



WHITE PAPER

# The Social Revolution

Redefining the Student Experience in  
Australian Higher Education Institutions

Hootsuite™

# Introduction

## A Hootsuite Whitepaper

Social technologies have revolutionised the communication landscape in Australia's higher education institutions. Since Mark Zuckerberg created Facebook in his dormitory room over a decade ago, prospective, current, and past students expect more immediacy in their engagement with universities than ever before.

The social revolution has begun, and it is redefining the educational journey for students worldwide. As the world's leading institutions aim to enhance student experiences, engagement and retention, campuses have become increasingly digital educational environments. A modern 'digital campus' fully engages and connects students, improving their engagement both on and off campus, which enables institutions to recruit and retain students, communicate academic success and thought leadership, and grow their reputation amongst a globally competitive environment.

Hootsuite has collaborated with data research agency RTL to analyse the social media activities and behaviours of 128 Australian universities and higher education institutions. Benchmarking these against leading institutions worldwide, we have discovered that the adoption of social media within the industry has been one-dimensional—with institutions struggling with the transition

to digital campuses, where social media has the potential to connect and deliver a revolutionised student experience.

This report explores the challenges faced by higher education institutions in their campaigns towards a 'digital campus' that influence their ability to deliver a revolutionised student experience, and the impacts on brand, perception, recruitment, and retention.

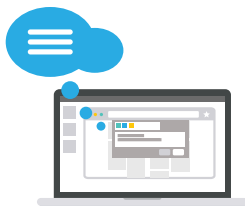
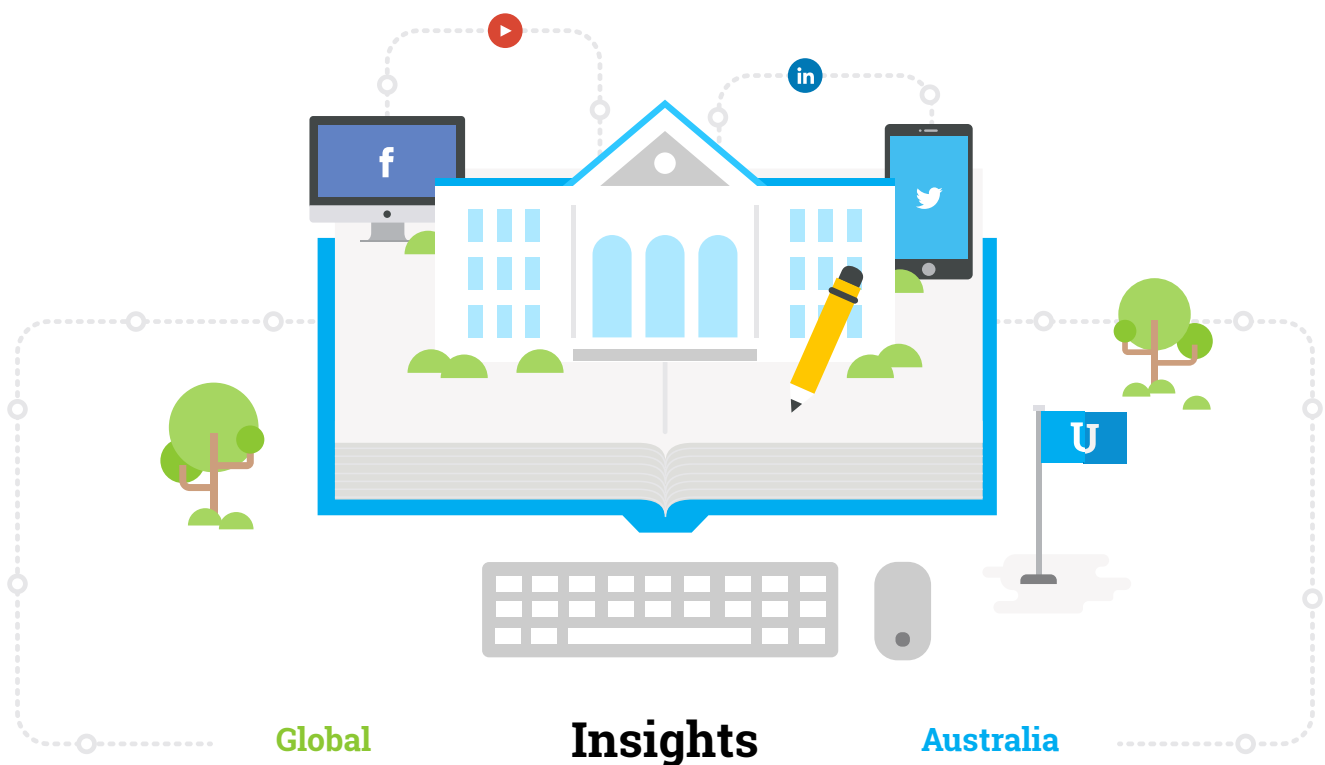
### **About Hootsuite**

