

Northland Community and Technical College

12-Month Communications Plan

Developed by MET: August 14, 2009

Plan Overview:

The following represents a communications plan for Northland Community and Technical College, to extend through 2009 and into 2010. It corresponds with the college's overarching goals; serving as an umbrella communications strategy for the college as a whole. It is not meant to supersede the individual plans for Enrollment Management and Creative Services, but it does address and support their needs at a macro level – creating a consistent thread by which they can tie their strategic and tactical efforts.

Northland has tremendous opportunities to capitalize upon, allowing us to be more relevant than ever. The pervasive acceptance and advances of social media is allowing its practitioners to have more meaningful dialog and communications with its audiences; becoming more effective at a far reduced cost. In many ways it levels the playing field in terms of budgets, rewarding those that most effectively engage their audiences, not those with the deepest coffers. Secondly, national trends point to a new mindset for the up-and-coming worker, identifying an era of "Free Agents". Workers that no longer feel tied to a company, but rather to a set of talents, moving from company to company or career to career. Northland is uniquely suited to quickly educate and train workers to enter this new era. And lastly, it has highly respected programs and instructors, along with quality admissions representatives and employees. We need to take advantage of this where appropriate, making it more widely known, and amplifying its effort to broader external audiences.

Our communications plan is designed with the following goals in mind:

Overarching Goals of the College:

- Inspire student success.
- Cultivate high quality programs, services and employees.
- Revolutionize growth strategies to sustain vibrant learning communities.

The way this communications plan and the MET team, in particular, can influence and contribute toward these goals is by achieving the following:

Communications Plan Goal:

- To authentically and effectively participate in the conversation, both online and off, with our potential and existing students and their influencers, where ever they are. This will

raise the visibility of Northland, changing perceptions where necessary and positively sharing its benefits in an effort to increase attendance and retention.

Objectives:

- Develop consistent, actionable brand guidelines and identity for the Enrollment Management and Creative Services team to build upon by October 2, 2009.
- Arm the Enrollment Management team with new tools and programs to most effectively recruit and attract new students in the field and amplify their effectiveness on campus. Grow student enrollment by four-percent by the start of the 2011 school year.
- Increase the effectiveness of the Creative Services team by streamlining communications to concentrate on the channels that yield the most influence with our key audiences in an effort to maximize impact and budget. Actively participating in at least four social media platforms where our audiences are that allow us to measure influence, reach, and engagement by November 6, 2009.
- Increase communication internally within Northland to merchandise team results and inform counterparts of communications efforts underway by January 8, 2010.
- Identify and implement research mechanisms the MET team can use to capture and measure external and internal data for marketing and communications purposes by January 29, 2010.

Strategies:

1. Develop four Initiative Teams to tackle crucial issues that need to be resolved through the input of multiple parties. The teams will focus on:
 - a. Name and identity of the college
 - b. Program prioritization for marketing focus
 - c. Identifying a data collection and measurement process
 - d. Enrollment Management priorities of outreach
2. Develop a comprehensive social media program to promote the college as a whole using students to serve as representatives. This will allow for true social media authenticity and significantly extending the marketing team's capacity.
3. Maximize relationships with traditional media outlets to serve as public relations vehicles for disseminating strategic communication.
4. Maintain a presence in traditional media for targeted advertising. Concentrate only in areas where we can have high impact through cost-effective, creative executions.
5. Provide support to admissions representatives by:
 - a. Streamlining their materials and outreach efforts and providing technology that allows them to interact both with prospective students, sharing and amplifying

their experience through social media, and to communicate back to Northland staff.

- b. Revamping the student ambassador program to provide more value/prestige to members while increasing its effectiveness in supporting the Enrollment Management team.
6. Develop an internal communications program that provides a vehicle to be shared with all faculty and staff that spotlights updates from the collective MET team, Creative Services and Enrollment Management. This allows the group to merchandise wins, report back on “tales from the road” and provide input and insight from the “collective voice of students”.

