



**A conversation with Scott Chappell, CMO,  
Sessions Online Schools of Art and Design**

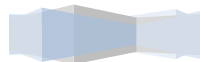
Interviewed by:  
**Steven Groves, StevenGroves.com**  
**Guy R. Powell, DemandROMI**

**Can you talk to us a little bit about Sessions and what Sessions offers?**

**Scott:** Sure. Well Sessions College for Professional Design was established in the late 90's. It is a fully online school teaching primarily graphic and web design, also multi-media, game art, fine art. We have students from over 100 countries and instructors from around the world, as well. They interact in an online campus, asynchronously. Ultimately, what's happening is the students are building a portfolio of design work in an effort to help them find work in their selective design field.

**At the Measure Up Conference, you are going to be speaking about the topic of: "Blogs, Tweets, Repeats: How Social Media Improves Lead Acquisition, Sales and Lifetime Value of your Customers." Tell us about the main points you would like to get across at the conference.**

**Scott:** Start with the title. The tweet, repeat part is just silly and rhymes. But the rest of it is the most relevant part, which is how social media improves lead acquisition, sales and lifetime value, which I think is important to a lot of marketers out there. So, that's it at a broad level. More specifically, how social media, Facebook, Twitter and to some degree, LinkedIn is what I focus on in using social media for Sessions and how it can dramatically increase your



touchpoints and the total number of communication opportunities you have with prospects. That's "A". And "B", I'll share how the technology itself lead me to realize that I could divide my messaging into three major content types, largely because of the mediums involved. So, it's kind of Marshall McLuhan's philosophy making sense more than ever for me, anyway, because the technology is new. So, the medium is the message, I get it. I always have. But when the technology is new, you get a whole new understanding of it. This is all usually hugely valuable for building your brand in the eyes of your prospects. So, I'll make it practical. It won't be a philosophical discussion about McLuhan, but more of a case study to some degree of how I'm using primarily Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn to really build my brand and establish a lot more communication with my prospects without losing them. If you want to double or triple your marketing messages to your prospective customers and you choose to do that, then you are going to turn a lot of them away because it is too much. But, using social media has the opposite effect, even though you are increasing your messages to them.

**Can you over communicate in social media? I don't think it's possible. I think people will opt in to the message stream and message volume that they are most comfortable with. They may opt out of a campaign, but not the overall relationship, I don't think.**

**Scott:** We will probably touch on this a little bit more. I think you are right, to some degree. But, part of the problem, I think, is that there is some abuse in social media. Part of that is when people go in it with a quantity over quality objective because they feel that that is what happens on, for example, Twitter. I've got to hire somebody part time, sit them down and have them tweet all day long about how awesome my brand is. In reality, there has to be sincerity. There has to be quality to the messages that go out, too. So, that's another factor and I'll explore that a little more.



**As you've implemented social media for Sessions, what would you say your biggest success was utilizing social media as a strategy or as a communication technology?**

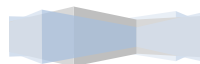
**Scott:** You know, there wasn't one moment or some viral video that we made and it ran around and tripled our lead pull or something like that. I think generally speaking, when we started using it, we dipped our toe in the water and you have to have a Facebook page, right? So, you put it up there and then at some point you decide that it is working, whatever that means. I'll chat a little more about that in my session at Measure Up. So, you decide it's working and you start to expand on it, you get more confident with it, you make it more customer-facing, you bring it more forward in your brand presence, but generally speaking in terms of success, it's when I realized I could go from literally about 12 messages per month going out to each individual prospect that we had, I tripled that to 36 and more without an increase in "unsubscribes". Instead, it increased sales conversions. The other thing I should circle back to, I keep talking about how I could triple the messaging. But, the reason I was able to do that was because I divided the messaging into three major message types, which I've labeled as culture, industry and sell. So, a prospective student who is coming to Sessions is going to hear from us in three different ways and from a couple of different brands, too. But, ultimately, they are going to have the sales message, which is time sensitive. It's a little more aggressive. It's enrolment deadline oriented. For another type of brand, it would be more promotional types of time sensitive promotions, that sort of thing. Then there are the industry methods and that is building the prospect's confidence in the industry. And Sessions' industry is a design industry and this is education. So, people thinking about career changes or movement into that direction. So, we talk about the industry and the strength of the industry. And third is the culture of Sessions. I'm using social media specifically for different messages. Culture is our Facebook page. Industry is our design blog that we manage and really, Twitter. I use Twitter primarily for that. And then for the sales channel, it's kind of a combination of the three. But, mostly that's the direct messages, emails and some mailers are coming directly from our admissions' team. So, it's more traditional media.