Hootsuite is the most widely used platform for managing social media, loved by over 14 million people around the globe and trusted by more than 800 of the Fortune 1000, and over 1,100 educational institutions in Australia. Our platform brings together institution's social networks and integrates with hundreds of business applications, allowing the development of meaningful customer relationships.

## The research

This research examined the social media behaviours of all domestic universities in Australia and 50% of the Australian Government's Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) registered education providers<sup>1</sup>. Student insights were sourced from 2,290 Australian and 231 global social media users who self reported as being current students across social media channels.

Benchmarking the findings against leading institutions worldwide, we have discovered that the development of social media within the Australian higher education industry has been one-dimensional—with institutions struggling to connect and deliver a modern and innovative student experience.



70% leverage social media to engage in conversations with students on campus and provide a platform for students to collaborate on projects and share ideas.



While a majority of Australian institutions have already captured an audience on social media, most are using social media as a one-way broadcast channel or bulletin board.



**2/3** global universities are experimenting with Snapchat to communicate and engage with students on campus.



**Less than 50%** are engaging in public conversations on social media channels.

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**What are Australian students talking about on social media?**



**16%** Course work, assignments and tutorials



**14%** Tuition fees and costs of education



**14%** Trying to find a contact number for, or within the institutions



While **83%** of Australian universities use social media, only **56%** of non-university institutions engage in similar activity.

# Results

Australian education providers are lagging behind global leaders, with less than 50% engaging in public conversations on social media channels.

All leading **global institutions** are publishing up to **5 times a day**.

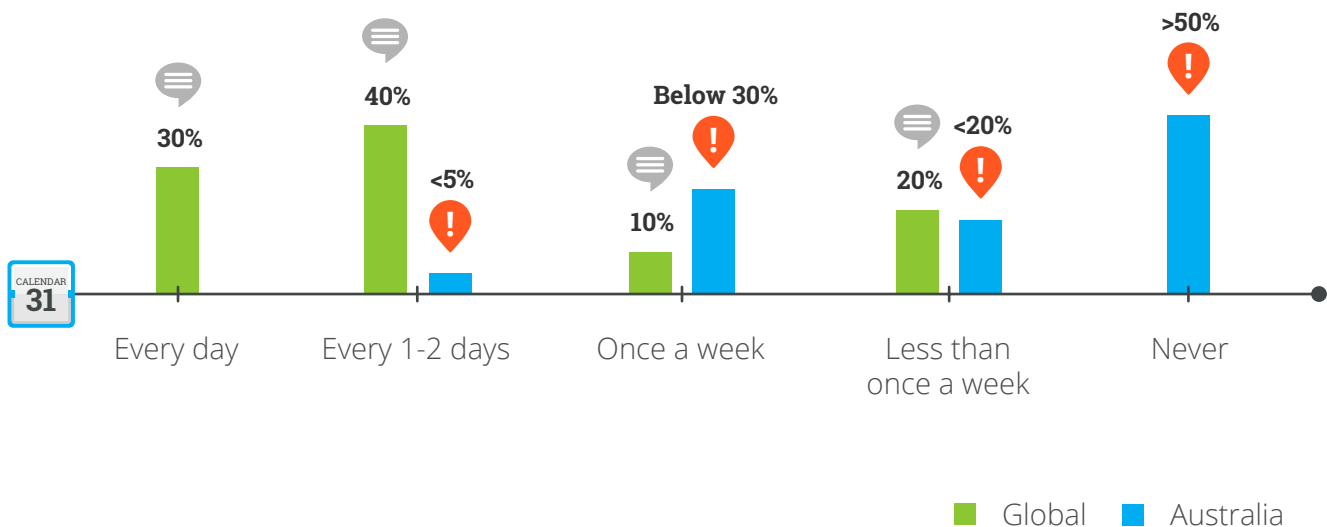


**82.5%** of **Australian universities** are publishing content at least **once a day**.



**43% of non-university institutions have not published** any content to their social media accounts in over **2 months**.

