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Rachel Hatch

Illinois Wesleyan University, iwumag@iwu.edu

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Net Gain

E-communications yields new career possibilities for young alumni.

Story by **RACHEL HATCH**



Kyle Brigham (above) says, “There is always something new to learn and there will always be a new way to market.” “Today’s great idea might not be tomorrow’s great idea.”

managing profiles on Internet media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. “I was looking for something big,” he says.

Sarah Bordson, a 2007 graduate with a double major in English and theatre arts, knew she wanted to work in theatre marketing. After internships at Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago and Berkeley Repertory Theatre in California, she took a job with Chicago Shakespeare Theatre as a marketing associate. After two weeks on the job, her boss called a meeting. “She announced, ‘Well, we’ve given Sarah a few projects on the website and with e-blasts, and she seems to be picking them up quickly, so that’s what she’ll be doing from now on.’” says Sarah. “From then on my job focused mainly on e-communications work.” She now works as an e-communications associate for Goodman Theatre in Chicago, where she sends e-blasts (e-mail updates to patrons), maintains the website and monitors the online presence of the theatre.

E-blast, pay-per-click, tweet, update, blog — all of these are tools of social media marketers, a job that didn’t even exist 10 years ago. Now Illinois Wesleyan alumni are using the Internet and e-communications as an integral part of their careers.

“Honestly, I didn’t even know this area existed when I was studying in school,” says Kyle Brigham ’06, a senior search marketing manager at Chicago’s L2T Media, an agency that specializes in helping businesses market through online media. Kyle says he planned for a career in media marketing after graduating from IWU with a major in business administration and a minor in music. Though he began as a promotions director for a local radio station, he was soon offered a job with L2T Media, where he assists clients in setting up and

By the time Stephanie Urban '08 graduated from IWU as an international business major, the field of e-communications was recognized as a career option. "I knew I wanted to do something Internet-based," says Stephanie, who is now a digital marketing and social media manager for the recruiting firm ExeculSearch Group in New York City. While at IWU, she began a fashion blog titled "Because I Said So" and fell in love with e-communications. Through the University's Hart Career Center, Stephanie found internships where she could work on websites for a local realtor, a foundation and a software company. "Those internships helped me decide what I wanted to do." Her duties now include posting articles on employment and job statistics on Facebook, Twitter and the firm's blog; managing the company's website content; and training new employees at the firm on social and online media efforts. She also remains close to her first love — managing a fashion blog titled StyleHop.com.



Stephanie Urban (above) found her career in e-communications through internships in college.

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges to working in e-communications is keeping up with the constantly changing medium. "You have to keep researching, keep reading to stay on top of the latest trends," says Stephanie. "You cannot fall behind."

Kyle Brigham notes that challenge is one of the things he loves about the job. "The pros are that it is always changing. There is always something new to learn and there will always be a new way to market," he says. "Today's great idea might not be tomorrow's great idea."



Sarah Bordson (above) says, “I like to credit my current employment to the liberal arts background I received from IWU.”

Sarah Bordson says that e-communications is doing more than transforming how marketing is done — it is also giving businesses answers. “The most fascinating thing about e-communications is the ability to gather analytics [or statistics] and analyze them,” she says. “There isn’t much wondering anymore about ‘Why did people buy more tickets yesterday than today?’ ‘What shows are they most excited about that we should push for next season?’ We aren’t throwing spaghetti at the wall anymore and seeing what sticks.”

Even though e-communications is a new field, alumni say their time at Illinois Wesleyan gave them the background they needed to tackle the new industry. “I like to credit my current employment to the liberal arts background I received from IWU,” says Sarah, who initially feared taking her “formal reasoning” required credit, until she saw a course that was an introduction to the Web. “I signed up immediately. A few years later,

I drew from the information I had learned in that class. My career path unfolded from there.”

Kyle believes his marketing classes at Illinois Wesleyan provided a strong base, and his extracurricular activities added to that. “I would say my work as the entertainment commissioner in the Student Senate and my work for the Hansen Student Center taught me the importance of marketing and public relations, which helped me to transfer some of my skills into the online space,” he says.

Brigham continues to draw on his Illinois Wesleyan connections. When he knew of job openings at L2T Media, he brought in John Curtis ’04 and 2010 graduate Dave Buesing, whom he found through the Hart Career Center. Curtis says his experience at Illinois Wesleyan taught him “critical thinking over task management. I was more prepared from an ‘outlook perspective’ than a ‘business fundamentals’ perspective,” says Curtis, who is also a senior search marketing manager at L2T Media.

Though the area of e-communications continues to grow and change, Stephanie Urban says there is an ease and camaraderie between those who work in the field. “It’s a good group of people,” she says. “It’s a new field, so right now it’s easy to connect with one another. Those of us who are involved are very involved, which means we can work together.”