Because of social media, I've evolved the messaging. I've realized that I can talk to people in different ways and have built the Sessions' brand. It's about the industry and the culture of Sessions because of Twitter and Facebook instead of just emails coming from our admissions' team telling them that their deadline is fast approaching for enrolment. So, it has enriched the conversation.

**When you look back over what you've done with social media, what would you say are the lessons learned? What are the mistakes that you might have made that you wouldn't do again?**

**Scott:** One example would be trying to use Twitter for the school. I think that you don't just use it because it's there. We have a design magazine. It's called: "Notes on Design." It's a web-based design magazine that started out as a newsletter. I'll get into the evolution of that and I think that is an interesting tool for people. And, obviously, blogs are considered social media, too. So, we have that design magazine based on blogging technology. I tried to have Twitter followers for both the blog/design magazine called: "Notes on Design" and for the school. I realized as we built up the followers for the school, Twitter is aggressive. There's volume and there's frequency to it. That's how people use it. It didn't fit the brand. It fit the effort that I was putting forward for the design magazine because there is a frequency of content and you can talk to people about the design industry at large and that made sense. For the school, it just seemed like aggressive sales tactics and self-serving. What are you going to say about yourself every day to somebody that is new? It's a design magazine and they are going to unsubscribe and you're going to lose them and it's going to affect you negatively across the board. They are going to stop following you on Facebook and they are going to ask you to stop emailing them. So, they have to get something out of it. There has to be some value for them. I think using Twitter for the school initially felt forced and was forced. And it comes back to the quality over quantity message that I'm going to explore in the session. So, if I had to pick out a



mistake, it was that. I tried to use Twitter and I stopped. I quit completely and realized that I don't have to do everything or every bit of social media out there. Just because there are millions of people on Twitter, I don't have to have that for the school. And I'm going to stick with Facebook because that fits that brand objective.

**Do you have year round intake for school enrolments or do you have that in certain seasons, such as fall and the new year?**

**Scott:** The degrees are three semesters a year, which I know some people call them trimesters. But, in the academic world, these aren't literally trimesters. They are three semesters. So, three enrolment periods for the degree programs. And the certificates are monthly. And then we have individual classes, which you can enroll any time. So, I have lots of different products to think about, if you will, in terms of when I use social media. So, the short answer for you is I'm using it all the time. I'm using Facebook and Twitter and the blog consistently to build the brand for the prospects. Some are in a different sell cycle. Some are considering something that is going to start three months from now. I have to be conscious of that. I have to understand that based upon my messaging strategy, some of these people are going to hear from us 200 times in different mediums before they enroll. So, I'm extra sensitive to that and I don't want to over do it. But, coming back to what I said before, because of the three different messaging strategies and because of the four different mediums that I'm in, it's not only can I get away with it, but is it effective and does it have some value to them? So, the short answer is that it is all year round and not just seasonal for me.

**As you move forward and look into the future, what do you see as the biggest obstacle for growth in using social media for Sessions?**

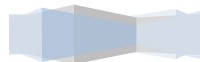
**Scott:** I think it requires patience. I sort of alluded to this before. I could create some cute viral saying or some app and let that result in



a huge uptake in the pool of prospects that comes in because of social media. That doesn't make sense for me or my brand because I'm selling education. So, I'm selling a one or two year commitment from the customer. I could probably pull a lot of people into our lead pool that are not currently considering enrolling in the school and may convert at some later date, but the conversion rate would be so low that it would be a waste of time for the admissions' department. It just wouldn't make sense. And then I'd have this artificially large pool of Facebook fans or Twitter followers or just this volume of people that shouldn't be there anyway. I just don't think that makes sense for everybody. I think for some people, a viral tool that pulls in a lot of people because you are selling a commodity that everybody wants and needs and is a low price point, that kind of thing makes sense for them and they can go for big numbers fast. So, for me, if that's a hurdle, patience. I've had to put Facebook and Twitter and the options for prospects to follow us front and center on our website. It's on the signature files of everybody who communicates with prospects and ultimately, what I'm trying to do is to get a prospective student to also subscribe to our blog. Also following our blog on Twitter. Also fanning the school on Facebook so that I can have all these messaging opportunities. It's a slow build. There is a pace to it, but I've realized that I have to let it happen organically. You can't force people to fall into that category in the social media pool. So, it's a round about answer for patience.