How often are institutions actively engaging in public conversations on their channels?

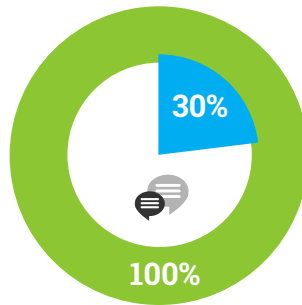


How often are institutions actively engaging in public conversations on their channels?

Global Institutions

100%

of leading global universities are regularly publishing thought leadership content from faculty and alumni.



Australian Universities

Only 30%

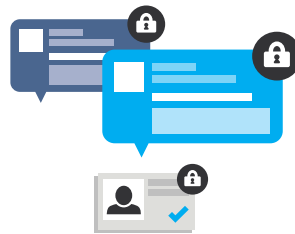
of Australian institutions are regularly publishing thought leadership content.

Centralisation of social media

Global Institutions

80%

have social media activity through a core account or cohesive channel strategy.



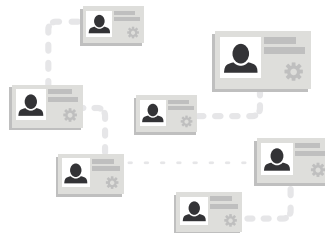
Australian Universities

40%

have social media activity through a core account or cohesive channel strategy.

20%

of institutions retain a 'parent' account, but enable faculties and colleges to managing their own social media accounts.



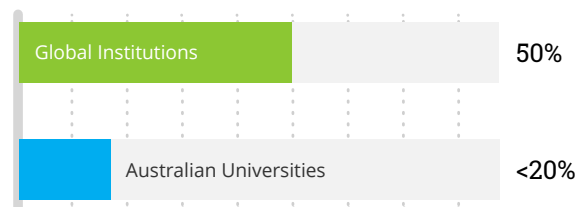
15%

of institutions have **over 50** social media accounts representing their institution.



Student exposure on social media

Institutions publishing research or thought leadership content from non-doctorate and junior students.



# Rationale for revolution

A majority of higher education institutions have observed social media emerge organically in various administrative and academic teams. These departments have developed social media programs largely in isolation from one another, sometimes sharing best practices but rarely coordinating their efforts under a single strategy. Fragmentation of social media initiatives, which are geared toward their individual business goals, community responsibilities, and educational objectives, results in a confusing and risky communication environment that fails both students and administrators.

*“Streamlining our communications whilst empowering social media moderators across the institution has enabled us to harness the power of social as a way to connect, not just communicate, with our on-campus and online communities. By working to centralise our social media presence, we are creating diversity within our audiences, conversations and content. We minimise content fatigue and provide variety for users to experience the whole brand story of CQUni.”*

*Jo Rees, Acting Director Marketing, Central Queensland University*

## Challenges faced by Australian higher education institutions

### Centralisation of social media activity



While 90% of leading global institutions have centralised social media activities across their organisation, only 40% of Australian universities have achieved this. On average, there are 4.57 social media accounts per institution, per platform, with 15% of local institutions having over 50 social media accounts representing their institutions. For institutions with multiple campuses, those who have extended interstate or across significant geographical areas are more likely to have centralised social media management and strategy processes.



## Digital engagement

Almost all Australian institutions have a formal web presence; however, 85% have no engagement with their audience on their actual website. Consistently, there are institutional websites aimed at attracting enrolments and informing prospective students, rather than providing direct or real-time engagement with current student services. This trend continues across the social web, with less than half of Australian higher education institutions engaging in public conversations with their communities.



## Purpose of social media

While Australian institutions are publishing frequently, the majority of institutions view social media as a broadcast channel, with only 30% of institutions engaging with their social media communities more than once a week. This is much less than the 80% of global leaders who engage with their students on a regular basis.



