Event Title:

How Do You Do, Fellow Kids? A Student-led Crash Course on Social Media Strategy

Event Category:

Publishing, Editing, and Technology

Event Visual Aid: [Link](#) to Slideshow

Event Description:

Are you a small press or writer looking to bolster your online presence, but don't know where to begin? These undergraduate students want to help. Drawing from their personal experience growing up in online book communities, they'll break down the ins and outs of popular social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok to help strategize content creation and investigate ideas of digital responsibility, global networking, and how social media is rewiring the publishing industry.

Event Organizer:

> **Ellie Pasquale** is an undergraduate student majoring in English literature and publishing & editing at Susquehanna University. There, she serves as the junior managing editor for RiverCraft Literary Magazine, a research assistant for children's literature at the Blough-Weis Library, and the conference coordinator for FUSE (the Forum for Undergraduate Student Editors). She formerly managed the TikTok account of Soman Chainani, the best-selling author of *The School for Good and Evil*.

Event Moderator:

> **Hannah Mackey** is a senior creative writing and publishing and editing undergraduate at Susquehanna University. She serves as the Director of FUSE (the Forum for Undergraduate Student Editors) and is the Managing Editor of Flagship, which is an on-campus travel magazine. Additionally, she has worked as the Editor in Chief of the Common Reading on campus, which publishes an anthology of texts for first-year students. Over her college career, she has built up a small following and literary circle on her Twitter and interacts with the publishing world as often as she can.

Event Participants:

Haley Dittbrenner is an undergraduate student at Susquehanna University. She is the Design Editor for Susquehanna's nonfiction magazine Essay, the Head Poetry Editor for The Sanctuary Magazine, and the National Reviews and Interviews Director for FUSE (the Forum for Undergraduate Student Editors). She manages a high-engagement Twitter page dedicated to publishing news.

Emily Hizny is a junior creative writing and publishing & editing double major at Susquehanna University. She is the junior editor of SU's literary magazine Sanctuary, the vice president of SU's Slam Poetry Club, and the junior director of SU's FUSE chapter (Forum for Undergraduate Student Editors). On Twitter, she loves to follow any literary magazine and small press she can find.

Ellie Pasquale is an undergraduate student majoring in English literature and publishing & editing at Susquehanna University. There, she serves as the junior managing editor for RiverCraft Literary Magazine, a research assistant for children's literature at the Blough-Weis Library, and the conference coordinator for FUSE (the Forum for Undergraduate Student Editors). She formerly managed the TikTok account of Soman Chainani, the best-selling author of *The School for Good and Evil*.

Amber Watkin is an undergraduate student at Susquehanna University majoring in creative writing with a minor in publishing & editing. She is the Associate Editor in Chief of Susquehanna's satire magazine The Squirrel, the Visual Arts Editor for Sanctuary Magazine, and the secretary for Susquehanna's FUSE chapter. She currently manages the social media for The Writers Institute and the Violence Intervention & Prevention Center at Susquehanna University.

Opening Remarks and Housekeeping Announcements

Welcome to "How Do You Do, Fellow Kids? A Student-led Crash Course on Social Media Strategy." A few reminders before we begin:

- For those needing or wishing to follow along with a written text, please let the moderator of the panel, Hannah Mackey, know, and a printed copy will be delivered to you.
- Please make sure that spaces marked for wheelchairs remain clear of chairs or other barriers.
- Treat service animals as working animals and do not attempt to distract or pet them.
- Be aware of those with chemical sensitivities and refrain from wearing scented products.
- Please be aware that your fellow attendees may have invisible disabilities. Do not question anyone's use of an accommodation while at the conference, including chairs reserved for those with disabilities.

Address: Good afternoon! Thank you all for being here. I hope everyone has been able to rest amid attending panels and forming new relationships with authors, presses, and magazines. My name is Hannah Mackey, and I am the Senior Director of Susquehanna's FUSE Chapter, which is the Forum for Undergraduate Student Editors.

Before I begin I can confidently say that each of us on the panel right now has differing experiences growing up with social media. For me, YouTube was my first real social media app that I frequented before Instagram and eventually Twitter. Through Instagram, I followed the YouTubers I idolized along with friends and family, which gave closeness to them that I did not quite have just on YouTube. I felt like I knew them as people, almost as if a barrier had come down between them and the screen. On my Instagram account, however, I did not utilize it as a way to interact with them in their comments or even in their direct messages. Instead, I use it to post cute pictures of my dog or cookies that I had just pulled from the oven. But what started off as a personal catalog and diary of my everyday life, quickly transformed into a networking and communication tool vital to my leadership positions and to my interests in writing and the publishing industry.

