

INTIMIDATED BY SOCIAL MEDIA?



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When students from St. Mary's College of Maryland study abroad, the liberal arts college sends them care packages a few weeks into the trip featuring snacks from home, including macaroni and cheese, peanut butter and a state favorite—Old Bay seasoning. Prior to shipping the packages, the school generates excitement among the students by posting a picture of the soon-to-arrive goodies. It's just one way St. Mary's College uses social media to connect with traveling students and promote its study abroad programs.

"Social media can enhance the international education experience," says Jeramy Johnson, Vice President of Marketing and Development for Academic Programs International (API), a provider of international programs. "Students can use social media to document their travels and cultural experiences, not only to share with families and friends back home, but to allow for future reflection. And schools can benefit from the great content generated by students to promote the idea of international education as well as their specific programs."

**YOUR STUDY
ABROAD
PROGRAM CAN
EASILY TAP INTO
SOCIAL MEDIA
OUTLETS.**

****Not to Worry!***



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WHY TO GO SOCIAL

Universities are relying more and more on social media outlets for promotion, connection and even crisis response, as these three examples highlight:

- **Promotion** – To foster support for its 250-plus study abroad programs in 90 countries, the University of Oregon created a 4-minute video called “The Duck Across the Pond” for use on various social media outlets. The video shows the school’s mascot, the Oregon Duck, in London eating fish and chips, crossing Abbey Road, visiting Buckingham Palace and more.
- **Connection** – St. Mary’s College of Maryland has a Facebook group for its study abroad students to share mutual experiences. The school prompts students to share photos of the craziest foods they’ve eaten or the best place they visited. Even better are the organic posts, where “students interact without us even prompting it,” says Mandy Reinig, Director of International Education at St. Mary’s College. For example, a study abroad alumna posted that she missed a certain food since returning to the U.S., and someone currently studying in that country shared how much he liked the delicacy, too.
- **Crisis Response** – “Social media helps us keep in contact with students in crisis situations, and we have unfortunately had to test that out recently,” says Reinig. A St. Mary’s student studying in Paris was in the Bataclan nightclub on November 13, 2015, but left minutes before the bombing. Reinig used Facebook Messenger to track down the student and ensure her whereabouts and safety.



TIPS FOR CHANNELING OUTLETS

There are so many social media outlets that it may seem overwhelming. Should you tweet or post videos on YouTube or Vine? Create a dedicated Facebook page or pin photos on Pinterest? “It’s still a relatively new and ever-changing medium,” says Johnson. “But right now, the visual platforms are king—things like Instagram, Pinterest and Snapchat. You’ve heard the cliché that a picture is worth a thousand words, and we now seem to all have amazing cameras in our pockets. It’s a great opportunity to tell these fantastic stories!”

In April, Snapchat—a mobile messaging application—dedicated one of its daily stories to study abroad. The company approached API to encourage students in its programs to contribute 10-second videos from their

host countries. “It was great to see such a rising and important social network like Snapchat see the value of study abroad,” says Johnson.

Kayla Patterson, Social Media Strategist for GoAbroad.com and Director of GoMedia, acknowledges that many people in the international education field may feel intimidated by social media. “They’re not really sure how to make it work or how to measure their results,” says Patterson. “But there’s a way. The more you accept social media, try it out and learn about it, the easier it gets.”

As you contemplate a social media strategy, consider these seven tips:

- **“Establish specific goals** you want to achieve with social media, and create those goals with your overall business objectives in mind,” says Patterson. That will help you determine the audience you are trying to reach and the best platform to use.
- **Pick a handful of channels.** “Try not to be a jack-of-all-trades when it comes to social media,” advises Reinig. “A lot of people think they should be on every platform. Instead, be really engaging on two or three channels rather than trying to be on everything.”
- **Work with the communications office.** “Most universities have an established communications office that runs social media for the school as a whole,” says

Johnson. "Partner with that office, and get tips and assistance on how it manages social media. If you can get the university main accounts to retweet and repost your items, that goes a long way."

- **Think like a student.** "Create content that students crave, which isn't necessarily your marketing content," says Patterson. Reinig encourages colleges to use lots of graphics, avoid heavy text and stay away from mundane topics about deadlines, rules, etc.
- **"Keep on top of social media trends,"** says Johnson. He says there are many user-friendly blogs and podcasts where you can learn about social media. Johnson recommends podcasts on the Social Media Examiner website.
- **Help students manage social media while abroad.** One of the risks of social media is that students will spend too much time glued to their

electronic devices rather than immersing themselves in the culture of the countries where they travel. Your pre-departure orientation should include reminders to disconnect and plug into the host culture. "I tell students the worst thing they can do when they are homesick is to get on Skype or Facebook and find out what everyone is doing back home. It will make it worse," says Reinig. "I tell them to go people watch in a café or go to a museum."

- **Keep at it!** "A successful social media program takes consistency and dedication. Going viral overnight is very rare," says Patterson. "Just keep at it. You can do it!"

Johnson understands that staff in study abroad offices wear many hats. They are advisors, administrators, marketers and more. So it's natural that social media may not be your number one priority. But it must be part of your to-do list.

"Social media is a great tool that more people need to make use of," says Reinig. "Students are using it, so you have to jump on the bandwagon to keep up with them."



T E R R A D O T T A

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