Issues and Opportunities:

Issues:

- We are understaffed in Creative Services in the one area that intersects with virtually every strategy we have identified for growth: web services. The web team is doing excellent work. Our web site is a bright spot for the college and a competitive differentiator in its current state. We don’t want to burn the team out by overextending them, lessening their ability to maintain or grow the creative standard established for the site. We would recommend hiring a programmer to support them.
- The tension that exists between the two campuses needs to be resolved. We addressed it in our leadership offsite and had a fruitful conversation, but it bears addressing again. There is no initiative planned or strategy in place to tackle this. We cannot enact change that way. We simply need to come together as leaders and live out our unity through example, putting the growth of the college as the first priority for us all.
- The economy. Our state budget, our school budget and the budget of our prospective students is an issue, to be sure. We have addressed it head-on in this plan. We must build out strategies and programs that allow us to maximize outreach and communication with minimal budget impact.
- We need to resolve the program specific marketing versus overall college marketing approach and have assigned an initiative team to do so.
- We don’t accurately capture or measure data for any external or internal marketing purposes. We need to fix this in an effort to make informed, strategic decisions.
- The current level of construction is a hindrance to our on-campus marketing efforts. We need to resolve by succinctly showcasing what the end result will look like.
- Our college promotional materials have improved greatly over the past two years, to be sure. As media usage habits continue to evolve for our targeted perspective students,

we also need to ensure we are in front of the curve in an effort to equip our college representatives with the best tools possible.

Opportunities:

- We are uniquely positioned to capitalize on the trend toward the “free agent” worker.
- We are a cost effective solution for a student wanting to advance toward a career or change/retrain for a new career.
- Social media allows us to level the playing field as it relates to marketing budgets. We already have a head start on the regional colleges we compete against for students. We need to continue to grow and nurture this.
- We have tremendous relationships in place with regional business leaders and need to identify ways to highlight this for the benefit of our students.

Positioning Statement: (Internal statement meant to inform messaging, tone and positioning. This is not a statement that would show up in any form of external marketing.)

For those who have a desire to advance their life through education and want to gain a fast track toward a meaningful profession or a four-year university, Northland is a gateway that provides personalized, career specific education and training. Unlike other area institutions we focus on helping our graduates immediately begin earning a professional living. We accomplish this through our established influence with regional business leaders and organizations.

Messaging Matrix (to be developed once the positioning statement is approved)

Key Audiences:

Through our planning we identified a number of audiences and prioritized them in the following way:

Key Student Audiences:

1. High school students.
2. Non-traditional/continual learners.
3. Under-represented/students of color.

Key Non-Student Audiences:

1. State and local government/MnSCU.
2. Surrounding communities (concentric circles from campuses).
3. Influencers in the lives of students: parents, friends, high school counselor or instructor, spouse or significant other, faith organizations, etc.

Tactical Executions

Strategy 1: Develop four Initiative Teams to tackle crucial issues that need to be resolved through the input of multiple parties. The teams will focus on:

- a. Name and identity of the college.
- b. Program prioritization for marketing focus.
- c. Identifying a data collection and measurement process.
- d. Enrollment Management priorities of outreach.

The concept of the Initiative Teams is to identify one team leader who will be responsible to drive the team toward a final recommendation and plan. Each team leader will choose no more than five people from any branch of the college whether they are a member of the MET team, faculty or even students, to be on the team and provide input. Each team will have 60 days to develop their recommendation and conduct itself any way it feels productive to meet its goal.

Team leaders and assignment:

1. Name and Identity of the college – Initiative Leader: Mark Johnson

Assignment: Come to a consensus on a consistent name and identity for the college to be used across all platforms.

