DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

MARKETING PROPOSAL

FOR HIRE :

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Dalhousie University is a widely known public research university located in Halifax. It was founded in 1818 and boasted 13 academic faculties, dedicated to building understanding through excellence in teaching.

This proposal will highlight some of the current statistics and strategy, areas of improvement, and proposed marketing plan to increase positive brand awareness, showcase the diversity of the student population, and increase engagement. The proposal shall also serve as a medium to showcase my skills, my strategic thinking and my dedication to this project and job opportunity.

SEO/SEM

99%	**206k**	149	221K	115K	**90**
Organic traffic vs Paid	Total Organic keywords	Paid Keywords (PPC)	Est. Monthly SEO Clicks	Est. Budget	Overall SEO Score

Search engine Optimization is important part of marketing in today's world. A good SEO strategy will help increase organic traffic to a site and rank higher in SERP.

Problem:

- While Dalhousie has conquered most keywords including Dal and Dalhousie, the ranking for related services or keywords to DAL is ranked lower. (Example: Brighspace)
- Long tail Keywords rank lower in category searches than specific searches that include the word DAL. (Ex: Universities in Halifax/ study in Maritimes/ best research university)
- According to QS ranking, Dalhousie is the best-ranked university east of Montreal and ranks currently at 11th in the country, yet no mention of it on-site, on social media, or in any posts.
- Current organic keywords, only 3,800 words out of 206k keywords help it on the first page of searches. 14,000 keywords responsible for 11-15 in SERP can be improved onto first page results.

Recommendations:

- Investing in more relevant content marketing through independent bloggers, journalist students, and news articles and backlinking them to DAL.
- Reducing spam links. Currently, there are about 3% of irrelevant backlinks. While the percentage is not a big number, Universities like SMU and Queens have less than 1% which is ranked higher in SERP.
- Paid Keywords/ AdWords strategy is a lot geared toward negative keyword screening. The budget for PPC should be increased to rank higher for more related keywords.
- Long tail keywords like 'Universities in Halifax or Maritime Universities' need to be included and rank higher for DAL in SERP.
- PPC campaigns are currently seasonal and DAL spends more on PPC during spring and summer for admission season than the rest of the year. While this is usual, there are no paid SERP ads that are available for DAL.
- Paid Ads Meta description can be improved for better description and results. The current CTR for paid ads is estimated at 1-2%*. While ad links directly to future students' pages, some links are too long for display and can contribute to higher CTR.

Data Source - SPyfu.com

Social Media Strategy

Social Media presence is an important factor that helps a brand produce an identity, and perceptions, build a loyal following and increase engagement with consumers and community.

Followers vs Avg. Engagement

Fo	**34k**	**30.5k**	**40k**	**133k**	**21k**
	Instagram	Twitter	Facebook	Linkedin	Youtube
En	95	6	24	40+	4

Problem:

- While Dalhousie boasts of a decent number of followers, the average engagement is very low.
- Most of the posts are backlinked to Dalnews and while this is a good strategy bit.ly links are shown to have very less engagement if there isn't anything in it for consumers.
- Most of the Instagram is filled with pictures of buildings with no students or representation of activities on campus.
- Most engaging posts are focussed on individual stories and accomplishments are shown to be more inspiring and engaging among our target group, yet there are only a handful of stories focused on individual stories.
- Hashtags are very generic to Dalhousie and do not cover relevant and opportunistic tags to increase followers and engagement. For example, the most used hashtag on the Twitter profile was #DalhousieU and it was only 31 times.
- Lack of incoming hashtags and mentions. Multiple Twitter and Instagram profiles.
- Lack of human perspective on posts. The posts are generally updates and bit.ly links which while informative are not promoting engagement and are often lost in clutter even among followers. For example, A student, unfortunately, died in Sheriff's residence on 17th December 2022 from meningitis. The posts and tweets on the page only talked about public health advisory and the temporary closure of Sheriff hall and no personal tone or empathy about the loss of one of their students .