Recently, Twitter has been an important app for me, as I have connected with so many talented writers and literary magazines I otherwise would not have known without it. As we edge deeper into the vast era of the internet, us as writers, readers, and editors must make the leap into the sometimes frightening world of social media. Each of us on this panel has run social media accounts or has had to strategize digital marketing content that would best inform students, faculty, and staff of various events, fundraisers, and more. We have experienced the highs and lows of digital marketing, but believe in the impact it holds for the literary world.

Reflecting on the previous AWP Conference, there seemed to be a lack of panels that discussed the complex role of social media in the publishing industry today. The subject was briefly touched on by audience members who asked for digital content strategy, and panelists frequently avoided their questions. With our diverse experiences as undergraduates in creating and consuming online content, we think we can offer unique student insight and engage in thoughtful dialogue about the responsibility of working in the digital sphere.

We hope to answer some concerns, confusion, and any other questions you all have about social media's role in the writing and publishing industry. It can be a steep learning curve, especially with new social media apps, but understanding the basics and the many uses are the first steps in greater engagement with the literary world.

Why does this matter? What are the general benefits of using social media to market yourself as a debuting writer or small press?

- Broaden your reach
    - Target specific age demographics on different platforms
    - Often the first place people will go to check something out
        - Do you have a presence, and when were you last active
        - Twitter was the first place Emily went looking for literary magazines - great place to start for small magazines that aren't on Submittable or Duotrope yet
- Increase engagement with and recognition of your brand
    - Create more personal connections with readers
    - Direct interactions with audience from anywhere
        - Can see reactions and comments in real time
        - Consistent posts and content creates a returning audience
    - Example: The explosion of BookTok in 2020
        - Midlist books returning to the NYT best-seller list
        - A debuting author scored a six-figure deal and movie deal through the "would you read this book?" trend
- Community
    - Connect with other authors, lit mags, and presses, support their endeavors and contributions to the literary world and they'll return that support!
- This is a huge tool for selling!
    - Important for presses and magazines to get the word out to the most people (can reach further if it's an advertisement)
    - But also for authors too!! You are a huge part of selling your book, of making yours stand out against the noise
        - Be genuine and excited about what you're posting
- It can be a little daunting to start, which is why we have lots of tips, but having a social media team can help. Even just instating one person who can review the content you're creating and posting can alleviate stress and increase productivity.
    - Give the opportunity to young folks who have grown up on the internet
    - Creativity and the ability to respond quickly to trends is really important

How does content vary by platform? Should you create different posts for different platforms?

Platforms:
- Instagram

- Intro slide
    - Target audience: millennials and younger
    - Primary content: photo/visual
    - Trends of note: Bookstagram, author accounts
        - Bookstagram is a subculture on Instagram surrounded by reading and writing books.
        - Bookstagrammers often review books and discuss author drama. Author accounts, by contrast, usually promote books, events, etc.
    - Good for authors, book reviewers, and established presses
    - "Bad" for small presses
- Slide One
    - The Instagram Professional Dashboard outlines how many accounts you've interacted with
        - The professional dashboard is only for business and creator accounts, so be sure to switch to a professional account!
        - The dashboard helps determine which posts do best
        - Follower vs. non-follower engagement
        - You can create and manage ads here
    - Hashtags are extremely helpful for reaching a broader audience. Ideally, use a mix of popular and less popular hashtags.
        - More popular hashtags will help your content appear on for-you and explore pages, while less popular hashtags will make your content more visible to a niche audience
    - Ad posts are also a way to increase engagement. For as little as $10, one of your posts will show up as an ad across Instagram.
        - These ads show up on feeds, for you pages, and throughout user's stories
    - For a professional-looking Instagram account, curate a clean, visually interesting array of content. Think color schemes, aesthetics, and eye-grabbing
- Slide Two–Strategic Posting
    - Hashtags are extremely helpful for getting your content noticed
        - Use a mix of popular and unpopular hashtags to reach a variety of audiences. You will want a mix of general and niche audiences
    - Ads can be bought for as little as $10 and greatly boost engagement.
        - When I did one, I gained twenty new followers
        - Ads show up on feeds, explore pages, for-you pages, and stories
    - Create clean, visually appealing content so that people will want to look at your content (as opposed to everything else out there)
        - Aesthetically pleasing, color schemes, and/or eye grabbing

