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**Using Social Media as a Marketing Tool for Scholarships**

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## **Executive Summary**

Scholarship Assistance Fund is a nonprofit organization with the mission of supporting local students (Arlington Heights, Buffalo Grove, Mt. Prospect, Prospect Heights, and Wheeling) that aim to achieve a higher education. The focus of the business project involved a few different parts, primarily being social media management, but also included other graphic design projects, website management, and grant research. Throughout the six months of the internship program, Scholarship Assistance Fund began to utilize social media in their process of marketing to students, on top of their outreach to schools and printing of physical posters. Along with this, they began to utilize grants from grant-giving foundations, realizing that they have the potential to provide more funding for scholarships. Through the business project, Scholarship Assistance Fund benefitted from the implementation of social media marketing, grant research, and improvement in graphic design, leading to more visually appealing designs.

## **Business Context**

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As long as college remains a financial burden on students, there will be numerous different nonprofit scholarship organizations that offer aid to students in need. Nonprofit organizations differ from the typical for-profit organization in the sense that they do not need to worry about financials in the same way. Nonprofits, like the title says, do not make a profit for their efforts, so they must be funded through other means. This can be done through a variety of methods, including investors, grants, and general fundraising (Norwich, 2016). Similar to for-profit organizations, though, nonprofits can benefit from the use of social media in order to garner interest and attention in their services, which can in turn increase funding (Milde 2017).

Scholarship Assistance Fund is a nonprofit organization that has a mission to help support local students (Arlington Heights, Buffalo Grove, Mt. Prospect, Prospect Heights, and Wheeling) that aim to achieve higher education. To achieve this, they primarily offer scholarships to students who live in those areas. This year they are offering thirteen \$2,500 one-year scholarships, and one four-year renewable scholarship totaling \$10,000. They have two primary goals for 2020. The first is that they plan on adding Elk Grove Village to the list of communities that they serve, which will bring them a step closer to supporting all District D214 communities. The second is to partner with District 214 to offer 1-2 more scholarships to first-generation students, expanding their reach (Dollars for Scholars, n.d.).

The part of Scholarship Assistance Fund that I primarily interacted with throughout my business project was the marketing portion. Marketing at Scholarship Assistance Fund occurs in a few different ways: social media, posters, and occasionally videos. Their social media presence consists of a Facebook and an Instagram page, where posts are made for a variety of different reasons, the most common ones being to inform students about the scholarships that are offered, warn applicants about upcoming deadlines, and to thank those that help support the organization. Going beyond that, posters are created and posted in local schools and libraries to inform students about these opportunities.

### **Business Project Description**

In recent years, social media has proven to be an effective tool for use by businesses to market their products and brand. This effectiveness has been reflected in numerous studies. One such study found due to the shift in marketing strategies since the appearance of social media, consumer's source of information for decisions on whether or not to buy a product has shifted to social media (Chen, 2018). This shows the importance of companies to use social media in the modern age, as consumers are looking less and less to traditional media to get their information. Another study also came to a similar conclusion, saying that companies need to focus more on their social media content marketing in order to attract customers to engage with their brand (Ahmad, 2016). This also shows the importance of businesses to expand their marketing to social media, as it can help reach out to more consumers and increase engagement with the brand.

Throughout my internship, I worked on numerous different tasks, the primary one being managing and building up Scholarship Assistance Fund's Instagram and Facebook pages. This meant that one of the most common tasks that I would be doing on my i-Days was making graphics, writing captions, and posting to Instagram and Facebook. These posts varied in content, some giving reminders on upcoming deadlines for the scholarships, others promoting the scholarships, and some giving recognition to those who help support Scholarship Assistance Fund.



Figure 1. An example of one of the many Instagram posts that was made throughout the internship