## Content for content

Global leaders utilise social media as a platform to highlight their research and education innovation, collaboration, and knowledge sharing, whereas two-thirds of Australian institutions social media feeds contain only news and announcements. Most concerning is the activity and perception of social media amongst non-university institutions, with over 43% of institutions not having published any content to their social media accounts over a two month period.

The alternative vision is the digital campus, where social media is an organisational priority and a shared responsibility. On a digital campus, every department works within an overarching social media governance structure, yet is empowered to leverage social media in creative ways to meet its own objectives.

University representatives from multiple departments participate in social communities not only to foster university-student relationships, but also to spark interdepartmental collaboration. With a coordinated strategy, the institution draws on social media to create a common thread between every stage in the student lifecycle, from application to commencement and beyond.



What's holding institutions back? The independence of faculties, departments, and organisations within higher education institutions often result in complex organisational and governance structures, which can impede the ability for innovators to drive change. Decentralised social media practices ultimately block collaboration among the numerous stakeholders that contribute to the student experience. With no single-use case or measure of success that can satisfy decision makers across campuses, innovators must develop a rationale for revolution if they are to achieve organisational-wide buy-in, and overcome ownership and compliance challenges.

Communications and marketing departments play a vital role in coordinating social media innovation throughout institutions, with 73% of communications/PR departments being responsible for creating, monitoring compliance, and enforcing institutional social media policies<sup>2</sup>. While the digital campus seeks to break down the siloing of social media activity from a single department to all employees, engagement and collaboration with communication and marketing departments is crucial for the development of any rationale. By nature, institutions have an appetite for innovation, but if executive decision makers are to support campus-wide transformations, endorsement from the communications and marketing departments is crucial.

#### CUSTOMER EXAMPLE:

## University of South Australia

In 2013, UniSA set a plan in motion to increase its international profile. With social media playing an increasingly important role in higher education, UniSA recognized the need to implement a university-wide social media strategy to connect with prospective students and enhance the whole experience. UniSA empowers their employees to be their eyes and ears on social media. With every department, region, and team working together on one centralised platform, the result is a well-organized social media effort. This social business model is highly scalable and improves UniSA's position in a highly competitive international market with the right tools for success.

#### Metrics



**23%**

Increase in social reach to new markets.



**42%**

in global engagement levels.

# The Australian student journey

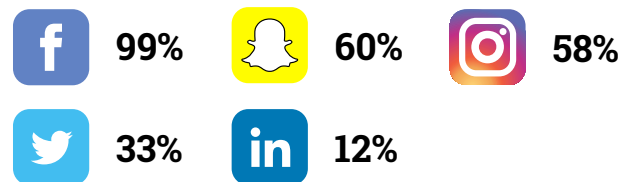
It is an interesting time for the Australian higher education industry. With the publication of the Times Higher Education World University Rankings: World Reputation Rankings 2016, it was revealed that only three of the 43 Australian universities made it into the top 100, with Melbourne University topping the list of Australian institutions for the sixth year in a row.

Leading institutions across the world are beginning to invest heavily in social media. Melbourne University's 'Where Great Minds Collide' campaign is a leading example of where an institution proactively sourced and developed a digitally-led campaign, which is believed to have contributed to their continued success in the global university rankings.

"Just on YouTube and Facebook alone, our video has had 1.5 million views. That's pretty crazy for a university video. And that's been viewed all over the world." Lara McKay, Executive Director of Marketing and Communications at Melbourne University.<sup>3</sup>

With 68% of Australians aged between 18 and 29 years of age who use Facebook indicating they are enrolled in or have attained a tertiary qualification, it is essential for institutions to be aware of the social media behaviours of the average Australian student.

## Which social media platforms are Australian students active on?<sup>4</sup>

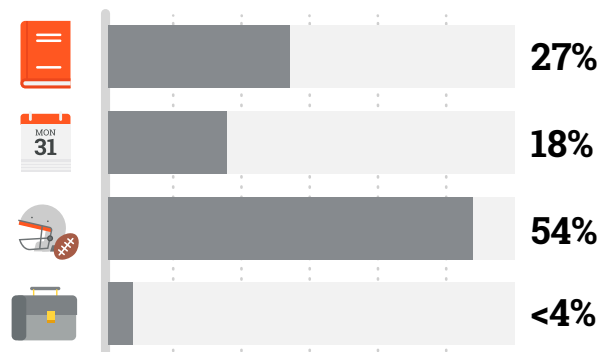


Source: Sensis Social Media Report 2016, Social Media Channels of Australians Aged 18-29.