- Slide Two–Scambots
  - When you use certain hashtags, you will get scambots on your posts. Scambots are robotic accounts made to scam people or promote a larger account.
    - DO NOT DM anyone asking you to promote your content on another account (unless it's coming from a trusted, reputable source).
    - You can delete these scam comments or leave them there. Leaving those comments alone will boost your engagement
    - Practice digital safety–don't open strange links or respond to unknown DMs

- How do you make content look nice?
  - Popular software: Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator
  - Cheaper/Free Alternatives:
    - GIMP
    - Affinity Photo
    - Procreate
    - Photopea
    - Rebelle
    - ArtRage
    - Krita
    - Sketch
    - Pixlr
    - Canva
  - Match your visual content to the vibes and aesthetics that you want your audience to get
    - if you want consistency among graphic content, find a color palette that works for you and commit to it
    - if you (particularly as a writer) want more laid-back casual content that makes it feel more natural for your audience to interact, commit to that instead
- Twitter
  - Target Audience - most users are between 25-34, followed by 35-49 and 18-24
  - Primary content - text-based (common to add images and gifs)
  - Short posts limited to 280 characters (not words) - short bursts of information (unless you pay for Twitter Blue then you can have up to 4,000 characters but overall it doesn't offer much except that and app customization options)
  - For longer thoughts create a thread - reply to your tweet with more tweets, tap "Show this thread" to keep reading

- Consistency is important for maintaining an audience, adding images or gifs boosts reach
- Use polls or questions to encourage audience to engage with and reply to your tweets
- Hashtags are important for categorizing information and adding your tweets to specific conversations (like #AWP23!)
- Follow Fridays!!
  Haley
    - #ff helps to engage with other literary accounts, build rapport with other members of the community
    - Promoting other accounts while boosting yourself
    - Mutual describes two parties who interact with each other's content. You want to build mutuals as your platform grows
- For lit mags and presses - use your bio to include your website, say what kind of work you publish, and whether submissions are open or closed
- People scan posts and profiles fast! Be concise!
- Similar to Instagram you can create a professional account for Twitter to access:
    - Analytics like profile visits, engagement rate, and link clicks
    - Product spotlights - able to put a link to your product (book!) right below your bio
    - Ad creation to promote posts and products
- Don't be scared!! Twitter gets a bad reputation but has a thriving literary
- You can curate your feed with who you're following so you can stay in conversations you're interested in and see posts from people you want to
- The algorithm will add other posts to your feed based on what's popular with the people you follow, but it's easy to customize your experience to what you're looking for
- TikTok
  - Younger demographic
      - Last month, over 32% of users were in the 10 to 19 age range, so this really is one of the best places to market content meant for students, ranging anywhere from elementary school to college-aged
          - The 20 to 29 age range is a close second to the top, making up 29% of the app's user base
      - 40% of gen z reports saying that they're directly influenced by products they see on TikTok, which means that if you can advertise literary magazines to a BookTok community already looking for reading recommendations, you've got it in the bag
  - It's a short video based app with a strong algorithm
      - You can edit videos for Tik Tok on the app

