

Twittamentary: Crowdsourcing a Project

Author Michael Netzley and case protagonist Tan Siok Siok talk about the development of the case, Twittamentary: Crowdsourcing a Project.

The author's perspective

Inspiration for the case



It's somewhat poetic that the opportunity for this case presented itself on Twitter! I saw the early calls inviting people to submit their contributions to the film and when a respected colleague retweeted the call, I felt tempted to follow the link. The interesting story and innovative approach about using Twitter to make a film about Twitter was all the spark I needed pursue this lead.

My interest in crowdsourcing comes from both my research and a course I teach titled Digital Media Across Asia. When I first discovered Twittamentary, crowdsourcing was a timely topic that fit neatly into my course. What made the story even more inviting was the opportunity to work with Siok from the beginning. When we started, Twittamentary was a cool idea but its success was not certain. These factors presented a unique vantage point when writing the case.

Working with the case protagonist

I made contact with Siok on Twitter and e-mail, and followed up with an interview on Skype. Siok has been a case writer's dream subject, fully sharing her thoughts and ideas with me from the outset. She displayed the Twitter community values of openness and transparency, and that made writing the first draft much easier. Months in to the project I interviewed Siok again which gave me a second look after the project had already gained traction. I believe Siok's willingness to share accelerated this project and brought the case into my classroom

much more rapidly. She actively remained in contact during the writing and feedback process, and to this day continues to be involved - both in the classroom and on Twitter - with teaching the case and student conversations.

Learning objectives



I wanted a teaching case for my digital media class that would help students see the broader opportunities for getting work done with social media. This objective required that the students learn to use social media as an interactive channel rather than the traditional one-way or broadcast form of communication. Siok presents a brilliant example of both. She identified an opportunity to use Twitter for solving a production problem, took a chance, asked questions on-line, and interacted with people around the globe to produce the documentary. In short, Siok and the film are both role models for the type of on-line communication and work practices I am trying to teach.

When writing a case it is important to always have your desired learning objectives at the back of your mind. During the second interview with Siok she shared an extremely interesting decision that she'd made. The decision presented a dramatic opening question, a small point for student reflection (ie what would I do?), and a voting opportunity. However, with some disappointment, I decided not to include this element of the story, no matter how irresistible, as it did not help me fulfil the learning objectives that I had set out for the case. I found this decision to be the most difficult part of the case writing process.

A rich, interactive classroom experience



I have, thanks to Siok, brought the interactive experience of Twittamentary into my classroom using what is called a community screening (these are free of charge, to request one contact Siok @sioksiok on Twitter). I have two screens side-by-side at the front of the room, the first shows Twittamentary and the second uses a platform like Twitterfall to show live tweets from the class as they watch the film. I strongly encourage live tweeting while they watch the film and I am careful to illustrate the desired behaviours. Soon, different people from around the world join the on-line conversation. Sometimes it is Siok herself responding to tweets from the class, other times it is the producer. Characters from the film often join in when the class tweets them. Thus, the learners go through an interactive film experience where they first discuss the case and then watch the film while a real-time stream of tweets is displayed on the second screen.

I have taken this model a step further and now invite interested people from the community into my class to watch the screening. Students can interact with equally interested community members and discuss the film on-line as they watch. This further highlights the benefits of openness as the class visitors add fresh ideas to the conversation.

Each time I teach the case I am amazed at how well this story, and the film, resonates with learners. The student discussions about crowdsourcing, and the possibilities of getting work done via social media, are both energized and opened-up by this case experience. The secret to this success, I believe, is the film. Seeing the final product helps students see the rich opportunity presented by social media.

The protagonist's perspective

A shared learning experience



As a filmmaker, my role is to document the lives of others and it has been a privilege to find myself on the other side of the equation for once. My involvement in the case has pushed me to think more about how the project, in its future permutations, can be more useful to educators and trainers. We have received multiple requests from schools, technology companies, media outlets and non-profit groups to screen the film and to share the lessons we have learnt with them. To make the case more useful for educators, we are continuing to crowdsource Twitter stories and put together short films (10 to 15 minutes long) along different themes such as government, communications and journalism, business etc. These short films will give educators more flexibility in adapting the Twittamentary case to the specific needs of their students.

Benefits of participating

It is a great compliment to be the subject of a case study. Not only do you gain a clearer perspective on your own processes, you also get to distil lessons that are of universal value. My advice is to be open to the opportunity and to with engage the case writer through the different stages of the project so that he or she becomes a partner in your journey of uncovering new insights.

Case details

This case and teaching note are available free to registered educators at ecch.com. Click on the titles below to view the item's record in product search.

Twittamentary: Crowdsourcing a Project
Michael Netzley
Singapore Management University



Publication: ecch
Date: 11 June 2012
Headline: Twittamentary: Crowdsourcing a Project

Ref SMU-11-0011

Also available:

Teaching note

Ref SMU-11-0011TN

About the author

Michael Netzley is Assistant Professor of Corporate Communication (Education) at Singapore Management University. e michael@smu.edu.sg

Related links

- Twittamentary website www.twittamentary.com
- Twittamentary on YouTube
- Twittamentary on Twitter @twittamentary
- Tan Siok Siok on Twitter @sioksiok