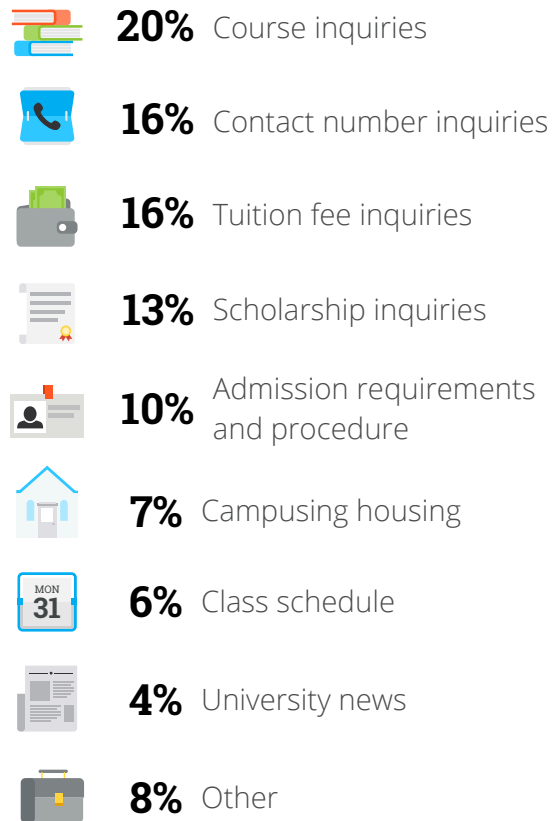
## How are students using social media in relation to their education?

Campus connectivity and culture is important for students.

Students are in social media communities and groups buying and selling textbooks (27%), events (18%) and hobbies and recreation on or around campus (54%). Less than 4% of students are members of groups jobs boards.

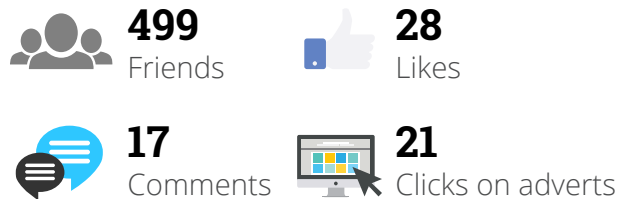


## What are students asking their education providers?



## Australian student social persona<sup>5</sup>

The average Australian student [18-29] has 499 friends, publishes 17 comments, likes 28 posts and clicks 21 adverts on Facebook each month. They have a strong affinity towards travel, comedic entertainment, music festivals, Skittles and energy drinks.



While on campus, 43% of Australian students are actively using social media.<sup>6</sup>

*Source: Transformed statistic, Sensis Social Media Report 2015*

Students are truly digital and social natives, and educational institutions must not only adapt, but they must also develop meaningful digital connections with students. By publishing relevant content, and listening and engaging social communities in an integrated, coherent way across the learning experience, Australian institutions are in a prime position to transition to the digital campus. With impacts across student enrolment and retention, brand reputation, and student services, the digital campus delivers the tools for Australian institutions to compete within this highly competitive industry at a global level.

# Cross-campus connectivity

## Social media in the chancellery

The university executive and chancellery are responsible for nurturing lasting relationships between the institution and its students, their families, and the academic community in general. Globally, the executive office and chancellery are embracing social media to break down barriers and Australia is no different in this regard<sup>7</sup>. While the majority of communications from the chancellery are published via an institution's formal news and communications system, a number of Australian institutions are providing social media platforms to enable communication and insight with senior academia.

## Social media tips for the executive office



Offer a personal take on the day's events and participate in campus culture by engaging directly with students



Ensure the use of their own authentic voice, channels, and tactics, but always keep audiences front of mind



Communicate the university's strategic direction to all stakeholders and instill a transparent management culture



Use their profile to draw attention to faculty experts, and to promote student achievements in academia, culture, and the arts

## Engaged enrollment

Leading higher education institutions are quickly learning that social media is an effective and cost-efficient way to engage with prospective students, drive traffic to application portals, and gather intelligence to steer their strategies. However, with 52% of Australian's unfollowing or blocking messaging from pages on social media owing to irrelevant or unappealing content, it is important to remember not to pin social media activity solely on marketing.

