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MEJO 332

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## **MEJO 332 Public Relations Writing**

### **Communications Audit – McNair Educational Foundation**

#### **Background**

The Robert and Janice McNair Educational Foundation was originally founded in 1989 to address the financial need for Rutherford County, North Carolina students to pursue postsecondary education. Its mission has expanded through the generosity of Robert and Janice McNair to support students from elementary school through the completion of their postsecondary degree by providing academic and financial opportunities through scholarship, mentorship and informational programs.

McNair maintains a website full of resources to aid students in their journey for a postsecondary education, information about upcoming and past events, information regarding scholarships and information about programs the organization offers. The foundation also runs Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and Snapchat accounts, on which it promotes programs to students, parents, mentors and teachers. The foundation has a staff of 12 employees and is governed by a board of trustees. Monica Lee is the executive director of the foundation. The organization serves as a national model for serving students in rural communities. With influence in 16 schools with over 7500 students, the foundation makes a significant impact across their 30 programs.

Overall, the McNair Educational Foundation does not have a strategic campaign implemented that speaks directly to their target audiences, specifically parents, and is in need of strong digital communications in the middle of the Coronavirus pandemic. The organization has

offices in each high school in the county, so they are missing in-person interactions with students and mentors, as well as the convenience of being able to gather with students during school hours to deliver information about scholarships, opportunities and programs.

Our team had the opportunity to meet with our client, the Robert and Janice McNair Educational Foundation, on Feb. 11, 2021. After discussing the successes and struggles of the organization's current communications efforts with the client, our team evaluated McNair Educational Foundation's current social media strategy, as well as its website. The SWOT analysis that follows examines the current communications efforts of the McNair Educational Foundation and addresses these strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats by providing recommendations for future communications strategies.

## **SWOT Analysis**

### **Strengths:**

- The website is intuitive, making it easy to find information. Menus are well-organized and information is clearly presented.
- Branding is cohesive and distinctive; the same color scheme and font are maintained across social channels, website pages, graphics and videos.
- McNair Educational Foundation produces engaging and informative videos that encourage college readiness and/or highlight past successful programs that are specifically targeted to a clear audience (comedy for high school, informative for parents, etc.)
- The McNair Educational Foundation website offers many helpful resources and scholarships, making it useful to key publics.

- The organization already has a large following on their social media channels. Over 2,500 publics follow its Facebook updates, almost 700 users follow its Instagram, and over 1,000 follow its Snapchat.
- The organization is self-funded, so communications do not have to involve fundraising efforts.
- McNair Educational Foundation's Snapchat garners a lot of engagement.
- The organization has the budget to continue a giveaway communications approach.
- The McNair Educational Foundation website offers many helpful programs and scholarships, making it easy to advocate for the organization.

#### **Weaknesses:**

- Matthew McSwain's position as community relations specialist is relatively new, and the organization is just beginning to build their digital presence; there is absolutely a need to streamline messages across different channels for McNair Educational Foundation's different audiences.
  - The staff recognizes that they are "doing instead of planning," they need a strategic communications plan.
- McNair Educational Foundation does not deliver communications to share and celebrate the opportunities it provides Rutherford County students to the larger community in Rutherford County and the state; the majority of their communications are internal to their stakeholders (students, parents and mentors).
- The foundation's social media has some weaknesses.
  - Its TikTok profile is underdeveloped and in need of consistent posts.
  - Snapchat has been a successful messaging vehicle and receives traction, but the target audience is not reached.

- Middle schoolers have the largest interactions, but messages are intended to reach high schoolers.
- Instagram is spot on with messaging and tone, but it could improve with consistent branding throughout posts visually.
- Facebook is currently reaching former students, community members and mentors; staff desires for this to be the main channel that is targeting parents.
- Website weaknesses are as follows:
  - “News & Updates” tab on the website needs to be updated; the most recent post was published in 2019.
    - This has been updated since the original audit in February 2021.
  - There is a duplicate “National Signing Day” link on the “High School Programs” page.
  - Headlines in dropdown menus fluctuate between uppercase and lowercase font.
  - Some copy on the website is not in AP style (mostly Oxford commas).
- There is a lack of consistency in AP style throughout emails, social media and website
- Some photos on the website are low-resolution, highly saturated and washed out.
  - This has been updated since the original audit in February 2021.

### **Opportunities:**

- The McNair Educational Foundation often communicates with key stakeholders through its website. The staff expressed their hopes that website improvements and advanced outreach on their website will result in better exposure to students and parents and engagement.
- The organization uses social media as a primary tool to communicate and hopes that, with advancements in social media outreach, they will be able to better reach students and parents. The different social media channels will target different groups; Facebook

will target parents, Instagram will target high school students and Snapchat will target middle school students.

- Communication and engagement is key. McNair Educational Foundation does a great job at trying to communicate with their students, but getting students to react or engage with posts is difficult.
- The organization has an extensive website with everything you need to know about the organization, but the design has not been updated in years.

### **Threats:**

- COVID-19 has heavily impacted students' engagement with their classes, and especially their extracurriculars. High school students are struggling to invest time in remote meetings and McNair Educational Foundation's opportunities.
- The biggest threat is remote learning. The website struggles to appeal to high school students. In normal years, they could host meetings, field trips and activities in person that sparked students' interest. Figuring out how to overcome this struggle is a threat to their communication tactics.
- The organization's main way of engaging with students was in person. Transitioning to remote learning has been extremely difficult to maintain. Students are not likely to use the resources and opportunities the McNair Educational Foundation provides to students without face-to-face engagement. Figuring out how to navigate this threat has been difficult for the organization.

### **Recommendations:**

- Implement an audience-based approach on the website for different target audiences:
  - Students and parents of Rutherford County

- Update pictures
- Edit for AP style
- Promote website updates on social media accounts
- Add recent stories on the “News and Updates” tab, specifically stories about the organization’s successes in the pandemic

## **Conclusion**

McNair’s largest weakness is also its biggest opportunity. Each social channel has a sizable following, but social media strategy must be adjusted and better optimized to target different audiences. There is also opportunity for growth on TikTok, as well as cross-platform utilization of these videos on Instagram. Engagement is low, so McNair Educational Foundation’s communications must incite action, rather than just passive viewership. Proactive promotion of the organization’s online events is crucial to the organization’s efforts during this time. Additionally, updates to the website will appeal to target audiences, such as students, parents, mentors and teachers. Our projects this semester will focus on promoting the strides the foundation is making in supporting students in their postsecondary education endeavors and preparation, as well as strategic social media communication and planning.