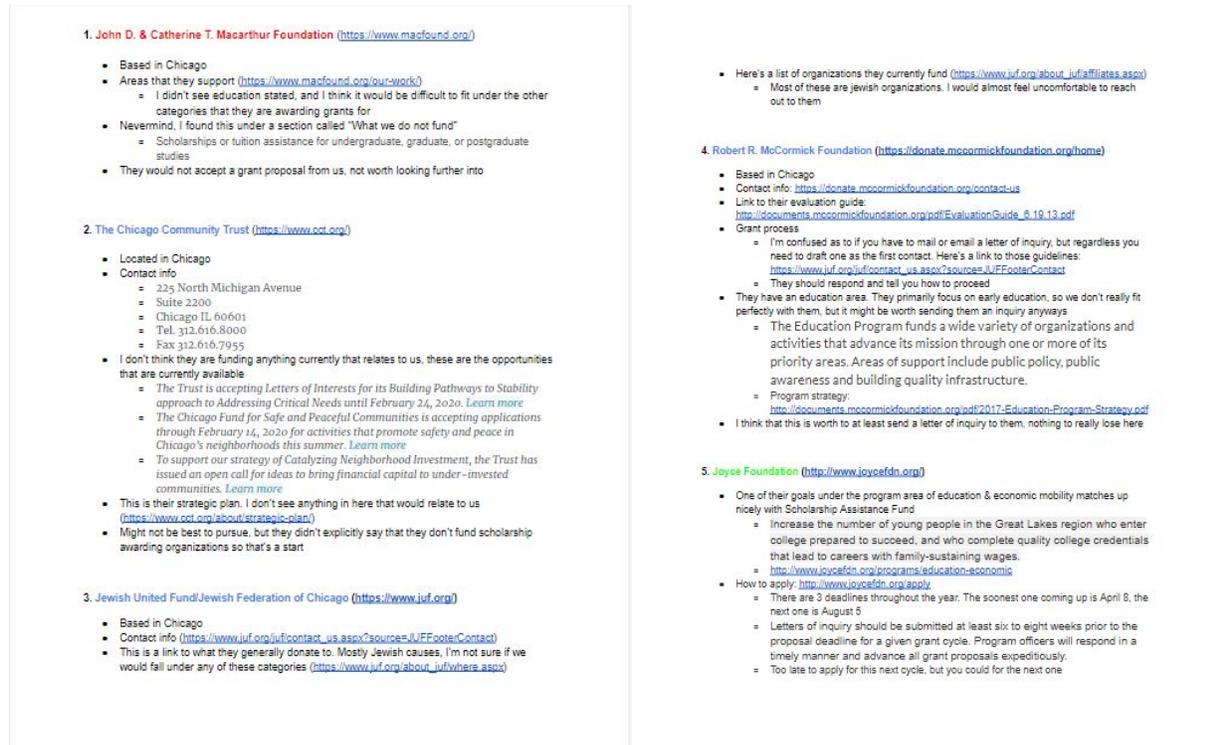
Figure 2. A sample Facebook post that was made to warn potential applicants about the upcoming application deadline

While my internship primarily dealt with the social media side of marketing, that doesn't mean that Scholarship Assistance Fund abandoned their traditional form of marketing. Because I was designing graphics for social media posts, I was also assigned the task of designing posters that would be put in public places such as schools and libraries in order to promote their scholarships. This was a slightly different experience to designing social media posts, as I needed to ensure that all of the pertinent information was on the graphic itself, and could not rely on a caption to hold this filler information. Despite this, I completed a few different posters over the course of a few i-Days.



Figure 3. A poster that is promoting Scholarship Assistance Fund's vocational scholarship. The QR code in the top left of the poster links to the organization's website.

At another point in the internship, I was tasked with doing something very different from the marketing side of things, but still provided me insight into the industry: researching grantmaking foundations. This entailed doing research on various organizations and discovering how well they match up with Scholarship Assistance Fund, i.e. the area that they generally service, their goals/missions, and other factors such as if past organizations they have funded are similar to this organization.



Figures 4 and 5. Excerpts from a document detailing all of the research into various organizations that I did. The colors represent how well they match Scholarship Assistance Fund/how likely they would be to fulfill a grant. Red indicates that there is some major thing that would prevent them from giving a grant to us. Blue indicates an uncertainty; there may be something unclear about the organization. Green represents that they are a good match.

## Business Project Research

There was one primary question that drove the business project: what is the best way to market Scholarship Assistance Fund? My methods of performing research into these two research relied heavily on using academic literature as a means to provide insight on these questions, and to help guide my management of the organization's social media. Since this is a broad question, it could be divided into different categories when doing research: how being a nonprofit affects the marketing strategy, how different social media platforms can differ, what the ideal posting schedule is, etc.

Social media as a whole is extremely useful, however, it is important to consider different platforms on social media, and how they may differ from one another. Consumers receive a different experience on social media depending on what platform they are using. For example,

platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat are used for social interaction, while platforms like Youtube and Pinterest are not. Facebook and Instagram are used to fill empty moments, while others are used in this way to a lesser extent. This means that all social media platforms have different strengths and weaknesses in what kind of experience they will give to the user. This translates to how advertising will be perceived on the platform, and to how these perceptions can affect a user's evaluation of the advertisement (Voorveld, 2018).