2. Program prioritization for marketing focus – Initiative Leader: Dan Klug

Assignment: Identify and prioritize the programs we will focus on in the coming year through our communications efforts. This does not mean programs will be excluded. Social media allows us to be fully inclusive to communicate about any program our outside audiences display an interest. What it does do, however, is funnel us toward areas where we will provide extra attention. Remember, the essence of strategy is sacrifice. We can't stretch our marketing budget to be all things to all people. We need to concentrate on the areas that offer us the most growth and build them out even further.

3. Identifying a data collection and measurement process – Initiative Leaders: Internal focus is Mary Fontes and external focus is Scott Fletcher

Assignment: Identify, price out and recommend a process the MET team can put in place to research outward perceptions about the college, collect data from incoming students for marketing purposes (i.e., why did you choose Northland, who influenced your decision, etc.) and make informed decisions.

4. Enrollment Management priorities of outreach – Initiative Leader: Shannon Bolden

Assignment: This team is effective now, evidenced by our strong enrollment numbers. However, as we view changing student trends we should evaluate our approach to ensure we are evolving in a way that allows us to remain relevant and effective. Let's take a bold leap. Making the assumption that we were starting this program today, factoring in the influences our perspective students face in today's new media environment, how would we shape it? I.e., where should we be spending our time in the next twelve months? Where are the areas we can have the most influence?

Tactics:

- The teams and team leaders will report their recommendation to the MET team on October 2, 2009.
- Team leaders choose no more than five to seven people to join their team and drive toward a decision. Compile a nice mix of viewpoints and insights among team members. Include faculty, MET team members, students, or any combination thereof. This is the team leader's call. There is no value in having redundant viewpoints among your team members when you're choosing them. You want to drive toward a consensus, but you don't want to start with it.
- The team leader doesn't have to come up with the solution, but they need to steer the group in that direction. The team leader is ultimately responsible for providing the deliverable on October 2, with the exception of team 4. Given the travel schedule that team will face in the fall, we are extending their deadline to December 15.
- No one person can serve on more than one initiative team.

Owner(s): identified above, per initiative

Timeline: TBD by initiative leader. Final deliverable October 2, 2009. Team 4 will deliver by December 15, 2009.

Budget: \$250 per team, not to exceed \$1,000 total.

Strategy 2: Develop a comprehensive social media program to promote the college as a whole using students to serve as representatives thus allowing for true social media authenticity and significantly extending the marketing team's capacity.

The tenets of social media are authenticity, transparency, earned credibility and real-time communication, in essence, word-of-mouth marketing at its best. Social media allows one to have direct dialog with its audiences, bypassing traditional channels. It costs very little in terms of budget expenditure to execute, but does require time. Something the MET team is short on. However, again referring to the tenets of social media, a program for Northland would be best conducted by students. They are able to accurately portray their experience at Northland. They speak the language of their peers and potential students. They have grown up with these technologies and use them authentically. A recent study (*The Edelman Trust Barometer*) states that "a person like me" is viewed as the most credible spokesperson for a company. This person is even more believable than the CEO of the company. This strategy is a win/win for Northland.

Tactics:

- Develop a Northland branded presence on the following social media platforms:
 - Twitter
 - Facebook
 - Flickr
 - Linked-In
 - YouTube
- Recruit two students for each platform – 10 in total. Perhaps these people come from the revamped Student Ambassador program or they're entirely different.
 - An alternate idea would be to identify the students through a contest. The contest could be a two-minute video submission on the YouTube channel for Northland on why they think they should be chosen. Develop a panel consisting of one student, one faculty member, two local journalists: one from the Grand Forks Herald and the other from the Thief River Falls Times, four members of the MET team and President Temte. The winners would receive X.
- Develop a social media playbook for Northland including parameters of discussion, people and institutions to follow on Twitter, Facebook, messaging, facts, do's and don'ts etc.
- Once the full team has been chosen provide a half-day training to go over the playbook and expectations.

- Provide each student we've chosen with a Flip Video Camera allowing them to capture video or stills to upload on to the platform we've chosen them to represent. Encourage students of Northland to upload photos and videos on the Northland branded pages as well.
- Begin announcing news for the college on our social media platforms first – conditioning media, students, officials, etc. to follow us online.