- If you want longer, more complicated videos, I suggest using software like Final Cut Pro or Adobe Premiere, but for most if not all your videos, you can get away with just using the app tools
- I haven't seen a lot of literary magazines on the app yet, but it is incredibly popular hub for authors and publishers
    - With the exception of a few smaller creators, the lit mag scene on TikTok has been almost completely untapped – could be a really exciting space to explore! Especially if you're interested in younger writers submitting to or reading your magazines
- On average, people spend about half an hour on other platforms, but data shows that people spend close to an hour and a half on TikTok
    - People who are on TikTok are ON TikTok, and the marketing there is super effective as a result
- The TikTok algorithm makes it easier to go viral
    - The algorithm is ruled by engagement
    - It doesn't privilege accounts with more followers like other apps do
    - I wrote a paper in one of my classes about how this idea of virality is just rhetorical velocity, or a term frequently used in digital rhetoric studies that refers to the speed at which rhetoric is communicated across online spaces. Trends exist to be remixed and remade and shared, suggesting that the algorithm itself has its own rhetoric. It reads what content you engage with most and feeds you — oftentimes scarily niche and accurate – content that'll interest you. So it's really easy for small accounts to go viral here.
- As Hank Green actually articulated in a [video](#), what makes the TikTok algorithm different than other video-centric platforms like YouTube is that you don't pick what comes up in your feed.
    - You don't click on a video. It's immediately shown to you. That means that things like thumbnails and cute titles aren't relevant. Instead, it's hooking people in the first few seconds of the video. You need a good hook. One example on BookTok was a trend in which writers framed their video as a storytime and said something outrageous about how their sister in law framed them for murder or their dog was kidnapped by an alien, and then after 15 seconds or so of playing into this, explained that it was actually the premise of their book.
- A general rule of thumb is simply performative authenticity
    - put thought and effort into your content, but the more casual and effortless it looks, the better it'll perform
    - It's the parasocial relationship of it all – people want to feel like they know the person writing
- YouTube: general audience

- long-form video content
  - short form: YouTube shorts (TikTok but for YouTube)
- Demographics range from 25 to 44 years
  - can reach a wider & older audience
- can either create content, or pay booktubers to advertise you as an author, lit mag, or publication
  - upload/livestream readings, performances, award shows, etc.! (the possibilities are endless)
  - live streams have grown in popularity
  - many features to use in YouTube Creator Studio
  - video essays have grown in popularity (thirty minutes to several hour long videos on niche/popular/diverse/opinionated topics)
  - polls/post which can increase community engagement
- Booktubers!
  - not as good nowadays for outreach but booktubers often have dedicated audiences, so could be good as a writer/editor/literary magazine to send books to them
  - perfect for creating/interacting with niche fandoms
- Downside: YouTube can be more work than other platforms, especially to maintain viewership and loyalty over time (views will ALWAYS be significantly higher than likes and that's OK)
  - Posting more often and engaging with subscribers is best
- Facebook
  - Older audience; younger population does not use Facebook
    - Metrics show that millennials are the most active, but gen x and boomers follow close behind.
  - visual + text + videos
  - It's a dying social media, primarily for family and friends, not for outreach
  - Facebook's user growth rate has slowed over the past few years to a grinding halt. But, the people who are on facebook are dedicated to it. This is a good place to stay in touch with alumni of your schools and manage donor relations – it's a good place to network with older crowds relevant to your magazine, as well as advertise your publications to them.
  - To save time, you can even link your Facebook with other social media accounts to post content at the same time, like Instagram

Are there bad practices you often observe in digital marketing, and how do you recommend avoiding these?

- Beware bots (and suspicious links)

- Falsely advertising your work
    - Generating excitement around specific genre/tropes/lines in your book that don't make it past the editing stage; consumers will be disappointed, and it can affect the reviews
    - This is one way in which social media is starting to influence the publishing industry – books go viral and blow up by word of mouth in these online communities (word of pixel?) because of their tropes
- Ignoring boundaries
    - Selling yourself as a brand can be a slippery slope — look out for your readers' well-being as well as your own by upholding a sense of privacy (parasocial relationships - define)
    - Stay out of review & fan spaces → tumblr example
- Addressing Controversy
    - Case by case basis
    - You're going to have to create your own code of ethics with your social media team
        - How much do you as an author want to comment on your work? We all study Roland Barthes' death of the author theory in one of our required courses at our school, and I know that's a big decision for you to make when branding yourself as an author. How dead are you to your readers?
            - Many authors online have lost their audience because of over-explaining or arguing with their readers' interpretations of their work
    - Have an action plan in place – should you delete ugly comments? Ignore them? Fires catch quickly online, so know how you will respond to controversy before it hits you
    - Know when to respond and when not to
        - My personal rule of thumb is to only respond to comments and controversies you can actually solve
    - Recent and loud (ex: AI submissions) be transparent and prompt when you can

Additional Moderator Questions

1) Do you have a preferred social media platform to use, and why?
2) What advice would you give to someone starting to advertise themself or their press for the first time?
3) What do you think "digital citizenship" looks like for an author or press?
4) Where do you see marketing on social media going in the next few years?

Q&A Session