From researching the social media behaviour of Australian students, the importance of engaging prospective students in social media channels where they seek out admissions advice and share their opinions with peers becomes apparent.

Admissions departments that want to connect with the next generation of students on social media must begin with a comprehensive plan for listening. The institution's main social media accounts are obvious channels to monitor for wall posts, comments, and mentions; however, prospective students reach out to schools at a variety of social touch points, not all of which are managed by the university's admissions or communications departments.

Prospective students often post messages about universities and colleges without referencing their official account handles. They also share their thoughts on external review sites, blogs, and forums. With less than 50% of Australian institutions engaging in public engagement on their own channels, the opportunity for admissions departments to proactively engage new prospects is huge.

### CUSTOMER EXAMPLE:

## University of Cambridge

University of Cambridge attracts top students and talent using social data. Hootsuite provides superior insight into how the university's social media efforts are being interpreted by the public in real time. This helps shape how the organisation engages with their target audience and gives them a chance to play with new content and ideas. The communications team aggregates reports to monitor over 260 accounts belonging to PhD students, affiliated organisations, influencers, and friends of the university. This also allows them to see the impact of those channels and measure the effectiveness against the university's overall digital strategy.

*"Metrics from Hootsuite have provided us with tangible and quantifiable insights to measure content that is shared with leadership teams. These metrics illustrate the success of content and how we can reach new and existing audiences better."*

*Barney Brown, Head of Digital Communications,  
University of Cambridge*

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To move the needle upward for enrolment targets, the admissions department should incorporate social media listening into its overall strategy for relationship management. By incorporating intelligence from social media into their customer relationship management technology, admissions department staff can bridge the divide between an online persona and an application record. With a socially integrated view of admitted students, they can make better predictions, lose fewer recruits to competing schools, and reach enrolment targets.

[“Social media is an essential tool for engaging with our students. Every day we use social media to answer questions from current and future students, as well as a way to champion the incredible work of our staff and researchers. Our Vice-Chancellor Professor John Dewar is a great advocate for social media and is active on Twitter. Our social media team continues to grow, reflecting the importance La Trobe places on innovative digital strategies.”](#)

*La Trobe University*

Armed with better intelligence by using social media, institutions can employ a number of engagement tactics to convert prospective students, thus empowering enrolment teams to initiate personal, two-way dialogue with prospective students and showing them the type of experience they can expect from the institution. Instead of simply telling prospective students that their institution is great, there is an opportunity to provide real value by answering students' questions with a human voice. The department can also proactively solicit questions from students

to ensure every applicant understands the admission process.

### **Student services department**

The broad mandate of the student services department is reflected in the sheer variety of enquiries and issues they now face on social media. Students have always had questions and concerns about financial aid, housing and residence, orientation, counselling services, and safety, but social media has brought them out into the open. However, are Australian institutions listening? More importantly, are they responding?

With less than 30% of Australian higher education institutions engaging their own social media communities more than once a week, compared to 80% of global education leaders, the opportunity to improve student experiences is there to be taken. A true digital campus places student services at the core of the engagement strategy, to monitor student feedback and comments on social media in real time, and address problems before they escalate.

By engaging in the social communities, blogs, and forums that are popular among students, student services departments are able to proactively resolve issues and provide greater visibility for their official channels and resources.

Resolving student inquiries on public channels is not without its challenges. Administrators in student services must balance the need for efficient customer service with the imperative to protect student privacy.

## GUIDE:

### What can student services do to stay compliant with institutional policies and regulatory requirements?



Provide staff with guidelines for taking conversations offline and for removing student-generated content from public channels.



Employ automated systems to immediately remove non-compliant messages that have been erroneously published by staff or students, including credit card information, account numbers, and other private data.

“With over 400,00 students across NSW it’s important we have a variety of ways for our students to connect and an “always on” approach to support our students. It’s quick and easy to acknowledge or respond and aside from this being good practice in customer relations, social media engagement with a student looks after an important aspect of student care and wellbeing for TAFE NSW. If our students know we are always here when they need us, we become more than just an education provider. We become an intrinsic part of their support network and cheer squad.”