Recommendations:

Instagram

- Instagram is a picture-based social media that primarily relies on the media used to convey the message. The media should be relevant, high quality, and diversified to include all aspects of DalU life, not just the buildings.
- Hashtags and mentions should be chosen based on relevance, opportunity, engagement, and tracking of specific campaigns. For example post regarding Madeline Cormier on 19 November'22 has 8 hashtags and all of them are too general about Dal or Halifax to boost engagement. Important tags like #BLACKANDGOLD #DANCE #Dalugrad #Gradutiongoggles #Dalcelebrates etc would have been more relevant.
- Multiple Instagram pages chip away at the target group and segregate the interactions with Dalu. For example Dalstudentlife has more engagement with the Dal community than the Dalhousieu page on Instagram.

- Social media content creation does not have to be a lone battle. Engaging students and community alike to tag, mention and boost engagement. For example: Create new social media contests that work for a cause but also engage students to participate and tag. The competitions can be used to promote maritime tourism, student life at Dal, "who wore it best" (Dalu accessories), sports-related contests, etc.
- No posts on student activities or sports accomplishments. A sense of community and Dalhousie pride is lacking in Social media and to boost it up, pictures and videos from sports meets should be posted creating a sense of Dalupride among students.
- While Dalu boasts of many student communities, specifically a rich international community but it is not featured, celebrated, or talked about on Social media channels.

Facebook

- Facebook's most engaging consumer base is the older generation and in the case of Dalhousie university that would be parents, staff, and alum. The posts on Facebook need to be positive, celebrating individual and university achievements, grants, and scholarship winners, and powerful individual stories.
- While narrowing down choices for university is a logical decision, where you want to belong is an emotional decision, and as such DalU needs to run campaigns that showcase not only the benefits of Dalu on paper but rewarding experience of alums and current students.
- Bit.ly links are better visible and have shown engagement with hyperlinks with the words "read more " or "learn more".
- Facebook also is better known for community development with groups and active community threads. Posts and updates should be retagged or reshared in community pages as well to increase engagement with the links.
- Fundraising efforts have shown to have gained interactions and engagement with Facebook more than other social media.

Twitter

- Twitter is a great space to share updates and fascinating directions the Dalhousie University community is exploring in terms of academic pursuits, research grants, opinion polls, etc.
- Currently, Dalhousie University's average is 21 tweets a week with an engagement rate of 0.02%. To increase engagement, Dalhousie needs to streamline its tweets based on relevance and interests.
- Dalhousie university needs a human tone in tweets. In today's social media, the line between an individual profile and a company is shrinking. Many companies have posts that are not in the third person or blanket statements but with a more personalized inclusive tone, that sparks debates, discussions, resolutions, and retweets.
- Current problems faced by Dalhousie University are represented on Twitter as news and information but do not provide any solutions or steps taken to overcome them. For example, Meningitis Death in dorm rooms sparks fear and concern among current and prospective parents, students, and staff. A good strategy would be to talk about it and give students a forum to express the loss. A tribute organized by students with school representation is a good way to show Dalhousie cares about every student and that they are not just a statistic every year.

Youtube

- As opposed to 2021, Youtube engagement has significantly reduced in 2022. From January 2021 to September 2021 alone, the Dalhousie page has gained 10,000+ followers and 2 million views on videos.
- Dalhousie university has created engaging campaigns using its community activities to power the videos before but unfortunately, the strategy has not been used in recent times. For example, in Tigers vs Huskies where both SMU and DALU president's challenged each other toward the outcome of the game.
- Youtube is a great platform for Dalhousie University to showcase campus tours, and dorm life, make short clips about labs and new equipment, live broadcasts of seminars, highlights of sports meets, messages from the president, short motivating speeches, success stories, etc.
- Dalhousie University is one of the top research schools and has a lot to offer in terms of research in areas regarding energy generation, conservation and development of marine sectors, and many more engineering projects that will shape tomorrow. 2-minute videos under #daluspotlights that showcase one story at a time while connecting to the realities and rewards of the research are another strategy to improve engagement and brand awareness.
- Student life is usually filled with a lot of academic assignments, meeting extracurricular needs, and also balancing a social life. But despite the heavy workload, many students want to start a project they are passionate about in college life and lack resources and motivation. For example, Simon Fraser University 2021 announced 3000$ cash prize for community engagement projects and saw 54 teams come up with amazing projects such as Indigenous tutoring and Naxolhome (kit for overdose).
- Creating sub-channels or category playlists with titles such as DalU pioneers showcasing academic achievements, the old walls of Dalu series that explores Dal's rich history over the years, I am Dal - series focussed on student's stories and struggles and Dalu Leads - with grads and alum reflecting on their time and benefits from Dal.

