YikYak? Snapchat? Four Questions to Ask Before Launching a New Platform

Snapchat wasn't a prong in Murray State University's social media strategy—until students convinced Dana Howard that it should be.

Earlier this year, Howard, social media manager at the 11,000-student Kentucky school, worked with a marketing class on a promotions project. When groups of students were challenged to create a social strategy for the popular All Campus Sing event, almost every one chose Snapchat as a channel.

"I wasn't ready to dive in until I heard students saying, 'This is what we're using. This is where we want to hear from you,'" says Howard.

Communications professionals may find themselves in a similar position, grappling with whether to adopt the next new platform-from Snapchat to YikYak to whatever comes along next. A key first step, says Howard, is to examine the audience that is using a platform and compare that to the audiences an institutional marketer wants to reach.

This assessment can help professionals avoid "shiny new object syndrome" or leaping on every cool, new thing, says Jonathan Gabriel, senior communications specialist at the University of Central Florida's College of Business Administration. He asks three questions:

- Do we have the time/bandwidth for creating content for a new platform?

- Does this new tool help me achieve our broader institutional goals?

- Has it attracted a significant portion of our target audience?

Consider, too, this question: how might your audience view your institution on the new platform? Howard says she's nixed platforms because students "don't want us there." Poll student ambassadors or convene a student "Is This Stupid?" committee—a much-discussed tactic at the 2015 CASE Social Media and Community Conference—to weigh in on the question.

Finally, even if a new tool seems viable, organize a soft launch or a long testing period.

Gabriel says he often tests new social media platforms informally to determine whether they might help the college in the future. For example, he notes that he has been experimenting with Periscope and Meerkat but hasn't formally launched them yet. Similarly, when launching Snapchat, Howard worked with students from the marketing course to create an account for the All Campus Sing event. When it was overwhelmingly successful, Murray State transitioned to a full university account and baked Snapchat into its strategy for its August orientation program.

Finally, communications professionals should work with the timeline that fits their team's needs. Although Murray State has dived into Snapchat fairly quickly-during the course of a school year-Howard says she researched Pinterest for a full year before launching it.