**Do you see a maturing process of your followers so that as they are leads on the one side and then they become students and then they become alumni, do you have a growth process where you physically transport them from one set of messaging and one set of blogs to the next? To when they are finally alumni and you are counting on them to help further the brand?**

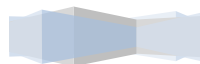
**Scott:** That's a great question. This is the type of stuff that is useful for the people here, really. How do I use social media to increase lifetime value for customers? A lot of products are repeat buys. For me, it's not. People come in and they enroll and they complete their



studies. On occasion, they'll come back or they'll go for a higher level degree, but that's not my priority. My priority is to get them in the pool. For example, on the Facebook fan page for Sessions, they end up becoming ambassadors for the school. So, a prospect that comes in and posts a comment on Facebook that's asking a broad question of anyone, like: "I've never heard of Sessions. Is this a credible school?" Or "I'm thinking of taking a graphic or web design certificate, but I can't pick between the two" or whatever the case may be. I don't have to do anything. I just sit back and some recent graduate chimes in and it's overwhelmingly positive. I never have to monitor in terms of deleting. And I'm conscious of letting it go because coming back to the sincerity and credibility message, if you are scrubbing your social media presence to make it sterile and to fit whatever your brand objectives are, then it's going to be completely transparent. People are going to see right through it and not believe it. So, I just let it go. But, the answer to your question is that they come in as a prospect. Some are obviously coming in through Facebook and they are already students and some are coming in as alumni. But they stay. If they like the school, they are going to stay there and they are going to continue to get those communication messages. So, whatever I'm posting or announcing on Facebook, they are going to get it. That I have to be conscious of. That's why the message type is labeled as culture. I can't keep selling to them through Facebook because some of them already bought and some of them have graduated. So, I'm talking about the culture and building the brand there. It's another reason why that particular audience gets a specific type of message. It seems to just get more valuable each day when people are in there and they fan and once they become a student and once they become alumni. With the alumni, I have an alumni group on LinkedIn, too. So, there is some movement. They get invited to participate in that. But, that's an excellent question.

**What do you see as the key tactics to designing a successful social media campaign or presence? What are the things that**

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## **are most important and that an organization should pay attention to?**

**Scott:** Go with quality over quantity is a central objective. Don't forget about it. I think it is easy to forget about it. You'll read rules about how many times you need to be on Twitter per day. People are writing books about it and I think some of it is true. You can tweet a certain percent and re-tweet 80% and this many messages per day, etc., etc. It's going to make sense for some people and not for others. It's ridiculous to think that there can be rules like that, just like there can't be rules for how many times you should phone somebody. It just doesn't make sense. There can't be an across the board rule for how to use the tool. Use it for the way that makes the most sense for your customers. So, quality over quantity.

Sincerity. Those two are very strongly linked because if you go for quantity, it is going to fall off. People aren't going to believe it. And keep in mind, it's called social media for a reason. Your brand is entering a place where people invest a lot of their social life. So, sincerity is important. It is an interesting time that we are living through in that brands are more integrated into our social lives. So, be careful. Don't abuse that and be sincere.

And then coming back to persistence. Or maybe I'm just introducing it for the first time, but I've been thinking about it. Despite the fact that you have to be conscious of not shooting for quantity, you have to be persistent. You can't be active on Facebook at some level, two posts per week, let's say, arbitrarily. And then suddenly fall off the face of the earth because the resource went away or the budget went away. There has to be some persistence there. You have to continue to do it and I think it is the same thing with Twitter or a blog or anything. We take it for granted with blogs and all of these things, just because blogs have been around for a while. All this is obvious. Yes, sincerity. Yes, quality. So, the same is true for social media.

Tactically, I think one other thing is don't over think it. I think a lot of people get scared. Who is going to do it? Who is going to be the



voice of our company? When are we going to launch it? What are we going to call it? How much content is going to go on there? What content is going to go on there? We have to build ten videos and it's going to cost this much, etc., etc. And they get bogged down in all the details because there is a bit of baggage and there is already ways of doing things. I think you have to figure out how to maybe do a soft launch. Maybe not put it on the front homepage of your website or in the signature file or in all your mailers, but get started. Because it will evolve and make sense for your brand.

**If people wanted to find out more about Sessions College, how would they do so?**

**Scott:** The best thing to do is just visit the website. So, it's sessions.edu.

**If they needed to get a hold of you and explore some of these topics a little bit deeper, are you available for conversation? How am I going to tweet you? How am I going to find you on Facebook?**

**Scott:** I'm going to go old school and give you my email address. It's scott@sessions.edu