Linkedin

- Linkedin is a great place to develop a professional network with various companies, recruiters, potential students, other academic professionals, and other educational institutions.
- Showcasing the best and ongoing developments of the university, research projects, academic discussions, policy debates, etc. have shown to be very engaging on Linkedin.
- Interesting Blog posts, Dalnews, and third-party content that Dalhousie University currently posts on Twitter will have better reception on Linkedin.
- Compared to other social media where being short is rewarded to reach the target audience, Linkedin is a little different where most engaging posts are between 1000 and 2000 words on Linkedin.
- Community blog articles that help with job search, employee retention, tips for resumes, etc are a good way to diversify and engage your target group on Linkedin.
- Educational articles are also very popular in terms of engagement on Linkedin. For example, what is SEM and how is it different from SEO?

Snapchat

- Many universities like the University of PEI, Iowa, Michigan Miami, etc have come to start an official University Snapchat account to engage with their students.
- Snapchat is a great tool to engage with the younger target audience. The current demographics show 48% of Snapchat active users are between 15-25, the perfect target group for universities as they are just starting to look for schools and careers seriously.
- Snapchat is a platform where the university does not have to seem like an official strict authoritarian but a chance to showcase the messages in a fun way. (For example, posts like Are you ready for E-day? (Exam day) and encourage students to share and tag preparation pics.
- Creating Snapchat filters and AR inserts that students can use to showcase the pride of the school. For example, the school mascot AR sticker with the #I am Dalproud tag.
- Snapchat stories can showcase, student life, one day in the life of, campus tours, new and exciting stories from universities, student festivals, and contests. Students come to university for an experience and Snapchat is a great tool to directly talk to that target and showcase different experiences of Student life.

Other Digital Marketing Efforts

- Traditional Campaigns utilizing Digital displays, Banner ads, Geo-fencing capabilities, Retargeting efforts based on internet behaviors and college intentions, ads on radio, free music streaming platforms, Over-the-top (OTT), and free streaming television apps (Tubi, Crave) can be used all year round tweaking parameters and budgets based on the season.
- The university website while doing good on SEO, the design and first paint loading, larger images, too much content on a lead page, etc. are contributing to lower performance in both desktop and mobile versions. The website needs to improve in certain areas to attain a higher rating as Google considers this for SEO. For example, if the SMU page has a higher score in Google page insights, then SMU would show up first before DAL when searching for Universities in Halifax. (Google Page Speed Insights)
- Traditional Billboard ads are used less and less by universities as more often than not, the efforts only reach the city level where most of the targets are already Brand aware, and hence their efforts are best utilized on other marketing efforts.
- Since the pandemic, many universities have seen growth in virtual Open houses where the tours can be more engaging, less overwhelming, and very informative to not just students that can attend but also accessible to potential students all over the world.
- A set of well-defined goals (KPI) can be utilized to create various campaigns that are easier to reach a specific target and measure engagement or retention, growth in applications, etc.
- Currently, Dalhousie University lacks a specific brand image online. Dalu needs to refine its brand image and establish how they want to be seen. University should have a 'voice'. This 'voice' turns it into a person, something people can use to simplify their thoughts and impressions to resonate with.

Brief Competitve Analysis

	DALU	SMU	Queen's	SFU	UBC
Facebook Followers	**42K**	**23k**	**100k**	**80K**	**304k**
Avg. Engagement	12+	14+	43+	22+	28+
Instagram Followers	**34K**	**10k**	**61.2K**	**36K**	**145k**
Engagement	3.86%	3.56%	1.87%	1.88%	0.9%
Twitter Followers	**30.6K**	**13k**	**68.6K**	**51K**	**90k**
Engagement	0.02%	0.4%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%
Youtube Followers	**22K**	**912**	**5K**	**20K**	**35k**
Engagement	1.97%	3.7%	0.8%	1.38%	1.56%
SEO score	**90**	85	92	99	82