Owner: Mark Johnson, to be supported by Chad Sperling

Timeline: TBD based on feedback

Budget: Not to exceed \$10,000

Strategy 3: Maximize relationships with traditional media outlets to serve as public relations vehicles for disseminating strategic communication.

Tactics:

- Conduct an editorial board meeting with the local media outlets including WDAZ, the Grand Forks Herald and the Exponent. These meetings would include President Temte, Dan Klug and Julie Olson. They would be held at the start of the school year to provide an overview of the school's priorities, its vision for the year and discuss story ideas and potential op-ed opportunities. Conduct the same meeting with the editor at the Thief River Falls Times.
- Develop an editorial calendar for stories we know are coming from our media outlets and those that we would like to generate from the college.
- Negotiate a feature column we could develop with both papers mentioned above where we have insights from the college. Perhaps one month it's a by-line from President Temte, another month it could be stats on college trends, etc.
- Update the media list to ensure it's fresh and add social media contacts: bloggers, Twitter feeds to follow, based on influence.
- Conduct a "pre-pitch" round of calls to editors on our media list in the fall. These calls are made to build the relationship with our target editors. Discuss their focus for the year. How they would like to work with us. Trends they're following and discuss trends we're following, etc. These calls pay dividends.
- Develop a Search Engine Optimization campaign to ensure Northland Community and Technical College is showing up in the top of key search term results.
- Block and Tackle PR: milestones announcements, new hires, key wins, etc.

- Based on feedback received from the Program Prioritization Initiative Team, build relationships with the high focus program leaders to ensure we have an open pipeline of information flowing in an effort to continually seek out potential story ideas to pitch to editors so we're drawing attention to these programs on a regular basis, both with regional press, but also in the trades appropriate to their program, i.e., nursing trade journals, etc.

Owner: Julie Olson

Timeline: TBD based on feedback

Budget: Use existing Public Relations budget of \$15,000. This budget is not listed in the Marketing or MET budget.

Strategy 4: Maintain a presence in traditional media for targeted advertising – concentrating only in areas where we can have high impact through cost-effective, creative executions.

Tactics: (need more input in this area – will plan a call with Mark to discuss/brainstorm)

- Develop a media buy plan for the year (input needed regarding current schedule/outlets in place now)
- Develop ads that will run in the classified section of area newspapers. The ads will be designed to look like a classified job listing but will be for Northland programs specific to the section it's in. For instance, in the section listing HVAC Repair we could run a job description talking about our program and how we could advance them in their career. The costs would be minimal, but we'd be capturing people at an opportune aperture moment.
- Develop creative content for web.

Owner: Mark Johnson

Timeline: TBD based on feedback

Budget: Not to exceed \$130,000.

Strategy 5: Provide support to admissions representatives by:

- I. Streamlining their materials and outreach efforts and providing technology that allows them to interact both with prospective students, sharing and amplifying their experience through social media and to communicate back to Northland staff.
- II. Revamping the student ambassador program to provide more value/prestige to members while increasing its effectiveness in supporting the Enrollment Management team.

Tactics:

- Provide all admissions reps with a Flip Video Camera (<http://www.theflip.com>, price: \$150 -- \$200 per). The reps can record insights (“Tales from the Road”) from prospective students while in the field. The videos would serve two purposes:
 - We would be able to glean valuable insights from the feedback to further inform and assist our marketing and recruitment efforts. We could provide questions in advance to gain consistency.
 - It would bring a level of energy to the group that isn’t normally seen. The “voice of the customer” is always the most energizing feedback. It would provide that, and it would also allow the reps to merchandise the work they are doing out in the field.
- Technology: While we will always have a need for printed material, we should continually seek ways to adopt the newest technologies. This will allow us to stay relevant in our approach, cut costs, and offer the same content (though we can do it in a far richer format). This would include such things as Northland branded Jump Drives, or similar tools, allowed within our system. These types of offerings are more in-line with a relevant Northland brand experience and provide prospective students with something they can use, will spend more time with and can re-use for their own purposes as well.
- Let’s create an umbrella strategy that can go over the Student Ambassador program to provide more value and prestige:
 - Create a nomination mechanism that allows faculty, other students, staff, etc. to vote on who should be student ambassadors.
 - Create a panel of business leaders that will come to the college once a month to have lunch in a private room on campus with the student ambassadors. Those lunches should be run in the fashion of a panel discussion. Perhaps we approach a business editor at the Grand Forks Herald and/or The Thief River Falls Times to serve as the moderator.