Another aspect of marketing that may differ from platform to platform is the ideal time to post content. This doesn't just differ from platform to platform, though, but also based on the demographic that one wishes to target. According to data collected by SproutSocial, Wednesday consistently appears to be one of the best days to post regardless of content. On Facebook, the most ideal days and times to post appeared to be Wednesday and Friday at 8-9 a.m. for nonprofit organizations. Instagram, on the other hand, had its best days and times on Tuesday from 1-3 p.m. and Wednesday at 2 p.m. (Arens, 2020).

While social media marketing is generally referring to traditional businesses, the practice can be extended to nonprofit organizations. While traditional use of marketing is still regularly used within nonprofit organizations, creating a thorough plan that adheres to the organization's mission. Making a strategy of this nature ahead of time will ultimately save time and money in the future. Along with this, once the plan is implemented, they must be prepared to make changes to ensure a successful campaign (Milde 2017).

All of this information definitely allowed me to gain insight on the best, most effective ways to market Scholarship Assistance Fund. For one, I ultimately decided against making a separate marketing plan for Instagram and Facebook, as the content on both is consumed very similarly, making it unnecessary to provide unique content to each platform. Along with this, I was able to make a sound marketing plan, deciding to post on Wednesdays around 2 p.m. on both platforms. This made the most sense, as it gave me time earlier in the day to create content to post and get it approved by my business mentor, and allowed me to post on the statistically most effective day to garner the most attention.

In terms of limitations, I was sometimes limited by those who were overseeing me. There were multiple occasions where I found that I had a complete post, but due to a lack of response from those who had to approve my post, I was just left waiting instead of being productive. This led to me having to post off-schedule, sometimes having to wait until the following week to make the post. Along with this, I was limited by the lack of a base following on the platform of Instagram specifically. I was essentially starting an account from scratch, which can prove very difficult to do when you don't have a great means of promoting the page, which in this case, I did not have access to.

## **Business Project Key Learnings & Recommendations**

I definitely took a lot away from this project, improving upon skills of communication, graphic design, social media and website management, grant research, etc. In terms of communication, I was expected to stay in constant contact with my mentor throughout my i-days. This consisted of having a meeting through Microsoft Teams at 10 a.m. every internship day, along with consistently sending emails updating her on what I was accomplishing throughout the day, and asking for help if I needed it. This improved my ability to do things like give updates on projects, and to more concisely say what I was doing in an understandable manner. In terms of graphic design, I worked very closely with Canva throughout the internship, making me very familiar with the site, along with the general principles of graphic design that were utilized when making things like Instagram posts, posters, and raffle tickets. I strongly believe that these skills will help me in the future, as graphic design is a very versatile skill that could be applied to many different jobs and tasks. In terms of social media and website management, I had to make posts to Instagram, Facebook, along with updating Scholarship Assistance Fund's website regularly. This experience allowed me to gain skills of juggling between different platforms and creating rough posting schedules for those platforms. Finally, I gained skills in doing grant research, and learned a lot about how to conduct this research in an effective manner. While I am unsure if I will use this information in the future, I think that it greatly improved my knowledge on the process of finding and applying for grants, which could be applicable if I ever find myself in that position of a company.

Overall, I greatly enjoyed my time acting as an intern for Scholarship Assistance Fund, but this does not mean that I cannot make recommendations to both the organization and my mentor, Marie DiVirgilio for the future. While I think Scholarship Assistance Fund is making great strides to improve their social media presence, I still think they could do a better job at promoting their social media pages. This includes showing their Instagram more prominently on their website, along with promoting it more during their events such as their golf outing and scholarship recipient reception. As for my mentor, I think she did a great job, especially with scheduling weekly meetings. These meetings were great to help keep me on track and make sure that I always had tasks to complete throughout my i-Days. If she were to take on another intern in the future, I would absolutely recommend keeping these meetings intact, as they create a sense of structure to the entire internship. Despite this sense of structure, I still found that at points I was lost as to what I should be doing, and how they adhered to the overall business project. As a whole, I would recommend that she spend a little more time on fleshing out the business project, and making sure that everything that is being completed pertains to it.

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