*Brendon Walker, Manager, Online Engagement - TAFE NSW*

## Graduates and alumni

Institutions must consider graduate alumni relationship management in terms of the entire student lifecycle, which begins at matriculation. After four years of student engagement, the university should be able to transfer existing social media relationships seamlessly to the alumni office.

One way to pass the baton is to encourage current students to engage with alumni on LinkedIn, Facebook, and other social channels, even before they graduate. In doing so, the university can facilitate employment opportunities for students and demonstrate the mutual benefits of a long-term relationship with the institution, both online and offline.

Graduates and alumni can give back to the institution in many ways. They have a deep and diverse pool of knowledge that higher education institutions can draw upon for curriculum development and other program improvements. Therefore, the social media strategy of the alumni relations department should help alumni build the future of the university with their minds as well as from financial contributions.

Alumni relations professionals can solicit and monitor feedback from former students in multiple social media channels, including the institution’s official LinkedIn university page and unofficial groups on LinkedIn and Facebook. They can also look for unsolicited feedback on open social channels and the web, using keyword searches and content discovery tools. This monitoring can reveal the pulse of the alumni community—how they



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are reacting to new executive hires, strategic initiatives, fundraising campaigns, and more.

With an organisational strategy for social media intelligence, the benefits of alumni feedback and expertise can be felt throughout the institution. Alumni relations should work with communications and IT service departments to create workflows for disseminating information to other departments. This information sharing can occur at the tactical level via message assignments and at the strategic level by periodic reporting.

### **The future of the digital campus**

The revolution is not coming; it is here now and it is challenging all institutions to rethink the way information is imparted to students. Australia's leading institutions are remaining with the global group, and are discovering the benefits of open communication and social collaboration both on and off campus. These leading institutions will continue to empower a larger and more diverse cross-section of their staff and faculty to participate in social media initiatives, and continue to deliver a revolutionised student experience.

Every employee will be given the platform and training he or she needs to collaborate both within the institution and externally. New insights will emerge from social media intelligence, which will allow universities and colleges to capture and expand institutional knowledge. Emerging in real time, these insights will drive better decisions by students, staff, and other constituencies. In particular, social media will continue to deepen relationships across the institution.

All Australian higher education institutions have the potential and opportunity to become true digital campuses. The challenge for Australian institutions is innovation enablement, and an institutional framework that allows student engagement throughout their entire academic journey.

### **Endnotes**

1. Australian Government, Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency - [National Register of higher education providers. 2016.](#) (accessed August 2016)
2. Case.org. ["CASE - Social Media Survey."](#) 2013. (accessed August 2016)
3. Times Higher Education World University Rankings: [World Reputation Rankings 2016 - World Reputation Rankings 2016 Digital Supplement.](#) (accessed August 2016).
4. Sensis Social Media Report 2016 - [How Australian people and businesses are using social media.](#) Social Media Channels of Australians Aged 18-29
5. Facebook - Facebook Audience Insights, Australians aged 18-29, The highest level of education reached based on self-reported data from people on Facebook (accessed August 2016).
6. Sensis Social Media Report, May 2015 - [How Australian people and businesses are using social media.](#) (accessed August 2016).
7. Umasd.edu. ["College Presidents Out Blog and Out - Tweet Corporate CEO's - UMass Dartmouth." 2014.](#) (accessed August 2016).



# About Hootsuite Enterprise

Partner with Hootsuite to accelerate your social transformation



Hootsuite is the most widely used platform for managing social media, loved by over 10 million people around the globe and trusted by more than 800 of the Fortune 1000. Hootsuite Enterprise empowers organisations to execute business strategies for the social media era and scale social media activities across multiple teams, departments, and regions. Our versatile platform supports a thriving ecosystem of social networks complemented by 200+ business applications and integrations, allowing organisations to extend social media into existing systems and programs.

Along with our channel and agency partners, we help organisations build deeper relationships with customers, stay connected to the needs of the market, grow revenue, and draw meaningful insights from social media data. Innovating since day one, we continue to help organisations pioneer the social media landscape and accelerate their success through product training, group training and tailored organisational training, as well as security and compliance services.

Request a custom demo today by visiting [enterprise.hootsuite.com](https://enterprise.hootsuite.com)

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