

DRAFT OF MEDIA STRATEGIES PLAN:  
THE EMERSON CENTER FOR ARTS & CULTURE

Stacey Ray

Marketing, Media & Communication II

University of Oregon

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The Emerson Center for Arts and Culture is a nonprofit community center and arts organization in Bozeman, Montana. The organization provides a variety of quality arts and culture programming, education opportunities as well as space for public use, social events, and retail/office space for local businesses, mostly local cultural businesses and organizations. The web based media that The Emerson is actually utilizing is fairly active, but they are only using a few digital sources very extensively. These sources include their website, Facebook page, e-newsletters, and digital community calendars.

I found the website to be relatively unorganized and somewhat difficult to use when trying to find important elements that should be readily available but were not, such as the mission statement. The design is lacking, and much of the visual content seems to warrant better curation. The organization just rebranded, so I was surprised at how the quality of their new logo mismatched the seemingly “random” aesthetics of the website. The site does effectively provide information on upcoming events but, like much of The Emerson marketing, I find that it promotes the event without nurturing the intriguing story that is so essential to generating interest. I would like to see galleries, videos, press, artist and event features, interviews and testimony that provide access to the history and mission of the organization as well as the stories behind the programming and events.

The Facebook page is somewhat richer than the website, and they post on most days, but the posts are sporadic, with content posted continuously for two or three days and then nothing. Posts include information and photos about auction items, tenants, artists and businesses, teasers for upcoming events and exhibitions, images of artwork, ticket purchases, workshops, events photos, schedules and other updates. Posts also include other news, videos and events going on in the community and within the university that are relevant to the Emerson’s mission. They

have laid the foundation for a very strong social media presence but, as with the website, I would like to see greater emphasis on stories, testimonies, interviews, photos, and less promotional jargon about tickets, event times, fundraisers and schedules. They need to focus on what makes the Emerson valuable, and they just need to do more of it, consistently and with purpose.

The Emerson sends out a weekly e-newsletter listing upcoming events and programming in the building. Their eNews generally contains information on upcoming news and events, classes and workshops, artists and information about rentals, memberships and donations. They are of decent design but the design does not connect well with that of the website. The emails are all very similar to one another, without much variation and even with the same lead content each time. They are well organized but lacking in variety and dynamic design which could be accomplished by creating features and utilizing more effective imagery.

While the website, Facebook page and eNews require improvements in order to be at their best, I recommend that the organization adopt other media channels in addition to those basic three. Instagram, Flickr, YouTube and Twitter are platforms that would provide an additional level of content and greater exposure for The Emerson. They would also help to build connections with audiences and share stories supportive to the organization's identity and mission.

I was very misled by the fact that The Emerson used a Twitter icon in their eNews but I was unable to locate a profile for the organization. It is likely that they did not notice the automatic inclusion of the Twitter thumbnail in their mailings. Twitter can be easily paired with Facebook to share stories and events, engage with audiences and also link The Emerson to other arts and culture organizations, businesses, people and happenings. It is a fast and easy method of

social media that provides instant connection and quick updates. The unfortunate aspect about Twitter is that it is not as popular as other social media platforms such as Facebook, and organizations and audiences tend to have a more difficult time understanding how to use Twitter effectively. It also has limitations on content length because the tweets are to be very concise for fast and easy consumption. It is more applicable to engage other organizations and partnerships in the community as well as the younger audience that exists within Montana State University and the Bozeman community.

Instagram and Flickr would be very helpful tools for The Emerson to share its story. Currently, the website and Facebook page are effectively marketing upcoming events; the information is relevant and up to date, but there is too much text and too little testimony, evocative imagery and personal stories that communicate the real message within the mission. Using photo sharing applications such as Instagram and Flickr would not only broaden the reach of the organization but provide an easy method of sharing artist and artwork photos, images from events and imagery that can help to build dimension in the stories initiated through The Emerson. The website is lacking in any sort of robust gallery and the images on Facebook are not tagged or organized in such a way as to be very effective. The Emerson offers an endless variety of cultural programming and education activities, most of which are represented by a headliner, brief description and an image or two online but very few of them portray the depth of impact that these robust activities have within the community.

Instagram and Flickr also provide the opportunity for participants to engage with the stories, feel better connected with what is going on at the Emerson and participate in online social imaging activities, connecting their own life experiences with Emerson programming. Both channels tend to attract an audience in between the ages of 18-35 which is a big portion of

the population relevant to the Emerson, which, like most organizations, struggles to get the young adult population, especially university students, inside its doors. As with any web channel, an effective presence on Instagram and Flickr would require staff time and energy to take photos, encourage visitors to send photos, develop content and maintain an active presence. In an organization with only seven staff members, only one of which is dedicated to community outreach, adding another task, even so small, can be daunting when piled on top of an already immense workload.

For similar reasons as Instagram and Facebook serve to illustrate the robust programming and events associated with the Emerson, video channels such as YouTube and Vimeo also provide methods of reaching wider audiences while also more effectively capturing the mission and stories that characterize the organization. There is little to no video material currently utilized on The Emerson web media even though the organization has hosted and partnered with film festivals, innovative workshops and lectures and other exciting and creative events. After living in Bozeman for seven years, I have been surprised to find out just how inventive and original some of The Emerson happenings really are, because one finds very little engaging material on their website. I would like to see The Emerson utilize video previews of films, engage with artists through interviews and recorded lectures, and utilize video montages of their programming to better capture the people, stories and real impact, because those are the elements that truly give the organization its value.

As the main arts organization in Bozeman, there is great potential for The Emerson to build its “word-of-mouth” reputation, and I think that better utilizing and expanding its web media channels will help to cultivate results in that arena. Additions of web media strategies would greatly elaborate on the story-telling aspect that is currently missing from their marketing.