- Partner each Student Ambassador with a business leader from the panel for the year to serve as a mentor and someone who can introduce the ambassador to a larger network.
- Do a news release profiling our ambassadors. Send the release, and follow-up with phone calls, to pitch editors locally and in the ambassador's hometowns.
- Same approach on the release for the business leaders.
- In addition to the above, we make providing tours mandatory.

Owners:

I: Gene Klinke

II: Nick Thompson and Nicki Carlson

Timeline: TBD based on feedback

Budget: \$7,500

Strategy 6: Develop an internal communications program that provides a vehicle to be shared with all faculty and staff that provides updates from the collective MET team, Creative Services and Enrollment Management. Allow the group to merchandise wins, report back on “tales from the road” and provide input and insight from the “collective voice of students”.

Tactics:

- Develop an HTML template that can be easily populated with information and sent to all faculty and staff (and any others we may want to target, perhaps influential individuals at MnSCU) on a monthly or quarterly basis. Populate with:
 - Updates on our social media campaign, number of followers, sample of photos shared by students, links to online conversations, etc.
 - Recaps of the panel discussions from our Student Ambassador/Business Leader lunches.
 - Links to video clips on our YouTube site. This would include the “Tales from the Road” videos by our admissions reps.
 - Summaries and links of stories that have run in traditional media.
 - Links and/or images of ads that have run.
 - Etc. The point is to show momentum – to let people know what the team is doing and to feel inspired by the progress the team is making on behalf of the college.

- Develop an internal rollout event to share the college's marketing efforts and focus for the year with all staff.
- Provide message training for employees, which, in many ways, serve as extensions of our marketing team.
- Provide a MET team standards toolkit and brand style guidelines.

Owner: Hank Roehrich, supported by Jennifer Sundberg

Timeline: TBD based on feedback

Budget: Not to exceed \$7,500

Other MET Logistics To Be Determined:

1. Continue to review and combine full Enrollment Management Plan into Marketing & Enrollment Plan by January 29, 2010. (Mary Fontes, Gene Klinke)
 - a. Strategies for attracting new types of students.
 - i. Underrepresented
 - ii. Program specific
2. Develop and/or revise job descriptions of the creative services team. Align performance expectations with goals of the marketing and enrollment management plan. To be accomplished by October 2, 2009. (Stacey Hron, Dan Klug)
3. Creative Services brainstorming on President's priorities for 2010-2011 by November 2009. (Creative Services, Dan Klug).
4. Examine best practices of similar colleges with successful marketing and enrollment management programs. (Steve Crittenden, Scott Fletcher).
5. Develop Outreach Activities, Events & Strategies:
 - a. High School Summer Camps – nursing, etc., based on program priorities
 - b. Think about events/promos rather than ads – iPod giveaways, Happy Graduation sponsorships – places where we intersect the college with our potential student in places they don't expect, but make perfect sense that we're there.
 - c. Other... Specific plans to be presented by January 2010. (Ben Kosharek, Dan Klug)
6. As we focus on marketing the college over the course of the next three years, we should evaluate this plan at the 120 day mark, based on effectiveness, making adjustments where needed, and developing the next 24 month plan allowing us strong, strategic structure over the course of the next 36 months.