seeing more and more now from experts in social media that whoever is in charge of social media -- and I don't think there's a preference for it one way or another -- has to be passionate about it.

It's something that takes time, and it's something that you need to have a zest for continuing education because the landscape changes so quickly. And I think a one or two-person school, that department, that's going to mean that you're going to have to kind of streamline your daily tasks.

And one thing that I know Bill Smith has been big on at Arkansas, and we talked back and forth a little about this, is that the idea of integrating social media tasks into your regular workday. I think that's the next big hurdle for those of us who are communicators who wear way too many hats already. And that's figure out ways to streamline social media into our regular workday so that it works with what we're already doing and doesn't seem like an added burden.

But whoever's in charge just has to be somebody that's passionate about it and can stay on top of it. I'm not a big fan of interns doing the work because we got in trouble with Montana State with all that, and I had a bad experience with it. So I wouldn't recommend it.

MELANIE MORAN: And I agree with Chris. That is critical. You can't phone social media in. You have to believe in it. You have to enjoy it. You have to speak the language.

So find -- I guess when you're thinking who's the best person? Who loves to do this? Who's doing this already in their personal life? Who gets it? And try to make time for that person to incorporate it into their job.

And absolutely, this isn't an extra. It's not an add-on anymore. It's another way we communicate, just like we use websites, e-mails, and still fax machines. So it just needs to be rolled into your process.

SHELLY POE: One last question from Kate at Georgia. Do you think it is best to have one person in charge of all social media within the SID office or each SID updating their particular

sport page? What would be the pros and cons to that?

CHRIS SYME: Well, that just depends on the size of your department, I think. For schools that have a lot of pages -- and I'm going to go back and use Wisconsin as an example because I've visited with them up there about what they're doing. And they have a ton of social media channels because they just do. And there, if a particular sport has social media, that sport's contact is in charge of overseeing that social media.

At Montana State, we were smaller. We didn't have as many of the sports involved in social media yet, and so I helped most of them, and our other sports information director that was pretty tech savvy also helped his sports with their social media too as well.

Again, I don't think there's a one size fits all template. I think you have to just figure out what fits in your culture and find a way to work it out.

MELANIE MORAN: And if you are -- like the question from the two-person office, if you're a small shop, just focus and really target. Maybe you don't have a Facebook page for every sport. Maybe you have one for your school's athletics programs. And if that one page is really great and gives people what they're looking for, they'll come back.

So you don't have to do everything if you do one thing well.

CHRIS SYME: And can I just add a PS to that too? When social media first became really big, a lot of our coaches wanted to be on it, so they started blogs and all this stuff. I was a little leery about it, but I couldn't tell them no. A year later, a majority of the blogs only had one posting on them.

I think one of the things we have to do as savvy communicators is we have to help coach our people, as Melanie said, through this kind of maze of what should we be doing? I think, whatever you're doing, if you have a particular sport that just has a savvy coach like we did for women's basketball at Montana State, you kind of let them go with the flow and take care of it. But other people that need a lot more hand holding, either they need some internal education or you just need to help them incorporate what they're doing into your department stuff as opposed to letting them go on their own.

Because there's nothing worse than a

social media channel that never gets posted on. I think Melanie talked about that earlier. That's just totally embarrassing.

SHELLY POE: Well, it's hard to believe, but an hour has gone by very quickly here. I want to thank our presenters today, Melanie Moran from the Vanderbilt News Service, and also Chris Syme, who's the chair of CoSIDA's New Media and Technology Committee. Remind everyone that the webscript provided by ASAP Sports will be available archived now, and an audio archive of this conversation will be available tomorrow morning at cosida.com.

I want to thank TRZ Communications and Mike Welch, who's our Director of Marketing, for setting up this call. And definitely thank our presenters and Barb Kowal for all their work in putting this together. It's been a great session. Thank you all for tuning in and keep watching, and we'll let you know if some more continuing ed calls coming up soon. Thanks very much, everybody.

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